

# POLYARCHY/PANARCHY

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A PARADIGM

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Polyarchy/Panarchy. A paradigm (2023)

Polyarchy - Panarchy - Statism - Territorialism - Aterritorialism - Autonomy -  
Voluntary Communities - Future

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# PRESENTATION

The present confusion  
The old paradigm : failings  
The new paradigm : functions  
The papers



## The present confusion

**C**ultural transformations and technical innovations are taking place at a phenomenal pace. However, social and political thinking and acting has remained practically unchanged and is now so out of touch with reality as to be, like a broken machine, out of order, that is, useless.

Yet, events happen and keep happening because history does not stop. Individuals are moving and changing even if they do not truly know where they are going and what will become of them.

At the end of the XX century, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the weakening of many barriers and borders in Europe, the end of distances (e.g. instant

messaging), the reduction of size (e.g. miniaturization); all these phenomena, among others, herald the dissolution of the reality produced by the age of the nation states and nation wars (e.g. compartmentalization, mechanization, gigantism, etc.) without necessarily depicting clearly what will supersede it.

This situation of confusion, leading either to a passive acceptance of events or to a distorted interpretation and destructive intervention, will remain so until new thinking tools are devised, capable of truly organizing reality theoretically and mastering it practically.

### **The old paradigm : failings**

This theoretical and practical confusion is the result of perceiving and assessing reality through the use of a paradigm that presents too many shortcomings and contradictions to be amended via integrations and corrections.

This old paradigm is based on specific concepts and attitudes, accepted almost without discussion. They could be briefly identified as:

- Fragmentation. Reality is portrayed as made of fragments, namely, as material and social atoms, mechanically assembled.
- Simplification. The relations between the parts of this fragmented reality are thought to be based on mono-linear causality, one main cause leading straight to one main effect.
- Contraposition. The simple parts of reality are seen as clashing atoms and are portrayed through the use of a vocabulary made of polarities (black - white), dialectics (thesis - antithesis), struggles (for survival, for class emancipation).

In the course of time, these concepts and attitudes have undergone some revision or addition. New mental habits and terms have been taken on board, as for instance:

- Integration. The parts composing reality have been integrated into wholes. From that moment onward many social scientists have focused on totalities and kept repeating that "the whole is bigger than the sum of the parts," misquoting or misinterpreting Durkheim who stated that "*un tout n'est pas identique à la somme de ses parties*" [a whole is not equal to the sum of its parts] (*Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, 1895). Since then it has become an intellectually authoritative statement that the whole (e.g. society) is more important, being bigger, than the supposed parts composing it (e.g. communities, individuals). People abiding by this conviction inevitably tend to attribute to society an unjustifiable aura of mystical superiority with respect to mere individuals,

As a matter of fact, entities of realities are, at the same time, wholes and parts (along a wholes-parts continuum). Moreover, a whole can be functionally 'smaller' than the parts composing it (e.g. a dysfunctional family).

- Plausibility. Simplicity has been strengthened by plausibility. This has made it possible to assume that what is plausible, in the social sciences, is also, generally, veridical. Until lately, not much place was given to the counter-intuitive aspects of reality. And so the social discourse was and still is too full of plausible statements repeated too often without any critical questioning to their truth. Given this situation, the expression 'plausible but false' should become a common saying within the new paradigm.

- Functionalism. The excesses of the contraposition model have been tempered by the functionalist outlook. This has not solved the problem because it has attempted to replace a partial portrait of reality with another partial one. Functionalism as a replacement for conflictualism does not represent a substantial progress towards a better understanding of reality. What is needed is a new approach capable of amalgamating the incredible richness of entities and relations, of cooperation and competition, which compose and animate the current world.

So, no amount of theoretical tinkering seems sufficient to bring the old paradigm back to a workable use. It needs to be replaced by a new paradigm.

### **The new paradigm : functions**

The need for a new paradigm is long overdue.

The new paradigm should accomplish the following functions:

- Interpretation: to perceive and organize new phenomena in meaningful/useful ways;
- Conception: to free the mind of outdated concepts and attitudes in order to be able to conceive new patterns;
- Construction: to project the new patterns from the (theoretical) mind to (practical) matters, without discontinuity.

There is then a clear connection between the emergence of a new paradigm and the actuation of a new praxis to build new empirical (possible and preferable) realities.

Otherwise, if we remain anchored to outdated dysfunctional paradigms, we keep manufacturing and transmitting myths based on the perpetuation of (old) fiction instead of producing science (knowledge) grounded on the interpretation of (new) facts.

### **The papers**

The papers here presented, drafted during the years 2000-2013, intend to offer a contribution towards the emergence of a new paradigm.

The main aim is to present matters for examination in order to push minds into reflection and discussion.

Examination, reflection and discussion of the data and beliefs contained in these papers should lead, in the course of time, to their corroboration or refutation. In any case, this would represent an

advance in knowledge, away from the present stagnant state of the social sciences, especially the so-called political sciences.

These papers can be read independently or in sequence. A certain redundancy (repetition of the same concept) will be felt by those who go through all the papers.

Some points of this presentation, especially those concerning a new paradigm, will be dealt with again, a bit more thoroughly, in the summing up.

# FROM MAGIC WORDS TO MEANINGFUL CONCEPTS

Introduction

Capital

Interest

Profit

Market

Work - Employment

Anarchy

Left - Right

Liberté - Egalité - Fraternité

Public - Private

Roots - Identity - Nationality

General considerations



## Introduction

**T**he building bricks of any argument are words that represent concepts.

In the course of time it might happen that:

- words lose their original meaning following some modification in their use;
- words lose any possible (sensible, real) meaning due to some transformation of the reality to which they were applied and are kept only for their magical appeal.

In both cases, it would be advisable to drop the term and to replace it with something more appropriate, manageable, precise.

In any case, a new paradigm, capable of interpreting and representing a new reality, requires the use of new terms.

This equates to leaving behind magic words employed to obscure reality, and to keep or bring about essential terms that permit us to master reality in a meaningful way.

It is like moving from the stage of alchemy to chemistry, when some terms were dropped, practices transformed, aims changed.

Eventually, only when alchemy got rid of the magic vocabulary (e.g. phlogiston), especially through the work of Lavoisier, it succeeded in acquiring the status of science under the name of chemistry.

The execution of Lavoisier by the so called French revolutionaries (May 8th, 1794) declaring that "*la république n'a pas besoin de savants*" [the republic does not need scientists], could be seen almost as an emblematic episode of the fear (by the state power) of the new science of chemistry with respect to the old magic world of alchemy.

While the Jacobins and their followers and imitators did not succeed in undermining the advancement of the science of matter, they did succeed in hampering the science of societies and individuals.

It is time to defeat them also in that field, clearing the air of the obnoxious fumes of magic and mystifying words.

In this paper, only a few words are examined and an attempt to put forward more appropriate terms is made.

## Capital

Many magic (deceitful) words are used almost exclusively in the economic domain; because of this restriction, they have assumed heavily charged tones that convey a negative attitude. For this reason we should bear in mind that their place is within the full spectrum of the sciences and their use should not be restricted to the field of economics.

The word *capital* comes from the Latin *caput* = head. Similarly to the head in the human body, it is usually meant to designate something important, preeminent, playing a key role, being at the centre or at the beginning.

In current language, besides economics, it is still used in such a way : the capital of a country is the preeminent political centre; a capital matter is a matter of highly importance, to be dealt with urgently.

On the contrary, in the social sciences, and particularly in economics, capital has become a very abused and misused term, evoking fat people counting money with greedy eyes.

To avoid emotionally misleading associations, the original etymological meaning of the term should be fully regained in the economic domain too, i.e. it should play the same general function of qualifying something important and central.

The term capital should refer, in economics, to the most important factor (of production) in a specific time and place. The classical economists, writing in a period in which mechanical tools (e.g. the power loom) were playing a central role, taking over hand production, used the word "capital" as synonym of "industrial capital," designating with it the mechanical instruments of production (machines, tools). For this reason capitalism, or better industrial capitalism, is



the historic period where the mechanical instruments of production came to dominate economic and social life, replacing the craft of the artisan. The epoch of capitalism can be temporally located from the end of the XVIII to the end of the XIX century.

In a later period, with the displacement of capitalism by statism, another factor became of central importance and, as in the past for the industrial capital, received the qualification of capital tout court. This new factor is money, that is financial capital.

Financial capital is made of monetary resources employed in the production and distribution of goods and services.

In this role financial capital plays a central function in the economy of statism; that is why, in the epoch of statism, the control of money is more important than the control of machines and industrial tools. Under the state, financial capital dominates industrial capital. Financial capital becomes so important that a rich country, with a fertile land, could become a barren place just because of the mismanagement of money by the state (as shown from the Big Crash to the Argentinean collapse).

Nowadays, in the most advanced economies of the most advanced regions, thanks also to the possibilities offered by the technology, we are moving beyond statism. A new capital factor is appearing, more and more, on the scene, made by intangible aspects defined as know-how, creativity, *esprit de finesse*, digital information, art and craft of problem solving.

The new capital factor of the post-statism era is virtual capital, superseding and taking over industrial and financial capital.

To sum it up, we could say that during the last few centuries there has been one actor (the human being) and three succeeding central factors of production, that is capital, namely:

- Industrial capital (**machines**): it refers to physical resources, especially productive tools and implements.
- Financial capital (**money**): it refers to movable, exchangeable resources and especially financial assets.
- Virtual capital (**mind**): it refers to intangible resources that have to do

with creativity and projections of the mind and of the spirit that become incorporated into artifacts and services.

What we are witnessing is the emergence and coming to preeminence of virtual capital (e.g. the knowledge domain, the communication domain, the software domain, etc.). The more this process advances, the more the identification of capital with machines and, especially, with money will come to rest and with it, perhaps, the ideological use of the word capital.

Furthermore, the end of the physical coins and banknotes and the replacement by all sort of alternative or unconventional means of transaction (electronic pursues, vouchers, bartering, etc.) will make the figure of the money-counting Scrooge totally obsolete, and of the money-sucking state pretty impracticable. At that point, the word capital will become a normal word, with or without capital importance, according to the case.

## Interest

The etymology of the word interest (*inter + esse*) refers to a relation, i.e. something that is (*esse*) in between (*inter*) two or many entities.

The matter in between the entities (somebody-something; somebody-somebody else) is what arouses feelings of concern, sympathy, curiosity, that is: interest.

Within the new paradigm, interests are seen as characterized by the following aspects:

- interests are always personal. There are no so-called public interests other than personal interests, i.e. shared personal interests or, in other words, common personal interests.
- interests are signs of vitality. A person without any interest does not exist other than as a corpse; a person showing no interest in many things he/she does is a troubled unhappy individual.
- interests are good (positive, enhancing) or bad (negative, destructive)

not according to the actor, but according to the action (the matter of interest) and the way it is expressed/carried out.

On the basis of these qualifications and with reference to the new paradigm, we suggest as follows:

- the narrow application of the word 'interest' (when taken without further qualification) to economic matters should be superseded in favour of a use that recaptures the original etymological width and flavour of the term;

- the deceitful expression of 'public interest' should be abolished and replaced by the meaningful concepts of personal interest and personal common interest;

- the attention should be focused on the content of the interest and the way it is expressed without being derailed by subordinate or non relevant aspects (actors, legal prescriptions, etc.). For instance, it is not because the state legalises brothels or justifies capital punishment that pimping and the carrying out of an execution become honourable activities and matters of highly esteemed interest.

## **Profit**

Profit is one of the most strongly emotionally negatively charged words.

It should not be so if we consider its etymology: profit comes from *pro + facio*, that is, I do (*facio*) something in favour (*pro*) of somebody (myself or somebody else).

Following the obsession with economics that characterized previously capitalism and still more dominates presently statism, the word profit has come to refer almost exclusively to monetary gains through the production and sale of goods and services.

Moreover, it is (almost always) implicitly assumed that your profit (usually seen as exorbitant) is in direct causal relation with my losses, as a consequence of exploitation or deception.

This vision of social reality prevails even when the actual reality

does not support it. This is because no distinction whatsoever is made between different types of social intercourse.

Social intercourse can be seen as a series of games. These games can be arranged on a continuum and characterized as:

- Non-zero sum games

The rules of the game permit everybody to gain, if not immediately, at least in the medium-long term. This is the situation we encounter in the area of free social intercourse (e.g. communication).

- Zero sum games

The rules let only one of the two (or more) players to gain. This is the situation we encounter in most recreational games (chess, snooker, cards, etc.) and sport tournaments (basketball, football, tennis, etc.). But, even in this case, the players, sometimes, could both get something out of the game (equalizing, sharing the prize, or just being happy to have taken part in it).

We could qualify the non-zero sum games as those in which cooperation prevails and the zero sum games those in which competition plays a bigger role, without attributing a moral preference to one over the other as they both are necessary for the functioning and development of individuals and communities.

In general, the games amongst producers are (mainly) competitive games and those between producers and consumers are (mainly) cooperative games because all the participants have something to gain from the intercourse. In this latter case the intercourse produces, or should produce if the intercourse has to continue, what in French is called *benefice partagé* (shared benefit).

Reality is a mix of cooperation and competition and, in many cases, free and fair competition (i.e. emulation) stimulates and enhances fine and fruitful cooperation (for instance, between the members of a team). And, in this case, the benefits would be higher for everybody (players, spectators, etc.)

If games of cooperation and competition are allowed to go on undisturbed, the areas of non-zero and zero sum games are likely to grow as needed according to the interests and desires of individuals and communities.

The opposite is true when there appears on the scene a monopolistic power (e.g. the state) capable of assuming or assigning monopolistic positions (e.g. an exclusive right of exploitation). In this case, the area of zero sum games comes, forcibly, to cover almost everything and the gains of the producers protected by the state (Cheating & Stealing UnLtd.) grow in direct relation to the pains inflicted on the consumers (i.e. higher prices, lower quality, limited choice, etc.).

Pro-fit becomes mis-fit, that is gains extorted by lousy producers under the protection of the state, from disgruntled but powerless consumers (e.g. the situation in practically all the state run monopolies all over the world). That is why, and rightly so, the word profit evokes bad feelings and bad attitudes.

Yet, the term has still some useful function to perform and it should be brought to its etymologically positive meaning, the more the state goes into obsolescence.

Within the new paradigm:

- the word profit should lose the almost exclusive application to economic matters and be applied to any situation in which something positive results;

- the word profit, when used in economics (non-monopolistic sphere), should lose the almost automatic association with undeserved gains derived from inflicting pains on exploited producers or cheated consumers;

- the word profit, when used with reference to monopolistic practices, should be replaced by more appropriate terms as, for instance: surcharge revenues, tax gains, expropriation gains, etc. or, when appropriate, by plain and simple words like stealing, cheating, pilfering and so on.

The removal of emotional deceitful feelings associated with the existence of a profit *per se* (by the way, a positive outcome) should allow the critical mind to focus on the real issue, that is how the profit came into existence: through the production and sale of arms or apples, and, in the case of apples, of tasty or unsavoury apples. These are the relevant questions that we risk omitting if led astray by a questionable (mystifying) use of the word.

## Market

A magic despicable term that has been abused for very long but that is coming back into acceptance is the word 'market.'

In the past, the anthropomorphized market has been accused of all sort of atrocities (imperialism, wars, slavery, etc.) that were, in actual fact, committed by some human beings (with power) against other human beings (powerless).

Attributing most evils to the greedy instinct of men operating on the world market, has given to the nation states the fabricated 'moral' justification to intervene in order to tame and master the 'monster.'

In fact the state, being an instrument of war, and following an economic philosophy (mercantilism) based on rivalry and booty, could only see in the market a force of destructive competition while totally ignoring (or cunningly passing over in silence) the aspects of cooperation (producers and consumers acting for the personal-reciprocal benefit) and emulation (firms improving via competing).

Moreover, the idea that the state can regulate the market for the so called 'public' (i.e. common) good more and better than the 'public' itself (i.e. each individual singularly or in association) is theoretically ludicrous and empirically mendacious. Especially considering the fact that the state dominated market was and, in some cases, is still based on state monopolies (gas, electricity, telephone, radio, tv, air and railway transport, postal services, etc.) surreptitiously called natural or public monopolies as if nature had anything to do with it or the public had something to rejoice in about prices always on the rise, because of lack of competition, via state protectionism and dirigism.

The suppression of the free market and the imposition of the state-controlled market has allowed the state to play, more effectively, two basic roles indispensable to its survival:

- tax collector. The state needs to control the economy in order to assure for itself a specific quota of revenues. Most of these revenues are in the form of a surcharge on the purchase of goods and services

(i.e. V.A.T.). The control of the market is essential for the state as tax collector.

- favours distributor. The state-controlled market is the familiar pond for state controlled and state protected firms. Throughout their existence, these firms have acted as centres for the distribution of a series of favours (money, employment, etc.) to the clique in power and to their supporters.

In the last decades of the XX century, with state monopolies like inflated dinosaurs advancing towards extinction (that is bankruptcy), and with state regulations strangling people's initiative and driving society right into recession and depression, the state-controlled market is not, any longer, unanimously popular with the press.

It is at this very moment that those who have championed freedom all the time, who have seen with anguish the assault by the state on the free market, rightly viewing it as an assault on personal freedom, should not commit the mistake of making the newly recovered free-market (still not so free) their idol. And this for mainly two reasons:

- historical reason

Throughout history, kings and rulers have, generally, been in favour of merchants and their trade as a way to fill their coffers. State and market are not antithetical terms. In fact, mercantilism has been the name given to the economic ideology of the state. The state has not been against the market, but against the uncontrollable untaxable market; that is, against any free intercourse (transaction), where individuals are free to attend undisturbed to their interests as producers and consumers, in a process whose aims are distributed (shared) and multiplied (increased) benefits for all.

For this reason, whatever goes in the direction of freedom should be favoured, without unduly stressing one aspect, as would be in the case of a market only approach.

- semantic reason

The term market applies to a time and a society based essentially on the exchange of material goods, when the transactions took place in a specific area, be it the *piazza* (town square), or the *foire* (fair)

where the merchants convened to show and sell their goods. It is less appropriate for a time and a society where services prevail over merchandise, software over hardware, virtuality over materiality. In this society, to declare that somebody bought a software program or a e-book in the market sounds quite odd while it seems perfectly natural and more appropriate when the purchase refers to fruit and vegetables.

Before and alongside the market, there were and there are other expressions of socio-economic intercourse. Within the new paradigm we should use terms that portray actions that convey the full range of contemporary transactions not adequately covered by the term 'market.' These action/transaction terms are:

- **Exchange.** It involves generally two specific individuals or groups of people. The term exchange gives the idea of reciprocity and includes all sort of transactions (monetary and non-monetary, with vouchers, with time currency, and so on).

- **Share.** It could involve many people, sometimes unknown to each other. In a society based on knowledge, sharing is becoming a very common and a widely-practised occurrence. For instance, people share expertise in a variety of give and take processes (e.g. through the Web) that go almost unnoticed.

- **Give.** A considerable number of socio-economic intercourse (more than we imagine) is based on the giving of gifts. In this case, what somebody gets back (at least in material terms and in the short period) is less than what he/she has given away, but the personal and social effect is a gigantic condision and multiplication of good feeling and good will.

These three actions/transactions, from exchange to gift giving, can be seen as on a continuum, from mirroring behaviour (exchange = reciprocating intercourse) to marvelling at somebody's action (give = initiating intercourse).

So, even keeping the word 'market' as a usable term for plain economic intercourse concerning physical goods of everyday use (food, clothes, etc.) or raw materials (petrol, coal, etc.), in the other cases it would be more appropriate to start using these three words:



exchange, share, give. And the more we use them the more we diffuse and pay attention to the reality they represent.

## **Work - Employment**

In the course of history, peasants, artisans, merchants, however harsh their life, were nevertheless independent in the running of their affairs. Even the apprentices were only temporarily dependent workers, just for the period necessary to learn the art before starting their own workshop. The peasants tilled their field and, when tired of paying the tithe or performing some tasks for their masters, could always pack and leave for good (usually heading for a town). The urban revolution that took place in the Middle Ages meant that their feudal lords were rarely successful in bringing them back.

It is only during the last two centuries (XIX and XX) that people have moved, more and more, from independent activities to dependent employment.

In modern times, vast industrial and bureaucratic complexes have sprouted, filled by an army of workers in a working situation that conspired in making them more and more:

- dependent. Hiring, performing, sacking, in a word, the entire working life of the individual has been in the hand of the master. Even the tremendous improvement in the working conditions has not cancelled this situation of dependency, unless the workers have become co-participants or co-protagonists in the business.

- despondent. The dependent job has become the job to be cherished for life, even if that meant the closure of any hope for a better brighter future. This was the result of a strong feeling of insecurity and an even stronger lack of confidence in the personal capacity for autonomy.

- dull. The dullness of the work has numbed the cerebral faculties of the human being. It is even more so where meaningless work (e.g. bureaucratic tasks) is performed at a high salary. The good pay disguises only a ghastly job.

It is then not surprising that individuals that had become unac-

customed to playing an independent role and performing an independent activity, have been quickly fascinated and attracted by whoever put on his banners the magic words of: 'work,' 'occupation,' 'full employment.'

The situation has radically changed in the last decades of the XX century: the state, the biggest manufacturer of dependency, despondency and dullness, is on the retreat, and a new scenario has appeared, composed of millions of computers and robots carrying out (or assisting in carrying out) the most repetitive functions and the less creative tasks.

Given these considerable changes in technology and its social uses and potentialities, the terms 'work' and 'employment' need a total overhaul.

There are then sharp differences between the old and the new paradigm, that need to be pointed out:

- the old paradigm stressed security and uniformity; the new paradigm stresses autonomy and creativity;
- the old paradigm gave high marks to a society with a high number of people occupied in dependent jobs; the new paradigm considers more advanced and more progressive a society with less people sucked into dependent jobs and more individuals engaged in autonomous activities.

On the whole, the new paradigm requires:

- the replacement of the term work by the concept of **activities** and by the dynamic image of starting, conducting, performing, being involved in activities.
- the going into oblivion of the magic word 'employment' that has filled the mouths of every politician and trade union representative.

In actual fact, what is taking place in the most stimulating and encouraging experiences, is the continuous move from dependent, despondent, dull, work to independent, inspiring, interesting activities.

These activities could be manual or intellectual or, better, they could present a variable mix of the two aspects, as this would be morally satisfying, mentally gratifying and physically healthy.

Furthermore, no one, unless he/she desires so, should be frozen for life in a specific job or working place, with the working time and working methods imposed by some external power. On the contrary, everyone should be involved in different activities during the course of their life, and in various tasks during the course of an activity. For instance, some tasks should be carried out by everybody, as in a small egalitarian club where all the adherents run, at regular intervals, the day-to-day affairs and perform on a rota the necessary chores.

So, behind the move from the use of the word 'work' to that of 'activities' a totally new conception of personal life should appear on the horizon, portraying a new world that is already taking shape around us.

## **Anarchy**

The term 'anarchy' represents the pinnacle of magic words, to which the most despicable connotations have been attributed by many people attracted or manipulated by the ideology of statism.

Pëtr Kropotkin, in his article *Anarchism* written in 1905 for the eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, clarifies from the start the etymology of the word, i.e.  $\alpha\nu + \alpha\rho\chi\eta$  = contrary to dominion. The term is then meant to convey the meaning of opposition to a supreme power who wants to control and constrict everybody and everything, as is the case of the government of a centralized state. This opposition to oppression means a refusal to be bound by a centre of power, external (not freely chosen) and totalitarian (affecting all aspects of life).

The name of anarchist could then be applied to all those who fought power, i.e. dominion, from Benjamin Franklin and Mahatma Gandhi (against the dominion of the British Crown) to Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela (against the dominion of the white man), at least during the period they were engaged in their struggle. In many cases, these fighters for freedom were actually branded as anarchists and their names were in the archives of the police, besides being regular visitors or permanent guests of state prisons.

Following, rightly and correctly, the etymological original meaning, many scholars have used the term anarchy in a very positive way.

For Kant, anarchy is the union of freedom and rules in the absence of force (*Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, 1798).

John Dewey, rebutting the devious use of the word as synonym of chaos and absence of any restraint, affirms that

"even the theoretical anarchist, whose philosophy commits him to the idea that state or government control is an unmitigated evil, believes that with the abolition of the political state other forms of social control would operate: indeed, his opposition to governmental regulation springs from his belief that other and to him more normal modes of control would operate with abolition of the state."  
(John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 1938)

Unfortunately, the consistent lifelong anarchist is a rebel bound to fail, at least in politics, because politics has to do with gaining and maintaining power and the true anarchist is not interested in any game in which the reward is power (dominion over individuals and communities). Anarchists not only oppose power; they do not look for power. If they succeeded in politics, they would be called patriots or even statesmen and this would mean that they have totally and utterly failed as anarchists. This is also the main reason why, in the game of politics, they have been regularly smashed and pulverized either by the old power they fail to erase or by the new power whose rising they fail to prevent. They were playing the wrong game.

The history of the people who have lived and fought for anarchy, is a long tale of deportation, incarceration, death. A chronicle of violence suffered more than of violence committed. To compile the list of individuals (kings and heads of state) killed by anarchists, a small piece of paper would suffice; for the homicidal and genocidal crimes perpetrated by the states, many volumes would not be enough.

The state used the anarchists as a useful (and providential) scapegoat. They were the powerless, isolated human beings whose impris-

onment and condemnation nobody would object to or even take notice of; they (and their presumed violent activities) were also the necessary justification for introducing further authoritarian measures (more police, more controls, etc.) that produced the illusion of security under the "protective" wings of the state.

The fact that the word 'anarchy' still evokes violence and disorder and the word 'state' is, even after the horrors of two world wars, unbelievably, associated to peace and order, can be explained in various ways, namely:

- Provocations. The free loose organization (or lack of organization) of the anarchist movement, meant that the state power could easily infiltrate it with informers and saboteurs. Sometimes violence was instigated by these agent-provocateurs in order for the police to intervene and show that the state was the real guarantor of order and security.

- Propaganda. Anarchists were, in many cases, isolated individuals, on the run from place to place, unable to contrast the lies and fabrications of the state, whose control of the means of communication grew parallel to the weakening in the diffusion of anarchist ideas.

- Puerility. Not only the people outside the anarchist movement were like small children, ignorant of the practice and ends of anarchism. Sometimes also the so-professed anarchists were expounding solutions that were more in tune with crass selfishness than with wise self-realization. Others, who joined the movement, were motivated by reasons that had nothing to do with anarchy, often boasting about blasting and so playing right in the hands of the state.

The combination of these three aspects, one reinforcing the other, made almost inevitable the demise of the anarchist movement and the rising of statism. At the same time, the word anarchy became an epithet of scorn and injury, to be applied just to looters and trouble-makers, with almost no one openly contesting this mendacious use.

The term seems now, at least in the short run, irrecoverable.

For this reason, we need to employ new or apparently new words which stress the building of something desirable more than the opposition to something despicable.

Within the new paradigm, and with reference to the conceptions/attitudes of the individuals, we could use the terms:

- **libertarian**, stressing the aspect of freedom and autonomy, that is self-regulation;

- **federalist**, stressing the aspect of voluntary association between autonomous communities;

- **cosmopolitan**, stressing the aspect of being citizen of the world, feeling at home in every place where freedom and fairness are practised.

With reference to the organization of individuals in communities and taking the word αρχη with the meaning of beginning/source, we could use the terms:

- **polyarchy**, stressing the aspect of varieties of cooperating realities/entities (sources) in different times/spaces;

- **panarchy**, stressing the aspect of varieties of competing realities/entities (sources) in the same time/space.

In this way, the silent personal journey beyond statism could be carried on focusing all the energies on conceiving/constructing the future more than on recriminating/rebutting the past.

## Left - Right

The left-right divide is one of the many (obtrusive and obsolete) remnants of the time of the French Revolution of 1789. When the French Estates General convened, in order to facilitate the counting of votes concerning the opportunity of a royal veto, the nobility (favouring the veto) regrouped on the right of the Speaker while the Third Estate (opposing the veto) took place on the left. As usual, the winners were those in the centre, proposing the compromise of upholding the veto for two more years.

From that time and from such humble beginning (i.e. the counting of votes), the left-right divide has stuck in politics as a quick terminological way for differentiating conservative and reactionaries on one side (right) and progressive and revolutionaries on the other (left).

The success of this pair of terms was due also to the existence, in some European societies (e.g. France during the XIX century) of clashes between ideas and groups (e.g. Monarchists vs. Republicans) in which one side represented (or was made to represent) tradition and conservation (the past) while the other personified innovation and progress (the future).

Besides this contrast, concerning the institutional form of the state, a new contraposition was making its mark on the scene, namely that of bourgeoisie or industrial entrepreneurs vs. proletariat or manual workers. In the political arena, the interests of these two social groups were represented by parties that defined themselves as of the right or of the left from the position of the seats of their members elected to the Parliament.

In this updated version, the right would stress the values of freedom and nation while the left would champion those of equality and internationalism.

Throughout the XX century, the use of the left-right categories, with these contrasting qualifications, that is

- freedom vs. equality
  - nationalism vs. internationalism
- has proved untenable in reality.

In fact, the pretended freedom of the right could very well include state totalitarianism and, in economic matters, its alleged laissez-faire could easily accommodate the most stringent protectionism.

As for the left, egalitarianism was branded by Stalin as a "petty-bourgeois deviation" and so a sharp inequality of pay became, in the very land of "real socialism," a fundamental aspect of working life.

With regard to the nationalism-internationalism contrast, this was just a mythical invention. During the first half of the XX century almost everybody engaged in politics was a nationalist; the mask of vaunted internationalism eventually fell when most socialist parties of Europe embraced war and nationalistic policies, and the communist parties started theorizing socialism in one country and promoting national versions of communism.

It is then clear from what has been said so far that the left-right

divide is, especially now, only a sort of political game of role-playing, devoid of serious and consistent substance.

As a matter of principle and as far as the most important aspects of life are concerned, the characterization left-right does not mean anything. This is especially true for attitudes and actions towards nature and freedom; neither freedom nor nature has any left or right qualification.

Furthermore, real current processes and social actors (e.g. globalization, migrations, non governmental organizations, etc.) cannot be confined/dealt within the straitjacket of the right-left divide.

Finally, what is most striking in all this nonsense of right and left, is the fact that on many aspects of contemporary life, people and politicians who profess to be on opposite sides present the same (fake) remedies, using the same (fallacious) arguments with even the same (phone) words. Sometimes, some of them change their political allegiances, put another mask, and the game (or joke) goes on as usual.

All this was and is made possible by a state of affairs in which it is permitted to some figures (called people's representatives) to convene in a room (called parliament) and it is given them the authorization of meddling in the lives of everybody and taking decisions binding for everybody. This leads to the formation of two competing factions, vying for the electorate's favours, differentiated only by external labels (left and right) but, to a closer and careful examination, indistinguishable in all the rest (values, ideas, projects, actions, etc.) except in their attempt to drain resources towards their own faction.

As for now, these categories are becoming more and more out of touch with reality; hopefully, quite soon, a point will be reached when the absurdities generated by the use of these categories will be so evident to even the most naive journalist/commentator that these two terms will be suddenly dropped as a dead body.

We should accelerate this dismissal.

Left and right are and must remain as simple terms for qualifying physical position or direction. In the political or ethical discourse we need to use terms that produce more precise and robust statements,



portraying decisions and actions, that is, what somebody has decided/would decide and what has done/would do with respect to a specific problem.

In this case, if there are differences between two positions they would be real and not fictitious.

At that point we could assess decisions and actions on the basis of meaningful essential values and not according to manipulated empty words.

In this way alienation will stop and real decisions and actions with associated real responsibilities and duties will be the substance of everybody's life.

Ortega y Gasset, already in 1937, in his Prologue to *La rebelión de las masas*, gave one of the best clarifications of what actually means to accept the left and right categorization:

"Ser de la izquierda es, como ser de la derecha, una de las infinitas maneras que el hombre puede elegir para ser un imbécil: ambas, en efecto, son formas de la hemiplejía moral." ("Being on the Left or being on the Right is one of the many ways man can choose for being an idiot; both are, actually, forms of moral paralysis").

## **Liberté - Egalité - Fraternité**

The French Revolution put on his banners and left as a heritage, impressed on people's minds, three magic words: Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.

While recognizing the eternal value of these words, it is also necessary to add that they are sometimes used in a conventional ritualistic way by people who pay respect to them without paying much attention to what they mean. It would be then better if more precise terms were employed to convey the same feelings and attitudes attached to those words but in a clearer and more cogent way.

### **Liberté (Liberty)**

In a celebrated passage, Montesquieu states that freedom is "the right to do all that the laws allow us to do." Given the fact that the

political and juridical thinking in the western world has been heavily influenced by Montesquieu's writings, the conception of Liberty as acting within the limits of the law should be taken into consideration and analysed because it still represents a widely accepted interpretation of the word.

At that time the term 'law' was employed as referring, mainly, to 'natural law,' that is the inviolable and unalterable rights of the human beings (law as human reason), rather than to 'positive law' (law as state's commands).

Since then, the unfolding of political and juridical history, in many parts of the world, has been in the direction of representative democracy, in which elected individuals convene in a Parliament to elaborate and promulgate laws binding for all those living within a certain territory and subject to a certain jurisdiction.

Following this shift, from 'natural' laws, originated by moral rational principles and customary uses, to 'positive' laws, made by elected representatives, the law has become a pliable affair, linked to the wishes of the current electoral majority and to the will of the current political power.

Within this scenario, it could very well happen (as it has happened) that laws are introduced, (unreasonably) harming somebody, (unduly) restricting the range of decisions of somebody else, discriminating against a minority group, all this not only in the name of democracy but in the very name of liberty

Given this paradoxical outcome, in order to keep the link between freedom (enjoyment of liberty) and norms (respect of rules), it would be better to modify the conception of liberty from a passive duty (i.e. obey the law) to an active concern (i.e. produce and administer the rules that permit a smooth intercourse between individuals).

In this respect, it would be better to replace the term liberty with the term **autonomy**, that is self-rule (*autos* = self; *nomos* = norm, rule).

Autonomy means that the rules are:

- directly produced (e.g. by the members, as in a club)
- personally accepted (e.g. interiorized freely and willingly)
- collectively administered (e.g. a jury)

by the same individuals that are affected by them.

Freedom as autonomy includes also the possibility of peacefully seceding in order to form a separate independent community (or to live independently of any community) if there are irreconcilable objections to the existing rules or for whatever personal reason might arise.

### **Egalité** (Equality)

In a society divided into hierarchical, non permeable 'estates,' as was the French society before the Revolution, the cry of equality (*égalité*) had a very powerful and fully justifiable appeal.

Taken on board by the Russian revolution and by the European communist parties that followed in its wake, it has unfortunately become a pretext for massification and homogenization of individuals, while the distance between the common person (nominally in power) and the ruling élite (actually in command), instead of narrowing, grew tremendously.

To offer just a simple example from the economic domain, during the Stalin period, in the Soviet Union, the 'paradise' of the communist workers and so the kingdom of equality, the wages of the top administrators came to be 300 times higher than those of the manual workers. The equality, if we can use this term, was only in the regimentation of the workers and in the reduction of millions of individuals into an indistinguishable mass.

Because of this misuse, the word 'equality' still carries with it the unpalatable connotation of everybody being like everybody else, sameness replicated ad infinitum.

To overcome the negative aspects attached to the term 'equality' while preserving the positive ones of impartiality, justice, parity of opportunities, and so on, it would be advisable to employ the word **equity** that better conveys the ideas of fairness and decency towards each and everybody.

### **Fraternité** (Fraternity)

Throughout history, individuals have associated in small and large groups and have cooperated on a voluntary basis to provide assistance to people in need (e.g. physical disabilities, natural calamities).

ties). Local parishes, work and exchange cooperatives, mutual aid societies, civic bodies, individual benefactors, these are some of the ways through which the deep human tendency for succour and support has been expressed and promoted.

Unfortunately, in the course of the last two centuries, the nation states have succeeded in dismantling and destroying local means and ways of reciprocal help and assistance and have replaced (or attempted to replace) them with central state run agencies (e.g. social security).

The result is that

- (a) the number of people in need has increased tremendously, in direct relation to the amount of available distributed provision;
- (b) the people who have fallen foul of state intervention have generally become addicted to it and unable to get out of their dependency.

The economic crisis of the state has made more and more apparent that these state agencies not only did not and do not work for the well-being (actual and long lasting) of the person, but, generally, have aggravated the problem making the need for assistance a permanent condition.

In recent times, non governmental organizations, charities, groups of *benevoles*, voluntary associations, etc. are, more and more, filling the place left vacant by the empty promises of the state and are trying to satisfy the demands for real help, left unanswered by the messy, illusory workings of the state agencies.

Through them fraternity (brotherhood/sisterhood) is reappearing on the global scene and its appropriate name is **care**.

Care is fraternity in action, carried out by compassionate and competent individuals and aiming at personal well-being.

The difference between care and the provision of assistance by the state is deep and comes mainly from two aspects:

- caring is a common concern of every single human being in a community; it is not the area of intervention of some administrator or the bureaucratic task assigned to some bureaucratic 'professional.'
- caring is a personal concern in which the intercourse between the

giver and the receiver produces for both some material and psychological satisfaction; and this is possible if and only if the situation is meant to evolve towards a positive conclusion (e.g. the recovery from a distressful condition, the reconstruction of a disaster area, a serene ending of life, etc.).

Through care as a common and personal concern, we will be moving away from the welfare state (that is, in reality, the welfare of the state, i.e. of those who occupy and use the state as their own hunting territory) towards the well-being of the person, that is the health and wealth of the harmonious personality proper to the new paradigm.

### **Public - Private**

One of the key words that is more ambiguously and deceitfully used within the old paradigm, is that of 'public' as opposed to 'private.'

Originally, public and private were (and still are) mainly used as linked to:

- quantitative number
- public = many
- private = one or few.

When the force of number came to be considered as worth something in itself, it was natural that those in power appropriated for themselves the adjective 'public' to stress the fact that they were speaking and acting in the name and on behalf of the largest number of people (the majority).

Following this appropriation, a new association came into being, attributing to the word public a:

- juridical status
- public = state owned/controlled/managed
- private = owned/controlled/managed by other(s) than the state.

Once these mental associations came into being, it was easy to carry them a step further, conferring to quantitative number and juridical status a:

- moral standing

public = good

private = bad (or potentially bad).

Through this process of building mental associations, 'public' has become a magic word having, practically always, a positive ring, in contrast with 'private,' taken, by default, as the negative pole.

For instance, a very common statement, uttered by everybody, is: in the 'public' interest. For something to be considered in the public interest it means, implicitly, that it is superior and is/should be accepted without further discussion; this is because it is in the interest of the many or in the interest of the state, with the state being thought as the expression of the many if not of all.

Performing a more careful analysis, we soon realize the need for untangling some of the accepted (and unquestioned) associations in which the word 'public' is used as the link that joins two terms in order to convey positive/favourable attitudes.

We have, for instance, the following associations:

(a) many = public = good

The equation many = public = good, has been subtly instilled into people's minds and is consonant with the mass propaganda of the mighty states keen on praising and glorifying big size and large quantity (the so-called power of numbers).

But, even to a superficial observer it should soon appear evident that, as a matter of fact and of principle, the power of numbers (size, quantity) should have nothing to do with terms like public or private and, certainly, it has nothing to do with qualifications of good or bad.

To attribute, almost automatically, positive or negative labels to public and private as expression of numbers (i.e. the many, the majority) could lead us (or the state rulers) to the abominable position of justifying or condoning a 'public' mob lynching of a 'private' individual or a 'public' killing by the state (war, terrorism, capital execution) in response to a 'private' act of violence.

In both cases there are individuals committing violence and as individuals (neither public nor private) they should be considered responsible for their acts.

(b) state = public = good

The equation state = public = good is a devious (but indispensable) propaganda move by the state power in order to promote the identification between the people and the state. For this to happen, society had to be replaced by the state and the state had to pretend to be the only real social (i.e. public) body; everything else outside the state is private, that is particularistic, not general and so, not in the 'public' interest.

This appropriation of the word 'public' by the state (and its administrative bodies) has produced and is still producing paradoxical if not absurd consequences. For instance, when the state government tries to impose idiotic and unfair rules (e.g. taxation, discrimination, etc.) it invariably asserts that they are in the 'public' interest even when the real public (those directly affected) has totally different or the most various ideas about its own interests. In this case, the state (that is the central and local bureaucrats and politicians) pretends to be more 'public' than the people at large.

Another absurd example of this use of the word 'public' is in the economic domain. Take for example a company, employing thousands of people, whose shares are owned by hundreds of thousand of individuals, producing goods and services for millions of customers all over the world and whose products affect the life and the way of living of millions of direct or indirect users. And, in contrast, take a secretive elitist organization within the state. Now, following current definitions, the first is labelled as private and the second as a public body. Clearly, this is not only silly or ludicrous, but patently absurd.

Moreover, to make another example, when a firm is denationalized and the shares are bought by hundreds of thousand of individuals, this is called 'privatising'; in actual fact it now belongs to a very great number of shareholders instead of being the personal feud of a very few bureaucrats and politicians.

Given these realities, some proposals are urgently needed in order to avoid the most blatant absurdities and to suggest a more precise use of terms.

Most of all, we need to take out from the terms public and private

undue emotional overtones (good-bad, positive-negative) and we should devise and employ more appropriate definitions.

Here we present some suggestions and advance some proposals.

#### Public

- Use the word 'public' preferably only with reference to things and places with the sense of open-accessible to anyone (e.g. a park is a public amenity; a cinema is a public place, accessible to everybody willing to pay an entrance fee).

- Replace the word 'public' with specific terms (e.g. group, community, crowd, audience, spectators, etc.) when referring to human beings.

- Replace the word 'public' with the terms 'collective' or 'mass' when it refers to many individuals and it is important to stress the aspects of quantity and whole (e.g. collective transport as opposed to individual transport).

- Replace the word 'public' with the term 'common' when referring to characteristics shared by a specific group of people (e.g. common interests, as the interests that some individuals have in common).

- Replace the word 'public' with the terms 'state' ; 'regional' ; 'municipal' when referring to activities, decisions, properties of these political or administrative bodies of power.

#### Private

- Use the word private preferably only with reference to things and places, with the sense of reserved-restricted (access, availability, etc.) to specific individuals or groups (e.g. a house is a private place, for the members of the family and their guests).

- Replace the word private with specific terms (e.g. man, woman, person, individual) when referring to human beings. This means that there are no 'private individuals' unless we intend to use the word 'private' in the old original sense of deprived (of basic rights, of state office, of goods, etc.) or withdrawn (from social life).

- Replace the word private with the terms 'personal' or 'individual' when referring to a specific object linked to a single human being (e.g. personal computer, individual property, etc.).



- Replace the word private with the terms 'group' or 'company' (or any appropriate definition) when referring to something linked to an entity composed by several individuals (e.g. group ownership, company property, etc.).

In general, given the vagueness, ambiguity and manipulative power of the two adjectives public and private we should try to use them sparingly and we should critically question whoever uses them inappropriately and inaccurately.

### **Roots - Identity - Nationality**

In a world of many despondent people, dependently performing dull work, deep seated needs of security and belongingness were stirred and conveyed by two words that had quite a large appeal and still evoke positive feelings.

These words are: roots and identity.

With reference to human beings, roots basically means to have a firm ground (physical, cultural) to which one is firmly anchored. In contrast, to have no roots, to be *déraciné*, was/is considered an unfortunate situation, like floating aimlessly in the air, in a state of psychological malaise and uneasiness.

To have no roots is believed also similar to having no identity, to be a phantom with no face, no legible past and no foreseeable future. In actual fact, having an identity has now become like a byword for existing.

All this seems quite unobjectionable.

A more careful and critical examination of these two terms brings to the fore less appealing aspects.

For instance, the naturalistic image of having roots should mean that, like a tree, a person is bound to the soil, incapable of moving. So, to compare the dynamic human being to a fixed vegetable specimen does not seem a compliment at all.

As for identity, the word comes from the Latin *idem* meaning 'the same' or *identidem* that means 'repeatedly,' 'in the same way.'

Referring to a human being, these characteristics do not seem to portray very appealing/interesting traits.

In actual fact, the healthy human being is a person in a process of becoming, playing different roles in syntony and harmony with a changing environment. One of the basic features of the living and flourishing individual is the ability to adapt and this requires a fit (i.e. appropriate) flexibility not a fixed (i.e. frozen) identity.

But, the real trouble with these two words, roots and identity, and the main reason for suggesting they be dropped from the vocabulary of the social sciences, derives from their association with the word 'nationality.'

The term nationality, in its etymology, simply means that a person is born (*natus*) in a certain place. Nothing more, nothing less, and certainly nothing to fight or die about.

Nationality becomes something obnoxious when the words 'roots' and 'identity' are attached to it with mystically charged implications.

The process of attributing roots to people (fixing them to the soil) and ascribing to them a frozen identity (personal, cultural, etc.) found its accomplishment through the coming to dominance of the nation state.

From that moment, the word 'roots' became associated with absorbing and propagating the dominant culture of the national state (the fatherland) and the word 'identity' came to be a shorthand for national identity.

A series of changes, i.e. impositions and restrictions, were then introduced, through which the concepts of roots, identity and nationality became glorified and codified. For instance:

#### Roots

In the first half of the XX century, some states (fascist Italy, communist Soviet Union) introduced measures to attach people to the soil, as in the feudal system, by issuing internal passports to restrict movements of people from rural to urban areas.

Besides that, in almost every country, the introduction of the passport differentiated (bureaucratically and juridically) between people born in different regions of the world, making more difficult, and so

discouraging, moving and intermingling, rooting people to the place where they happened to be born. This in stark contrast to the XIX and early XX centuries when vast migrations took place, especially between Europe and the Americas.

Nowadays, In some countries (e.g. France) to be on the move, without a fixed abode, is still equivalent to being a non citizen, that is a person without rights and, generally, the target of deep suspicion.

#### Identity

In order to firmly root and control somebody, the state needed to clearly identify him/her, and so identity cards and all sort of documents and papers were invented to register each and every person subjected to a central state power. In some countries (e.g. Italy), everybody has to carry an identity document at all times, otherwise they might be stopped and detained by the state police.

To have no identity (stateless person) or many identities (cosmopolitan person) or an identity that does not match with the (national) one imposed/accepted by the state, is a sure recipe for trouble (especially in times of insecurity and nationalistic frenzy).

Identity is also forced upon individuals by a system of cultural indoctrination, when the ruling clique dictate on everybody the acceptance of the same language and laws. As a matter of fact, the national identity is essentially a manufactured identity, obtained by crushing local cultures, rather than a real common bond joining people living next to each other.

#### Nationality

Under the nation state, a person, from birth to death, is put under a category (English, French, Italian, etc.) from which it is not easy to escape. This ascribed imposed label is like the branding of cattle by the owner, to keep and control it within a fence (fixed borders).

Furthermore, being assigned to a narrow category instead of being part of humanity at large, your destiny is (willingly or unwillingly) the destiny of your category, for good or bad (progression, decadence, destruction).

To make a historical parallel, in some places, during the Middle Ages, people were assigned the same religion as the master in which

territory they happened to be born (*cuius regio, eius religio*); now people are generally and automatically given the nationality of the state in whose territory they are born, with all the juridical obligations and compulsions that follow from it; a situation not really different from the one in the Middle Ages.

And, in the course of history, some people, without moving from their place of birth, found themselves changing nationality (sometimes more than once) just because of the intromission of a different state ruling power. Perhaps, future generations, pondering on these facts, would consider our personal freedom under the nation state on the par with that of the serfs under the feudal system, that is very limited indeed.

In the world of nation states, nationality, based on attached/fixed roots and ascribed/imposed cultural identity, froze people into rival groups (natives - foreigners) and gave rise to senseless destructive conflicts. These absurd distinctions, deviously manufactured, have to disappear, taking with them the terms 'roots' and 'identity' as applied to human beings.

The new world and the new paradigm present many substantial differences with respect to the old one. With regard to the terms under exam, the main mental and material changes proposed are the following ones:

- from fixed roots to fresh seeds

The person is not a tree attached to the soil by order of a nation state. The freedom of anybody, as world citizen, to move and settle anywhere on the earth should not be limited other than by personal wishes or logistic matters.

If we want to convey the idea that the human being takes vital (natural, cultural) substances from the environment and uses them for self development, the image of 'seeds' could be a more appropriate one than that of 'roots.' Human beings could be then seen as strong seeds that grow in any soil, as long as it is rich in the appropriate nutrients, and as long as they keep their seed-like freshness.

- from imposed identity (national mono culture) to interbreeding cultural patterns (transnational cultural mix)

If we look at interesting personalities, we see them being at home in various courts of Europe (Voltaire), expressing themselves in various cultural domains (Leonardo), changing styles through different phases of their artistic life (Picasso), impersonating many different characters (Laurence Olivier).

To give to them a single identity would be to deprive them (and the world) of their worth and richness. It is only the bureaucrat that has always the same face and the same immutable identity, at work and at home, during the course of the entire life.

In the new paradigm (as in actual reality) there is no imposed identity because there is no national culture; in fact, there are only cultures developing from a dazzling plurality of contributions from individuals in near or far away places and from current or far remote times.

If we want to convey the image of some recognisable features, something familiar but not fixed forever, the word pattern, instead of identity, would appear more appropriate.

- from ascribed nationality to asserted multinationality

Nationality is not and should not be something a person finds imposed upon him at her birth, unless it is simply a birth note stating the place and time the event happened. Nothing more.

For this reason, in the new paradigm, the concept of nationality as it has been manufactured and imposed with violence by the state, has no place whatsoever.

We have all one country: the world.

To mark a break with the past and knowing the hatred inspired and spread by the states towards 'multinational' firms, we could say that we are all 'multinationals,' (or transnationals), meaning that we are the result of the mixing of many people and many cultures, from various places, since the beginning of time.

So, in the new paradigm, the old smelly bag of magic words qualifying a piece of soil as fatherland, mother country, *patrie*, nation or referring to groups of people as nationals or foreigners, loses any empirical meaning and emotional appeal.

The basic, meaningful concepts to be employed are those of

geographical region and birthplace; and, with reference to human beings, the simple terms of person (*per sonum* = somebody having a voice) and individual (somebody unique).

Not long ago, in some parts of the western world, anyone from the next village was considered a foreigner, a stranger, i.e. coming from the outside (*foris, extraneus*). Now, for the multicultural cosmopolitan open-minded citizen/traveller/communicator of this world, there are no foreigners, at least not in a permanent way. Foreigner is or might be only the one(s) we are not familiar with, we do not know, until we do know him/her/them.

As for the nation, what was supposed to link and bond people was, essentially, the fact that they were born on the same soil, spoke the same language and were subject to the same jurisdiction. A very static (always the same soil), limiting (just one language) and artificial (under the same jurisdiction) condition, that is and will be more and more uncongenial even for the simple person of the XXI century.

Communities instead arise from what individuals have in common (common interests, common attitudes, common views) and are matter of choice(s), not ascription.

The best example of community is the community of scientists. For them, through the centuries, the barriers of birth-place and mother-tongue did not apply. In fact, the more notions they have about this world, the less they are bound by one or any nation.

Science has no country and speaks a universal idiom; the scientist is at home in every place, where the pursuit of knowledge is promoted, and communicates in all languages, for those who pay attention, listen and participate.

As is the case for the polyvalent, polycultural, polyglot person to whom the new paradigm refers.

### **General considerations**

In the course of time language undergoes transformations, with terms modified in their use and meaning.

In contrast, the seminal everlasting values survive basically unchanged and withstand even the most atrocious assaults.

What has happened is that, in a world dominated by nation states, war has been passed for peace, ignorance for knowledge and slavery for freedom. But, since the beginning of history, it is clear inside our mind and our heart, what is peace, what is knowledge and what is freedom.

Nevertheless, to make things smoother and to avoid that the use and meanings of words be unduly manipulated in order to manipulate human beings, we should, generally, follow a simple precaution: when we use terms that affect people's life in practical ways, we should actualize and operationalize them.

To actualize and operationalize words means to bring them down to reality and see how they work in practice.

For instance, if the states talk about freedom while introducing all sort of controls and restrictions to people's movement, we know which freedom they are talking about (freedom as fetters).

Through actualization and operationalization, it would be then more difficult to use a term as a screen to hide either a manipulative deception or a misleading illusion.

## FROM VICIOUS INTERESTS TO VIRTUOUS CHOICES

**Interests : the down-to-earth hypothesis**

**Interests : the up-in-the-sky myth**

**Interests : the professional figures**

- Doctors

- Lawyers

- Accountants

- Teachers

- Economists

**Interests : the state figures**

- The law workers

- The police workers

- The paper workers

- The social workers

**The nature of interests**

**Vested-hidden interests as vicious interests**

**Competing-visible interests for virtuous choices**





### **Interests : the down-to-earth hypothesis**

**W**e, the common people, assume the existence of material personal interests that guide the behaviour of all or most individuals operating in a business: monetary gain.

The existence of material personal interests is taken almost for granted in any business endeavour, always and everywhere, even when the gain is not so certain, is not so high as supposed, or when other motives play a stronger role (power, adventure, influence, recognition, mission, etc.).

The corollary to this, is the other assumption and attitude that the interests of the producer/seller are not only different but divergent from that of the consumer/buyer; so that, any gain secured by the former, is in almost direct relation to some pain or loss incurred by the latter.

To contrast this general disenchantment about the producer's motives (i.e. pure and simple maximization of monetary gains), the businessmen, by means of glossy publicity and edulcorated press releases, try to portray their interests as the interests of society at large, especially when they are big corporations grown fat through state protectionism.

To complete the picture, it must be said that not many consumers actually believe a word of what the businessmen proclaim (i.e. their being paladins of the general interest) and keep safeguarding personally their own interests, especially when the financial resources are limited.

This sketchy presentation of a specific reality has been made just to stress that, in the economic domain, we have formed a mental image (hypothesis) and an empirical attitude (habit) based on the following premisses:

- there are no general universal interests
- there are only specific personal interests.

Given these premisses, the conclusion reached by most individuals is that, as far as economic behaviour is concerned, to forfeit the

right to look after his/her own interests, could lead to disaster; consequently, the surest way to avert it, is for everybody to attend carefully to those interests (personally or with personal assistance by a professional expert).

This is, basically, the Adam Smith position, with the addition that each one, cleverly looking after his/her own long-term interests, could contribute to the realization of other individual personal interests.

### **Interests : the up-in-the-sky myth**

Given this mental image and empirical attitude in the economic domain, it is quite strange to realize that similar images and attitudes do not prevail, with the same vigour and the same consistency, in other spheres of life and activity.

In actual fact, putting aside cynical remarks and occasional outbursts of rage, people, generally, think and act as if under the illusion that, in many sectors of life, apart from the economy:

- there are no material interests (or they are not so strong)
- there are no particular interests (or they are not prevalent)
- there are general interests (different from personal interests)
- there are individuals and organisations that are mandated to provide and grant these presumed general interests.

The individuals here referred to, as providers and guarantors of the general interests, are:

- the professional figures (doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc.)
- the state figures (policemen, state clerks, social workers, etc.).

Contrary to this image and attitude, we intend to point out that, also in those cases, as in any other case affecting human beings

- there are strong material interests
- there are exclusively particular interests.

These are certainly not new ideas. Intervening in front of the Selected Committee on Privileges (1947) Winston Churchill had this to say with reference to Members of Parliament:

"Everybody here has private interests which may be affected by legislation which is passing and so forth ... Then there are those people who come to represent public bodies, particular groups of a non-political character in the general sense, and there again we must recognise that as one of the conditions of our varied life ... We are not supposed to be an assembly of gentlemen who have no interests of any kind and no association of any kind. That is ridiculous. That might apply in Heaven, but not, happily, here ... ." (Winston Churchill, 1947)

Having said that, it must be added that there is nothing strange nor reproachable with this situation, as some would have us to believe. As previously pointed out, as long as we refer to the earth and to its inhabitants, we have argued that:

- there are no purely immaterial interests, other than for angels and saints;
- there are no general interests other than, or in another form than, the particular shared interests of specific individuals.

If this is the case, there should not be any problem with respect to these two large categories of individuals (professional and state figures), the nature of their interests being similar to that of everybody else.

The problem arises because, contrary to the situation of almost everybody else, their interests (material and particular) are:

- vested: highly protected and defended by a large apparatus of propaganda that has put them in a position of strength and dominance, increasing the gap between the safeguard of their interests and that of other individuals;
- hidden: deeply concealed by an aura of deontological respectability, an esoteric jargon, or behind a thick screen, covering secret practices and mysterious collusion.

Before giving some evidence and putting forward some observations concerning these supposed vested-hidden interests, it is necessary to stress that the remarks that will be made do not affect all individuals belonging to a category, nor, those affected, in the same measure. Furthermore, it must be said that most of professional and state figures are not conscious of being part of a category with vested-hidden interests, as many aristocrats, in the *Ancien Régime*, never realized that their privileges were not the design of a celestial God but the outcome of a terrestrial power.

### **Interests : the professional figures**

The so-called liberal and intellectual professions have, in the course of time, surrounded themselves with an aura of respectability and sacrality that has spared them the animosity and acrimony (to say the least) that have been addressed to the economic (business) sector.

This image of propriety and correctness is not always reliable.

A brief sketch of the actual situation and current practices of some of these professional figures is necessary for demystifying myths and shattering pious illusions.

#### Doctors

The medical profession (including in this category the healers of the body and the mind) has become a powerful lobby from the time when Koch and Charcot practised the art.

The profession has undergone a process of specialization aiming at training doctors to focus either on the body or on the mind (but not on both at the same time).

As for the body, they are trained to intervene on a specific disease affecting only a specific part of it. Even general practitioners very rarely see and examine the full person and the multiple inter-relations with the natural and social environment in which the person lives. This would probably be an impossible demand, considering that, on average, only a few minutes (in England, 7 minutes in the year 2001), are reserved to each individual seeking medical advice.

As a professional group, not only are they not in the forefront of

the ecological movement, but, in many places, they do not even seem to notice and warn about the destruction and ravages of the environment that affects and compromises the health of human beings. And this is very odd, to say the least, because they are the professional group that is closest to the manifestation of the problem, that is the decline of people's health and well-being as a result of the deterioration of the environment, and with plenty of data at their disposal. Perhaps, they feel pretty satisfied by the fact that a general betterment in living conditions (i.e. food, clothes, houses, etc.) has lengthened the span of life, and attribute (undeservedly) to themselves most of the merit.

In general, they are more worried about shielding themselves from what they qualify as intruders (e.g. alternative medicine practitioners) than protecting human beings from large and small ecological disasters.

This is easily understandable. In actual fact, the situation for the medical profession is a totally paradoxical one: the worse the environmental stress and the psychological distress, the better for business. They are caught in a tragical dilemma, not of their making, between prevention of disease or provision of medical care. For a series of reason (time, energies, training, etc.) they have opted, in large majority, exclusively, for the latter.

So, it is neither in the attitude nor in the interest of the medical profession, as a whole, to inquire into the causes of physical disease and mental malaise. It is neither in their attitude nor in their interest to diffuse information about self-care and self-healing.

Furthermore, their practice puts in their hands, as pointed out, a wealth of data they do not want, do not intend or are not prepared to use for advancing radical proposals. Besides that, it would be ruinous for their interests. Their attempted solutions, in general, must be limited to a specific case, using conventional means (mostly chemical drugs), under their strict control.

Inside the present paradigm they are doing brisk business; they are in great demand and the demand is increasing dramatically. If things continue like this, the triad doctor-psychologist-pharmacist

can really become the new holy trinity, i.e. the indispensable figures of reference for surviving in modern life.

#### Lawyers

Lawyers have existed for centuries, to professionally assist individuals in reaching an agreement concerning a controversy. In Roman times, with no written code up to the *Justinian Corpus Juris Civilis* (a.D. 529-565), the lawyers were also the producers of law, working out rules of settlement, derived from secular customs and deemed acceptable to their fellow citizens.

With the installation in power of the state and its propagation to almost every sphere of life, the law, its emanation and application, became state prerogatives. Natural right came to be replaced by the so-called positive laws, and morality gave way to legality. Where few moral steady principles existed, thousands of changeable contradictory laws were put in place (e.g. in Italy 50.000, as up to the year 2000). With regard to this, it has already been remarked, long time ago, that "*corruptissima republica, plurimae leges*" in other words, the more corrupt the republic, the higher the number of laws (Tacitus, *Annales*).

The multiplication of laws in modern times is the invaluable bequest that the lawyers Robespierre, Danton and Saint-Just, amongst others, all working so hard for the establishment of the omnipotent state, have left to their fellows in the trade.

For the category this proliferation of laws has been a god-send, or better, a state-send, insofar as it has permitted to its members to grow and multiply and even to add to the juridical list new professional figures (e.g. the *notaires* in France and Italy).

The state has given to the lawyers the reasons for and the means of existence. In exchange, the lawyers act as secular priests (justifying the existence and the power of the state) and guard dogs (providing the state with juridical ammunition to exercise and keep the power).

The task of the lawyers is, as proclaimed, to assist in reestablishing the smooth operational intercourse of individuals in society, when some controversy arises.

However, the development of good social relations and under-

standing amongst individuals would leave the mass of lawyers not in much demand and so in deep trouble (meagre earnings).

As a matter of fact, and this should not be taken as a moral reproach addressed to them, the lawyers fish, predominantly, in the turbid waters of deceitful behaviour, ambiguous interpretation, formalistic punctiliousness.

So, willingly or unwillingly, their interests lay in the multiplications of Byzantine indecipherable laws, giving rise of all sort of litigation or pretext for litigation. And the state gives them aplenty.

To this fertile ground for social and personal morass, the lawyers add some of their own: misrepresentation, procrastination, legalistic cavils; in a word, simple and plain trickery.

When deceit is not a viable tool (e.g. in the case of the *notaires*), the juridical professionals play a parasitic and costly role that could be very well performed, more cheaply and effectively, by a register, manned by a group of citizens or by a local agency.

The more these categories succeed and prosper, the more it might mean that parasitism is growing and morality is declining. Both of which are likely to bring more disorder. This will be eagerly assumed by the legal profession as the need for more state and so more laws, and then more lawyers, in a process of upholding vested-hidden interests that feeds itself until it is unmasked and overturned by critical reflection and firm resolution.

#### Accountants

The situation of the accountants is, in many respect, similar to that of the lawyers. The absorption of huge economic resources by the state, and the multiplication of financial obligations towards the state, has boasted the profession of accountants to an unbelievable degree.

The fiscal jungle brought about by the state ha made the accountant one of the central figures of contemporary life. The *minutiae* of fiscal dispositions, changing all too often, have become one of the major painful realities to be dealt with, from the business enterprise down to families and individuals. The accountant, working for these

subjects, is required to untangle this gigantic mess and to please both the state and the client.

So, notwithstanding the mumbling about the never-ending flow of new state financial dispositions, the real interest of the accountants resides firmly in the continuous existence of the bureaucratic regulations in every aspect of economic life, in their extension to every possible subject (pimps and prostitutes possibly included) and in their continuous alteration and complication.

#### Overview

What is common to all these professions (doctors, lawyers, accountants) is that they exist and prosper in direct relation to the existence and enlargement of what can be generally defined 'problematic situations' (diseases, litigations, compulsory payments, etc.), in most cases, directly manufactured by the 'bureaucratic state.'

The reduction, not to say the disappearance, of most of these 'problematic situations' and of their generator, the 'bureaucratic state,' would spell disaster for the vested-hidden interests of these professions up to the point of threatening their survival (for instance, in the case of the *notaires*).

Amongst the professional figures, we include also some who are paid by the state but whose interest and survival are not (necessarily) coincident or dependent on the survival of the state.

We examine here two figures: teachers and economists.

#### Teachers

Since the time when the state expropriated the parishes and the local communities, taking over the care and education of children and adults, and imposing compulsory state schooling, the teachers have been the *longa manus* of the central power in shaping minds.

Teachers are granted a job by the state; so, it is clear enough that, in exchange, they should grant to the state the formation of obedient subjects (from *sub - jacere* = to stay under). There is nothing to be ashamed of when a person believes in the progressive indispensable role of the state and he/she wants the message to be passed on for other people to believe it too.



Nevertheless, there are some points that should be very clear to everybody:

- the state means somebody in power and so, when the state is in control of the education, it means also that, whoever is in power, he can exact from the personnel he employs, the same unquestioned obedience and eagerness in shaping the minds of people, according to the ideology dominant at the time;

- within this situation, the interest of the teachers as state paid employees, is not that of diffusing and developing knowledge, but that of transmitting, besides a wealth of data, ideological messages whose underlying content is to stress the necessary progressive role of the present state power, to show the negative regressive role of all the previous or different forms of power and, overall, to instill the fear in case of absence of the state power.

This is not at all a recommendable outcome because there is an irreconcilable contrast between the interest of knowledge, founded on the experimentation and introduction of original ideas, and the interest of the state, based on the conservation and transmission of conventional notions. And most teachers, consciously or unconsciously, play the role of state ideological messengers instead of being universal knowledge seekers.

In a state-run schooling system, unconventional figures of educators are like fish in unfamiliar waters and their behaviour is clearly at odds with the oath of fidelity to the state they are requested to undergo in some countries.

The development of knowledge requires a universal free competition in the pursuit of truth, that is incompatible with the semi-monopolistic state hold on education and with the misconceived vested-hidden interests of the state educators.

#### Economists

The taking over by the state of (almost) the entire economy of a country (owning, controlling, directing), throughout the most part of the XX century, has greatly increased the role and the power of the economists.

They have been active, managing and giving advice, in advanced and backward countries. The entire profession has been so keen on intervening at every possible opportunity in the running of the economy, that those streams of thought opposite to their pervasive intrusion, have been totally sidelined and their spokespersons almost branded as crooks.

The general acceptance of the role of the economists, at least up to recent times, has, more or less, given to them the status of doctors of economic welfare.

For this reason, the more backward or awkward the economic situation is, the more their prescriptions are considered necessary.

We are, once again, in the contradictory and paradoxical position that, only the permanence of a problem, not its radical solution, assures the prosperity of the professional figures concerned with its treatment. This would be acceptable only if the problem/task is recurrent (e.g. the daily preparation of food for feeding the body) but should not apply in other cases and especially not in the case of a process of development that, from a certain point onwards, should become self-sustaining.

The situation is especially puzzling in so-called underdeveloped countries, where poverty and backwardness are mainly related to exploitation, oppression and corruption on the part of the state. Here, the economist is (or has generally been) the propagator of state recipes for a development that never happened and is never likely to happen insofar as the main cause of the problem (i.e. the state running, that is ruining, the economy) was and is taken also as its solution (i.e. more state running, that is ruining, more sectors of the economy).

The persistence of the economists in advancing, year after year, until recently, the same proposals leading to the same *impasse* (or to a worsening of the situation) show how strong vicious interests can be, so strong as to cloud the critical faculties and to silence the moral sense of the human beings.

Certainly, there are economists sincerely committed to promoting development (assuming that development is an economic matter and could be promoted by economists and their policies); but, the cate-

gory, as a whole, has a (unconscious) vicious interest in preserving a negative situation, that is a state of backwardness, that requires their continuous and dominant presence.

### **Interests : the state figures**

The existence (function) and permanence (survival) of the state and of the state figures who operate for and within it, is based on an insoluble contradiction that needs to be highlighted.

The state proclaims that its fundamental *raison d'être* derives from the presence of malevolence between individuals due to lack of civilization or to the partly evil nature of human beings.

On the basis of this belief concerning humankind, the state is seen as the agent of civilization and the restrainer of the malevolent nature of human beings, acting either as indispensable regulator or, when appropriate, as necessary repressor.

From this, it should logically follow that, the more the state is successful in its role as agent of civilization and of regulation of social life, the less we need it. As in a family, the more successful the parents are in bringing up their children, the less the children depend on their parents for help and assistance and the sooner they become autonomous human beings.

If this is the theoretical picture about the state as an impersonal entity, what about the people who work for the state and derive from it the daily means for survival or the undue funds for luxury? Do their vital interests reside in a reduction in their number or even in the extinction of their role, as society becomes more civilized and people learn to control their malevolence?

A plausible answer to this question has been that:

- malevolence is intrinsic to every human nature so it is a general permanent feature of all human beings;
- malevolence is reducible only through the permanent presence of the state acting through professional state figures.

If we accept this answer, we might find it wanting in two respects:

- theoretical implications: assuming that malevolence is intrinsic in

every human being, why should we make exception for some individuals, that is those who take or are given the power to control (regulate and repress) malevolence; in other words, why should we be so confident about those in charge or, as the ancient question recites: "*quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*" ("Who controls the very same controllers?") (Juvenalis). The lack of a convincing answer to this question would be like "to think that men are so foolish that they take care to avoid what mischiefs may be done them by polecats or foxes, but are content, nay, think it safety, to be devoured by lions." (John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 1690)

- empirical reality: assuming that the role of the state is that of reducing, i.e. putting under control malevolence, does the historical reality, especially during the XX century, give any reason to substantiate the truth of this assumption? A dispassionate observer, after having listed the wars (big and small) and counted the casualties (dead and injured) engendered by the states all over the world, will conclude that the major role of this organization called "state" has been that of bringing havoc into people's lives instead of granting security against other people's mischief. And to suggest that, without the presence of the states, the number of wars and casualties would have been much higher, would be, not only a wild implausible hypothesis but also an idiotic and indecent one.

If we carry the analysis to its extreme consequences, we might be bound to admit that the actual reason for the (continuing) existence of the state is ... the (continuation of the) existence of the state. Nothing more, nothing less. In other words, the function of the state is to replicate and perpetuate itself, and to put into reality practices that will enable it to do so. And they have nothing to do (in many cases are in total contrast) with the proclaimed role of the state as producer of order, peace, security, prosperity and justice for all.

Being the state nothing else than the state figures who compose it and act in its name, let us see the reality of interests that affect some of those figures, keeping in mind that, given the generality of the analysis, it will not apply to every state figure within a category.

The law workers

The role of the law workers, especially magistrates, is to administer justice, a function of which the state has a practical monopoly. The number of magistrates, or better the need for their enrolment, depends on the level of injustice present in a society and by the possibility and willingness of people to claim justice through the state juridical procedure.

Moreover, justice having been reduced to what the laws say, the number of magistrates needed is directly related to the number of laws whose infraction requires juridical sanction. In general, the more the laws, the more the workload for the law workers but also the greater the number of them, justifiably, required. As a matter of fact, opportunities for enrolment and career (i.e. their material interests) for the law workers, depend, as for the lawyers, on the existence of a society plagued and infested by a confusion of many juridical rules. The confusion could lead to unfairness, procrastination, deception, in a word, everything except justice. But this is a further powerful reason to justify an increase in the number and resources for those who are appointed to administer 'justice.'

#### The police workers

The history of the police is the history of the criminal world, in too many ways, not just as opposition but also as derivation and acquisition. The famous chief of police in Paris, under Napoleon and later Louis-Philippe, was an ex convict (Vidocq); gangsters and policemen intermingled extensively in the USA during the prohibitionist period (1919-1933). In general, considering the existence of criminals informers and criminals in uniform, the line between the two sectors has never been strictly observed. In some countries, the police charge people for extra protection or claim a share of the revenues of the criminal world.

In any case, apart from these unsavoury hidden associations, what is important to stress here is that the interests of the police workers are, in many ways, linked to the presence of criminals, in the sense that the more criminals there are, the more police workers are needed and the more important their functions and attributions become.

### The paper workers

The bureaucrat is a paper worker. The paper he/she handles (typing, photocopying, transmitting, archiving, etc.) is, generally, the conveyor of an infinite continuous flow of rules. The more rules there are (for instance: registration, identification, request for permission, etc.) the more the paperwork and, consequently, the greater the number of paper workers necessarily involved.

The cycle is as follows: the state (i.e. the state rulers) generates paper work that requires paper workers to deal with it; the paper workers will generate further paper that will/would require further paper workers, in a snowballing sequence in which the usefulness or uselessness of this mountain of paper is not an issue. For this reason, the paperless society, predicted or advocated by some, cannot be other than a stateless society.

Here again we discover that the vested-hidden interests of a category of workers reside more in the pure and simple protection and expansion of its members than in the fair and fast execution of tasks benefiting the community of users.

### The social workers

The state, assuming the role of the benevolent father, has given employment, under the name of welfare, to an army of social workers, with the professed mission to assist people in need.

This worthy cause has, nevertheless, meant that, in the course of time, self-help and community care have been, generally, thrown out of the window and state quasi-monopoly of assistance has been permanently installed.

This historical process of putting assistance in the hands of state-paid employees has produced an abnormal phenomenon with respect to the interests concerned. In fact, it happened that the interests of the people in need and those of the people in charge of satisfying those needs have joined to such a point that the permanence and accretion of the former (people in need) means the maintenance and expansion of the latter (social workers). In other words, the more the welfare recipients, the more the welfare providers.

This is an extremely pathological state of affairs because it means

that the solution of any problem concerning personal welfare has to be avoided or postponed as long as possible. Otherwise, there would be those who lose their regular cheque as people in need, and those who lose their regular job as caterer and administrators of people in need.

And this is not in the material interest of either of the categories involved.

#### Overview

There are some elements that are common to all these state figures as far as interests are concerned:

- the existence and enlargement of their interests rely on the parallel existence and enlargement of a condition of sickness in society. A substantial drop in the level of sickness and the survival of many of these figures is put at risk; a substantial rise in that level and their number expands and their total material gains increase.

- the interests of these categories sustain and reinforce each other. This would be a positive aspect if only the interests were worth preserving and worth pursuing and were compatible with the development of healthy individuals. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

From what has been presented, it should be clear that the welfare of the state is not, a priori, identifiable with the well-being of individuals and communities. On the contrary, it seems that, in too many cases, there is a fundamental (theoretical and empirical) opposition between the interests of the people who compose a community and the interests of those who derive their means of survival from the controlling and policing of that community.

We are in presence of a real zero sum game, as far as power is concerned. On the one side the individuals will feel the urge and sometimes struggle to become independent (from an external opposing power); on the other side the state figures will feel the necessity to fight this move in order to become indispensable (as an internal imposing power). Clearly, everything happens subterraneously, through the use of magic words. It might resemble the sale of an unhealthy product, for instance tobacco, where the seller empha-

sizes taste and flavour while keeping quiet about the likelihood of addiction and tumour.

Likewise, the states figure present themselves as the defenders and providers of a chimerical 'general interest' but, actually, are protecting and providing very well for their vested-hidden interests, that is interests more or less surreptitiously acquired (with the backing of power) and more or less dishonestly presented (through the propaganda of power).

Before assessing the reality of vested-hidden interests, let us sketch briefly the nature of interests as seen within the new paradigm.

### **The nature of interests**

Interests are basic (instinctual and cultural) motives that foster links between (*inter*) a human being and something or somebody else (*esse*). The formation of the link allows the human being the satisfaction of the interest.

Interests can be analysed under form and content.

- Form. It refers to by whom and how the interests are expressed. In this respect, interests are or could be:

- personal. It is always some specific individual who expresses an interest, not a mythical entity like the state or the nation or the market. In this sense, there are no 'public' interests other than interests shared by each component of a certain 'public' (e.g. a group).

- particular. The term 'particular' refers not only to the specific bearer of the interest but also to the specific way the interest gets satisfied. The term 'particular' should not convey feelings of selfishness and meanness. As a matter of fact, there are no general interests in the sense of abstract interests or in the sense of interests belonging to an abstract entity or being satisfied by everybody in exactly the same manner.

- partaken. Personal particular interests can be shared by some or



many people. In that case we say that personal particular interests are also common similar interests. A common similar interest is a personal particular interest partaken (shared) by some or many people (in a group, in a team, in a community, etc.).

Considering the form of interests we might say that one of the most basic personal partaken interest is (or should be) the respect of particular personal interests. In fact, everybody having particular interests, there is nothing wrong with them, otherwise we would all be condemned to a tragic state of affairs. It goes without saying that all personal particular interests should not crush other personal particular interests. This is most likely to happen only when a group with particular interests wants them to appear as general interests (interests of everybody) that must be either accepted by or imposed on everybody. This is usually what a 'majority' does with respect to a 'minority' (tyranny of the many over the few) or a ruling 'minority' with respect to everybody (tyranny of the few over the many).

- Content. It refers to the substance of interests and to the relation with other interests in space and time, that is to:

- what. Interests have substance, that is concrete qualities. The substance of interests is the main aspect to consider when assessing them. Unfortunately, the analysis of interests is, mostly or exclusively, addressed to the form, leaving behind the content. To this purpose, some magic words (e.g. general, public, national) are employed in order to grant, automatically, positive connotations to the interests, irrespective of their content.

- when. Interests affect people in time. Assessing the content of an interest means to consider its repercussions from past to present to future. In this respect, interests having a long-term value are preferable to interests having only a short-term value.

- where. Interests affect people in space. Assessing the content of an interest means to consider the repercussions from here to there to everywhere. In this respect, interests having a wide-range value are preferable to interests having only a narrow-range value.

. . .

OVERALL, the considerations about the content of interests should bring into question the ideological use by the state propaganda of the notions of 'general' or 'national' interest. Usually, the expression 'general interest' does not include future generations, and that of 'national interest' certainly does not include humankind as a whole. This should be kept in mind when institutions employ those expressions, and objections should be made to emphasize that the term 'public' or 'general' should include the universality of every person (you, he, she, I) in every period (future, present, past) and every place (here, there, everywhere). Otherwise, it does not refer to the totality of individuals but to a specific group, however large it might be.

Having briefly sketched the nature of interests, we pass now to consider the problem concerning those interests that are here characterized as vested-hidden interests.

### **Vested-hidden interests as vicious interests**

As previously stated, vested-hidden interests are interests more or less surreptitiously acquired and more or less dishonestly presented.

The problem with these interests is that they are, at the same time and almost without exception, vicious interests, that is unconfessed and unconfessable vital interests of a disreputable nature, not to be proud of or boast about.

For this reason, a subtle propaganda is at work all the time in order to mask the real interests and to put forward, in their place, respectable interests supporting respectable actions (policies). All this is presented with apparently plausible justifications that hold up to the moment they undergo careful scrutiny and the widespread gullibility is replaced by perspicuity and wisdom.

An exemplary case of vested-hidden (i.e. vicious) interests is the contrast between the so called public (i.e. collective) and private (i.e. individual) means of transport. In many countries of Europe, the state presents itself as the champion of 'public' transport. To show

and stress their determination, many governments have put very high taxes on petrol to discourage the 'private' use of cars. At the same time, more roads are built by the state (for petrol driven vehicles); other means of transport (e.g. rail) have been left to decay by the owner (i.e. the state); the situation of 'public' transport is in shambles because of state-run (dis)services; and, all in all, the state is doing a brisk business attributing to itself up to 80% of the price of each litre or gallon of petrol sold (and pointing the finger to the multinational companies as the culprits for such high price). This is a superbly conceived and masterly implemented plot of trickery and swindle on a gigantic scale, in which the real interests (getting revenue from taxation) disappear and noble intentions (encouraging 'public' transport, protecting the environment, etc.) are put forward as a smoke screen.

Another classic example is represented by the provision of security. The state justifies its existence as the supreme guarantor of peace and security. As many historians have repeatedly shown, states have acquired/appropriated most of their power in times of (state-made) conflicts and (state-manufactured) fear and have enlarged it through the deepening of instability and insecurity. So, the vital interest for the survival of the state is, contrary to conventional and plausible belief, the permanence of a situation of fear and insecurity. The actual paradoxical reality is that the organization which is in charge of combating fear and insecurity is, also, the one most interested in maintaining and spreading them. In some countries, the consolidation of a troubled ruling power has resulted in manufacturing, on purpose, a situation of tension abroad (verbal aggression and wars) and at home (sabotage and bombs).

The granting of peace and security to the citizens has been considered, by many statesmen, a very secondary task with respect to the survival of the state power and its aggrandizement. And when they collide, security goes out of the window, because the more insecure the individuals are, the more secure is the grip of the state on them.

A way out of this vicious situation produced by vicious interests

(i.e. vested-hidden interests presented as universal noble interests) consists in:

- eliminating vested interests (acquired and backed with the support of a monopolistic power) and making all interests compete for recognition and survival;
- transforming hidden interests (covered by propaganda) into visible ones in order that visibility of interests might breed soundness in choices.

### **Competing-visible interests for virtuous choices**

What we all do is the result of our interests, taking the term in its broadest possible sense.

For this reason it is important to be aware of the presence and manifestation of them, in ourselves and in others. Otherwise, we can take or be taken for a ride.

The benevolent statesman, the immaculate professional, the paternalistic bureaucrat, all those figures who reassure us with their apparent solicitude from the top, breed only irresponsibility and impotence at the bottom. Naivety needs to be replaced by perspicacity.

This mean, first of all, the discarding of misleading faked oppositions such as the one between particular and general interests. Interests are all particular (i.e. specific to a certain part), even when shared by many, and they are not good (or bad) because shared by many . When many or even most of people express the interest of driving cars (or smoking cigarettes, or drinking beer), this does not make the interest something good (or bad), just because of the number of people involved and the fact of being a general interest.

What is, then, very important with respect to interests is the presence of:

- competing interests

Interests should not be backed by any monopolistic power but in free competition with other interests. To each one the choice and care of interests of his/her liking.

- visible interests

Interests should be clearly stated by each one and everybody should expect the same from everybody else, not only in words (voiced interests) but also in deeds (verifiable interests).

In other words, for the safeguard of the interests of individuals and communities, we should favour situations in which:

- the quality and worth of every product/service is directly and speedily verifiable (instead of generic and unsubstantiated promises, as in the electoral process);

- the reward or the sanction is easily applicable on a recurrent basis, through an appropriate and timely feed-back (instead of every 4-5 years, as in the electoral process); this could take place by using or discounting the use and support of some product/service.

Competing and visible interests, coupled with personal perspicacity, represent the best recipe for producing virtuous choices.

To favour virtuous choices does not mean to demand or impose a society of angels and saints.

In actual fact, the practice of unhealthy interests (e.g. smoking) should be left undisturbed in the name of another personal, particular and partaken interest, that is individual freedom. It is only when one's individual behaviour collides with somebody else's individual freedom, that rules appear necessary (e.g. smoking and non smoking areas).

What is really necessary is to minimise and finally abolish the role of those who enjoy protected interests, acting for the perpetuation of a negative situation. In other words, what needs to be broken is the vicious link that makes the survival of those in charge of a sick situation dependent on the permanence of the sick situation.

Only then, faked interests and forced options might be replaced by fair interests and free options, where the full development of each is the condition for the full development of all.

## FROM FAKE POLARITIES TO FITTING PLURALITIES

### **Polarities**

**The functions of polarities**

**The limits of polarities**

**Reality as plurality**

**Plurality as variety**

**The multiple networked continua**

**From polarity to plurality**



### **Polarities**

**T**he paradigm in use during the last two centuries has portrayed and interpreted the social reality as generally made of opposing polarities.

For instance, the unfolding of history has been characterized by the contrast of interests and the struggle for power of two vying protagonists:

- freeman and slave in the antiquity
- patrician and plebeian in the ancient Rome
- lord and serf in the feudal time
- guild master and journeyman in the cities of the Middle Age
- Guelph and Ghibelline (later Black and White) in the opposition between pope and emperor
- proletariat and bourgeoisie during the Industrial Revolution
- left and right since the French Revolution
- national and foreigner in the age of nationalism and of the nation state
- communist and fascist (or conservative and labour, republican and democrat) in the political struggle of the XX century.

Besides these (supposedly) contrasting protagonists, other aspects of reality have been included in this two pole scheme, as for instance:

- private and public
- town and country
- manual and intellectual.

Some of these polarities (e.g. manual and intellectual) were and are still useful ways of portraying reality, even after a certain amount of revision and updating has been carried out.

Some of them have been dropped altogether as depicting a bygone reality (e.g. Guelph and Ghibelline).

Some others still survive more as remnants of a familiar past than as tools of any use for the present. They are so out of touch with current reality that their total suppression or radical reformulation should be high on the agenda of the social scientists and of any sensible human being.

Nevertheless, they are still kept in constant use for lack of better terms or for dearth of better ideas.

What is put forward here is that the paradigm based on polarities is undergoing a radical crisis and it is not any longer (if ever it was) useful and relevant for interpreting reality.

Before advancing suggestions as to the replacement of the

polarity scheme, let us see the reasons why it came to be accepted and the role it has played in social and political thinking.

### **The functions of polarities**

The idea of portraying and interpreting reality as made of opposing forces and figures is an appealing one.

The strength of this mental tool derives from its performing three indispensable functions of everyday life, that is:

- comprehension
- communication
- selection.

In fact, the carrying out of these three functions is greatly assisted by the polarity device, insofar as it permits:

- Simplification of reality (assisting comprehension)

The aim of giving intelligible order to reality is generally performed by grouping similar (or supposedly similar) elements having similar features.

The natural limit of this grouping is reached when two distinctive groups have been made up. Without this distinction in at least two groups (duality) we would be back to some undifferentiated, incomprehensible or hardly definable reality. With a finer richer distinction we would be in a situation of complexity, more difficult to grasp, discuss and deal with.

For this reason duality, that is polarity, strikes a cord, giving the impression of achieving a good balance between simplicity and complexity.

Duality has seemed to work wonderfully well because it has facilitated another essential task.

- Identification of/with reality (assisting communication)

Once reality has been simplified, the composing entities can be identified with more clarity. Besides recognition, identification can also push towards a personal association with one or the other entity.

Then, what has been identified (e.g. a colour) or identified with (e.g. a party) can be communicated to and apprehended by the



receiver of a message, quickly and easily, the more precise is the assumed contrast and the expressed polarity between entities.

Black and white, left and right, us and them: these have become the simplified archetypes of any process of recognition and identification. The result has been to facilitate a further task.

- Decision about reality (assisting selection)

The process of identification, in the wide sense of attraction, leads to decisions. In the case of personal identification, it refers to the process by which an individual decides to belong to one group instead of the other, to support one team in opposition to the other (or all the others seen as a block). The selection, and so the decision, is easier when the choices are few and neatly characterized; the most convenient (but not always the less awkward), being the case where there are only two sharply contrasting options. Below this minimum, there is not even matter for discussion.

### **The limits of polarities**

Given the worth and strength of the functions performed and the tasks facilitated by the polarity approach, it is not surprising it had and still has a wide appeal and application.

Nevertheless, the very points of worth and strength of polarity (simplification, identification, decision) represent also its main weaknesses and limitations.

We refer here not to the instrument itself of highlighting contrasts, as in literary plots and in many other expressions of human creativity or human competition. What is here under critical questioning is the use of feeble or, even worse, fake polarities to diminish and impoverish a rich reality or to conjure up some makeshift reality.

In this case, the reality of polarities is based on:

- Simplification as stultification

Simplification (even over-simplification) can be the initial step in the process of perceiving reality but certainly not the final one unless we accept the fact of remaining always in an infantile childish state.

In this case, simplification becomes stultification, based on the use of very elementary categories.

Furthermore, an excessively simplified grouping is generally based on sloppy clichéd concepts (e.g. bourgeoisie, capitalism, democracy), where the duality is achieved through duplicities, i.e. through the use of other ambiguously formulated and ambiguously employed concepts. This happens generally in the social and political discourse, and it prepares the conditions for the rise of another negative aspect.

- Identification as manipulation

Elementary categories and classes represent, most of the time, only propaganda catchwords employed by those in power or seeking power. In due course they become empty labels, useful not to identify a certain reality and the affected people, but to manipulate both reality and people. The reality is made to fit the label according to a pre-ordained image. For instance, fascism (historical fascism) is seen always as promoting order even in situations, of its own making, characterized by total disorder and disorganization; communism (historical communism) is seen always as advocating equality even when those who define themselves 'communists' implement total and blatant inequality; conservatives (U.K.) and republicans (U.S.A.) are seen always as championing budgetary responsibility even when they squander billions in extravagant or dangerous endeavours.

The manipulation of reality reaches its zenith when basically homogeneous realities (e.g. communism and fascism as statism) are made to appear as totally different realities (proletarian communism vs. capitalist fascism) and totally incompatible realities (war vs. peace) are presented as basically homogeneous ones (preparing/waging war is peace or the best way for promoting/keeping peace).

The process of manipulative identification facilitates, almost automatizes, the decision process. This leads to a further negative aspect.

- Decision as imposition

A fake polarity, based on manipulated empty concepts, strongly

suggests that the choices made by individuals on that basis cannot be defined as meaningful ones.

In a fake polarity, the falsification of options imply that, whatever the decision, the outcome will be the same, that is, the imposition of the same reality, although under different labels. In the political arena this means that people think, falsely, that they are fighting for alternative positions but, in fact, they are supporting the same constrictive power and the only difference is in the faces of those who constrict them. They are framed in a fake "either ... or" alternative until they discover (if they ever do) that both poles of the alternative are so similar as to represent a choiceless identity.

### **Reality as plurality**

From what has been said so far, it should be clear that 'polarity' is only a device, an elementary one, for capturing reality and dealing with it.

Familiarity with this conventional device should not hide the fact that reality is not at all made (simply) by polarities, i.e. reducible to "either ... or" alternatives, to positive - negative poles, to a 0 - 1 symbols, however forceful and useful this kind of conceptualization and representation might be.

Reality is a buzzing dazzling mix of multivarious entities (e.g. human beings, objects) on multilevel networked continua. To master and make sense of its richness we need much more appropriate and powerful tools.

In other words, reality is plurality, or better a variety of pluralities (different entities) on a variety of continua (different levels and places), with many links amongst them (networked entities) and in permanent transformation (birth, growth, development, decay, disappearance, modification, regeneration, etc.).

Pluralities are entities characterized by:

- **fields** (domains)
- **factors** (elements)
- **features** (aspects)

Entities (for instance the human beings in a family) are dynamic forces, active in fields of space and time (e.g. the home, the daily activities) through the factors composing the specific entity (e.g. the members of the family) and the features (e.g. the extrovert personality of the child) associated to those factors.

The interactions between entities with/within fields-factors-features make for the extraordinary variety of reality.

The seeing of reality as plurality is strictly associated with the vision of plurality as variety.

### **Plurality as variety**

Variety is related to the qualitative and quantitative richness of the entities (and their fields, factors, features) composing reality.

At this point it is necessary to make a distinction between manufactured difference and meaningful variety.

- Manufactured difference (unseemly and useless)

It generally derives from the implementation of restrictions to access (in the widest sense of the term), through the protection of some monopolistic locus of power (political, economic, etc.). In the fore front of those who manufacture useless, or even harmful, differences we find the state and the state-associated groups (protected industries, nationalistic newspapers, etc.), with their propaganda and interventions aimed at imposing on everybody a mystical national identity and to cry wolf against 'external' 'alien' influences.

Needless to say, the imposition of a so-called national identity is a clear case of shielding diversity through insularity, that has nothing to do with promoting variety. In fact, while variety is based on the concept of plurality within an entity (e.g. open multi-cultural cosmopolitan societies), diversity refers to similar entities that diverge in their behaviour and are sometimes opposed to each other (e.g. closed mono-cultural national societies).

The absurdity of proclaiming and sustaining this specific manufactured difference resides in the fact that, after centuries of intermingling of people and cultures, we are all "bastards"; and this should be

a title of pride in contrast with the mono-cultured mono-tone monolithic moron likely to come out of a closed group interbreeding (biological and cultural).

- Meaningful variety (fitting and fruitful)

It arises out of the free inter-play of free individuals, and it becomes consolidated in cultural expressions, adopted and re-adapted by people all over the world, in a changing tapestry of colours, sounds, smells, sights, feelings, attitudes, and so on.

In the global village, the variety of plurality (activities, messages, experiences, cultural expressions, etc.) is growing fast and expanding wide and, if left free to develop, it will soon break the constrictive mould containing the old paradigm of beliefs.

Leaving this process to run its course while actively participating in it, means that unseemly and useless differences should be allowed to decay while fitting and fruitful varieties should be left free to develop.

The process of promoting (or not impeding) the spreading of plurality is here called pluralization.

It is based on the implementation of:

- standardization: reduction of differences that complicate life unnecessarily, obstruct the free flow of exchanges and do not enhance variety (for instance, incompatible technical devices). In the domain of production, for example, standardization translates into lower costs and lower selling prices, with advantages for both the producers and the users (interoperability, intercommunication, integration).

- personalization: development of as many viable personal answers as there are possible personal questions. This is, differently formulated, the sadly neglected and generally ignored law of requisite variety that affirms that, for the working of a (complex) system, the variety of possible situations should be matched by a variety of possible responses. Otherwise the system will, sooner or later, get out of order and finally collapse.

So, through the interplay of standardization and personalization, a sound pluralization (plurality as variety) can be achieved.

## The multiple networked continua

The conceptualization and representation of reality as plurality of variety lead us to the concept of multiple networked continua.

If we examine an entity, for instance a human being, we can portray the same element (factor: eye) of many entities (i.e. human beings) belonging to the same domain (field: humankind) as arranged on a continuum according to its qualitative or quantitative variations (features: colour, size, etc.).

The various factors (e.g. eye, face, hand, etc.) that compose the entity human being can be depicted on multiple continua representing variations in their features. An entity is a whole made up of these interconnected variations.

The same procedure can be applied while examining and comparing a series of other entities (with their fields, factors, features).

The merit of this simple way to represent reality consists in showing, at the same time, the unicity and unity (i.e. singularity and similarity) of all existing entities. This is in contrast to the old paradigm where disjointed entities are seen as opposite poles of a reality characterized by duality (e.g. black-white, male-female, human-animal).

We cannot help stressing, over and over again, that most of these polarities are the result of ideologies and practices whose main interest is to impose a rudimentary label for the purpose of identification, manipulation and control.

The scientist, that is any human being as knowledge seeker, is interested in a deeper and richer apprehension of reality. To this purpose, the cognitive tool represented by the multiple networked continua seems quite truthful and useful.

Consider, for instance, the best example of the continuum concept: colours. In nature colours exist as light (one). Visible light consists of wavelengths in continuous variations; the variations affect the retina, linked to the brain, producing colours (many). So, out of one beam we come to perceive many colours. The brain then interprets some wavelengths as a colour, for instance, green, but this is in

reality a mixture of yellow and blue. So, from the unity of two or more colours we are led to peculiarity (a specific colour) and plurality (many different colours).

What is applicable to colours (unity within variety) can be extended to most, if not all, life entities and experiences.

To fully grasp this reality, our conceptual tools must possess the same multifarious richness. And this requires a learning process away from banalization and polarization.

For instance, again with respect to colours, a child might be able to distinguish and name only a few of them (grey being confused with black); an adult will clearly differentiate between grey and black, while an expert painter is able to distinguish and name 5 types of grey. All in all, a manufacturer produces more than 100 different oil colours for artists and these will be further mixed to produce an astronomical variety of tonalities.

This is art and this is life.

As for the colour of our skin, science (and personal experience) cannot avoid pointing to the incredible variations of pigmentation, from very dark to very pale. And for the sexes, it seems that at least five are biologically recognizable. Moreover, from personal experience, we all know how varied is the mixture of so-defined masculine and feminine traits in each of us.

To make a further example of the richness of reality and the poverty of our conventional way of expressing it, take the entity 'snow.' What to a common person living in a temperate climate appears as snow and is simply called snow, is put by an Eskimo into several categories with different names.

This proficiency to perceive and name variations, makes the richness of a culture and its ability to survive and prosper.

It should be then evident that the polarity outlook, far from being an instrument to advance science, reveals only the gaps of missing data in our knowledge base and the coarseness of our perceptive faculties.

To represent the incredible variety and variations on a single theme of reality, the multiple networked continua could be a useful

device. Clearly, other mental tools can be put forward and employed. In any case, what should be very clear, is the fact that the paradigm based on polarity has outlived its usefulness.

We need to move beyond it.

### **From polarity to plurality**

The polarity paradigm has been adopted and employed extensively in the human sciences and in human affairs (e.g. religion, politics).

This has fostered a vision of the world as made up, almost exclusively, of fights and hardship (the struggle for life).

For instance, religion has operated, in the past, as a factor of polarization, leading to clashes instead of promoting communion. The world was said to be divided between Christians and Pagans, true believers and heretics or infidels, and the task of power was to convert them or to get rid of them with any means (expulsion, torture, burning at the stake, dismembering the body, etc.).

Only after centuries of strife, persecutions and horrendous misdeeds against different religions and religious practices, did it become manifest that the only way towards a possible solution relied in tolerance and freedom from any external interference. Almost at once, an intractable problem, a barrier to any civilizing process, magically disappeared from the scene.

In more recent times, and especially throughout the XX century, politics has replaced religion as the agent of polarization and as the new stumbling block on the way to the development of civilization. Politics has become the new opium of the people.

Nothing is more representative of the old paradigm than the way politics has been and is still conducted, totally based on polarities that are stultifying, manipulative and do not represent real alternative choices.

In many countries and places, during the XX century, the political scenario has been frozen for generations into:

- two factions (communist and fascist)
- two parties (conservative and progressive, labels that do not



always mean what they are literally supposed to express)

- two ideologies (left and right, whatever that means)
- two classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat or their new updated versions)
- two economies (socialist and capitalist)
- two sectors (public and private)
- two camps (East and West)
- two worlds (North and South)

Whatever could be dichotomized and polarized, politics has done it. Nothing touched by politics has escaped this dualistic categorization, be it race (Aryan-non Aryan, black man-white man), science (materialistic-idealistic), art and literature (revolutionary-reactionary) and so on and so forth.

At the same time, politics offers individuals the same richness of choices as when Ford introduced the model T car, saying that people could have any colour provided it was black. Now the electors can choose any political soup provided they do not carry out a thorough inspection or serious comparison (between programmes or between declarations and actions), as all of them are based on the same unpleasant recipes masked by lofty words and all have, eventually, the same unsavoury taste.

In politics, as in any other related area, we have reached the end of the road: the manufactured (i.e. fake) polarities have become moral, material and mental barriers to any further progress in knowledge and civilization. The old black and white contrapositions mask only grey people with blank minds.

It is time to move from fake polarities and frozen contrapositions to fitting pluralities (many, small, dynamic entities) and fruitful co-emulation (cooperation + emulation); from constrictions and confines to freedom (of movement, of development, etc.) and open-ended continua.

"One does not show his greatness by being at one extreme, but in touching both extremes at once, and in filling all the intermediate space." (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 1670)

## FROM SENSELESS CONSUMPTION TO SENSIBLE CARE

In the past : necessary consumption  
The wealthy élite : conspicuous consumption  
The interlude : in between the wars  
The working masses : continuous consumption  
In the present : senseless consumption  
The ways of waste  
The functions of waste  
The effects of waste  
In the future : sensible care



### In the past : necessary consumption

**S**ocial analyses and historical surveys of the time of the Industrial Revolution present the image of workers reduced to subsistence wages that provided only for the maintenance of the bodily strength to work. It was a necessary level of consumption, below which not enough energy would have been available to the individual to function as a producer.

As for the industrial capitalists (the owners of the industrial capital, that is of the means of industrial production), they were portrayed as penny-wise parsimonious individuals who were investing most of their profits in new machines and productive devices. For this reason, the level and nature of their consumption was not at all excessive or extravagant, in tune with the austere Victorian morality.

If we accept the truthfulness of these historical portraits, we come to the conclusion that a style of life of imposed poverty and accepted frugality characterized both, the worker and the master.

Assuming this to be the reality in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, the continuous phenomenal increase in the production of food, clothes and other basic goods, was bound to change the living conditions of everybody, almost beyond recognition.

### **The wealthy élite : conspicuous consumption**

The growing availability of goods could not help affecting, first of all, the masters and the image of them that prevailed up to then. The portrait of the ascetic and abstemious capitalist was replaced by the caricature of a fat flabby individual intent on accumulating money to spend in ever more luxurious extravagance.

The time had arrived for the emergence of conspicuous and ostentatious consumption of the wealthy élites, where both the level and the nature of it were a show of power and a declaration of distinction.

This pathological spending frenzy was especially characteristic of the roaring twenties in the U.S.A., a period of easy money and cheap illusions (both courtesy of the state), when many dreamt of a sudden jump from rags to riches.

In that euphoric climate even the masses could start envisaging sharing in the ever growing amount of money and goods. They were told by their leaders that wealth was just around the corner. Unfortunately, around the corner, they found only the wreckage of a state-manufactured and finally state-busted boom.

### **The interlude : in between the wars**

The ensuing depression, more than an economic phenomenon, was a psychological one, a mental state of total disillusionment that fuelled mistrust, destroyed hope and drained energy for years to come.

It was at that point that three personages appeared on the scene to restart the race to consumption, interrupted before it had time to reach the masses of workers.

The first to come to the fore was Adolf Hitler, the new German chancellor, with his bold economic plans of state intervention via state promoted infrastructural works (especially road building).

The second was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the new president of the USA, with his designs of mending the economic engine and healing the social tissue broken by the depression through the intervention of a powerful federal state.

The third personage, acting as a theoretical link between the former two, was John Maynard Keynes, the English economist who took inspiration from the working of some economic practices of the new German government, gave them a veneer of conceptual respectability and made them appealing to the point that they became the economic creed of the USA central government from the "New Deal" onwards.

Then the war came, giving even more justification and impulse to the recommendations of state intervention that is the fulcrum of the Keynesian ideology.

Whatever truth there was in the "laissez-faire" advice of the classical economists, it got obliterated. In its place, state-paid economists and the state-employed bureaucrats substituted and launched the "laissez-nous faire" appeal that was to become the new economic doctrine.

In the "laissez-faire" model everybody looking after his/her own interest (in the long period) is led to satisfy the needs of somebody else.

In the "laissez-nous-faire" appeal, somebody claiming to look after somebody/everybody else's interest is actually attending to his/her

own needs; besides taking almost everybody for a ride, leading almost everybody, sooner or later, to a condition of irresponsibility and insecurity.

In actual fact there was nothing new but the re-discovery and re-implementation of a conceptual armoury, at least 200 years old, called mercantilism.

It replaced the "invisible hand" of competition/emulation, attempting to harmonize many interacting entities and interests, with the "intrusive fingers" of the monopolistic state, intent on grabbing slices from every possible pie, even the smallest ones, totally absorbed in the safeguard of its own interests.

The neo-mercantilism or "laissez-nous faire" doctrine is based on the state superintending the whole of the economy, owning many large industries (often presented as natural monopolies) and printing money as deemed necessary to implement the agenda of the political bosses.

It is especially this last point that has made it possible to restart the process of widespread consumption, with a growing involvement of the working masses.

### **The working masses : continuous consumption**

The period following the second world war witnessed an unlocking of energies, after the oppressive regimentation of the previous decades.

In the economic field, this resulted in a continuous, generalized increase of production that permitted a continuous generalized growth of consumption affecting all strata of the population.

The tutelage and control of the state were discreet but only if compared with the preceding authoritarian period. The state, having put aside messianic messages of social regeneration (e.g. fascism, communism) was more interested in taking advantage of the new situation. The enlarged production was seen by the state as a pie of which several slices could be appropriated and allocated amongst different social groups in order to ensure their electoral

support. The larger the group subsidized, the wider the support expected.

All the post-war states (i.e. the state's élites) where full universal suffrage had been achieved changed their image about and attitude towards people. Instead of marching soldiers, the state politicians saw them as voting subjects whose favour was to be courted. For this reason, to grant employment and to increase the level of consumption of the masses became the proclaimed aims of all political parties within the state (socialist and non socialist alike).

This policy was certainly an improvement with respect to the past and something not to be dismissive of, considering that the level of unsatisfied needs was high and the material infrastructure was poor or, in some places, non existent following the destruction of the war.

The improvement in organization and in working practices, the introduction of better machines and more powerful tools, the existence of individuals wanting to satisfy more and more of their needs and desires, all this pushed and sustained a continuous growth of production.

It was only 15-20 years after the war (i.e. during the '60s), when the basic needs were satisfied and the infrastructure repaired and renovated, that the new problem appeared, namely how to equalise the continuous increase of production with an incessant enlargement of consumption. To this end something had to be done, first of all on the commercialization side, matching the improvements in the production side.

In order to increase consumption, goods had to have:

- continuous visibility: publicity, in all forms (banners, leaflets, posters, etc.) and media support (press, radio, tv, etc.)
- continuous accessibility: supermarkets (with goods on display, to be handled directly by the consumers), shopping precincts (open for longer hours), vending machines (constantly refilled), etc.

These became the big and small reference points (trademarks, landmarks) of the early consumeristic period.

But all this would not have worked as it did, so smoothly and so effectively, without a specific "providential" intervention by the state.

## **In the present : senseless consumption**

The state, after having taken the role of guarantor of employment and promoter of consumption, has kept performing this role with determination even when the situation has totally changed.

In the era of robots and automatic devices, of productive powers capable of overfilling any shelf with astronomical quantities of goods, of basic needs satisfied or easily satisfiable (except for extraordinary events), the state still sees employment as a 7-8 hours working day and material consumption as still the supreme yardstick of welfare.

Based on this ideology, confident of its mission as provider of the welfare of the nation, reassured by the conceptual elaboration of Lord Keynes, the state (almost any state), had no hesitation in printing money and accumulating debts, whenever the level of employment declined or the growth of production-consumption relented.

To sustain occupation, the simplest thing for the state to do was to extend the bureaucratic morass and multiply useless paper work, so that shuffling paper from one desk to the other was the modern equivalent of alternately digging and filling holes, in order to have people employed.

Nevertheless, there remained the problem of absorbing a growing production and to this end not even a large non-productive array of consumer-prone bureaucrats could represent a satisfactory answer.

To really promote consumption, something bolder had to be found. The linked roles of producer and consumer, both proper of every human being, had to be dissociated and a large sector of able-bodied and mentally-capable people had to play exclusively the essential role of consumers. The workers army shrinks (thanks to technology) and the lost positions are taken by the consumers army. Consumption becomes a new occupation; for some (i.e. welfare recipients) the only occupation.

From that moment onwards the magic words of occupation and consumption assume a new meaning: the mind and the body are

fully occupied in a foolish consumption of torpor inducing and fat producing substances.

Living is consuming. The more the consumption (real or potential), the more the appreciation and self-consideration. The general attitude can be resumed by sayings like 'the more, the better' or 'the more we have, the merrier we are.'

Mental alienation and physical obesity are the almost inevitable outcome of the process of inflated consumption activated by the state through a growing pyramid of money printing and debt making.

This is the central point. What is questionable is not lavish consumption or even extravagant consumption by a few or by the many when this is within the economic possibilities and in accord with the individual preferences. This is part and parcel of the freedom to use personal income as deemed appropriate and it is not for us to poke our nose on personal choices affecting only the person who makes them.

What is questionable is the fact that (a very large) part of this consumption has been financed by debts incurred by the state governments to gain electoral favours. For instance, the debt by the USA federal government has reached, in July 2022, the astronomical figure of over 30 trillion dollars. This debt will be paid by future generations and by the present generation in the years to come when, perhaps, pension income will be drastically curtailed and pension age will be imperatively postponed.

The cracks in the system have been appearing for quite a while and this means that we are approaching the end of the road. From the necessary consumption of the industrial age, through the continuous consumption of the late industrial phase, we have got to the present senseless consumption.

This senseless consumption is also the result of excessive or useless production. They both are, in themselves, nothing other than waste.

Nevertheless, it would be silly to dismiss waste as something that better methods of recycling will take care of because waste, that is not just the trash left behind by production and consumption, plays a



very important role in the state dominated phase, the one we still live in. It is then necessary to examine, however briefly, the various ways, functions and effects of waste.

### **The ways of waste**

The production of waste concerns:

#### **Natural resources**

The waste of natural resources takes place through:

- over-production, that reduces or extinguishes the future stock of some natural resource.

- over-consumption, based especially on throw-away objects that pollute the environment transforming it into a dustbin.

Nature then becomes a wasteland and a repository of waste, being first sapped of resources and then soiled with a mountain of residues, discharged directly into the environment.

#### **Human beings**

The waste in human beings takes place through the process of:

- useless production, that means people employed in meaningless work, with no real utility or, worst, with high disutility not only to themselves but to others (e.g. workers producing weapons in an arms factory, bureaucrats shuffling paper in a state office, etc.).

- useless consumption, that means consumption of unhealthy products, or in excess of need, sometimes just to fill the lack of any satisfying activity and to placate the emptiness and boredom of personal life.

#### **Material goods**

The waste in material goods takes place through:

- shoddy production, that means production of ephemeral goods, having a short life span for reason of fashion or, plainly, for poor or non-existent quality in view of their quick replacement (e.g. in-built technical obsolescence).

- shoddy consumption, that originates from a buyer having too much money at his disposal to act as a discerning customer; this leads to the buying of shoddy goods that soon go into the waste pile, or to

the excessive buying of goods, some of which will left unused, to accumulate dust before being thrown away.

### **The functions of waste**

Waste as senseless consumption of useless production, has become a necessary factor of people's life in the late period of state-run, state-dominated society.

This is because waste performs three main functions:

- psychological

People not satisfied with their life (their job, family, city or themselves, etc.) have to invent outlets where to vent their frustrations. And the act of buying goods seems a good way to affirm that they are in control of their existence.

As for the poor, the excluded, the non-integrated, for them also, to succeed means to be capable of buying the same goods as most of the others. The ability to appropriate material goods, well beyond the satisfaction of basic needs, becomes the measure of their progress in life.

So consumption, even useless or especially useless, is a strong psychological drive for those unable or unwilling, for whatever reason, to look for deeper and subtler ways of fulfilment.

- economic

Wasting resources (natural, human, material) has a positive embellishing effect on the figures put forward by the state to present the situation of the national economy. For instance, the utilization of employment data, irrespective of the task performed, and especially the use of the GNP (gross national product) as a totemic index of achievement, transform any waste into a resounding economic success.

Production, useless production, destructive production, all contribute to promote employment and so they are to be welcomed. In actual fact, the best of all is the parasitically performed production, that is bureaucratically managed, in which ten people hardly achieve what one could very well do on his/her own. Similarly, the

useless requirement of implementing idiotic practices aims at fulfilling the same economic function of producing employment. Clearly, to call that an economic function is a misnomer, possible only under statism.

Useless consumption is also the engine of an economy dominated by the state, where whatever gets used up and destroyed is counted as a plus and added to the GNP. Because of this, the more we consume and destroy, the more reasons there are to celebrate the national economy and the power of its master steerer, the state.

These economic aspects (employment, national accounting) are all mixed with psychological attitudes (e.g. the plus figures produce the feel good factor) and have at their basis a strong political motivation.

- political

Useless production and excessive consumption, that is the wasting and squandering of resources, are indispensable for the survival of parasitic strata, mainly state originated, protected and nurtured strata.

The income to support these strata comes, more and more, from the so-called indirect taxes, that is taxes on consumption (e.g. V.A.T.). Consequently, a drop in consumption equates, for the state, to a drop in revenues while a large increase in consumer spending, represents for the state a god-given respite, always necessary to plug financial holes. For this reason state and consumerism are the two inextricable faces of the same coin. As a matter of fact, while a firm has a limited (to its area of business) and specific (to its brand of products) interest in consumption, the state is concerned and affected by it across the board. That is why the appeal to consume can be heard in many languages and has been voiced by politicians under different labels, from the republican George W. Bush senior in the USA at the beginning of the '90s (with the famous shopping trip at Macy's to buy a pair of socks to give a good example to his fellows American) to the socialist Martine Aubry in France at the end of the same decade (proclaiming on TV that "*il faut relancer la consommation*" - we need to boost consumption). Because of huge revenues as result of people's

purchases, the state has a total overwhelming stake in keeping consumption going and growing; and its task is facilitated if most of consumption is or quickly ends as waste, so that the cycle could continue on an eternally enlarged basis.

A political (but not less important) by-product of this consumeristic frenzy sponsored by the state is the waste of human beings and their human qualities. Humanity was lost then when people were tied to machines, forced to work for too many hours; humanity is lost now when people are continuously bombarded by advertisements, pressurized into consuming too much of everything. In both cases, power is satisfied because the more people have their bodies and minds occupied by silly things, the less they can apply themselves to explore and experiment with novel ideas.

### **The effects of waste**

Waste is generating effects that are more and more visible as the scars become wider and deeper. They will affect future generations for years to come. The main effects relate to:

- Destruction of nature

Insanity in production and consumption has resulted in treating nature as a hunting reserve for overkill and as a dustbin to overflow. The inevitable outcome is the destruction of nature on a scale and intensity never attained before. And this has been possible because of the pathological promotion of an ever increasing level of consumption by the states through their money printing - debt making - resource squandering practices. The over-expansion of money directly translates into an over-exploitation of nature. The debt of the state and the death of the environment are two causally strictly inter-linked aspects.

- Deterioration of humanity

A dying natural habitat is the symptom of a dying social environment, in which the human being is losing the basic qualities and achievements of the civilization process, that is humanity's well-being characterized by:

- **wisdom:** appropriate understanding and assessment of reality
- **wealth:** freedom, richness and meaningfulness of choices
- **health:** biosocial and psychophysical soundness.

The physical and moral fibre of individuals are becoming flaccid. Obesity and obtuseness are turning into mass phenomena. Wealth is equated to money and this is one of the most striking examples of the lack of wisdom and clear thinking.

The presence of air pollution and food poisoning, the many cases of cancer, the acts of gratuitous madness arising from deep-seated rage, mental stress and moral confusion: all these are signals of the void of many existences lacking inner purpose and self direction and signs of the sickness and deterioration of too many individuals.

- Depletion of resources

The obese/obtuse human being is squandering resources at an incredible rate, leaving behind a desert and a void that future generations will have difficulty in restoring and, perhaps, no hope of refilling.

This is all in accordance with the ideology of statism reciting that, "in the long term we are all dead." To this saying, the state ideologues have implicitly added that, "in the long run we don't give a damn."

The depletion of resources has been encouraged by states who are afraid of a drop in consumption, a deceleration of growth, lest they lose tax revenues. To support this consumeristic view, the state rulers even invoke the general national interest. Under statism, consumerism has become a national duty, a patriotic activity, encouraged by the political leaders, as a service to the country.

What this reveals is that some functions of waste have become so intrinsically necessary for the survival of the nation state that the preservation and continuation of waste have become a matter of national interest. When this happens, the organization that has generated this necessity of waste (i.e. the nation state) is itself condemned to end up in the wastebin of history.

The preservation of the state demands the extinction of nature.

Being this the reality, it is through the extinction of the state that we can operate for the preservation of nature.

### **In the future : sensible care**

Given the fact that the present ideology, based on growth of consumption and on short-term binge, is preparing, in the medium-long term, dearth and disaster for future generations, a new paradigm and a new practice should urgently become the common attitude of the humankind.

In this new paradigm, short-termism is not viewed as realism but as irresponsibility and irrationality that will likely destroy any future reality.

In actual fact, not what is real is rational but only what is rational (i.e. having sense, soundness and sanity) is and will remain real.

Rationality is behaviour conducive to a long-lasting reality, that is to permanence; only what is permanent (not ephemeral) is real (in the sense of worth and worth preserving), be it an artifact, a concept, a sonnet or a mathematical formula.

Permanence requires maintenance. To promote permanence, we need to move from senseless consumption to sensible care. With reference to the total environment (i.e. human beings, animal beings and natural resources), this means that production and consumption should be:

- sound
  - left free to spread and be shared equitably and rationally (i.e. according to a fair ratio) amongst individuals and communities instead of being artificially kept concentrated by state restrictions in pockets of over-work and over-affluence on one side and inactivity and indigence on the other;
- sustainable
  - using mainly or preferably renewable resources at a rate compatible with their regeneration (input-output equilibration);
  - using substitutes for non-renewable resources or, when this is not possible or practicable, the use of non-renewable resources

should be balanced by the effort to find suitable ready-made substitutes for future generations to rely on (e.g. cheap, efficient, ubiquitous solar panels);

- balancing the emission of pollutants in the environment with the capacity of absorption by the environment.

- sane

- satisfying healthy needs

- at healthy/appropriate levels

- through healthy goods and services

- that promote natural, personal, common well-being.

In any case, the usage of (scarce) resources should be:

- adequate: aiming at satisfying needs and not greed;

- moderate: aiming at economizing and saving;

- appropriate: aiming at length-in-use (also by restoring, reusing, recycling).

If a new Girolamo Savonarola (the Dominican priest who preached against tyranny and corruption in the late XV century Florence) came to life amid the filth and noise of some modern metropolis, his cry might resound high and loud for all to hear and might be expressed with the words: Consume, consume, the end will come soon!

If we want to avoid a man-made end, we should move very soon and very fast away from the senseless consumption, induced and fomented by state power, towards the sensible use of resources, from waste to wisdom.

In other words, from curse to cure and care.

## FROM TERRITORIAL SOVEREIGNTY TO PERSONAL SEIGNIORY

In principio

Power : territorial sovereignty

State power : total territorial sovereignty

The erosion of total territorial sovereignty

The present/actual reality

The present/potential trend

Personal seigniority

Personal seigniority as individual responsibility (actors)

Personal seigniority as universal husbandry (actions)

Epilogue



In principio

**T**he beginning of time presented a world where the only barriers to movement for living creatures were constituted by nature (a river, a mountain, a desert).

Slowly, human beings, through their efforts and ingenuity, have been able to overcome many natural obstacles and have been willing



to move from place to place, in search of the richest areas for hunting animals and collecting wild fruits.

Nomadic life does not favour any attachment to a particular territory, nor the tracing and fixing of limits in order to take possession and to guard protection, permanently, of some specific tract of land.

It was only when people stopped moving and started tilling the soil, developing agriculture, that, for many, life became sedentary. Following this epochal shift, a series of related changes has taken place. One of the most relevant was the delimitation of territories to safeguard the efforts put into their amelioration and cultivation.

### **Power : territorial sovereignty**

Since ancient times, with more and more people settling down cultivating land and fixing borders around the patch they had improved, directly or through servants, the possession and control of land became the most evident sign of power.

This was true for the pharaohs in the fertile Nile valley, for the Roman senators with their vast estates, and even more when the Roman Empire collapsed in the West and small territorial masters appeared on the scene.

The nomadic German tribes that had shaken Rome to the foundations, gave way, in the course of time, to a scattered crowd of feudal lords all over Europe.

These feudal lords appropriated for themselves the function of granting security to the rural inhabitants, in too many cases after having first brought hell and insecurity in the attempts to exercise and extend their territorial power.

The need for security is as strong as the need for fresh air; but as the latter is not felt until somebody has heavily polluted the air we breathe, so the former becomes paramount only when somebody has previously jeopardized it; and usually, those who destroy security, in the first place, are the same who, immediately after, advocate for themselves the exclusive prerogative of granting it.

In any case, whatever the particular dynamic, each feudal lord

proclaimed his sovereignty over a specific territory he could control and from which he could derive his sustenance. This sovereignty was characterized by three aspects:

- small territory. The area under a feudal lord was small, at least with respect to most other historical periods, when the ruling power extended over empires or large dominions.

- low levy. The feudal appropriations consisted of a ten per cent imposition on produce, for the maintenance of the master, his family and his (small) retinue of people, plus some working obligations during the course of the year. These customary exactions were quite light, at least with respect to the squeezing taxation of much later times.

- feeble control. The feudal master, in his castle, was generally a distant master; who did not interfere with the lives of those living in the territory under his protection. He could become intrusive, but this was not the general attitude, not least because the rural labourers could rebel and declare allegiance to another master. In any case, the control and interference of the feudal master were quite loose comparing to what would take place in later periods.

### **State power : total territorial sovereignty**

The birth of some nation states (e.g. Italy, Germany) could be seen as the process through which the mightiest or shrewdest feudal lord, starting from his home base (e.g. Piedmont, Prussia) came to dominate and annex a vast territory.

In other words, statism, that is the coming to prominence in Europe (from the XVI century) of a system of states, represents the enlargement and accomplishment of the pyramid of the feudal system.

Statism is feudalism on a large scale, with the elimination of petty obstacles (e.g. a toll at every turn of the road) and the relaxation or abolition of restrictions (of movement, of commerce, etc.) between regions and places, now under one single master. At the same time,

the means of control of this larger territory (bureaucracy, army, police) augment in relation to the increase in the means (revenues) extracted by the central power.

Territorial sovereignty becomes then, under the state, total territorial sovereignty. This total territorial sovereignty is characterized by three aspects:

- large territory. The annexation of some territory, with the consequent strengthening of the power, acts as a stimulant and a lever for the annexation of more territory, until either natural or political obstacles are met.

- high levies. Dominating a large territory and so controlling a large repository of resources, the state power can extract a considerable income, that greed and necessity (war, luxury, patronage, etc.) push to inconceivable heights.

- strong control. Within a large territory and through large revenues, the state power can hire a large number of obedient servants (bureaucrats, taxmen, policemen, military personnel, etc.) to exert a strong control on the territory and its people. The state attributes to itself total (indivisible) and absolute (unlimited) sovereignty over every matter (social, cultural, economical, educational etc.) and over every person living within its fixed borders.

To retain, rein in and reinforce this total territorial sovereignty, the state power uses two instruments:

- nationalism as the ideological glue, manufactured through the fictitious invention of a specific culture linking all the people born on a certain territory and confirmed by the imposition of a state nationality ascribed, willingly or unwillingly, to all of them. This manufactured culture becomes the state accepted culture (norms, language, etc.), that obliterates, or tries to obliterate, the historical traditions and practices of the individuals living in communities, before and beyond the state, with the intention of making them isolated and defenceless in front of the mighty state.

- imperialism as the political vent for channelling energies in the direction of the glory and power of the state.

It is interesting to remark that many revolutions, out of which a national state was born or regenerated, have ended up in promoting imperialistic policies: from the French revolution (the campaigns of Napoleon), to the Russian revolution (the satellite countries), down to independent India (the occupation of Goa), communist China (the annexation of Tibet) and unified Vietnam (invasion of Laos), just to mention the most notorious cases. Imperialism seems to be nothing else than the continuation of nationalism, the will to impose the ruling power of one national clique over larger and larger territories.

In the past, the western élites presented both phenomena under a favourable light : nationalism as noble aspiration to freedom and independence and imperialism as a vehicle for the "civilizing" mission of the white man.

It is now clear to almost everybody that they were and are, mainly, abominable expressions of the deception and brutality (e.g. violence, manipulation, ethnic cleansing) of the state power.

While no modern state ruler advocates any more, at least openly, policies based on nationalism and imperialism, what still remains, strongly upheld by every state politician, of any political inkling, is the concept of national sovereignty.

Time has come for the national sovereignty of the state, in whose name all sort of crimes has been and is still committed, to be thrown into the dustbin of history.

### **The erosion of total territorial sovereignty**

During the XIX and XX century, the notion of national sovereignty (total territorial sovereignty) had already found some opposition and limitation.

In 1865 a convention was signed in Paris that established the International Telegraph Union, the first international organization in modern times. In 1874 representatives from 22 countries convened in Bern and founded the General Postal Union (later, in 1878, to become the Universal Postal Union). It now has 189 members.

It was followed by the International Bureau of Weights and Standards for the unification of systems of measurement, and the International Railway Union for setting rules and standards for the circulation of rail carriages in Europe.

After the First World War, the League of Nations (1920) and the Permanent Court of International Justice (1922), gave only a glimpse of a world beyond the nation state or, at least, one in which the nation state was accountable for its deeds and misdeeds. But the League appeared dominated not only by the states but by the concept of the nation state and of its total territorial sovereignty. For this reason it was bound to fail miserably.

After the Second World War, a renewed attempt was made through the institution of the United Nations (1945) and collateral international organizations, to keep the nation states bound to a code of conduct where (extreme) nationalism and (political) imperialism would not be accepted.

On the economic scene, in Europe, the petty national protectionism of the first half of the XX century appeared obsolete and so an enlarged commercial space came into being in Europe under the name of the European Common Market.

Beyond these institutions and institutional changes, other powerful factors (especially cultural and technological) have operated, in recent times, to dismantle the strictures imposed by the nation states.

These factors affect:

- products. Goods circulate again, more or less freely, through the world, even if some areas (i.e. the less-industrialized regions) are kept or remain aside. Firms have found it convenient to install branches in various countries; they are called 'multinational' companies, and their allegiance is not to national bureaucracies but to customers and shareholders, wherever they are or come from.

- individuals. An increased economic affluence has produced a renewal of migration flows, of permanent or occasional nature. In the first case (permanent migration) people move from regions still domi-

nated by cultural or institutional heavy controls to regions with more relaxed styles of life and so more affluent standards of living. In the second case (occasional displacement) people go in search of exotic or just different places, to enjoy variety and undergo new experiences.

- messages. From the time of the first message sent by the airwaves to the millions of daily messages sent and received to and from every corner of the world, the reality of communication has undergone an astounding transformation. Even counting the fact that not all the messages (i.e. their contents) are for the good, what is undoubtedly good is this freedom to transcend barriers and link people, this possibility to converse and construct new exciting experiences.

All these changes-exchanges have worked and are still working in favour of the erosion of national sovereignty and towards its eventual dissolution.

### **The present/actual reality**

At the dawn of the XXI century, the nation state is a reality without a future. If it is left to carry on for much longer, humankind might not have any future.

The basic tenets of the state need to be totally superseded and with them the state itself. They are:

- closed territory (fixing of borders)

The state, as fiefdom on a large scale, is still attached to land, to territory, and the larger the territory the more powerful the state. The first thing to do for the control of a territory is the fixing of borders and this is the first preoccupation of any state.

Within a closed territory, the state wants absolute control of all the subjects living inside. That is why international individuals, like the Jews during the first half of the XX century or the Arabs in the early XXI century, are looked on with total suspicion. The state has so manipulated the minds of people that a word like "multinational" has become almost a swearword. Contrary to this deceitful image, it is

necessary to stress that highly cultivated individuals are polycultural and polyglot and so are multi-national or trans-national or a-national.

- exploitable territory (raping of nature)

To be based and rely on a specific territory does not mean that the state, as impersonal owner, is gentle and thoughtful with nature. In actual fact, where the central national state is weak, as in Switzerland, nature is in a better shape and quite well cared for; on the contrary, where the state has been more in control (e.g. the communist states of Eastern Europe) we had as result the most polluted and ravaged natural environments. This is because the state is essentially anti-nature, seeing nature as something to exploit savagely for use in the present and not something to manage wisely for the long-term enjoyment of everybody.

Following a distinction introduced by Aristotle (*oikonomy* and *chrematistics*), the policy of the state in dealing with resources should be defined as "pecu-nomy" (rules for making money) instead of "economy" (rules for managing the house). This has been true, at least, since the time of mercantilism, when the aim of the state was to accumulate gold and riches, down to the contemporary neo-mercantilism, motivated by the same aim of enlarging, through taxation, the coffers of the state. And the higher the production/consumption, the higher the accumulation of riches. So, the reaping of revenues for the state is in direct relation with the raping of nature by the state and its associates.

These realities, of national states, national borders, national sovereignty, are fast crumbling down, falling to pieces like the Berlin wall, no thanks to the benevolence and farsightedness of some national politicians, but because some individuals (eco-activists, mind shakers, etc.) have ignored the border posts and shown the path towards new ways of thinking and acting.

The state, as a closed-imposed territorial reality, cannot cope any longer with the open-spontaneous development of natural and personal energies sprouting all over the global village.

That is why new realities have started appearing towards the end

of the XX century and new potentialities are becoming more and more visible and feasible at the beginning of the XXI century.

### **The present/potential trend**

The inability and impossibility of the nation state to cope with the new reality emerging after the Second World War, led to the birth and expansion of many international organizations.

The present trend is towards political and economic entities, or just commercial agreements, covering almost an entire continent, as shown by the examples of the European Union, Africa Union, North American Free Trade Agreement and so on.

These realities are meant to get over the pettiness, foolishness and destructiveness of the nation states; but they are only a timid step towards a borderless world, based on the harmonious intercourse between nature and individuals.

Besides that, there are severe potential dangers in a reality made up of Super Blocks on a continental basis (Africa, North America, Asia, Europe).

They might be a replica, on a larger scale, of the feudalistic model of the state, with its protectionist-mercantilist policies, the permanence of borders, the usual stinking bag of nationalism and territorialism, only on a larger level and on a larger scale (e.g. Western Europe versus North America).

There are already signs of this mentality and of the related practices. The European Union, for instance, has erected a new barbed wire fence around the Fortress Europe, replacing and rivalling the old Iron Curtain, obstructing and repelling the entering and the free circulation of people and goods from other areas.

However, to oppose this new super-nationalism and super-territorialism at a continental level, there are other powerful realities in operation. They refer to:

- natural reality: the physical conformation of a region can present obstacles (a mountain, a river) but does not impose boundaries in the



sense of insurmountable barriers. Barriers are only man-made. The natural elements such as air and water (be they clear and fresh or stinking and polluted) move and flow freely, irrespective of countries and continents, without taking notice of silly borders set up by silly governments of states or super states.

- cultural reality: throughout history, the development of culture, that is the knowledge base and artifacts of a community, has resulted from the intermingling of individuals, their wandering through places and ideas, their exchanging information.

Communication does not have borders; like the air transported by the wind, the airwaves transport messages. To communicate is natural; to introduce obstacles to communication or movement is the exact contrary. Here, again, the close link between nature and culture shows also their clashing with the territorial restrictions and limitations imposed by the states. Any border control produces culturally mutilated people, segregated and disadvantaged communities, in one word, non-grown-up individuals, eternal minors subjected to the guardianship of the power.

Now, human will and technological tools are allowing more and more individuals to move away from a culture based on a delimited territory and administered by the power of the moment to a culture (knowledge base) transcending space and time, in hyperspace and hypertime. It is the world of virtual reality.

- virtual reality: the physical-material reality, over which the territorial power had so much control, is not anymore the (almost) exclusive reality and, in many cases, not even the principal one.

This means that individuals can create and communicate virtual realities (e.g. a virtual library, a virtual university, a virtual community) beyond the control of territorial powers and against which territorial powers are impotent.

For this reason, an economy based, for example, on virtual currencies and planetary exchanges represents the nightmare scenario for any state revenue system, insofar as it heralds the era of voluntary allocation that replaces compulsory taxation.

The problem represented for the states by the existence of the multinational firms is nothing compared with the coming a-national a-territorial units of exchange, especially if/when new communities appear that are based on extra-territoriality (free spaces of autonomous communities where territorial sovereignty is neither exerted nor accepted).

Natural, cultural and virtual realities are incompatible with the model of total territorial sovereignty represented by the nation states and aped now by the continental super states.

New individuals are, more and more, realizing that what is needed is:

- varieties of cooperating realities/entities in distinct times/spaces
- varieties of competing realities/entities within the same time/space.

To achieve this we have to move away from territorial sovereignty towards personal seigniority.

### **Personal seigniority**

Personal seigniority is intended as the empowerment of individuals interacting within and between communities.

Without negating the concept of 'society' and the existence of collective realities called 'societies,' it is nevertheless necessary to stress that:

- individuals and their interactions make societies and without interacting individuals there would not be any society;
- individuals have needs, values, customs, not society in the abstract; what are called social needs are, simply, needs common to some or many individuals.
- individuals bear responsibility for what they do or do not do; to talk of responsibility with reference to society is only a figure of speech, that means (or should mean) the responsibility of each single individual in a group

The old paradigm is totally pervaded by the concept of society as

a real entity beyond and above real individuals. Furthermore, in the old paradigm, society has become so identified and confused with the state that there are people who still believe in the fallacious notion expressed by the statement: we are the state. This statement reveals, not only the naivety of the person who makes it, but also the deceitful entanglement between reality and organizational phenomena super-imposed on reality. In fact, with the disappearance of the state (an historical form of organization of individuals) we do not disappear as individual human beings because we are not the state; we just change the form of our organization.

Personal seigniorship is the convergence and coincidence between the form (ways of organizing) and the substance (who organizes what) of organization, insofar as both are meant to refer to real self-administered individuals and not to abstract super-imposed entities.

Having clarified this point, we can briefly sketch some aspects of personal seigniorship. They concern and are grouped under two categories:

- individual responsibility (actors)
- universal husbandry (actions).

### **Personal seigniorship as individual responsibility (actors)**

The territorial powers known as nation states have arrogated to themselves all sort of prerogatives and attributions concerning every possible aspect: security, justice, trade, education, environment, etc., considering them matters of national interest to which national measures apply.

Now, this view of problems, delimited by national borders, dealt with through national solutions, laboriously elaborated by national states, is not only ludicrous but out of this world.

In actual reality, the states have started taking into consideration some problems only because pushed and led to do so by individuals and voluntary organizations (associations, trusts, cooperatives, etc.).

These responsible individuals, local communities and non-state

organizations, are examples of personal seignior, to be expanded and improved everywhere.

Personal seignior means moving from subjected people, compulsorily ascribed to a national state and its territorial political reality, to connected individuals, free to choose which community they want to participate in and contribute to and, within that community, which provider of services they want to use and support.

To make this feasible and possible, we need to cut the knot tying individuals to the territorial power, to abolish any claim by territorial powers on the life of individuals born and living in a specific territory.

In place of national subjects, with ascribed imposed membership and obligations, we have individuals who freely choose (if and when) to become members of one or more communities, on the basis of selected shared interests.

This would clearly mark the end of territorial powers, exerting unlimited control with unlimited irresponsibility on a bordered territory; and the true beginning of a borderless space, the entire globe, in the care of individuals that know both their duties and their responsibilities.

The cosmopolitan, polycultured, polyglot human being is one who shows class in what he/she does while not belonging to any class; one who masters many structured notions (that is, the world knowledge) while not being mastered by any straitening nation (that is, the deceitful ideology of a territorial power).

This individual, free to evolve and to choose without restrictions as to movement, settlement and development, is the one who, in association with other individuals, will start getting out of the morass and disasters engendered by the territorial powers.

They will be the actors of universal husbandry.

### **Personal seignior as universal husbandry (actions)**

The end of territorial powers with their illusory bag of nation-made solutions to global problems, will bring to the fore the exigency and the existence of:

- universal principles. Like protocols of communication, universal principles express the needs and values, intrinsic to human beings, cherished and developed by individuals and communities throughout history, that have been tested and have withstood the passage of time and have become the robust core of guidelines for all living creatures.

- local practices. Principles, per se, are useless if they are not implemented in the day-to-day occurrences of life. This is why, the lofty declarations of intents coming from the state are a void shell when compared in importance to the actual attitudes and actions of human beings in their daily intercourses.

Universal principles should be the result of the reflection on historical local practices, and local practices should rely on and implement these universal principles as a concentration of wisdom out of experience.

The union of universal principles and local practices is the foundation of universal husbandry.

Personal seigniory as universal husbandry is characterized by:

### **Ownership**

Ownership is possession and use of products of human activity and of means of production. It can be:

- personal

It concerns, mainly, products that belong or are used by a specific individual. As a general rule, the personal ownership of the basic means of protection and sustenance (shelter, food, clothes, etc.) should be a universal possibility and reality.

- common

It concerns, mainly, means of production that belong and are put to use by groups of individuals, for instance, a company, a trust, a club, a cooperative, an association or any type of organization where the possibility for involvement of the members is not distant or occasional. Common ownership should not be confused with state ownership, fallaciously called public ownership, that is ownership in the name of all for the vested/vicious interest of some.

### **Stewardship**

Stewardship is the management and maintenance of the various spheres of human experience (biosphere, sociosphere, technosphere) for the enjoyment of present and future generations. It refers to the common heritage (natural, cultural), administered but not owned by anyone in particular except by humankind and all the living creatures (past, present, future). Stewardship can be:

- particular

The management and maintenance concern specific artifacts or places such as, for instance, a painting, a museum, a building, etc.

- general

Management and maintenance concern the total environment and their inhabitants, seas and rivers, fields and trees, mountains and forests, gardens and parks, including views and sceneries and whatever else is worth preserving and cherishing.

## Epilogue

Personal seigniority means individual responsibility and universal husbandry in order to contribute to the well-being of oneself and others.

The individual responsibility for universal husbandry could very well imply and require, in some cases, the active ostracism and boycott of individuals and communities that implement bad precepts and follow bad practices that result in damage or even violence to other individuals and communities. A serious continuous boycott of a violent institution or of a polluting company can be very effective in a networked world, because it is fast acting and very persuasive, if the pressure applied is sufficiently ample and resolute.

Individuals, associations, trusts, voluntary organizations, they have done more to protect the environment, to defend human dignity, to promote freedom and security, than all the territorial powers put together who, more often, have been the destroyers of nature, the offenders of humanity and the negators of freedom and security.

The disappearance of territorial powers would finally mean:

- the removal of artificial borders and the assertion of the universal freedom of movement - settlement - development;
- the end of compulsory national ascription and the beginning of contractual option, in other words, the choice if, when and which community-communities to start, select, support.

The time of personal seigniority has arrived.

## FROM CLOSED TERRITORIALISM TO OPEN SPATIALISM

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## Introduction

The analysis of the physical world by scientists in the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, geology, etc.) has progressed tremendously in the last few centuries, moving from unsubstantiated concepts (e.g. the phlogiston) to testable hypotheses, and leading to an incredible array of technological devices and breakthroughs in knowledge.

However, the same cannot be said with reference to physical space as analyzed, represented and planned by social scientists. Up to now, the way the space (the habitat) is viewed and organized has practically nothing to do with a scientific approach but is almost entirely concerned with the cultivation of cherished myths (democracy as power of the people, the state as the indispensable provider of security and welfare, etc.) and the preservation of existing power mechanisms (political, economic, cultural).

It is therefore appropriate and helpful to present a different view that tries to disentangle the current cultural conception concerning the environment in which we live (especially land or territory) from unnecessary physical restrictions and plain mental distortions.

The analysis will focus essentially on the following aspects:

- Territory
- Territoriality
- Territorialism

Particularly, what is territory, or territoriality or territorialism? What have they become? And what should be made of them once they are no longer attached to or subjugated by any form of monopolistic and exploitative power.

## Territory

The term *territory* comes from the Latin *terra* that refers either to the earth or to a specific part of it, a region, or to the material of which the land is composed, the soil.

A territory is, first of all, a natural-physical reality, namely a piece

of land inhabited/occupied by some animate or inanimate entity. When people settle on a specific territory, that piece of land becomes also a social reality.

This means that a territory is either an existing natural environment, a human-built environment or a variable mixture of both.

To call a specific tract of land a territory relates to the fact that, usually, it contains some homogenous natural or man-made features that differentiate it from other pieces of land. In this respect a town, a forest, the estuary of a river can be called territories and examined on the basis of their distinctive characteristics.

All territories seen as homogenous spaces are not only delimited and distinguished by specific features, but also linked or linkable to other territories, in many cases through the effort and ingenuity of individuals that have overcome physical barriers such as mountains, rivers and seas. The search for and discovery of new territories beyond the Pillars of Hercules (the Strait of Gibraltar) or in the American Far West or in the South Pacific seas has been one of the distinctive traits of human beings.

Moreover a territory is something transformable by humans within very large limits, for instance from desert to cultivated land and from forest to arid soil.

Human Being's reliance on a specific piece of land as a place to live and a means of sustenance (stationary cultivation instead of recurrent migrations) has produced the social trait called *territoriality*.

## **Territoriality**

It seems that prehistoric human beings moved from place to place in search of food (plants, animals). It was only at a later stage that the cultivation of plants and the raising of animals were discovered and practised by a growing number of people.

These new techniques of food production transformed, in many cases, what were non-territorial migratory hunters or groups of hunters into settled territorial farmers or communities of farmers.

The development of territoriality was the logical and rational

outcome of the continual reliance on the same specific territory for all or most of the necessities of life, both material and psychological.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives, among others, these two definitions of territoriality:

“2a: persistent attachment to a specific territory

2b: the pattern of behavior associated with the defense of a territory.”

Territoriality can then be seen as an historical outcome of the protracted use and care of a specific territory that generates a sense of belongingness and a will to defend it from intruders.

The fact that territoriality was alien to the prehistoric human being means that:

- Territoriality is not part of the genetic endowment of the individual but is a quite sensible attitude that emerges once specific agricultural practices are put in place;

- Territoriality is an attitude learned and displayed only in the presence of those practices (farming, breeding) that are based on the continuous use of a certain territory.

For stationary people, territoriality is a quite appropriate way of dealing with problems of ownership and management of territories. Unfortunately, by exercising irrational passions and developing absurd pretensions, some power-hungry individuals have developed a pathological urge to tamper with the concept of territoriality. This has resulted in the development of what is known as *territorialism*, a conviction accepted nowadays by most people without giving it much thought.

## **Territorialism**

Throughout history the control of large expanses of territory has been synonymous with power, since control of a given territory equates to control of that territory's exploitable resources, including people (labour) and raw materials (cultivable soil, minerals, timber, etc.).

The first brute who, having enclosed a piece of land, declared it to

be his own, without basing his assertion on having worked and improved the land, and nevertheless found people afraid to challenge him and gullible enough to believe and accept his claim, he is the real originator of territorialism.

Over the course of centuries, all who have shown an addiction to power (ambitious kings in the past and arrogant politicians in the present) have developed an urge to seek territorialism.

Territorialism is the claim to monopolistic sovereignty over a very large territory or territories including all of its inhabitants and resources.

This claim, put forward by certain power-hungry individuals, often in exchange for the promise (real or illusory) of protection against aggression from external forces, has been reiterated with such constancy that, to many timid and credulous minds, it has become, in the course of time, a fully legitimate and seemingly quite proper demand. The claim to territorialism remains, nevertheless, even now, an invented (made up) and imposed (forced upon) pretension, never accepted by the totality of people living in a certain territory. It has therefore resulted in violent struggles, forced displacements and personal tragedies.

Three main aspects characterise territorialism:

- Monopoly of power: there is only one superior power - thus an exclusive power - for each specific territory;
- Submission of people: everybody living within that territory is subject to the laws of the territorial superior power and cannot enter or exit the territory without his authorization in the form of a passport or visa;
- Exaction of resources: personal resources are appropriated by the superior power through taxation and monetary policy, and all natural resources of significant economic value (e.g. gas, minerals, etc.) are appropriated by the superior power and legal rights to their commercial exploitation are granted to supporters in return for a fee.

Territorialism has assumed in history two main forms: micro-territorialism and macro-territorialism. Setting aside the micro-territorialism of the Greek city state and the macro-territorialism of the

Roman Empire, we focus briefly on two realities closer to us in time: the micro-territorialism of the Middle Ages and the macro-territorialism of the modern world.

### **Micro-territorialism (feudalism)**

The importance of territory as the most substantial and direct source of power appears very clearly in Europe during the Middle Ages when, usually, the one who controlled the largest extent of territories was the king and he recompensed obedience and services of other men by assigning to them large pieces of land. In the course of time those large pieces of territory were transformed into hereditary fiefdoms.

The local feudal master became then, eventually, the unique owner of a territory and of its inhabitants, who were in turn reduced to the condition of serfs. The only way for them to be free was to abandon that territory and run away. If not, they would be subject to a series of work and payment obligations and other rules characterizing their position as servile appendages to the land.

The expression: *Nulle terre sans seigneur* (No land without a lord) that was meant to indicate that all concession of land was in relation to services provided to the king, might be also interpreted as the desire, by those in power, that all tracts of land be under a master. The fulfilment of this desire would have represented the universalisation of territorialism in the medieval age.

Fortunately, there were tracts of land where the rising class of merchants and artisans congregated, that were outside the sphere of control of the feudal masters. These spaces became the nuclei of the free towns that attracted all those who wanted to lead a life away from the shackles of territorialism (i.e. the subjection to a territorial ruler). In order to free themselves, many serfs abandoned the feudal dominions and started again from scratch in a new urban environment.

However, in the course of time, the flourishing cities became the new centres of territorial power, first stretching out their control to the surrounding rural areas, and then, as capital cities, extending

their territorial pretensions to lands further and further away. Eventually, the rulers living in some capital cities (Madrid, Amsterdam, Lisbon, London, Paris, Berlin) started to entertain the idea that the entire earth was up for grabs.

Within this new scenario, any expressions of micro-territorialism - be it the ancient feudal master transformed into a countryside aristocrat or the local ruler of small principalities - would become impotent remnants of the past, superseded by the new reality of national macro-territorialism under the rule of the central state.

### **Macro-territorialism (statism)**

The emergence of the modern territorial state can be seen as the fulfilment of the ambition of the strongest feudal lord who succeeded in conquering, annexing or associating vast new territories and their inhabitants.

Territorial statism has been viewed as a direct continuation and extension of territorial feudalism. Henry Sumner Maine remarked:

“Territorial sovereignty - the view which connects sovereignty with the possession of a limited portion of the earth’s surface, was distinctly an offshoot, though a tardy one, of *feudalism*. This might have been expected *a priori*, for it was feudalism which for the first time linked personal duties, and by consequence personal rights, to the ownership of land.” (*Ancient Law*, Chapter IV)

In other words, statism is feudalism writ large.

In the transition from feudalism to statism, some feudal vassals at the service of the king became high-ranking state bureaucrats, while all the feudal servants became state subjects. In addition, there were also a number of other significant changes that strengthened territorialism and which we will examine.

The Peace of Westphalia (1648) that ended the Thirty Years' War and the ensuing treaties are credited with having set up the condi-

tions suitable for the rise of the system of territorial states, each one sovereign in a specific territory and over all of its inhabitants.

This is a significant departure from the Middle Ages conception when the king, albeit controlling vast tracts of land, was essentially the ruler of his people. As pointed out by Henry Sumner Maine, even while occupying the land that is now known as France “the Merovingian line of chieftains, the descendants of Clovis, were not Kings of France, they were Kings of the Franks.” (*Ancient Law*, Chapter IV). Confirming this notion is the fact that the power and jurisdiction of the medieval kings did not apply to foreigners; for instance, to the travelling merchants who had their own *lex mercatoria*.

Under the type of territorialism imposed by the modern state, national and democratic, there are no more bounded-men (the country people) and free-men (the merchants, the artisans and the city dwellers) but all are or become state subjects (i.e. subservient to the territorial state rulers), even the foreigners living in that specific territory.

The major impulse towards state territorialism was provided, later on, when the concept of nation came to be associated with the reality of territory. Until the formation of the idea of nation and the ideology of nationalism, the pretension of monopolistic territorial sovereignty by a king over a vast extent of land rested always on very shaky foundations and could be very well dismissed by a powerful rival or questioned by the authority of the Church. It was when the masses, as nations, came to the scene that modern territorialism was born. Nationalism and territorialism are then the two sides of the same coin, and nationalism is a truly territorial ideology.

After the middle of the XIX century, with the unification of Italy (1861) and of Germany (1871), the idea that every nation (national group) had a right to own a specific territory (homeland) became, at least in the Western world, an entrenched creed, unquestioned and unquestionable.

The First World War and its aftermath sanctioned state territorialism in the most compelling ways as the absolute and exclusive right of the state rulers to dominate a specific territory and whatever it

included, without any external interference or the presence, internally, of any other autonomous entity. In other words, full and unlimited sovereignty within the borders fixed by the state.

The distinctive characteristics of state macro-territorialism are then:

- The monopoly of territorial sovereignty: the territorial state is, first of all, a monopolist. For the territorial state rulers and their followers, a state within a state is an inconceivable idea. This is because they see the state as a territory at their exclusive disposal and not as a social organization at the service of voluntary members and free customers. Only some extraterritorial rights are given to foreign state representatives through the reciprocal fiction that locates each diplomatic mission on a piece of land granted to the other state.

- The fixing of territorial boundaries: the territorial state is based on restricted access and exit. Boundaries are essential elements for the existence of the territorial state. Even nowadays, the suppression of border posts between two European states means only that a certain freedom of movement has been allowed over a larger area. It does not mean that state boundaries have been abolished.

- The imposition of territorial identities: the territorial state can survive only by perpetuating the fiction of a homogeneous culture, officially imposed on everybody by the dominant national group. For this reason the territorial state is fully determined on dictating/cultivating a mono-culture (the same cultural identity for all those living on a territory) and rejecting any substantial cultural variety.

These three interrelated aspects of territorialism have generated a series of appalling deeds that are the criminal traits of territorial statism and that we will now briefly analyze.

### **The wrongs/faults of territorialism (monopolizing territories)**

Territorialism, that is, one huge territory and one almighty master, has been the exclusive form of social ruling in modern times because, in its apparent simplicity and straightforwardness, it could plausibly



be presented and accepted as the one most suitable to grant (i.e. impose) order.

However, if we take even a superficial glance at the events of the last century, when state territorialism was fully dominant, we cannot fail to notice levels of disorder (for instance, repeated massacres of human beings made under the order of the territorial state rulers) on a scale rarely witnessed in history. This cannot be simplistically ascribed to the introduction of more efficient means of extermination. Knives and clubs, as shown for example in 1994 in Rwanda, have also been effective tools to perform genocide in an attempt to affirm exclusive territorial dominance.

Given that, the current appeal and acceptance of territorialism can be explained only by the existence of a massive propaganda machine orchestrated by the rulers and their intellectual servants that have succeeded in making people believe that territorialism has scientific unquestionable underpinnings. The cultural bases of territorialism are, on the contrary, total fabrications in the form of:

- Inexistent instinct. The territorial instinct, put forward for example by Robert Ardrey in *The Territorial Imperative* (1967), is no instinct at all being absent in many humans and even in many animals; otherwise we could not make sense, for example, of confirmed travellers, wanderers, hobos and migrant workers, or individuals that do not own or are not particularly attached to any specific piece of land (like those living all their lives in rented accommodation or mobile homes). The territorial instinct is perhaps confused with the rational expectations of somebody who does not want intruders disturbing the peace of his home (owned or rented) or a farmer who cultivates an area of peacefully acquired land and declares that specific piece of land and the fruits of his work to be his own. But this has to do with basic rationality, basic decency and not with any basic instinct.

- Invented myth. The widely diffused idea that each nation has a territory of its own is a powerful but nevertheless invented myth based on the association of two made up realities, that of a national group and that of a mother country. In reality, we are first of all

distinctive individuals and not creatures of a national herd; furthermore, almost every person on earth is the result of mass migrations and extensive genetic crosses. Out of this comes the true reality of cultural affinities that are a product of human development. It leads individuals to the formation of and choice amongst a multiplicity of social groups (like personal clubs) that have less and less to do with territorial rooting and certainly nothing to do with the fanciful tales of *Volksgeist* and *Fatherland*. The myth is now breaking down because, with current communication technology, one can be in constant touch and associate with many individuals without the necessity of territorial physical proximity. This fact opens up a new world of virtual intentional communities and affinity groups, beyond the territorial state.

- Inaccurate story. The feudal idea that every piece of land must have a master has been reaffirmed in quite recent times through a fable called *The Tragedy of the Commons* in which the author, Garrett Hardin, advocates universal territorialism (one territory - one master) for fear that otherwise the land will be overexploited by everybody. However, Hardin's tale, as it will be pointed out shortly, is a very inaccurate way, to say the least, of presenting the historical reality of the commons and it leads to a totally illusory/deceitful proposal to solve problems of territorial management.

Because these fabrications have found fertile ground with people having vested interests or those with gullible minds, we are all stuck with a system of territorial organization (state territorialism) that has produced, as previously said, an abominable series of disasters on all fronts (moral, social, cultural, ecological, economic, etc.).

The wrongs/faults of statism are the inevitable by-product of its distinctive characteristics arising out of territorialism:

- The monopoly of territorial sovereignty: wars and imperialisms. In a world characterized by territorial monopolistic powers, the scrambling for territories to annex and dominate has been the recurrent preoccupation of every state ruler, compatible with his military strength. Hitler's *Lebensraum* (a living space) or Mussolini's *un posto al sole* (a place in the sun) have been only the most crass expressions of

the way of thinking and acting of every territorial power. Wars and imperialisms are then intrinsic urges of territorial state rulers, manifested either by occupying territories (as in Africa, Asia and the Americas) or by vying for spheres of political influence (as during the period of the Cold War and afterwards). For those who abide by the reality and conception of territorial monopolistic sovereignty, there is a kind of "*horror vacui*" (fear of empty spaces) so that, within a system of territorial states, the rulers feel obliged, by right, to occupy a place before others arrive and do the same. This policy is nowadays applied mainly within each territorial state, given the practical disappearance of stateless territories, with the looting of local resources by the national robber rulers via taxes and the spoils system. In the most appalling instances this predatory behaviour leads to more or less violent "civil wars" that are quite often the ghastly identity card of the territorial state (see the cases of Palestine, the ex-Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Sierra Leone, Somalia, East Timor, Darfur, and so many others).

- The fixing of territorial boundaries: partitions and segregations. These territorial states are obsessed with the tracing of boundaries that, in many cases (as in Africa) are invented lines of demarcation drawn for the convenience of the occupying power. The fixing of boundaries generated by state territorialism has led to tragedies of appalling horror, like for instance the mass migration and massacres following the partition of India. The existence of territorial states has been directly responsible for the extermination of six millions of Jews that had nowhere to go because the borders of all territorial states were closed to them (except for limited cases of individuals and small groups). Internally, the fixing of territorial boundaries resulted also in Native Americans being confined in the reserves, some sections of the black population (for instance in South Africa) being shunted into the shantytowns and the Jews, or other "undesirable" people like the immigrants, into ghettos. One of the most appalling signs of territorialism have been the Berlin Wall and the Barbed Wire running along the border of Hungary and dividing Europe into two blocks, Eastern and Western. Nowadays, some of the same Europeans that vehe-

mently opposed the illiberal practices of state communism have built Fortress Europe whose military forces, patrolling land and sea, are re-enacting the same policies with the same immoral insouciance and idiotic arrogance.

- The imposition of territorial identities: ethnocentrism and homogenization. State territorialism can survive only through the manipulation of minds and the imposition of idiotic territorial identities, that is the perpetuation of phoney ideas of artificial differentiations instilled in the minds of individuals from infancy. This means the manufacturing of serial mass-morons (identical national marionettes) on a scale never attained in the past. One of the most heinous moral crimes committed by state territorial masters is the destruction of local cultures (the real variety) and the invention of national cultures (the fake diversity), all this leading to the end of cosmopolitanism. The gentle a-territorial Jews exterminated in the concentration camps are here again an indication of what we have lost because of territorialism. In their place we have now the ultra-territorialist Israeli state rulers and their followers, prepared to bomb, torture and confine in ghettos men, women and children in the process of granting to themselves the exclusive control and use of a specific territory.

It is then not an exaggeration to say that the ideology and practice of territorialism has created monsters (the criminal bosses of the territorial states) that have committed monstrous acts that they are continuously replicating. They feel legitimized to do this, as long as territorialism will remain the commonly accepted creed and mode of political and social governance.

For all these reasons, we must recognize that territorialism is indeed a nefarious manner for social groups to regulate, organize and manage themselves and is totally inadequate for dealing with territorial problems. Clearly, the existence of a territorial reality requires theoretical and practical tools to deal with that reality but not in the simplistic and abominable way put forward and implemented by the advocates and actors of state territorialism.

Let us then examine what are the requirements and the instru-

ments that could be used for managing territories instead of monopolizing them.

### **The rights/functions of territoriality (managing territories)**

Living in a certain territory, feeling attached to it, drawing from it the means of sustenance, all this and more are at the source of what is called here territoriality. As previously pointed out, territoriality is not an inborn instinct but a learnt or taught trait, coming out of some specific life experiences in relation to some specific territory. Territorial attitudes rightly intended should lead to the management of territories concerning their use, enjoyment and care, fairly, pleasantly and efficiently.

To this end, property rights relating to the access and use of land have been developed and refined over the centuries; arising, as in the case of social norms, from recurrent practices accepted and shared by individuals and communities. Only very naive and ignorant people can still believe that property rights have been first invented/implemented by the state or by any superior power.

As a matter of fact, the state, like any monopolistic power appearing on the scene, has only codified in laws the property rights of the dominant social group and, first of all, has granted property rights to itself (via annexations, expropriations, requisitions, forfeitures acts, etc.) and to its cronies (e.g. the enclosure of common land) bringing about a huge concentration of land ownership. In fact, as remarked by Ludwig von Mises:

“Nowhere and at no time has the large-scale ownership of land come into being through the working of economic forces in the market. It is the result of military and political effort. Founded by violence, it has been upheld by violence and by that alone.” “The great landed fortunes did not arise through the economic superiority of large-scale ownership, but by violent annexation outside the area of trade.” (*Socialism*, 1936).

In Europe, for instance, the modern territorial state with its landed class results from the looting of Church properties (for instance, in England with the dissolution of monasteries under Henry VIII) and the appropriation of common land (before the Industrial Revolution) on a massive scale.

These simple historical facts should be enough to convince us that, in order to really grant and protect individual and common property rights, we must go beyond any monopolistic territorial power and that means, in our time, beyond state territorialism.

While monopolizing territories provides a simple but highly ineffective and deceptive answer to a complex reality (the variety of territories and the various modes of their access and use), managing territories, like any management activity and process, requires a variety of solutions in relation to the plurality of situations and exigencies.

We can distinguish between three main types of land property and access rights as the basis for three different ways of relating to and managing territories:

- Individual (Person). Individual property rights emerge from the work undertaken by a person upon a vacant field. This is the classic liberal position as expressed by Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690). We are referring here to moderately large or relatively small parcels of land cultivated by a farmer, or to built surfaces (an apartment, or a house) occupied by a person or a family. In the case of very large individual properties (e.g. hundreds of hectares of land) the instance should be examined on its merits. If the land lay unused because worthless even for recreational purposes and the occupier has been able to put it to good use (investing resources and hiring workers), the ensuing personal property should be accepted and protected (at least for the time being and until new realities emerge). If, on the other hand, the land has been compulsorily appropriated by naked force (violent expropriation) or by legal chicanery (state deception) we are very much in the unacceptable realm of state territorialism under the not so different and always unpalatable guise of one's man territorialism. This is what Albert Nock called the state's

“preoccupation with converting labour-made property into law-made property, and redistributing its ownership.” In fact, “a purely legal distribution of the ownership of natural resources is what the state came into being for.” (*Anarchist's Progress*, 1927)

The diffusion of genuine individual property rights has been shown to be conducive in producing two very positive results:

- a generally higher level of productive outcome and a degree of more effective maintenance because of the direct personal interest and involvement of the owner;

- a bulwark against oppression and exploitation because it gives to the individual(s) a place to stand in order to oppose possible infringements to liberty and autonomy from wherever they might arise. For this reason Proudhon qualified the monopolization of property as "theft" (*vol*) and the diffusion of property as "freedom" (*liberté*). (*Théorie de la propriété*, 1862)

- Common (Community). Group property is probably the oldest form of property that appeared in history. When the individual felt defenceless or powerless with respect to environmental challenges or when he needed other individuals to master nature (e.g. opening up new agricultural fields) and extract resources (hunting, mining, etc.), group property was a recurrent solution. During the Middle Ages, community properties (common land) were those uncultivated territories (e.g. wooded areas, large tracts of pastures, streams, etc.) of which all the members of the local community enjoyed the use. A use highly regulated through customary practices, indicating what was permitted or prohibited, so that over-exploitation of the resources was almost non-existent. The so called "tragedy of the commons" highlighted by Garrett Hardin in a popular essay (1968) previously referred to and that has given a bad name to common property, is then basically a farcical comedy of scientific ignorance and intellectual deception. Pollution and over-exploitation has happened in spaces that were seen to be “no man’s land” and “no one’s concern” (like the seas and the oceans) but this has nothing to do with the reality of the commons.

Group property (as in a shareholding company) is particularly relevant when we are dealing with the management of territorial resources or tracts of land that require means for cultivation and care bigger than those generally at the disposal of an individual or a family. It applies also to any case in which individuals are willing to pool their resources and efforts like, for instance, the National Trust in England and Wales, set up for the preservation and care of places of historic interest and natural beauty. A further difference with respect to individual property is that here we are referring to a much wider area or to natural and architectural resources in which the right of transit/access is granted practically to everybody (in some cases paying a small entrance fee as contribution for the upkeep of an historic building).

- Universal (World). There are certain territorial resources that, like works of art or scientific formulas or technological inventions, are the common heritage of humanity. To exemplify it, the Amazon forest belongs, in exclusivity, neither to the Brazilian state nor to the Brazilian people, and not even to those living on or around those territories. The acceptance of universal-world rights of property disposes definitively of the pretension of territorial states to claiming the exclusive ownership and control of large territories (the so-called state sovereignty). In other words, the earth does not belong to monopolistic national masters and so it should not be the arena for their bullying, harassing and racketeering. The earth belongs to the entire humankind, to the present and future generations, for their care and enjoyment. The idea of the earth resources (e.g. seas, mountains, rivers, landscapes, etc.) as world heritage has already been asserted and developed in the past by rational individuals (like Hugo Grotius proclaiming the universal freedom of navigation in *Mare Liberum*, 1609) and, in the present, by some associations and institutions (for instance the Unesco World Heritage Centre). What is required is the refinement of instruments for the preservation and care of those resources and the complete disentanglement of those territories from the sovereignty of any state in order to assure their future.



In fact, there are signs that bankrupted states might be trying to sell natural resources to the highest bidder in order to refill their coffers. Those attempts have already taken place in the past. Norman Douglas deprecated the destruction of the wooded areas in Calabria (Southern Italy), courtesy of the Italian state, when he wrote that the virgin forest of Gariglione

"has been sold for 350,000 francs to a German company; its primeval silence is now invaded by an army of 260 workmen, who have been cutting down the timber as fast as they can." (Norman Douglas, *Old Calabria*, 1915).

In recent times, a Minister of the Italian Government has suggested selling off beaches in order to raise money for the state. It suffices that one state bandit does it and gets away with it, and the entire earth becomes, even more than now, a huge territorial racket. And this will be a final disastrous accomplishment of state territorialism.

The way in which group and universal resources will be administered and cared for is not a matter to be decided in the abstract. From past experience, the only thing we can say and stress is that people left free to sort out problems, manifest, sooner or later, the ingenuity and willingness to find a solution, unless vicious and deceptive obstacles are put in their way. So, for the moment, the arrival at appropriate solutions is less important than the removal of absurd illusions concerning the existence of an institution (the territorial state) capable of solving any problem of territorial organization. As pointed out by Elinor Ostrom

"communities of individuals have relied on institutions resembling neither the state nor the market to govern some resource systems with reasonable degrees of success over long period of time." (*Governing the Commons*, 1990)

For this to be possible, the deceitful alternative of public property

- private property, is to be abandoned as one of the most vicious cons ever performed on gullible minds considering that, more often than not, public=state property is nothing other than the "private" fiefdom of the ruling strata, to be used and abused as their personal dominion to raise and pocket revenues. What we need instead is to develop a very transparent scale of land rights that could be in the form of:

- Ownership. Full property rights (*ius utendi et abutendi*) and full control of access (property as disposal)

- Trusteeship. Partial property rights (*ius utendi sine abutendi*) and relative-weak control of access (possession as use).

- Stewardship. Disseminated property rights and almost non-existent control of access (enjoyment as care).

The way these land rights emerge depends on the type of resource and the type of effort expended on it and by whom. Moreover, we might have single ownership or shared ownership of a piece of land according to the voluntary choices of the individuals concerned. The many ways and forms of ownership, trusteeship and stewardship are not, however, the most important aspect. What is more relevant is the realization that there is one planet earth that belongs to human beings, as individuals, communities or the whole humanity and is not an arena for theft by state rulers and their cronies. For this reason we need sensible shared norms for managing territories and certainly not idiotic imposed laws to monopolize territories and subjugate all people living on them. State territorialism has inflicted so many miseries on people and so many scars on landscapes and places that it is time to get rid of this calamity as soon as possible and once for all.

### **Beyond territorialism**

The end of territorialism is the necessary pre-requirement for three positive reconciliations:

- The recomposition national territories - foreign territories. The feudal cages of the feudal masters have been replaced by the national boxes of the national rulers. This cannot be seen as a significant change for

the better but as the continuation of the same rotten attitude: to consider and to treat human beings as servile appendices to the territory, submitted to the territorial rulers. For instance, there are people that, in the course of their lives have changed, more than once, nationality and juridical systems according to political and military vagaries. This is all nonsense that can only be accepted and considered as normal because of popular errors and prejudices brought about by constant brainwashing through state propaganda. Furthermore, the fact that an individual is required to ask for a document (a permit) from the state to move from one territory to the other of the earth, sometimes even within the same state (internal passports) is an obscene abuse of power on the one hand and a humiliating sign of servitude on the other. As pointed out by Proudhon, with the institution of passports the state is supervising and selling “the right to walk and travel.” (*Qu'est-ce que la propriété?*, 1840). All this would come to pass with the end of territorialism and the recomposition of the earth into one whole free space (land and sea), differentiated simply by orographic factors and environmental and cultural features.

- The recomposition town-country. State territorialism and the related by-products of wars and imperialisms have generated huge concentrations of people in certain places (e.g. the capital cities of the empires) where resources were channelled and where a voracious bureaucracy and other parasitic strata were, and still are, intent to consume them. In 1947, for instance, a French geographer, Jean-François Gravier, produced a book with the telling title *Paris et le désert français* (Paris and the French desert). It was a powerful indictment of the abnormal power of the territorial central state (represented by Paris) which was absorbing resources to the disadvantages of other territories. The same situation is replicated in underdeveloped regions where the capital centre is the cancer that drains resources from the surrounding region. All this is possible because of territorialism, that is the exclusive territorial sovereignty of the state, that people have been duped (manipulated) to accept as a necessary and indispensable condition for the management of a territory. Going beyond territorialism will make it possible to overcome huge social,

economic and demographic imbalances, with a reduction in layers of parasitic strata and a diffusion of population and resources in a more rational and appropriate way.

- The recomposition functionality-reality. Up to now the way to manage territories and resources had to do essentially with the imperatives dictated by national politics. What is needed instead are functional norms (as for road traffic or air pollution) in place of national laws, laws often made to favour national lobbies. For instance, a service offered by a company (e.g. an insurance company) usually ends at the border of each state even if it would be much more sensible, for producers and consumers, to ignore artificial borders and extend their reach up to the point where their provision-fruit is functionally and economically viable. In an historical period in which access to services is a very significant factor in the life of everybody, to retain the same obstacles that were once imposed in relation to "foreign" goods, makes it clear that we are still not far removed from feudalism.

It should then appear increasingly clear to all of us that if we want to build a viable future we must go beyond territorialism and towards spatialism.

### **Towards spatialism**

The use of the word spatialism to qualify a reality beyond territorialism seems appropriate in so far as it is meant to cover all sorts of territories and places, including multi-dimensional and non-physical ones. And this is important nowadays when people, more than in the past, are highly diverse in their attitude towards the land and when new spaces are continuously built, materially and virtually.

We can list the following typology of spaces:

- Natural spaces (litho-idro-atmosphere)
- Artificial spaces (built environment)
- Virtual spaces (ideational reality).

The advocates of state territorialism have so far succeeded in monopolizing the sovereignty of natural and artificial spaces and

manipulating the ideational reality by employing state-paid intellectuals. However, as more and more people engage in producing virtual spaces of ideation and communication, the state control and manipulation of minds is destined to fail and, in due course, the free and universal circulation of new ideas will also contribute to the breaking down of other monopolistic pretensions. In the way that the introduction of the printing press (around 1440), threw light on obscurantist creeds, and contributed to the dismissal of the temporal power of the Church, so the virtual net (Internet) with the universal spreading of information and counter-information, is going to destroy myths and mental restrictions and, with them, the territorial monopolistic power of states.

A very simple reality can have simple mechanisms of control and management, but a reality of many intersecting spaces (natural-artificial-virtual) is not something that can be patrolled and circumscribed by simply putting up border posts and “no trespassing” signs. Mises, for instance, in his writings, has stressed many times that “the market economy as such does not respect political frontiers. Its field is the world.” (*Human Action*, 1949). Now, more than ever, the current virtual reality of information and communication does not recognise any barriers or limitations.

In recent times the use of hundreds of typing machines and radio equipments in the hands of those who wanted to counter-act the lies of the Communist States, was sufficient to coalesce an opposition to the Communist Parties of Eastern Europe and make them give up power within a short period of time.

The idea that, in order to avoid this, states might take over the universal network of virtual spaces known as the World Wide Web is pie in the sky. That is unless an extraordinary number of people decide otherwise and, out of “fear of freedom,” succeed in making everybody retreat even from those virtual spaces to the servile condition of territorialism and accept that the Internet be reduced to a series of closed and controlled Statenets or Imperialnets.

However, this would require a collapse of technology, similar to a devastating war, with total insecurity and corresponding fears taking

hold of people's minds. To be sure that this does not happen, territorialism should be superseded, in every sphere of life, by the reality of spatialism.

Spatialism should be characterized by a series of qualities and requisites attached to the spaces so as to make them cherished and taken care of voluntarily and effectively. Spaces should then possess the following traits:

- Peculiarity: that can be achieved through the personalization of spaces, highlighting the sense of variety by way of distinctive landmarks (buildings, squares, parks, etc.);
- Permeability: that means interconnectedness between spaces through the removal of unnecessary impediments (natural or artificial);
- Manageability: that means a clear attribution of responsibilities in relation to functionality, competence and willingness to manage spaces.

All this clearly goes against the current state territorial pattern in which an artificial cultural uniformity is imposed, connections between territories are obstructed by political and bureaucratic imperatives and centralization makes a tragic mockery of the efficient care and management of territories.

For spatialism to be possible we also need to have certain recognized entitlements of people in relation to spaces. They are:

- Assuredness: personal property of personal spaces should be secured (for instance protected by insurance companies financed by the customers) and not subject to the whims of a monopolistic power. The idea that property exists only because it is assured by the state, is a ludicrous notion that should be sent back to its inventor, the state robbers and tricksters, as a discarded useless assumption.
- Availability: property is like manure, the more widely spread everywhere on fertile soil, i.e. among all those able and willing to use it productively, the better. That is why the process of achieving ownership through direct effort, which results in an increase in the value of the property, is the only fully acceptable method and the only one that leaves enough opportunities for everybody willing to

care and make the most of natural, artificial and virtual spaces and resources.

- **Accessibility:** certain properties should also be accessible, allowing people to enter and enjoy them (world heritage sites) and use them (common lands). This, by the way, means that there should be also open access to ideational resources without state made patents. Breakthroughs in knowledge and practical improvements are made possible by relying upon the past knowledge of an infinite numbers of scientists and common people and this is something to be encouraged and protected without introducing foolish limitations.

Spatialism is then a wide umbrella term meant to mark a decisive break with the narrow conception and arrogant pretences of state territorialism. In the passage from territorialism to spatialism, many new problems associated with the management of resources will appear. However, they will be solved by the ingenuity of human beings, in many different ways, according to different exigencies and wishes. The fact that not everything can be defined and decided in advance is not a reason to remain attached to the old devil of territorialism which is responsible for a long and never-ending list of miseries, tragedies and of never solved problems. A list that is going to grow as it is increasingly unlikely that the local and global problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be tackled successfully within the feudal framework of state territorialism.

Spatialism is then not a jump into the dark from the supposedly cosy and wonderful world of territorialism, but an elegant and efficient way to solve old and new problems. It is an élan towards fresh challenges in new unexplored spaces of the human adventure, in order to avoid the present and future disasters that the territorial state rulers and their cronies are engendering for all of us.

# FROM CONGESTED AGGLOMERATIONS TO CONVIVIAL HABITATS

The rural world  
The urban revolution  
The urban reality  
The agricultural scene  
The medieval town  
The capital city  
The industrial centre  
The imperial megalopolis  
The urban crisis  
The recomposition of space  
The rurban alternative  
Towards convivial habitats





## **The rural world**

**I**n the absence of historical evidence, it is plausible to assume that, in the beginning of time, most human beings were like wandering animals, not attached for long to any specific location but searching everywhere for edible resources and protective shelters.

In other words, the primeval human being was, first of all, a picker of fruits and a hunter of small animals, always on the alert with respect to fierce beasts and dangerous natural phenomena.

It was only in the course of time, with the invention of appropriate devices (spears, arrows, etc.) and the development of better cooperative skills for chasing and bringing down larger animals, that the nomadic or semi-nomadic individual and his family or small group of kin, were able to start a more sedentary life.

This sedentary or quasi-sedentary existence became, afterwards, a strong cultural feature with the invention-discovery of agriculture and the domestication of animals. The more skilful individuals became then capable of balancing production and consumption, away from the vagaries of an unsuccessful hunting or of occasional natural scarcities.

The agricultural revolution was the necessary preliminary phase for what the archeologist Gordon Childe has called the Urban Revolution (V. Gordon Childe, *The Urban Revolution*, *The Town Planning Review*, April 1950).

## **The urban revolution**

Small settlements of people existed already in prehistoric time and some of them developed into relatively large agglomerations. However, the sheer number of individuals congregating together in a place is not a sign of the existence of a town. Something more is required to transform a mass of people living in close contact into a urban reality. And this is what happened in the course of time.

The Urban Revolution that took place during the Neolithic Era is

considered an important phase of the civilizing process. This aspect emerges clearly from the fact that the root of the word civilization is *civis* (latin = citizen) and *civilis* (latin = belonging or proper to citizens).

During the Neolithic Era, the simplicity of the rural world was replaced, in some geographical places, by a much more complex type of organization characterised by:

- the production of an agricultural surplus;
- the concentration of people and the specialization of labour;
- the centralization of power and the rise of lasting leaders/rulers.

The invention of the city relied also on the emergence of new social needs that were fulfilled through:

- the elaboration of symbolic tools (writing, arithmetic, geometry, etc.) for representing and mastering reality;
- the construction of important structures for functional (e.g. granaries) or devotional (e.g. temples) uses;
- the establishment of long-distance trade and cultural exchanges as the city became the magnet for all sorts of artisans and merchants from far away.

The fact that civilization (progress) and domination (power) both emerged in the development of cities is the sign, right from the beginning, of the ambivalent aspect of the new social organization brought about by the urban revolution. The clearest examples, with their positive and negative implications, are the famous cities of the ancient world: Athens, Alexandria, Rome.

### **The urban reality**

The urban reality of the ancient world presented aspects that were to be recurrent features of many large cities in later years.

First of all, a city becomes important in so far as it is the centre of power (military, political, administrative, religious) and it attracts people looking for social prestige, cultural life and economic opportunities.

Secondly, in order to satisfy a large population and reinforce their

political power, the rulers aim at controlling and channelling towards the city the surplus of production extracted from nearby and further afield.

There is, for instance, the case of the city-state of Athens. During the time of Pericles, Athens became an imperial power, dominating the association of Greek city-states known as the Delian League and appropriating its treasury. It seems that Pericles used those resources, which belonged to all citizens of the League, in order to finance grandiose public works and to support state functionaries and state patronage.

The famous Athenian democracy was, actually, a political regime based on the work of numerous slaves (around 100.000 out of a population of 300.000, according to the historian R. E. Wycherley). Athens achieved also imperialistic supremacy over and exploitation of other Greek city-states. (Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, 1961)

The dominion of Athens could last only as long as the exploitative imperialistic policy had not extended its corruptive effects to the majority of its inhabitants, and the envy and rage of the submitted populations had not been pushed into forming a coalition to free themselves from the oppressor.

The Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.) marked the end of the power of Athens.

After that, the trial and poisoning by the state rulers of Socrates in 399 B.C. could have marked also the end of Athens as a cultural centre if it were not that the teachings of Socrates survived and were saved for posterity by his disciple, Plato, and then continued and developed by Plato's disciple, Aristotle. Aristotle was the preceptor of Alexander the Macedon, the founder of another large city: Alexandria in Egypt.

In the winter of 332-331 B.C., Alexander instructed the architect Dinocrates of Rhodes to lay the plan for a city on a strip of land between the Mediterranean sea and the lake Mareotis. And so Alexandria came into existence, attracting, in a brief span of time, an interesting mixture of people (Jews, Greeks, Egyptians) that contributed to its splendour as a cultural centre and a trading port.

The Museum in which scientific research was organized and the famous Library in which knowledge documents were stored and preserved, were the clearest examples of the civilizing force engendered by the city as a place where people with different cultural backgrounds could connect and construct all sorts of artefacts.

The city and the entire country of Egypt later on fell under the control of Rome which took formal jurisdiction of all those territories in 80 B.C.

In considering the rising and long dominance of Rome, all the positive and negative aspects intrinsic to the development of a large city were exposed in the clearest way.

From a humble beginning as a collection of pastoral settlements on the hills, Rome grew continuously, moving from Republican Rome to Imperial Rome, attracting an ever larger number of people and absorbing an increasing quantity of resources.

In the words of Lewis Mumford:

"This people [The Romans] began as a nation of sturdy farmers, close to the earth, abstemious, hard-working, strong-muscled delvers and hewers, becoming through their very capacity for enduring hardship and taking blows the strongest people in antiquity. But their very strength and their unflagging industry turned them into a nation of grabbers and cadgers, living off their neighbours, converting their mother city into a gigantic mouth and stomach." (*The City in History*, 1961).

Imperialism begot parasitism. At a certain point in time some 200,000 inhabitants (out of a population of over 1 million) lived on public funds and were kept occupied with extravagant past-times during the 159 days marked as public holidays during the reign of Claudius (41-54 A.D.). So that *panem et circenses* was really all which filled their lives.

Rome is the classic example of the trends associated with gigantism and imperialism. The energy necessary to grow and dominate gives way, in the course of time, to flaccidity and complacency; so that,

when new energetic individuals arrive, they are bound to take over, destroying the current power and preparing the ground for future developments.

This is what happened with Rome when the so-called barbarians (the Germans) entered the peninsula.

After almost seven centuries in which Rome was the most important city of the western world, in the year 330 the capital of the Roman Empire was moved to Constantinople and in 410 the Visigoths, under Alaric, sacked the city. It was the first of two other sacks (in 455 and in 472) that sanctioned the end of Rome as a powerful urban centre. The population of Rome dwindled from over a million inhabitants (in the 1st century A.D.) to less than 50,000 people (in the 7th century).

The impossibility of relying, as in the past, on the channelling of resources towards the imperial centre, encouraged the people to abandon the city and to start a productive life in the countryside.

Following the decaying of Rome and until the turn of the first millennium, life in Western Europe revolved in the countryside and focused on agricultural occupations. For many historians this was a long period of suspended urban life and civilization and perhaps, for this reason, they called it the Middle Ages.

### **The agricultural scene**

The decadence and final collapse of the Roman Empire in the West brought about the end of those relationships in which the bureaucracy and the aristocracy, living in Rome and in the towns of the Empire, dominated the rural population, through the army, and enjoyed the surplus extracted. This dynamic had lasted for several centuries and had been made possible by the continuous appropriation of new territories and new subjects to control and exploit.

When the imperialistic expansion ended and the people in the new provinces strove to become more autonomous, keeping for themselves a bigger quota of the surplus produced, the people of Rome were unable to carry on with their unproductive style of life.

Many aristocrats left Rome and settled in their properties in the countryside, finding there the necessary means of sustenance. It could be said that it was not just the sack of towns by the barbarians, but also the end of the pillage of the rural world by the imperial bureaucracy and aristocracy, that pushed people towards the countryside. Whatever the main cause, the fact remains that many urban inhabitants had to move back to nature and engage in a more productive way of life.

The western world became then, once again, a mainly rural world characterized by two types of social organization:

- the *villa*, in the Italian peninsula and in the southern part of Gallia (Gaul);
- the *marca*, in the territories of the Germans.

These new settlements were both centres of agricultural production, with lands cultivated individually or in common, rented by the master to the serf in exchange for part of the crop, usually ten per cent, or owned by the whole community that shared the fruits of production amongst its members.

We see, in the social organization emerging after the end of the Roman Empire, the beginning of those feudal and communitarian relationships that characterized the Middle Ages, at least until the turn of the millennium.

On the whole, the Middle Ages, far from being an age of obscurantism, lacking in civilization, saw the vast reclamation of new lands and the introduction of new implements (e.g. the heavy wheeled plough) and new methods (the three-year crop rotation) in the cultivation of the fields. All this led to a rise in productivity and to the formation of surpluses of agricultural goods that, in its turn, made possible a new social division of labour, increasing the number of artisans and merchants.

The commercial revolution, that started during the tenth century, was then preceded by a growth of agricultural production. These surpluses of production found, generally, three destinations. They were:

- partly absorbed by the masters as a payment of rents or services

provided (e.g. protection);

- partly exchanged with other goods produced by the artisans or imported via the merchants from far away (e.g. spices);

- partly used for financing community buildings (e.g. a church, a market) or for the improvement of personal situations (e.g. better housing).

In all these cases we can see some of the factors leading to the revival of the towns and of the urban life.

### The medieval town

The urban renewal, that started around the turn of the first millennium, had then a common basis, namely the growth of agricultural production that made possible a wider division of labour. Out of this common underpinning emerged a variety of urban forms like:

- the old settlements, i.e. the *civitates* of Roman origin (in central and southern Europe) that were kept alive by the presence of ecclesiastic power. These were given a new lease of life by the arrival of new inhabitants from the countryside, like farmers that became artisans and landowners that became urban rentiers;

- the parallel settlements, i.e. those settlements that started and grew next to a point of attraction or a resting stop, like a castle, an abbey, a convent. Towards these places gravitated, regularly or occasionally, merchants and pilgrims. The best sites in terms of transport (e.g. on a river), or the best protected agglomerations (e.g. within walls) became not only places of passage but also crowded settlements, reaching a point when the growing population had to be accommodated on the outside, *foris burgus*, in the suburb.

- the new settlements, i.e. the *villae novae* or free burghs, started in many cases by the rural masters that saw, in populating new lands (*terrae novae*), the opportunity to increase their power and wealth. In order to attract people, the landowners had to grant exemption from certain exactions and ensure other privileges and liberties (e.g. hunting and fishing rights).

Whatever the origin of the medieval towns, the animating force

was represented by "new" individuals endowed with a vast amount of energy and the desire to explore and express new ways of life. We are referring here to:

- The artisans. Following the growth of production in the countryside, resulting from better cultivation practices and the use of more efficient implements, a certain number of peasants moved to the towns and concentrated their efforts in making tools and objects to be exchanged with the surplus food. The artisan workshop was not only a place of production but also for the sale of artefacts for town people and rural folks.

- The merchants. With the growth of craft production and the revival of long-distance trade, a further division of labour emerged with the reappearance of numerous merchants. They crisscrossed Europe with their wares to display and sell in the fairs that took place in many different localities, the most famous being the Champagne fairs in the region currently known as Île de France (south-east of Paris).

Both the artisans and the merchants played an increasingly important role in the socio-economic life of the Middle Ages. Their influence and power was due also, in a large measure, to the fact that they were organized in associations, variously called according to their geographical location (corporations, guilds, hansa), and were able to dictate terms of production and commerce and protect the interests and security of their members.

In the course of time, these associations became closed institutions, regulating all sorts of aspects concerning, for instance, the conditions of access, the requirements for apprenticeship, the quantity and the price of goods produced, the level of wages, the introduction of new technology, and so on and so forth.

At the same time, the association was a fraternity caring for the well-being of the members, protecting their security against foreigners and outsiders, and helping to settle internal controversies.

These various features of the associations, as institutions and as fraternities, expressed the positive and the negative side of this new form of social organization. The positive side referred, for instance, to



the aspect of mutual assistance and to the autonomous solution of internal problems (e.g. the administration of justice through the *lex mercatoria*), without the need for external interventions. The negative side consisted in the fact that those organizations tried to dominate the urban scene and to impose their power on the people living in the countryside. In other words, the associations aimed at dictating trading conditions, both to the town dwellers (e.g. by the prohibition to import artisanal goods from the outside) and to the rural peasants (e.g. by the obligation for the peasants to sell their produces on the town market at a controlled price).

The prevailing preoccupation of the wealthy families of the medieval towns was that of controlling not only the countryside but also other towns that could become competitors for economic success. And so we have, for instance, in the Italian peninsula, the struggles between Genoa and Pisa, Pisa and Amalfi, Genoa and Venice. In the final instance, the political aspect of territorial and maritime supremacy became more important than the economic aspect of productive capacity and trading skill.

If we add to this change of mentality and objectives, the introduction of new weapons (e.g. cannons), more expensive to manufacture and capable of destroying the protective walls of a castle and of a town, we have some explanation why a world composed of many aristocratic fiefdoms and independent towns went into decline and was taken over by a world made of large territorial sovereign realities characterized by one dominant master (the king) and one dominant city (the capital).

### **The capital city**

The decline of the original free towns of the Middle Ages and their incorporation into big territorial states, whose inhabitants were homogenized into national subjects, was the result of long process of which the town folks themselves were in large part responsible, even if not always in a conscious or willing way.

The change took place in different epochs in Europe, starting

with France and England where the centralizing forces were stronger and appeared earlier with respect to other realities. The Italian peninsula and the German territories were, in fact, characterized by a proliferation of cities, principalities, dukedoms that lasted, more or less, until the middle of the 19th century.

This transformation was the result of other changes in the spheres of culture, economy, technology. The dynamics of this change is briefly touched on below. The members of the corporations played on the contrast between the king (the strongest feudal master) and the local masters (ecclesiastical or secular), often putting themselves under the protection of the former and giving to him a sort of formal allegiance. In this way they obtained, in exchange, certain privileges like for instance, the exemption from some taxes and monopolistic rights of sale in a certain area.

In so doing, the leading exponents of the economic life of the city were abandoning the possibility of playing an autonomous role and were content with exploiting the surrounding countryside and other urban strata, and of becoming wealthier under the shield of a distant master. However, this did not bode well as it compromised definitively their political and administrative independence.

The centralisation of power in the hands of a powerful master, with considerable means at his disposal, was also greatly favoured, as previously pointed out, by the introduction of more sophisticated and more expensive weapons, first of all the cannon with cast-iron projectiles (replacing stone projectiles) that could perforate almost any fortification that, up to them, granted the security of the local master in his castle or of the urban community within the city walls. In the words of Lewis Mumford, "the introduction of gunpowder early in the fourteenth century sounded the death knell of the free cities." (*The Culture of Cities*, 1938)

In addition, the survival of many separate local powers trying to impose their taxes (i.e. road tolls, bridge tolls, river tolls, town tolls), their parameters of measurement and weight, and their means of payment, became increasingly unacceptable to those rising economic strata that were in favour of the free flow of goods at a time in which

production and trade were growing and spreading. So that, the unification of a large territory under a unique master, i.e. in a central state, represented progress because it meant the end of local particularism. The central state also prevailed by offering a functional organisation more in tune with the evolving needs of the time and with the development of technology.

The free towns of the early Middle Ages could have survived and prospered if their inhabitants had worked with the country folk on a productive co-operative basis and had behaved towards the other towns and principalities in a productive competitive manner. The result could have been a universally expanding federalism, with economic development and cultural progress affecting and being diffused over all the territories and all the people.

This is what happened, albeit after a period of fighting and only to a certain extent, in the Swiss Confederation where no king emerged or was allowed to emerge, but the towns and the country decided to confederate on an equal basis and organised the territory in the form of many largely autonomous cantons, with no domineering centre.

Elsewhere, on the contrary, with the rise of the central state, power and wealth began to be concentrated in the capital city. While the medieval city was growing slowly, in an organic and almost spontaneous way, the capital city and the subordinate peripheral towns started to become objects of formal planning by the architects and engineers at the service of the powerful.

In London, the Great Fire of 1666 that destroyed two thirds of the City, offered the opportunity for rebuilding on a vast scale on the basis of plans made by Christopher Wren, the newly appointed King's Surveyor of Works (1669).

In Berlin, Philipp Gerlach, royal architect and planner (from 1707) was commissioned, by Frederick William I, to extend the city development westward with the planning of Pariser Platz.

Paris was, in this respect and in later times, an exemplary case, namely when Baron Haussmann was the prefect of the city (1853-1870) and supervised its radical transformation and extraordinary

growth (from 1.2 to 2 million inhabitants). The Parisians called him *Attila* because of the massive demolition of buildings and entire quarters in order to implement his urban projects.

The narrow streets of the medieval cities were eliminated in favour of large avenues and boulevards that were more functional to the passing of a parading army; the sober sturdy buildings of the medieval town became the baroque palaces and the imposing edifices where the rich aristocrats and bourgeois spent their time and their incomes.

Eventually, the central state and the capital city became the model to follow in structuring power and dominating a large territory. The more this model was implemented and succeeded, in France and in England, the more other relatively small powers (e.g. the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, the kingdom of Prussia) followed, until it became the way of organising society.

And, within the large territory controlled by the central state, towards the middle of the 18th century, the industrial society and the industrial centre started to emerge.

### **The industrial centre**

The industrial society coming out of free-entrepreneurship and free-trade (*laissez-faire, laissez-passer*) existent, to a certain measure, in some regions of Europe, was not the result of the central state but was certainly made possible also because the central state had erased some of the most blatant feudal and corporative restrictions and impediments to free economic activity.

The main features of the industrial society were:

- organisation of production based on the division of labour and the introduction of mechanical tools and machines;
- augmentation of production as the result of a more intense and more efficient utilisation of human and mechanical energy;
- concentration of production in factories where the owner of capital (i.e. of the productive machinery) could better control the workers.

This concentration of production, with movement of population from the countryside to the localities where factories were built for functional reasons of manufacturing (e.g. near sources of hydraulic energy), or trade (e.g. near navigable rivers, within existing agglomerations), gave rise to industrial centres, first of all in England where the Industrial Revolution started, and then in other European countries.

For instance, Manchester which was a large village of 12,000 inhabitants (around 1760) became a town of 95,000 in 1800 and of 400,000 inhabitants in 1850. Liverpool grew from 26,000 inhabitants (1670) to 77,000 (1800) and then to 375,000 (1850). Leeds moved from 17,000 inhabitants in 1775 to 172,000 in 1850. In Scotland, Glasgow went from 30,000 to 300,000 inhabitants between 1750 and 1850. (Pierre Lavedan, *Histoire de l'Urbanisme*, vol. III, 1952)

The towns became industrial centres where people flocked for various reasons, but mainly to earn a living (the industrial workers) or to spend their wealth (the affluent rentiers). In the industrial centres, the best palaces and the worst shelters could be found within walking distance.

This massive growth of urban population that started in the age of industrialization and got increasingly common with the passing of time, led, in many cases, to a sharp division between town and country.

As remarked by J. L. and Barbara Hammond in their survey of the town labourer:

“Formerly, the men and women who lived in the English towns ... were never far from the open country: their town life was fringed with orchards and gardens. But as the Industrial Revolution advanced, a Manchester was growing up in which the workmen would find it harder and harder to escape out of the wide web of smoke and squalor that enveloped their daily lives.” (*The Town Labourer 1760-1832*, 1925)

The quite sudden and growing concentration of people and the presence of industries polluting the air and the water, made the towns

a place of filth and congestion, where living conditions were, for many people, quite miserable. During the 19th century a series of social surveys were made to document the situation of the working class and of the paupers in the towns. The most famous were *The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* (1842) by Edwin Chadwick and *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844) by Friedrich Engels.

The picture presented was one of desolation and distress. According to the conclusions drawn by Engels

"The dwellings of the workers are everywhere badly planned, badly built, and kept in the worst condition, badly ventilated, damp, and unwholesome. The inhabitants are confined to the smallest possible space, and at least one family usually sleeps in each room. The interior arrangement of the dwellings is poverty-stricken in various degrees, down to the utter absence of even the most necessary furniture. The clothing of the workers, too, is generally scanty, and that of great multitudes is in rags. The food is, in general, bad; often almost unfit for use, and in many cases, at least at times, insufficient in quantity, so that, in extreme cases, death by starvation results." (*The condition of the working class in England*, 1844)

Certainly, poverty and bad sanitary conditions were not something new with respect to the countryside or the urban agglomerations of the past. What was new was the scale of the phenomenon and the fact that it could give rise to epidemics (e.g. cholera) that might not be circumscribed but affected a vast number of people. The same can be said about bad fumes and smells that could not be constrained within a specific area.

So, by way of an improved technology, and facing social criticism and the widespread desire for better living condition, many European towns went through a period of transformation, often promoted and carried out by enlightened individuals that aimed at reducing and often succeeded in repairing the major faults existent in the industrial centres.

The time of Queen Victoria in England and of Napoleon III in France was a period of vast productive expansion that was widely imitated and affected other countries like Germany and the USA and put the foundation of what will be, in the big states, the imperial megalopolis.

### **The imperial megalopolis**

The industrial centres of the period of the early industrialization (middle of the 18th century onwards) gave way, towards the end of the 19th century, to the rise, in the countries of Western Europe, of a dominant megalopolis that was the seat of an imperial political power. We are here referring, in particular, to three capital cities: London, Paris and Berlin.

London was already a city of around one million inhabitants at the beginning of the 19th century, and of 2.3 million inhabitants in 1850. This figure would almost double before the end of the century (1890) to 4.2 million inhabitants. (Adna Ferrin Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century*, 1899)

Paris had half a million inhabitants in 1800, over a million in 1850, and 2.4 million in 1890 (Adna Ferrin Weber).

Berlin was a medium size town of 173,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the 19th century when it was the capital of Prussia. Towards the middle of the century it doubled the population (378,000 in 1850) (Adna Ferrin Weber). The dramatic growth came when Berlin became the capital of the German Empire (1871): from a population of 826,000 in 1871 it went to almost 2 million at the end of the century. (*Berlin Population Statistics - Wikipedia*)

The extraordinary growth of these cities can be explained only if we assume a causal link between the fact of being the capital of an Empire and what that meant in terms of attracting and supporting a vast number of people.

In fact, an abnormal urban growth is understandable only because of the presence of three magnets, (1) power, (2) prestige (3)

pleasure, that constitute the motives why all sorts of people converge or install themselves in the capitals. We have then:

Power

- political lobbies, party and trade unions headquarters, company main offices;
- foreign embassies and consulates;
- communication services : radio, TV, newspapers.

Prestige

- financial institutions : banks, insurance companies, the stock exchange.;
- educational facilities : universities, museums, research centres.

Pleasure

- mega stores, shopping centres, luxurious boutiques;
- restaurants, hotels, cinemas, theatres, entertainment places.

These three magnets became even stronger when the states, of which these cities were the capitals, embarked on the road to imperialism. That meant that even more resources were channelled towards the imperial megalopolis to feed an expanding bureaucracy, and the people for which power, prestige and pleasure were the life motives.

London, the Greater London, was, in 1931, a megalopolis of over 8 million people (*Demographia, Greater London, Population* - <http://www.demographia.com/dm-lon31.htm>).

Paris, with its urban agglomeration, reached the 5.6 million inhabitants in 1931 (*Agglomération Parisienne – Wikipedia*).

The Greater Berlin, instituted in 1920 following the introduction of the Greater Berlin Act, became, even after the loss of colonies, an agglomeration of 4.2 million inhabitants (1933) (*Berlin Population Statistics - Wikipedia*).

Besides these three megalopolis, new world cities emerged like New York (almost 7 million inhabitants in 1930) and Tokyo (6.3 million inhabitants in 1935). In every case we find the same dynamics: the drawing of resources from nearby or far away areas into a central point (the imperial megalopolis) where the sources of power, prestige and pleasure are concentrated to the highest degree.

Eventually, this phenomenon reached such a point of imbalance



that, in 1947, a French geographer, Jean-François Gravier, had plenty of materials to write his seminal book, *Paris et le désert français*, in which he documented a situation in which, in terms of concentration of services and decisional power, the megalopolis was (almost) everything and the rest of France was (almost) nothing.

In the following years, the growing urbanisation of the world, with some urban areas, even in semi-developed countries, reaching (2012) several million inhabitants (Delhi, 22 million; Mexico City, almost 20 million; Cairo, almost 17 million) ([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)—*List\_of\_urban\_areas\_by\_population*) has made evident the existence of serious problems connected with the urbanisation.

It was and it is quite clear that this trend cannot continue indefinitely.

### **The urban crisis**

The existence of some large cities is a very old reality, but the phenomenon of world urbanisation, i.e. the fact that a high percentage of world population lives in towns, is a quite recent development.

World urbanisation has taken place mainly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

During the nineteenth century we had:

(a) an increase in the number of European cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (from 42 in 1850 with aggregate population of 9 million, to 120 in 1895 with aggregate population of 37 million);

(b) a world growth of urban population (people living in cities with over 20,000 inhabitants) whose percentage went from 2.4% in 1800 to 9.2% in 1900 (Kingsley Davis, *The Origin and Growth of Urbanization in the World*, 1955).

This trend continued and was accentuated during the 20th century. By 1950 around 34% of world population was living in cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants (Kingsley Davis, 1955). In some countries the percentages of urban population were much higher; in

the USA, for instance, in 1950, 60% of population was urbanized. (Kingsley Davis, *Human Society*, 1966)

The authors of the United Nations report on World Urbanization Prospects state that the urban population in the world increased from 220 million in 1900 to 732 million in 1950, and is estimated to have reached 3.2 billion in 2005 (49% of world population), thus more than quadrupling in the second half of the 20th century.

In this process of urbanisation, the less developed regions are taking a preponderant role. In fact "by 1968 the urban population of the less developed regions surpassed for the first time that of the more developed regions and continued to do so thereafter." (*U.N. Report on World Urbanization Prospects, The 2005 Revision*, 2006).

The urbanization phenomenon contains both positive and negative aspects. Generally, the cities, especially in the past, have represented the place where a more dynamic life can take shape, mainly because a variety of resources are attracted or drained there, allowing for a higher level of social services and cultural possibilities.

On a theoretical level, a healthy and flourishing town is a productive place where, besides other aspects, industrial goods are designed, made and then freely exchanged with goods produced in the countryside. Instead, what has happened, in many cases, is the fact that urbanization has meant the growth of parasitic strata living in the capital and in the main urban centres, feeding on the productive work of those living in the countryside or in small agglomerations or in the peripheries and ghettos of the world. This is quite apparent in the megalopolis of the advanced world, that have become bureaucratic-financial hubs; and also, in a more evident way, in the megacities of the less developed world (Dhaka, Lagos, Lima, Abidjan, Kabul, etc.) that have become bureaucratic-parasitocratic entities.

The abnormal growth of cities, not justified by their productive functions, has led to the rise and spread of unpalatable and obnoxious realities that combine to generate what has been called the "urban crisis."

The urban crisis manifests itself mainly through three phenomena:

Congestion. The sheer density of people living in a city would not be a problem (up to a point) if it were not accompanied by a level of consumption of goods and use of means of transport that generate effects challenging the resources of human beings to the limit and the capacity of physical space to absorb its impact. For instance:

- the number of cars circulating in a city makes movement from one point to the other, during certain times of the day, slower than in past ages;

- the number of people looking for accommodation increases tremendously the price of houses and leads to more housing programs and housing density, making the problem of congestion even more intractable.

Pollution. A high density of people that consume an increasing volume of goods is likely to result in high level of:

- air pollution, produced by the exhaust fumes of motor cars and emissions from heating systems;

- water pollution, discharging pollutants into rivers or the soil, affecting the water-bearing stratum;

- noise pollution, namely, a continuous noise level that generates overall discomfort, even if not always perceived in a conscious way;

- solid waste pollution, i.e. the amount of rubbish that piles up in the city streets and is disposed of with increased difficulty.

Stress. Congestion and pollution lead, often, to various types of stress, i.e. mental and physical problems, that manifest themselves as:

- irritation: the person reacts angrily to all sorts of inconveniences that make urban daily life pretty unpleasant;

- alienation: the person is not, any longer, a versatile human being but somebody wearing a mask and playing a specific role, chosen or given;

- isolation: people have the feeling of just being a lonely face in an anonymous crowd. The more the individuals feel isolated, the more likely they are to insulate themselves from the others who are seen as strangers.

These aspects of the urban crisis have been portrayed in many books, films, articles and social researches. The amount of materials

presenting and supporting the case of the human predicament and malaise associated with urban crisis is quite relevant.

Nevertheless, cities in the developed world remain important centres of power and prestige and cities in the less developed regions keep growing because that is where resources are conveyed.

However, new cultural patterns and new technological devices combine nowadays in such a way that it seems finally possible to move away from the urban crisis without abandoning the best aspects of life in the town/city and, moreover, uniting them with the best aspects of life in the countryside.

### **The recomposition of space**

During the age of industrialisation and urbanisation (from 18th to 20th century) a certain number of social thinkers and planners have put forward a series of proposals and even formulated detailed projects with the aim of overcoming the negative aspects of industrial and urban life.

Those negative aspects, already previously sketched, can be summed up as:

- Exploitation. The big cities, all throughout history, have been the place where resources have been drained, mainly from the countryside or from minor towns. In modern time the imperial megalopolis has heightened this reality.

- Concentration. The concentration of people and resources on specific points of territory has generated huge spatial and social imbalances that reflect negatively on the quality of human life and of the social intercourses.

- Isolation. The rural isolation has been the other face of the urban concentration. The peasants have been portrayed, sometimes correctly albeit, often, not of their choosing, as backward individuals, cut off from modern progress.

In the past, social critics have pointed the finger at the exploitation and alienation of industrial workers amassed in towns and the idiocy of rural life caused by the lack of amenities and cultural oppor-

tunities. At the same time, some other critics have extolled industry and the city as the symbols of progress and cultural innovation, or celebrated the countryside as the place where healthy lives and human virtues could better develop.

It was then quite appropriate that a recomposition of the space (town and country) was advocated by the most farsighted critics, a recomposition that, clearly, would associate the best aspects of the two worlds (urban and rural) and produce a new, highly desirable, reality.

This intention appears, for instance, in the writings of Friedrich Engels when he affirmed that:

"[Accordingly,] abolition of the antithesis between town and country is not merely possible. It has become a direct necessity of industrial production itself, just as it has become a necessity of agricultural production and, besides, of public health. The present poisoning of the air, water and land can be put an end to only by the fusion of town and country; and only such fusion will change the situation of the masses now languishing in the towns, and enable their excrement to be used for the production of plants instead of for the production of disease." (*Antidühring*, 1878)

Breaking down the division between town and country was advocated and articulated, in more precise terms, by Pëtr Kropotkin in *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (1899). His leading ideas revolved around the decentralization of industry and the combination of industrial and agricultural activities:

"The scattering of industries over the country - so as to bring the factory amidst the fields, to make agriculture derive all those profits which it always finds in being combined with industry and to produce a combination of industrial with agricultural work - is surely the next step to be made, as soon as a reorganization of our present conditions is possible." (*Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 1899)

This rural-industrial recomposition would allow overcome the division between country and town. Kropotkin, for instance, envisaged that many town-dwellers would become agriculturists, tending horticultural gardens and producing vegetables to be sold on the town market.

The times were so ripe for this idea of the recomposition of the space that, in those same years, a self-taught amateur planner, Ebenezer Howard, came out with the proposal of garden-cities in a book titled *To-morrow: a Peaceful Path to Social Reform* (1898) that was re-issued, a few years late, as *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1902). The wide acceptance of his idea led to the setting up of a Garden Cities Association (1899) that, in 1903, was in the position of acquiring some land in order to implement those proposals. In this way the garden city of Letchworth was born, followed (1919-1920) by Welwyn Garden City.

However, quite soon, this interesting vision and the related projects of polyvalent communities offering the best of both worlds (country and town) were side-tracked, in actual fact, by two subsequent developments:

- The Suburbs. An easy option, in order to get away from urban congestion and noise and to recreate a semi-rural environment, was the planning of garden suburbs of which Hampstead Garden Suburb in London was one of the first. The movement towards the suburbs grew because of the improvement in the means of transport and the ever present desire for the town folks to live more in contact with nature, even if it was just a small home garden. Nonetheless, the movement towards the suburbs contributed to the enlargement of big cities and to an increase of traffic, as many people moved daily to and from the city centres. In so many cases, suburbs became dormitory towns or dormitory villages, totally depending on the big city centre for work and cultural amenities. Often the result was the formation of a space neither urban nor rural, and of "a new kind of community ... which caricatured both the historic city and the archetypal suburban refuge." (Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, 1961)

- The New Towns. In England, the Garden Cities movement was

transformed into the New Towns Movement. This happened when the Government intervened in the post Second World War reconstruction and planning of the environment. The guiding lines for this intervention were those of the *Barlow Report* (1940) that advocated a planned decentralisation of population. In 1945, in the aftermath of the war, the New Towns Committee was instituted. In 1946 the Committee produced a study containing recommendations for the construction of New Towns. The difference with respect to the ideas of Ebenezer Howard was that the aim was not, any longer, to create a new type of environment that was a fusion of rural and urban qualities, but a more modest one: to relieve the pressure on big cities, first of all London, and to provide new housing and proper urban services, satisfying old and new exigences. In this case too, the improvement in transport (especially the rail) affecting the large agglomerations, meant that many people were still working in the big cities and living in the New Towns, that were then used as dormitory towns.

These two developments were also made possible by the fact that, during the second half of the twentieth century, with the full expansion of the welfare dirigist state made possible by a growth in productivity, there was a marked increase of state or state-linked personnel living in the capital cities and in the regional centres. The enlargement of the state in terms of power and number of people working for the state, meant, as previously pointed out, that the cities, where the central and regional bureaucracies lived, swelled beyond their productive and cultural function. And this phenomenon, practically, put a stop to those ideas and experiments of recomposition of the space (town-country) aiming at overcoming both urban congestion and rural isolation.

However these ideas and aspirations have not been totally forgotten as they re-appeared, for example, in the writings of Lewis Mumford and in the actions of those alternative movements advocating, during the nineteen-sixties and seventies, the abandonment of the cities and a return to the land.

All this could have remained an elitist and romantic aspiration, if

it were not for the fact that technological progress in the area of production and communication has been changing completely the relationship between individuals and space. This makes possible the exploration and implementation of what can be called the “rurban” (rural + urban) alternative, in which not only the limitations of the past can be overcome but the promises of a better future, personally satisfying, socially attractive and economically viable, can be reaped on a large scale.

### **The rurban alternative**

Many social critics of the past, as previously pointed out, have portrayed the rural and urban realities through the use of powerful images that were, sometimes, only stereotypes. For instance, they depicted:

- the countryside as the place of either rural idiocy or rural arcadia;
- the cities as the scene of either urban inferno or urban excitement.

Going beyond these stereotyped visions, it is possible to see that country and town can offer a full range of experiences to the human being in search of nature and culture, isolation and connection, tranquillity and liveliness.

To be confined to only one side of this spectrum, or to have to spend time and effort in order to move from one side to the other of the spectrum in order to satisfy all those deep human longings, might represent, for many, a sort of personal loss or forced deprivation.

During the 20th century, that was a time characterized by the presence of the masses, of industrial concentration and bureaucratic centralization, the sharp contrast between urban (hyper-developed) and rural (under-developed) realities seemed, in too many cases, an unavoidable outcome.

Nevertheless, this scenario has totally changed following at least two deep transformations:



- the breaking down of old ideological straitjackets that impeded, practically and psychologically, bold experimentations;
- the advent of personal instantaneous-ubiquitous communication on a world scale that favours the ever wider circulation of ideas.

The first hints of this new reality were already given, several decades ago, by one of the most farsighted of the social analysts, Marshall McLuhan, when he depicted the world like a Global Village and not like a Global Megalopolis. The choice of the terms used was indicative also of a change of approach that, nowadays, is not only hopeful but also needful.

In the past it was assumed that a very big city, like a huge complicated machine, had to be under the control of professional experts for its growth and management. As Baron Haussmann designed the Paris of the 19th century, so planners and architects like Abercrombie, Le Corbusier or Lucio Costa were meant to design the big cities of the 20th century as commissioned by the political masters.

In the first chapter of a booklet published in 1933 (*Town and Country Planning*), Sir Patrick Abercrombie, the most famous of the English town planners, defined, very clearly, the terms of the problem, as perceived in those times: "Planning or Laissez-Faire."

Only much later, following cultural and technological transformations, has it become evident that such an alternative is non-existent, and that the problem is simply: who is doing the planning.

In other words, if an alternative really exists, that alternative is between a reality in which the people are simply obliged to delegate the planning to some professionals who think they know best, and a reality in which everyone concerned (i.e. individuals and communities) is free to plan his/her life and environment through personal decisions and common agreements.

If the latter is the case, it is highly likely that, in a matter of time, we will see the disappearance of huge concentration of people in the megalopolis. This concentration, as repeatedly highlighted, is the unavoidable result of the drainage of resources from the peripheral territories towards the mega-urban centres, on the basis of the deci-

sions taken by those wielding political power and implemented by the bureaucracies subservient to that power.

In their stead, we are likely to witness, everywhere, the spread of population and a diffusion of resources. This should be facilitated by the fact that, with the end of capital cities and political centralization, the people in every locality will strive to make their community attractive, functional and viable in all sorts of respects (services, amenities, activities, communications, transports, energy, etc.).

In so doing, the old contrapositions and unbalances should disappear and new fascinating realities that transcend the town and country division should emerge like, for instance, those advocated and practiced by and through:

- urban farmers: tending horticultural gardens on rooftops;
- transition towns: moving to a sustainable and viable environment, based on permaculture, recycling and energy saving;
- aquaponics: raising fish (aquaculture) in symbiosis with water-grown vegetables (hydroponics).
- green architecture: designing and building structures that are environmentally-sound and resource-efficient throughout their entire life-cycle.

The development of a spontaneous and multifarious order emerging from the people directly affected by a problem, represents the most promising option, in clear contrast to unsatisfactory imposed solutions and new problems generated by planners, even when they are animated with the best of possible intentions.

At the end of a large survey into housing conducted in England in the early nineteen eighties, a researcher confronted with dysfunctional environments produced by many official plans of urban regeneration or housing improvement, wrote that

"the more any aspect of housing is subjected to official interference, the more retrograde has been its change in quality. New slums have been created on an unprecedented scale." "Our vast housing-problems machine [the author refers here to the Department of Environment of the British State, and in particular to the Housing

Development Directorate] has committed one blunder after another in the name of social betterment." (Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*, 1985)

In fact, at the same time when state capitals engendered centralization, state housing gave rise to concentration of people in mega-structures that, in some cases, had to be pulled down after some years (like the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project in Saint Louis, Missouri) because of the incredible levels of physical vandalism and psychological rejection by the tenants.

For these reasons we need new visions and experimentations in the development of new realities.

The rurban alternative of the XXI century should be in the form of a space that is:

- open: that means the end of large territories controlled by nation states (the so-called state territorial sovereignty) so that individuals, whatever their place of birth, can move freely and install themselves in new regions as they have done in the past, opening new vistas and contributing to the development of new spaces;

- linked: that means that, wherever a person finds a suitable place to live and decides to move there, it doesn't matter how far away from existing settlements it might be, he/she can be in touch with the rest of the world given the current state of technology. This is because previous material or psychological constraints (e.g. energy, communications, etc.), operating against a full decentralization of population, have now practically disappeared;

- self-managed: that means that the space, being such an important component in the life of individuals and communities, cannot be left to bureaucrats or professional experts, to be shaped according to their partial views or contingent interests. The space has to be like a canvas where the needs, desires and aspirations of individuals and groups are expressed by them in a compatible, sustainable and functional way.

Let us then list briefly the aspects and components that, within the rurban space, would make for convivial habitats.

## **Towards convivial habitats**

The productive machine set up in the course of previous centuries and the communication network that has grown, especially during the last decades, have contributed to beget two main results:

- freeing people's time from menial repetitive tasks in favour of more creative and more engaging activities;
- enlarging people's horizons and knowledge by connecting them with many individuals and a wealth of data at the touch of a button.

Freedom (availability of free time) and knowledge (availability of structured data) are two basic requirements for people to be able and capable to shape their lives and their living environments.

In fact, only the active involvement of the users can lead to the development of convivial habitats. These convivial habitats, in their turn, can favour and promote the further active involvement of the users.

Let us then see what might be the features that, following the suggestions of various scholars and practitioners, characterise convivial habitats.

If we examine the topic in an analytic way, we can divide it into three aspects:

- (1) General: the principles
- (2) Substantial: the agents
- (3) Formal: the criteria.

1. General. The guiding principles for convivial habitats can be summed up as:

- The overcoming of the division between country and town. The aim is to go beyond the stereotyped but sometimes so real images of city concentration-cum-anonymity (the lonely crowd) and country isolation-cum-apathy (the rural idiocy). This can be achieved, for instance, at a basic level, with the cities gaining in village atmosphere and horticultural activities, and the countryside attracting high-tech industries and research centres that need only good communication facilities to operate effectively. In any case, the options in terms of density of population and of types of activity can be represented like

on a continuum, with the stress put, in some realities, more on the urban, and in others, more on the rural side. What needs to be avoided is the fact that the density or the dispersion of population be the result of political decisions and not of personal choices.

- The overcoming of the opposition between individual and community. The aim is to produce a reality in which the satisfaction of the needs of one individual is not in opposition to the satisfaction of needs of many individuals living nearby (the local community) or even far-away (the global community). For choices affecting many people this requires (a) on the part of the individual to stress rational (not whimsical) and long-term (not short-lived) needs and (b) on the part of everybody (the community) the openness and willingness to accept pertinent adjustments and, in the final instance, binding arbitrations. What is excluded is the current process of political imposition by so-called representatives of a supposed political majority.

- The overcoming of the subordination between designers and doers. The aim is to produce the conditions for everybody to be free to intervene to shape the environment, individually if that refers to personal spaces, or in a communitarian way if that refers to common spaces. This means the end of the professional expert that takes decisions commissioned by or associated with political leaders, and the resumption of the role of designers by the active members of the community. The latter (the doers) might refer and rely on the advice and suggestions of the former (the designers) but, in the final instance, they are the only ones responsible for taking the decisions and accountable for the decisions taken.

2. Substantial. The agents promoting and animating convivial habitats are the individuals and the communities. With reference to the built and natural environment that means, in particular:

- Housing by people. In the past the built environment has been shaped mainly by people building their own houses. It is a relatively quite recent phenomenon where families have started living in houses and districts built totally beyond their control. In the case of huge blocks of flats built by the state to accommodate people with low income or on public support, the outcome has often been

tenants' alienation and vandalism, if not riots and gratuitous destruction. Instead, as pointed out by John Turner et alii: "When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contribution to the design, construction or management of their housing, both this process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social well-being." (*Freedom to Build*, 1972)

- Planning by communities. In the Middle Ages, the big significant landmarks of the town such as the Cathedral and the Market Hall were buildings and places where the entire population took an active part in the development, even to the extent of offering a financial or working contribution. In more recent times, the local community has again made its voice heard when it wanted to save areas meant for destruction like the Covent Garden in London. So, the community can and should be the protagonist of planning the natural and built environment because the individuals forming the community are the ones who will bear the cost of any future planning blight. Only if they are the ones directly responsible for making the decisions, even unfortunate planning decisions, can they learn from the experience and try to find a solution instead of just venting their frustration and rage against the "experts" that came from outside. As remarked by Christopher Alexander: "It is impossible, utterly impossible, to make a building or a town which is alive by control from above." (*The Timeless Way of Building*, 1979)

- Managing by associates. During the previous centuries, when it was possible to satisfy a collective need from the fruition of new technologies, a company was formed to provide for it. This has been, for instance, the case of electricity and gas, in American towns. In other instances the municipality (local government) took the lead, especially with reference to public hygiene and urban sanitation. Nowadays, with the main infrastructures in place, utilities and amenities existing in a region could very well be managed by individuals (users) associating in the form of co-operatives. This is more likely to result in the provision of better services (users-oriented) at a reduced price (cost-friendly).

3. Formal. The criteria that make for a convivial habitat have been

highlighted by some designers on the basis of the experience of past centuries. They should be introduced and tested in actual projects and improved, adapted or changed whenever needed. In the 1980's a group of urban designers listed the following criteria as conducive to what they called a "responsive environment" (VV.AA. *Responsive Environments*, 1985):

- **Permeability:** the extent of choice of access (accessibility) to a certain space. That is facilitated, for instance, by designing blocks of buildings of small size.

- **Variety:** the existence of a plurality of forms, uses and relative meanings, attracting people towards a certain space. Variety (as opposed to the zoning that separates work and home) makes also the place alive from early morning to late evening.

- **Legibility:** the easy comprehension by the people of the physical form (layout) and of the activity patterns (use) of a place. This aim is enhanced by the presence of some physical features (nodes, edges, paths, districts, landmarks) as highlighted in the studies of Kevin Lynch (*The Image of the City*, 1975).

- **Robustness:** the capability of a place to offer, in an easy practicable way, a variety of potential choices; for instance, the possibility of a change of use of a large building or of a specific area within it.

- **Visual appropriateness:** this quality is linked to the legibility of a place and of a building, and means that the visual form should contain cultural or other specific cues that indicate, quite easily, its function.

- **Richness:** the environment should involve and satisfy the various sensory receptors of a human being (sight, smell, hearing, touch, motion) and this is possible only if uniformity and anonymity, i.e. plainness, gives way to a rich variety of forms and colours, i.e. richness.

- **Personalisation:** this aspect represents the possibility and capability of putting a mark on the place where one lives, contributing, with other residents, to shaping the common space.

The full dynamic resulting from implementing (1) the principles

by (2) the agents on the basis of (3) the criteria, should result in the development of convivial habitats that satisfy and cherish:

- all types of people (e.g. from children and old-age people in need of care to self-sufficient adults);
- all tastes of living styles (e.g. from total seclusion and quiet to full participation and animation);
- all times of the historical experience (e.g. from being citizens in a medieval town or inhabitants of a futuristic environment).

In other words, conviviality is, to a very large extent, a matter of variety and choices, because only through the respect of variety and the existence of choices, can we really look forward to the formation and development of convivial habitats.



## FROM ENFORCED SCHOOLING TO SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Education from living  
Education as schooling  
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From schooling to learning  
Self-directed learning  
Learning environments



## Education from living

**I**n the course of history people have learnt from experience, that is

- by observation and imitation of behaviour judged successful, suitable or simply acceptable;

- by experimentation and invention, i.e. by trial and error leading to the discovery of new forms of behaviour.

During most times there was no differentiation between living and learning and there was no idea that these two aspects could be held separate.

For the vast majority of people this was the case for centuries, even when in wealthy cities some individuals started offering their services as teachers and the first schools were opened in ancient Egypt and Babylonia.

In fact, although the image of the school as the main centre of learning has now taken strong roots in almost everybody's mind, the concepts of learning from life and learning as a lifelong process have never disappeared.

The many English men and women that, from the 17th to the early 20th century, embarked on the Grand Tour, that is on a voyage of discovery of other European countries and of the Greek and Roman civilizations, are a vivid example of this belief and practice.

At the same time, it is true that, in so doing, many of them were continuing a learning course that had also included previous attendance at some school.

Learning through schooling, while arising, historically, later than learning through life experiences, is in fact, as already mentioned, quite an ancient social phenomenon.

## Education as schooling

The invention and diffusion of writing, with all the related skills in terms of reading and arithmetic, favoured the establishment of schools, first in Egypt and Babylonia and later in Greece.

In Greece, Socrates became the celebrated exponent of a way of educating called *maieutic*, where the learner is helped, through a series of pertinent questions and answers, to bring consciously to the fore what was deemed to be already present, in a latent and still undeveloped form, in his mind and senses. As a matter of fact, the etymology of the word education is "to draw out" (*e-ducere*) i.e. to stimulate and let the individual fully express his potential energies and qualities.

In contrast to this educational conception and practice, a new breed of instructors emerged at the same time in ancient Greece that would provide a model for most future teachers: the sophists. The method adopted by the sophists was to teach standard elements concerning the art of persuasion (dialectic) and the art of expression (rhetoric) in order that the sons of wealthy Athenians could prevail against their opponents in the political arena.

The sophists' method of teaching gave enormous importance to the handling of words and to their formal arrangement, aspects that would inform most teaching in schools throughout the centuries.

The separation between school and life that this way of teaching/learning could not avoid was also present in Rome. It was this truly negative aspect in Roman education that prompted Seneca to express his famous warning: "*non scholae sed vitae discimus*" ["we learn for life, not for school"].

After the collapse of the Roman Empire and the decadence of life in the towns, schooling declined and almost disappeared, and education took place again mostly within the family and through daily activities. It was only with the urban revival (around the year 1000) and the development of production and trade that teachers and centres of formal education reappeared to cater for the sons of new aristocratic families and of wealthy merchants and master craftsmen.

### **The resumption and diffusion of schooling**

During the Middle Ages, the Church took upon herself the task of preserving the classical works of Greek and Roman authors against

ruin and neglect. The churchmen became then the cultivated elements in society, practically the only ones endowed with literacy skills and in possession of formal notions from past ages.

For this reason it is not surprising that the Church wielded a dominating (or even exclusive) influence over the setting up and running of almost all educational centres and activities of that time, from the teaching of children up to the founding of universities.

Because the Church was a universal power, scholars and students could move from one centre of learning to the other (from Bologna to Paris to Oxford), free from any political border or cultural barrier, using Latin as the *lingua franca*.

The limits to learning were, in many cases, of a different nature and consisted of the same ones that had affected the practice of the sophists: the separation between teaching topics and teaching methods on one side and life activities and life problems on the other. Rote learning, rules of form, pedantic study of the Greek and Latin languages, these became the centrepieces of a large part of mediaeval schools. The learner was supposed to study slavishly the texts of the classical authors as if they were the still unsurpassed and unsurpassable pinnacles of culture. This view, which was shared by many educated individuals all over Europe, would leave a deep imprint on the aims and practices of many future schooling institutions, restricting them to the pure and simple transmission of past cultural achievements.

Classical education based on the study of Latin was then deemed essential for being part of the professional élite composed of lawyers, physicians, theologians. However, at the same time, in response to an emerging demand, vernacular schools started appearing, where more practical subjects such as commercial mathematics and reading and writing in local idioms were taught to the children of the rising merchant class.

The co-presence of various types of schools, promoted by different categories of people (wealthy merchants, secular and ecclesiastical masters, town rulers, itinerant teachers, etc.) shows that, once a need arises, if there are no restrictions (political, technical or other)

as how it may be satisfied, the likely result is the coming into existence of a number of possibilities, in this case of a variety of educational services offered by a series of educational promoters.

This fact would be much more evident later on, at the time of the Industrial Revolution, when the general improvements in living conditions, due to a dramatic increase in productivity, permitted the allocation of more and more time and energy to the formal education of children. During the first half of the XIX century, an incredible array of new initiatives in schooling took place in England, which was becoming the most industrially advanced country in Europe. Catholic and Protestant schools were supplemented by Sunday schools for the workers, adult evening schools, charity schools or dame schools for the poor in many run down quarters of the towns, village schools supported by endowments and small fees, factory schools promoted by farsighted entrepreneurs like Robert Owen, mechanics institutes initiated by the efforts of George Birkbeck, mutual improvement societies, literary and philosophical institutes, training colleges and a host of different schools and civic universities started with a legacy and funded mainly by voluntary donations, personal funds and users' contributions. The number of so called private schools (that is, those deriving their income only from fees) jumped in England and Wales from 688 in 1841 to 3,754 in 1850 (Source: Census 1851), an increase of 545% within just ten years. A similar development could be expected in other countries once they started the industrialization process leading to the general betterment of living conditions.

But, in other parts of Europe things had already moved in a different direction, with the state taking more and more control of educational matters, and even England would be affected, in due time, by this trend and attitude.

### **The birth of state schooling**

The coming to dominance of the state in schooling is preceded by a long preparatory period during which the Church and the schools

she had established started to be vilified and ostracized; this was in contrast to the previous period when the Church had been taken by the state as an ally to whom educational matters could be entrusted as her proper mission.

In fact, in 1547 the Spanish viceroy had promoted the involvement of the Jesuits in education and the founding of schools when he invited Ignatius Loyola (the founder of the Society of Jesus) to send some Jesuits to the Sicilian city of Messina for teaching and charitable activities.

However, in 1759 the wind had totally changed direction. That year the Society of Jesus was expelled from Portugal. In 1764 it was banned from France and, in 1767, from Spain. The schools it had established were either closed down or given to other institutions to run.

From the end of the XVIII century onwards, many buildings and properties belonging to the Church were confiscated in several European countries (first of all in Revolutionary France) undermining not only Church power but also, in some cases, the Church's ability to perform some charitable activities like providing free schooling for the poor.

In 1763 Louis-René Caradeuc de la Chalotais, attorney-general to the Parliament of Brittany, wrote an "Essay on National Education" putting forward the idea of an educational system promoted by the State. He was moved by two main preoccupations:

- To control the access to education. Louis-René Caradeuc de la Chalotais was extremely worried by the fact that "never before have there been so many students ... even the working people want to study"; "the Brothers of Christian Doctrine, called the Ignorantins, are pursuing a fatal policy; they are teaching people to read and write who should have learnt only to draw and to handle planes and files but who now no longer wish to do so."

- To control the content of education. In order to end the influence of the Church, in particular that of the Jesuits, on young intellectuals, Louis-René Caradeuc de la Chalotais wanted the institution of state schools because "the children of the state must be brought up by

members of the state." To this aim, he advocated the appointment by the king of a commission to study the question of national education, to define its aims and to prepare the materials (e.g. textbooks) needed for this purpose.

In Prussia, which should be considered with France as the cradle of state schooling, the General Schools Regulations of 1763 (under Frederick II) made school attendance compulsory for all children between the age of five and thirteen. At around the same time (1768) Johann Bernhard Basedow was advancing the proposal for a Supreme Supervisory Council of Public Instruction that was actually implemented (*Oberschulcollegium*) under Frederick the Great in 1787. In 1794 all educational establishments were put under the supervision of the state, a decision reaffirmed in 1803 in the Prussian Law Code in which it is expressly declared that "the schools and universities are state institutions."

Meanwhile in France, B. G. Rolland, president of the Parlement of Paris, drafted a report on national education (1768) advocating the intervention of the state through a centralized and hierarchical system of schools supervised from the centre.

The theoretical and practical foundations of state schooling were, then, laid down in the second half of the XVIII century, ready for the protagonists of the French Revolution to build on them and for the other ruling élites to follow suit, given the military successes and political appeal of state centralized France.

### **The consolidation of state schooling**

In France the Revolution, with its idolization of the state as the supreme protector and guarantor of the citizens, prepared the way for Napoleonic imperial despotism.

In 1802, with Fourcroy's decree, the state, while leaving elementary schools to local arrangement, intervened in the area of secondary education through a centrally controlled curriculum. Napoleon saw state education as the means for producing well-trained administrators and officers obedient to him. For this reason he instituted state

Lycées where military discipline was the distinctive trait. Starting from 1804 the state took upon itself the right of appointing the teachers and, in 1806, it established the Imperial University (with supplementary decrees in 1808). This was a sort of Ministry of education in charge of controlling the whole of the schooling system and teaching apparatus in France.

The role of the state in education was extended after the fall of Napoleon, when in 1833, with the Guizot law, every town in France was obliged to set up a state elementary school. But it was under the minister of education Jules Ferry (during the 1880s) that state education received a strong boost, becoming the state monopoly to which the political ruling élite had aspired since the beginning of the century. A series of laws reduced greatly, and in some cases even eliminated, the presence of Catholic schools, forbidding priests from teaching. The curriculum for all schools was centrally planned and thoroughly expurgated of any religious reference and theme. Moreover state schools became tax supported and so apparently free of charge, the fees being paid, in a different, unrelated and almost undetected way, by everybody.

In Prussia, the example of France and of the expanding role that the state was playing as supreme guide of the nation in all fields, contributed to the emergence of a current of ideas (represented especially by Hegel and Fichte) according to which the task of education was seen as the formation of loyal state citizens and patriots.

Following the example of France and Prussia, many European states took education into their own hands, expropriating past providers and eliminating new possible ones that could never compete with a state schooling system that was compulsorily financed by all national subjects.

Since those early beginnings in the second half of the XVIII century, state schooling has spread everywhere and taken over education to the point that education has been identified with schooling, and schooling has come to mean, almost implicitly and generally, state schooling.

We need then to focus a bit deeper on state schooling, pointing



out briefly the justifications given for its introduction and the functions (aims), features (traits), figures (protagonists) and effects (results) connected to its existence.

### **The proclaimed justifications for state schooling**

The main reason generally put forward for the establishment of state schooling was an egalitarian and humanitarian one.

The radical elements present in France and England, in association with philanthropists, social activists and political reformers, saw in the intervention of the state in education the way to improve the lot of the poor and to reduce, if not overcome, cultural disparities and social evils.

In other words, according to the preachers of state intervention, only the state, as the representative of the entire national community, could and should provide education to everybody in order to form citizens free from ignorance and a society free from inequality.

Actually, in many countries, a large part of the state ruling élite did not share this intention of emancipating individuals through the spread of education promoted by the state. In actual fact, the emergence of literacy amongst the masses was considered a potential cause of rebellion and unrest. According to this view, a literate servant or a cultivated manual worker were seen as a contradiction and a source of discontent that would not bode well for the established order.

Clearly this reality undermines the myth, cherished by many, that the state was the real promoter of general education and the initiator of mass literacy.

In actual fact, from the end of the XVIII century the spread of literacy was already taking place against and in spite of the opposition of the state, considering that even a liberal ruling élite such as that in English had put taxes on paper in order to discourage the diffusion of reading and writing amongst the poor. Nevertheless, revolutionary pamphlets like Paine's, *Rights of Man* (1791-1792) and Godwin's, *Enquiry concerning political justice* (1793) circulated widely

and this was a sign that reading skills were expanding without the need of state assistance and in spite of actual state hindrance. In fact, as soon as the Stamp Act was repealed in 1855, seventeen provincial daily papers were founded, a further indication of a consolidated presence of reading skills amongst the English population at large, well before the beginning of any state schooling in England.

A further justification for state intervention in the form of compulsory schooling for all children up to a certain age, was to stop them being exploited by uncaring parents and greedy masters who put them to work in the mines and in the factories. This was, again, a very commendable reason but it was based on a generalization that was far from reality.

In fact, while it is true that a small number of parents were not behaving decently, to say the least, towards their children, most of them were making every possible effort to assure a better future for their offspring. As James Mill reported in the *Edinburgh Review* in October 1813:

"We have met with families in which, for weeks together, not an article of sustenance but potatoes had been used; yet for every child the hard-earned sum was provided to send them to school."

And to schools or to various educational courses they were going in increasing number, at least if we refer to the English situation. During the first half of the XIX century (1818-1858), when the intervention of the English state in education was practically nil, the student population rose from 675,000 to 2,500,000, with an annual increase in the number of pupils attending school that was double the annual growth in population (E. G. West, *Education and the State*, 1965). At the same time the large majority of workers had already become literate through personal effort or charitable assistance. So, the conventional portrait showing that, before state schooling, we are in the presence of mass illiteracy and generalized child neglect and exploitation, is, in most cases, either literary invention or pure propaganda necessary to justify the entry by the state into a new field (as

the supposedly indispensable provider of an otherwise unachievable service) in order to establish its own total supremacy.

### **The concealed motivations for state schooling**

The reasons advanced for state intervention in education are very appealing indeed and have rallied to the cause many sincerely progressive and humanitarian individuals. However, even if we accept those as valid reasons for giving support to the promotion of education by the state (for instance, financing and facilitating in many ways all sorts of educational activities), they do not lead necessarily to state schooling and universal state control of education.

It is then clear that, behind a smokescreen of philanthropism and egalitarianism that animated many social reformers and social activists and justified the state's entry into the field of education, there are, concealed, other substantial motivations that paved the way towards the most pervasive and intrusive type of intervention: compulsory state schooling.

This goes well beyond and against what many caring individuals advocated. In fact, to be in favour of education for the 'lower' classes with a view to their emancipation, does not equate with state schooling, considering the many ways in which education can be accessed and promoted. Nevertheless, even against most educational principles, in many countries state schooling was the only road to education, chosen to the detriment and exclusion of many others. This choice was the direct consequence of some important events that suggested such a course of action to state rulers.

At that time the whole of Europe was under the spell of Napoleon who was exporting the ideas of the French revolution and of the new French state to every country; amongst the so-called "revolutionary" measures there was that of a centralized system of education (1802).

The many victories of the French armies all over Europe and especially the defeat of the Prussians at Jena in 1806 had the effect of stirring up feelings of national revanchism. If the successes of Napoleon were due to a strong state and a centralized system of

education that produced obedient and efficient soldiers, that model had to be copied. And so a new idea emerged and spread, namely that of instilling sentiments of national pride and state allegiance through a national system of education, under the unquestionable direction of the nation state. The document that best represent this attitude is Fichte's *Address to the German Nation* (1808).

The state system of education, already present in Prussia, was then perfected even further on nationalistic lines to the point that the schools became one of the most effective tools in the political arsenal of the state. This policy worked so well in producing manipulable state subjects that, after the fall of Napoleon, Prussia was on the way to becoming the new super power in continental Europe. This ascent would be sanctioned by two events:

- the victory of the Prussian army over the Austrian army at Königgrätz (Sadowa) in 1864;
- the victory of the Prussian army over the French army at Sedan in 1870.

In the words of the Prussian minister of war, "the victor at Königgrätz was the Prussian Volksschule teacher." The same could probably be said for the military success against the French.

The Prussian-German experience showed that "schools are instruments of state policy, like the army, the police and the exchequer." (Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 1960). And practically all state rulers, in due course, learned the lesson.

The first state to follow was the one already best positioned in that respect, i.e. France. After the defeat of its army, new politicians emerged for whom the renewal of the nation under a strong state was the top priority. Amongst them Jules Ferry who, as already mentioned, was the promoter of a system of state schooling (laws of 1882 and 1886) rigidly controlled from the centre and from which any influence external to the state (e.g. the Church, the parents, the community) was methodically either expunged or marginalized. This is the system that would be adopted in other countries (for instance Italy) and that would last, with some updating and with a modernizing varnish, throughout most of the XX century.

So, the real motive behind the intervention of the state in education was the protection, survival and aggrandizement of the state ruling élite. As pointed out by a perceptive historian, in the schooling system of the nation state "the purpose of education ... is to bend the will of the young to the will of the nation" (Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 1960), that is to the will of the nation state rulers. Or, to quote the words of a well-known French historian (Ernest Lavisse) at the beginning of the XX century "if the schoolboy does not become a citizen fully aware of his duties, and a soldier who loves his gun, the teacher will have wasted his time."

### **The functions of state schooling**

If the un-confessed aim of state schooling is to instruct subjects for the purpose of the consolidation and expansion of state power at home and abroad, clearly the real functions certainly cannot be those of liberation from ignorance and of emancipation towards independent thinking and acting. On the contrary, the objectives of state schooling, more evident and blatant in the past but still presently intrinsic to the state's way of dealing with education, can be summed up as:

- People indoctrination. Indoctrination here means the spreading, forced and planned from the top, of ideas conducive to the creation of a national identity (i.e. sameness) under the aegis of the state. The real mission of state schooling is not to facilitate the development of cultivated reasoning individuals but to manufacture identical docile state servants. The implementation of territorial sovereignty by the state requires the control and manipulation of the mental attitudes of the subjects living within that territory. In the words of an Italian writer and patriot, Massimo d'Azeglio, once Italy was made, it was time to "make the Italians," meaning with it the formation of an Italian identity (i.e. serial or mass-produced identical national subjects). And this task could be best performed only through the establishment and continuous strengthening of a state schooling system aimed at rearing a population "devoted to the Country and to

the King" (from an 1886 circular of Michele Coppino, minister of Education in Italy) or, as in Germany, "loyal to one Kaiser, one army, one navy." The state had finally displaced the Church in the function of moulding citizens' minds and was replacing the old religion with the new ideology of statism.

- Mass homogenisation. Homogenization means that all the learners have to go through the same learning process, absorbing in a uniform manner the same notions and the same attitudes that would make them obedient workers and law abiding subjects. The process is so uniformly imposed from the top that, towards the end of the XIX century, a Minister of education in France seems to have boasted that he could state which part of the state curriculum was being imparted in every school in the country by simply looking at the date and time. The notions to be ingurgitated mainly concern events and artefacts of previous civilizations, arranged on an historical progressive trend leading, as its final accomplishment, to the appearance of the nation state. The state is artfully presented as the initiator or accomplisher of everything that was, supposedly, either neglected or badly performed in the past (administration of justice, provision of social services, development of infrastructures, etc.). Moreover, each national school system seems to possess the irresistible tendency to portray its country as the beacon of civilization and to neglect or minimise the accomplishments and successes of the others or to attribute to them, sometimes, practices of exploitation and expropriation from which its own country has been, magically, immune. No wonder that this kind of manipulative mass teaching prepared the way to mass carnage, when opposed manufactured identities clashed for supremacy.

Homogenization is only part of the function of state schooling and is mainly addressed to the 'lower' classes. Once those belonging to these classes have absorbed the basic notions and attitudes, their schooling life was/is over while the children of the 'higher' classes continue their studies in the Lycées (another Napoleonic invention) and at the University (or presently in further postgraduate courses).

- Class Differentiation. Differentiation means that the school is

organized into levels and branches reflecting the division of society into classes. The main division is that between those assigned to perform manual work (execution) and those destined for intellectual activities (direction). The differentiation starts in the elementary grades when the children of the ruling élite and of the wealthy parents go to better schools (sometimes state schools in selected areas), schools abroad or even catholic or other religious schools if they are considered of higher quality. The other state schools, many of them crowded and bureaucratically managed, are for the children of the undifferentiated mass, who should be happy and grateful for being allowed to go to school, apparently free of charge.

At this point it is necessary to highlight the main features of the state schools that the sons and daughters of the common people (but not only them) are obliged to attend.

### **The features of state schooling**

A confirmation of the real functions of state schooling comes from an overview of what were and still are the basic features of state schooling, namely

- Universal compulsory funding (taxes). State schooling is a service provided on a practically monopolistic basis (i.e. there is no serious competition) given the fact that it is compulsorily financed by everybody, whether or not they have children and whether or not they approve of the state schooling system or even refuse to use it and actually invest personal time and resources in order to offer alternative educational experiences to their children (home teaching, community schooling, expert tuition, special courses, provision of learning materials, etc.).

- Universal compulsory attendance (up to a certain age). School attendance is mandatory by law in practically all countries (home teaching is now permitted but not everywhere) and pupils are obliged to go to school, otherwise the state intervenes through the police and the judiciary.

- Teacher Regimentation (teachers' training and teachers' teaching).

The teachers are trained under the supervision of the state and are meant to teach notions that are spelled out in a state devised curriculum, using state approved textbooks, following conventional state approved techniques (mainly, the academic lesson).

- Pupil Regimentation. Pupils are divided according to their chronological age (their actual mental capacities or personal interests are not taken into account at all) and, in some cases, according to their sex, and put into groups (large or small according to the amount of resources allocated) under the command and instruction of one or more teachers. All the pupils are supposed to pay attention, memorize and repeat the notions passed on to them by the teachers without questioning either the content or the form of the process.

- Nationally based notions. The notions transmitted, especially in the humanities, reflect mainly the culture of the national ruling élite and what that national élite considers worth absorbing and worth perpetuating. Creativity and cosmopolitanism are not, in general, in the state educational agenda.

- State-endorsed qualifications. If the students have been satisfactorily docile and sufficiently effective in their effort of attention, memorization and repetition of what they have been presented, they can expect to receive a state-endorsed document (a diploma) that would (more in the past than in the present) open to them many careers, especially within the state or in state-related state-licensed positions. That piece of paper is a magic key that, however, does not always reflect what people are actually capable of doing. In that case, they will learn on the job, during their professional activities. With reference to this, "the American economist, Professor George J. Stigler, who measured the kind of education which leads to increases in income-earning power of the individual, concluded that in 1940 as much as two-thirds of it was acquired not in colleges or schools but by experience and instruction within the factory or office." (E.G.West, *Education and the State. A study in political economy*, 1965). If it is still so, we are back to the past, when learning was taking place through life experiences. The only difference, and it is not something to be proud of, is that educational failure within state schooling means that



personal time and social resources have been squandered in enormous quantities without rational reasons and praiseworthy results.

In fact, if there is something that is certain it is that state schooling absorbs a huge amount of resources, appropriated mainly by those who work for the system. It is then necessary to examine briefly the figures linked to the state schooling system.

### **The figures of state schooling**

When education was simply acquired from life experiences, everybody, in the family and in the outside world, endowed with some specific skill, was an informal teacher (a disseminator of knowledge).

Later on, literate individuals belonging mainly to some Church congregations dedicated their efforts to teaching in a formal way, either to the poor or as tutors in wealthy families.

With the birth of the idea of modern schooling, ladies from aristocratic families engaged themselves in charitable teaching institutions. At the same time, individuals, often from humble origins, who had become literate, offered their educational services, becoming the first nucleus of established teachers; they were paid by the parents and were under the scrutiny of the local community or of the clergy that employed them.

The financial uncertainties of the profession, at the mercy of parents and local people, and its dependence on the Church, which controlled most formal education, were the main reasons why, in the course of time, more and more teachers favoured and accepted the intervention of the state in the field. For them it meant:

- a regular salary paid by the state out of compulsory taxes instead of worrying to collect the fees from each parent personally;
- a distant master in the form of the ministry of education located in the capital instead of the continuous control exerted locally by the parents and the whole community;
- a more updated curriculum that would do away with some pedantic religious teaching and introduce more down to earth learning matters;

- a better personal standing within the local community and the society at large, as they were seen as the educational representatives of an ascending power (the nation state) and bestowed with a mission to accomplish (the education/nationalization of the new generations).

No wonder that the teachers had a strong direct interest in the spreading of state schooling and in becoming sort of state educational officers. An acceptable justification was the fact that, in this way, they were emancipating themselves, in many cases, from the suffocating tutelage of the Church. What was not noticed was the fact that, for financial reasons, they were putting themselves under another tutelage, that of the state, that would be, from the start or in due course, not less suffocating and demeaning. From that moment onwards they became if not the mouthpiece of state power, certainly the national propagandists of the statist ideology that is made up of a mixture of compassionate paternalism and authoritarian dirigism.

In this respect it must be pointed out that state schoolteachers are members of a category that includes many who were/are the direct instigators and propagators of state roles played by their pupils as concentration camp guards, torturers and killers under the instructions of the state. As remarked by a contemporary historian, "the torture chamber and the concentration camp merely completed the work that the classroom had begun." (Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State*, 1999). And the bureaucratic/authoritarian superstructure of the state still holds nowadays mainly because of the propagandistic and manipulative work of most state schoolteachers (whether they are conscious of it or not).

Other categories that eagerly accepted the rising and spreading of state schooling were those who found employment in bureaucratic roles as school inspectors or administrators either inside the school or within the huge, centralised apparatus that would guide and shape the instructional machine.

Presently, in some countries the Ministry of education is the biggest national employer and so the amount of vested interests that work for the perpetuation of the system is formidable even when or

where the results are very poor or simply provide an incredibly low return on the amount of resources employed.

Let us then examine briefly what have been and what still are the effects of the imposition/diffusion of state schooling.

### **The effects of state schooling**

Compulsory state schooling has achieved no less than three unsavoury results that were not expected by many of those who favoured this educational road:

- It has devalued parents. According to the premises underpinning state intervention, schooling has to be forced on parents otherwise they would never be interested in the education of their children. This unsupported generalization, even if true in regard to a small number of parents, has been applied to all parents with the result of eliminating any responsibility of the families in the education of the children and attributing this task to a group of professional figures and bureaucrats which take most (if not all) decisions. No wonder that the parents have really become irrelevant or marginal as pedagogical figures, not any more originators and stimulators of values but pure and simple dispensers of cash.

- It has devalued learning. Another basic premise of the compulsory state school model is the idea that learning has to be forced on children otherwise they would show no interest and curiosity in anything and would remain forever lazy and ignorant. This, again, is an unproved generalization, discounted by practically all major educationalists; paradoxically it is valid only when self-motivation to learn is eliminated and is replaced by compulsion. In that case, as in any case when coercion is introduced, any supposed educational experience loses most of its attraction and becomes an annoying chore to be avoided as much as possible. Creative learning is displaced by rote-parroting, compulsorily endured only to obtain the required piece of paper called a diploma.

- It has devalued activity. The fundamental approach of state schooling consists in congregating children in a specific place (the

classroom within the school building) where somebody is in charge of presenting notions. In this way, the strict link - if not unity - between learning and doing is totally broken. Learning appears as something completely detached from activity, a long vacation from real life that will resume its course once schooling is over. This model, derived from a view of society divided between manual and intellectual activities, is at the basis of the class divide between ruled and rulers. And the state school, through its way of operating, perpetuates this social fracture.

On the whole, the state school has failed and is failing in what many, naively, think is its essential function, i.e. to develop and promote knowledge for dealing/coping with new realities. This is not possible in so far as the state school favours:

- the repetition of the past over the invention of the future
- the transmission of national notions over the exploration of universal science
- the study of conventional theories over the experimentation with original hypotheses.

The social/psychological results of all this appear very clearly if we just reflect on the attitudes cultivated and transmitted during most of the XX century, namely:

- nationalism, chauvinism and the dismissal of cosmopolitanism
- imperialism, militarism and the contempt for pacifism.

To think that state schooling has nothing to do with all this is like being mentally and morally blind, a degenerate zombie with a degree in idiocy.

On the basis of these results, the state school could very aptly be listed amongst the total institutions of the state like the prison, the army barracks and the mental asylum, sharing with them, although in a more soft and subtle way, the characteristics of:

- restriction (prison)
- regimentation (barracks)
- repression (asylum).

The state school is also the perfect example of a mass society where even education becomes a uniform pre-packaged process and

the pupils are like machines on an assembly line. Or, to give a more apt view of the entire sequence, children are like battery chickens, force-fed in order to produce animals that fit into the stew of the bureaucratic state, in the role of docile workers and alienated consumers.

Besides that, schools have also become centres of rage, violence, apathy and illiteracy to the point that not only education is out of the question but miseducation is spreading fast and wide, coupled with an enormous dissipation of resources, especially human resources.

Many saw from the start the nefarious effects of the state taking control of education. And so, the objections to state schooling have been numerous especially from those who grew up in places and times when the state played a reduced role (XIX century); further objections have reappeared in the second half of the XX century and are becoming an avalanche since the beginning of the XXI century.

### **The objections to state schooling**

Objections to state intervention in education arose during the XIX century both in England and in France.

Thinkers like John Stuart Mill warned, not always in a consistent manner, about the risks connected to leaving education in the state's hands. In the essay "*On Liberty*" (1859) he wrote:

"A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another" and "in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body."

In the *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) Mill stated very forcefully that:

"It is not endurable that a government should, either *de jure* or *de facto*, have a complete control over the education of the people. To possess such a control, and actually exert it, is to be despotic. A

government which can mould the opinions and sentiments of the people from their youth upwards can do with them whatever it pleases."

Karl Marx expressed objections of similar nature when, criticizing the programme of the Social-democratic Party of Germany (the Gotha programme) he wrote:

"Education of the people by the state is altogether objectionable." "Government and Church should rather be equally excluded from any influence on the school." (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875).

In France, Frédéric Bastiat, amongst others, was totally opposed to state education, declaring that:

"The State, or more precisely the party, the faction, the sect, the man who gets hold at a certain moment, even in a totally legal way, of the power to influence the government, can give to education the direction that pleases him, and can shape according to his wishes all the minds just through the mechanism of diplomas." ["L'Etat, ou pour mieux dire le parti, la faction, la secte, l'homme qui s'empare momentanément, et même très légalement, de l'influence gouvernementale, peut donner à l'enseignement la direction qui lui plaît, et façonner à son gré tous les intelligences par le seul mécanisme des grades."] (*Baccalauréat et socialisme*, 1850).

In Italy, Antonio Gramsci, in an article published in 1918 in the socialist paper *Il grido del popolo* wrote:

«We socialists should be in favour of the free school, of the school left to personal initiative and to the Municipalities. Freedom in school is possible only if the school is independent from state control. (...) We should promote the free school and we should take the freedom of setting up our school. Catholics will do the same where they are in the majority; and we will see who is going to be

the most able." [«Noi socialisti dobbiamo essere propugnatori della scuola libera, della scuola lasciata all'iniziativa privata e ai Comuni. La libertà nella scuola è possibile solo se la scuola è indipendente del controllo dello Stato. (...) Noi dobbiamo farci propugnatori della scuola libera e conquistarci la libertà di creare la nostra scuola. I cattolici faranno altrettanto dove sono in maggioranza; chi avrà più filo tesserà più tela»].

And Piero Gobetti, turning upside down the flawed logic of those who want to impose on everybody a secular education under the control of the state, wrote that:

"Only a theocratic state can claim the right to monopolize education." ["Solo uno stato teocratico può rivendicare il diritto del monopolio scolastico."] (*La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 1924).

Other objections have been directed at the regimented and forced nature of the schooling system, where children are treated like empty barrels and teaching means filling them with notions, whether they want it or not.

However, the reverence inspired, at least in the past, by the figure of the professional teacher backed by the Church and, later on, by the mighty state, made the objections less and less forceful and capable of changing educational practices. The only option left was to abandon the school whenever possible and practicable.

One of the most famous cases of refusal of schooling is that involving in 1854 the seven-year-old Thomas Alva Edison. After a discussion with the principal of the school, and disapproving of the rigid teaching system, the mother decided to educate her son at home. Thanks to this courageous resolution, the mind of the young Edison was spared from conformity and one of the brightest intellects of all ages was allowed to flourish.

Not so fortunate, as far as school attendance is concerned, was another genius, Albert Einstein, who, looking back to his school years had this to say:

"One had to cram all this stuff into one's mind, whether one liked it or not. This coercion had such a deterring effect that, after I had passed the final examination, I found the consideration of any scientific problems distasteful to me for an entire year."

If this is the effect that schooling had on such a curious and bright mind as that of Einstein, we should be terrified at the thought of what it produces in less exceptional pupils. Unfortunately, too many nice, accommodating children are unable to follow Mark Twain's resolution expressed in the statement: "I never let schooling interfere with my education"; and for this reason they are repelled for life from real educational experiences.

For many critics of schooling educational results have appeared to be so discouraging that, starting from the 1960's, a series of books began to be published with revelatory titles like *Compulsory Miseducation* (Paul Goodman, 1962) or *How Children Fail* (John Holt, 1964).

They were followed, at the beginning of the 1970's, by even more radical books advocating the ending of schooling. Their titles were no less explicit: *School Is Dead* (Everett Reimer, 1971) and *Deschooling society* (Ivan Illich, 1971).

The analyses and the diagnoses were all quite similar: learning cannot be based on compulsion, memorization and repetition but it arises out of personal freedom and natural curiosity that leads to investigation and discovery.

On the basis of these ideas and as a reaction to the failing of children in the schooling system dominated by the state, new experiences came to life especially during the 1980's and 1990's and are multiplying at the beginning of the XXI century.

### **The alternatives to state schooling**

During the period of dominance of state schooling and even within the domain of state schooling, some experiences of progressive education have taken place that run counter to the conventional formulas dictated by the centre.



While state schooling was/is:

- centred on the teacher
- based on textbooks and academic lessons
- compulsory and regimented

progressive education was/is

- centred on the child (Maria Montessori)
- focusing on learning by doing (John Dewey)
- free from compulsion and regimentation (A. S. Neill and the

experience of Summerhill).

But these experiences have been either islands on a sea of conformity and acquiescence to the state directives or a sprinkling of novelty in a generally bureaucratically formulated approach.

The inadequacies of the state schooling system have, then, persisted and have been compounded by a social and technological dynamic that is making the school appear ever more irrelevant and detached not just from the real needs of the learners but also from actual reality.

An urgency is presently felt by many to move from a few experimental cases to a rich variety of experiences. And this is what is happening in some regions of the world.

There are three parallel ideas that are starting to be accepted by an increasing number of individuals and that push for the setting up of alternatives to the present situation:

- The end of the identification of schooling with state schooling. The pedagogical deterioration of many state schools, made even more visible and acute by episodes of violence and bad behaviour, has energized other actors to intervene, by entering in the field of education, or expanding their presence within it. In the USA, the end of state criminalization of homeschooling has allowed the flourishing of many experiences in which parents have taken direct responsibility for the education of their children. The number of homeschooling students is estimated to have grown in the USA from 350,000 in 1990 up to 1.3 million in 1998 and approximately 2 million students in 2012.

Schools promoted by religious groups and institutions and aimed at conveying also a strong moral teaching represent another devel-

oping area of non-state schooling. This kind of school is chosen by those who attribute particular importance to an ethical education and to the transmission of certain firm values. Thus we have Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Quaker, Mennonite and Amish schools, to list the most well known. (Ronald E. Koetzsch, *The Parent's Guide to Alternatives in Education*, 1997).

Besides religious schools, in many countries there have always existed non-state schools (called "public schools" in England and "private schools" elsewhere) promoted by individuals and groups and supported by fees paid by the parents and by donations. The current financial crisis of the state, which is, at last, unable to cover with its presence all sectors of life, makes these initiatives even more necessary. To cite just a case, in Poland since the collapse of state communism almost 300 new non-state universities have been opened, attended by half of Poland's current university students.

All these are just some examples amongst others that show that the mental association between state and schooling as an indispensable and necessary combination is less and less tenable.

- The end of the identification of learning with schooling. In addition to new schools there are also experiences of education tailored to the individual and instructional tools to be used by individuals for self-teaching. Hypertext coursewares introduce the learner to many subjects of cognitive interest and allow for personalized trails of discovery, at the time and pace of his/her own choice. In general, the high circulation of information and the considerable amount of learning materials and opportunities available beyond formal schooling, already make the total environment a learning environment and the schools only one (and not even the most important) of the many places dealing with knowledge.

- The end of the identification of learning with a specific period (school years) or place (school buildings). Learning is and always has been a lifelong process. It is so now more than ever, given the pace of technological and social change. The idea of learning limited to the school years, inside a school building, aimed at to the absorption of notions from a curriculum imposed from the centre, updated every so many

years, is a very bizarre one and puts individuals in a very disadvantaged situation. Those who undergo this process become incapable of coping with new situations, obsolete human beings like the notions they have been forced to absorb.

To remedy this situation, courses (short, long, at a distance, introductory, advanced, specialized, etc.) on almost every possible subject, along with experts on demand, are or should be available within the reach of everyone, at any time during people's lives, via a series of old and new promoters (learned societies, local associations, the business community, professional specialists, etc.). This reality, in most cases far away from formal schooling and geared to the specific actual needs of the learner, is what, in the first and final instance, promotes true educational development.

All these experiences introduce us to a new paradigm of learning, beyond schooling and especially beyond state schooling, that needs to be examined a bit closer.

### **From schooling to learning**

The conceptual overcoming of the three identifications previously highlighted is the necessary premise for freeing the mind from a series of deceptive ideas that have been transmitted through the generations.

The most erroneous of those ideas, propagated by the state and not by educationists, is that learning is an unavoidably painful imposition, whereas in fact it is a natural pleasurable experience.

What is really painful is to be compulsorily confined in a room, for many hours a day, for many days every year, and for many years during what is the most active part of a human being's life, to listen to and absorb second hand experiences and notions that have to be memorized and parroted out in order to pass a test that will allow young people to climb the social ladder. Having being forced to do this in the past, many parents have been prepared (i.e. manipulated) to accept that their children go through the same painful and tedious

process only because there is (or there should be) a prize at the end of the tunnel: economic security and material gratification.

As a matter of fact, this is the re-proposition of the old Church view of life as suffering rewarded by the gaining of after-life bliss. Under statism the years of schooling are a long preparation for a life of stress and boredom in order to gain material comfort, presented as the source of true happiness.

Needless to say, all this has nothing to do with learning. Certainly some useful notions might reach the minds of the young during such a long period of forced confinement in a classroom but these meagre results cannot justify either the methods employed or the amount of resources dissipated.

Learning is something completely different from present schooling because its basic traits are opposite to it. In fact, a learning process is characterized by being:

- free not forced
- pleasurable not painful
- creative not repetitive
- inner-motivated not outer-directed
- spontaneous not regimented
- personalized not mass-imposed
- lifelong not time limited
- ubiquitous not place-restricted

That is why, instead of allocating further effort and resources to the old schooling system, we should favour projects and activities promoting:

- self-directed learning\_(learning as personal exploration)
- learning environments (learning as social experience).

### **Self-directed learning**

The central aspect of learning is that it is a personal exploration leading to personal development. For this reason learning is essentially self-directed, based on and marked by the following dynamic:

- Personal motivation. Learning is initiated by the learner who finds in it the way to satisfy some natural dispositions. Curiosity and an active desire for discovery are basic traits of every human being.

- Personal engagement. Curiosity and the desire for discovery lead necessarily to personal engagement in meaningful and fulfilling activities that become learning experiences. Living and learning represent then a unity.

- Personal empowerment. The results of motivation and engagement are likely to provide the individual with qualities (attitudes, skills, worldviews, etc.) he/she was not endowed with before. This fact stimulates and motivates the learner to search for engagement in further learning experiences, in a never ending process in which the individual finds more and more satisfaction and enjoyment as he/she progresses in exploring and experiencing the world.

This learning dynamic is spontaneous and self-sustained and it takes place within a framework characterized by:

- primary skill: the individual becomes capable of learning to learn.

- unrestricted place/time: there are no borders and no limits to learning.

- integrated topics: there is no fragmentation and no separation between learning experiences.

The process of learning, being centred on the individual and on his demands, pays special attention to freedom with respect to:

- Learning themes. Learning themes refer to the learning contents chosen by the learner on the basis of his/her personal interests and needs. Different learners will approach different learning themes that will crisscross and reinforce one another, all being characterized by being meaningful, relevant and in tune with the life of the individual.

- Learning types. Learning types refer to the experiences selected by the learner in order to deal with the learning themes. Different learning themes require different experiences, stressing different learning qualities (e.g. visual, motorial, logical, etc.) through different learning paths.

- Learning styles. Learning styles refer to the learning actor and the

way he/she deals with the learning experience. Individuals present differences (motivations, interests, previous knowledge base, etc.) that are reflected in different learning styles proper to the individuals (for instance, more stress given to an intuitional rather than an analytical approach, or vice versa).

On the whole, in order to satisfy all these aspects and requisites an educational process should be based on:

- Individualization: learning is in close relation to the requirements and motivations of the learner;
- Personalization: the learner chooses the most suitable path, place and pace of exploration;
- Integration: the materials explored not only integrate with each other but also with the learner's previous knowledge, and enlarge/deepen it.

A learning curriculum, if it exists as a learning sequence, is suggested/shaped by the learning themes, types and styles that are strictly linked to each individual personality; it cannot be uniformly imposed from the top by a bureaucratic power. As remarked by the psychologist Carl Rogers:

"self-initiated learning which involves the whole person of the learner - feelings as well as intellect - is the most lasting and pervasive." (Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn*, 1969).

Learning, although being a very personal experience/development, takes place through a continuous series/web of exchanges and this requires and fosters the existence and spreading of learning environments.

### **Learning environments**

Learning environments are made by communities (interconnected individuals), places (resource centres) and activities (meaningful experiences) through which every human being can satisfy the inborn curiosity and desire to learn. Within the learning environ-

ments everybody is, on different occasions, a giver and a receiver of knowledge according to the specific skills he/she has mastered.

The higher the quality and the wider the variety of these learning environments, the more possibilities present themselves for learning. To be a participant (as promoter and user) of a network of relevant learning environments sets up the conditions for an exponential cognitive multiplication in the learning base of each contributor.

At a personal and interpersonal level learning becomes what it used to be and what it should always have been, a

- **Problem Finding** (Research)
- **Problem Solving** (Design)
- **Problem Acting** (Planning)

commitment and engagement concerning the totality of life experience, in which each phase is contained in every other.

The new educational paradigm (new with respect to current mainstream state schooling practices) aims at enabling every human being to become an active problem finder/problem solver instead of becoming a sort of answering machine repeating the past in the present and in a never changing future.

At the dawn of the XXI century most schools (state schools or state certified schools) still produce a large number of unsatisfied individuals, social clones of a decaying world, docile automata ready for the rat-race or angry and aggressive people disgusted with what has been presented to them as learning: regimentation, homogenization, subordination, in a word, pure and simple manipulation.

Individuals and communities have to take learning back into their own hands, abolishing the monopolistic role of the state buttressed by forced taxation, compulsory attendance and the paraphernalia of degrees and diplomas as bribing baits that open the way to money and power.

The separation between state and education is as necessary now as was the separation between state and religion before. The latter ended the wars of religion and introduced toleration in religious matters; the former might end national/tribal wars tout court and

certainly political strife, introducing not only toleration but also wisdom.

We should replace state schools with a dazzling spectrum of learning experiments and experiences. There are no limits to learning and there shouldn't be limits to what can be done in the field of learning.

State school, i.e. state mass indoctrination, represents a dead future, like the mass society of which it is the most despicable product.

Let us focus, for real and anew, on personal self-directed learning.



## FROM WICKED OCCUPATIONS TO WORTHY ACTIVITIES

Presentation

Toil

Labour

Trades

Work

Jobs

Professions

Careers

Employment

The end of occupations

The spread of activities

Towards a new reality



## Presentation

One of the basic characteristics of the human being is the desire to be engaged in doing something. To remain still and inactive for long requires either a strong force of the will, like in meditation, or a potent social conditioning, as might be present in some (quite rare) tribes where nothing much is done by the members apart from occasional hunting or raising animals for food.

This aspect of doing something is also motivated by the drive towards the satisfaction of basic human needs like the:

- need of sustenance (physical)
- need of expression (psychological)
- need of collaboration (social)

For these reasons, idleness (doing nothing) has never being considered a virtue to be extolled. In fact, in the course of history, the human being has been variously characterized, in a positive sense, as *Homo Faber* (Appius Claudius), the *Artifex* of his destiny and, a *Tool-making Animal* (Benjamin Franklin).

While every human being is, generally, an active person, it is also true that not all activities that need to be performed to satisfy human needs have been considered worth accomplishing. In some cases, individuals have tried to avoid certain tasks. These have been assigned to their subordinates.

For example, starting from ancient times and in situations of technological backwardness, the efforts needed to provide the means for sustenance and existence (food, clothes, implements) have been imposed on certain categories of human beings considered inferiors (slaves, servants, helots).

In these cases, doing is not a free spontaneous choice but an imposed painful duty. For this reason it was qualified as *Ponos* (Toil) from which the word pain derives.

## Toil

In ancient times, the attitude towards any type of activities performed with the hands (even the artistic work of a sculptor) was fluctuating.

This is quite evident in the history of the ancient Greeks. At first, and during a long period (from the 9th century B.C.) when the Greeks lived in small communities, manual work was considered the proper way to get the means of daily sustenance, and idleness was condemned and even sanctioned (as in Athens under Solon, 6th century B.C.).

In Greek mythology, Prometheus was the archetype of the enterprising individual, rich in foresight and energy. He was the one who presented humans with the gift of fire and made possible all subsequent activities and development. Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.), in his *Prometheus bound*, called him the "master of all arts (*techne*) and sciences."

The Greek heroes, as they appear in the poems of Homer, were celebrated, besides their bravery, for their mastery in doing things. Ulysses, for instance, is shown recounting how he built, with his hands, the nuptial bed carved out of an olive tree rooted to the soil. Even the Gods, in ancient Greece, were portrayed as not disdaining manual work:

"Apollo builds the walls of Troy, while Hephaestus forges the arms and the shield of Achilles, Demeter plants corn and Dionysus grape; Athena, Circe and Calypso are weavers." (Pierre Jaccard, *Histoire sociale du travail*, 1963)

The most famous written document of the ancient times in celebration of work is the poem *Works and Days* (*Erga xai emeraï*) written by Hesiod in the 8th century BC. In this poem the author openly states that:

"Both gods and men are angry with a man who lives idle ... Through work men grow rich in flocks and substance, and working they are

much better loved by the immortals. Work is no disgrace: it is idleness which is a disgrace. But if you work, the idle will soon envy you as you grow rich, for fame and renown attend on wealth. And whatever be your lot, work is best for you, if you turn your misguided mind away from other men's property to your work and attend to your livelihood as I bid you."

However, this attitude changed radically in the course of time, the more Sparta became powerful and Athens wealthy. By conquering territories and subjugating people, Spartans and Athenians reduced the vanquished into slavery and forced them to perform, as slaves, all sort of manual work. At that moment, manual work began to be seen as something demeaning for a free man.

Starting from the 7th century B.C., the only honourable occupations were, for the free Spartans, military training, and for the free Athenians, philosophizing and debating on political matters.

For Plato, manual work (*ponos* = pain, toil) was the despicable but necessary occupation of the mass of people but was not something appropriate for the elite made of free human beings. In the *Republic*, while extolling the noble function of philosophizing, he writes of people whose "bodies are mutilated by the arts and crafts" and "their souls are doubled up and spoiled as a result of being in mechanical occupations." (Book VI, 495).

And Aristotle, in the *Politics*, states openly that "those who are in a position which places them above toil have stewards who attend to their households while they occupy themselves with philosophy or with politics." (Book I, Chapter 7)

Clearly these attitudes could be held and the statements expressing them could be made, because the majority of free Athenians owned at least one slave. The total estimated figure of slaves in ancient Greece varies greatly: from a minimum of 20,000 in Athens to a maximum of 400,000, probably for the area of Attica (see Moses Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 1973). However, apart from these figures, what remains constant and certain is the fact that in Greece (and later

on in Rome) manual work came to be confined to people of inferior status.

In Rome the number of slaves kept growing after each territorial conquest. Some estimates put the number of slaves in the Italian peninsula, in different period of times, between 20 to 40% of the entire population (see: Richard Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 1974).

The effects of this abundance of cheap labour (in many cases the slave was used to the maximum with a minimum of maintenance costs) were that:

- technology in general, and technological devices applied to production in particular, were neither studied extensively nor introduced, even when somebody came forward with a new discovery. In Roman history a famous case in point was when the emperor Vespasianus (69 -79 A.C.), presented with an invention to transport columns up to the Capitoline Hill without the need for so many labourers, preferred not to use it in order to let the people of Rome to be occupied in some way. Even more remarkable is the fact that the use of the water-mill, invented in antiquity (an exemplar was operating in the Mithridates palace around the year 18 B.C.), did not spread until the Middle Ages. The most likely reason was that slaves could always be found to turn the millstone.

- productivity was very low, because slaves were keen on preserving their energy in order to stay alive and, usually, were not interested in a productive effort from which they will enjoy a quite insignificant gain.

To the Greek and Roman civilizations we owe some progress in the art of reasoning (philosophy) and in regulating social intercourse (law) but not very much in the field of technology, apart from that concerned with military and logistic uses (for instance, roads and bridges to move an army).

This way of life, i.e. an elite that relied on enslaved masses to perform manual works, could not last. Slavery was, as pointed out, the cause of technological backwardness and was associated with low

productivity. In the long run, it condemned a society to intellectual and material decadence, and moral degeneration.

The disruption that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire prepared the way for the progression to a less constrictive (even if still compulsory) work relationship in the form of labour.

## Labour

With the decline of Rome and the end of Roman military conquests, the number of slaves started to dwindle progressively. However, that did not lead to the emergence of free workers. The need for security was as pressing as ever and this has always led to the rise of some individuals and organizations to a position of power with respect to the masses. The arrangement was, as usual, the promise of protection in exchange for labour services.

The *latifundia* of the Roman period, abandoned or badly cultivated by slaves, were, in the course of time, subdivided by the old and new owners, and assigned to individuals (tenants) to be cultivated. The masters then extracted for themselves a quota of the produce and demanded also that the tenant used part of his time in performing specific tasks for their convenience.

This new work relationship can be characterized as the passage from slavery to servitude, i.e. from toil to labour.

The motives behind this change were essentially:

- economic: the continuous decrease in the availability of slaves, their consequent high cost and their low level of productivity;
- ethic: the spread of Christianity that made progressively less acceptable the existence of slavery as its justification became problematic for a religion that attributed equal dignity to every human being.

However, it took a long period of time before slavery disappeared completely, at least in Western Europe. Certainly, after the collapse of Rome, it was not any longer the widespread condition endured by manual workers.

The servitude that replaced slavery was still a condition that

subjected specific individuals to a series of limitations and obligations. At the same time, as pointed out by Marc Bloch:

"this serf, so despised and confined in a state of such a narrow dependence, didn't present any trait of a slave" neither from the juridical point of view, nor according to social and economic conditions. (Marc Bloch, *Comment et pourquoi finit l'esclavage antique*, 1947, Issue 2)

"He didn't live all the time under the orders of another man; he had his own roof and fireside; he was in control of the tilling of his fields; if he was particularly keen on satisfying his needs and particularly skilful, he was better nourished than his neighbour - or, if there was a market, he sold there his produce." (Marc Bloch, *Comment et pourquoi finit l'esclavage antique*, 1947, Issue 1)

In other words, we are here at the beginning of a very long path towards giving a certain degree of freedom and a first trace of dignity to manual work and to manual workers, after centuries of negative attitudes if not utter rejection of that condition.

A significant contribution to the birth of this new attitude should be given to monastic orders that not only preached the value of manual work alternated with meditation, pray and study (e.g. the exhortation *Ora et Labora - Pray and Work* associated to the name of Saint Benedict, c. 480-547) but also practiced what they were preaching, engaging themselves in huge works of land reclamation, horticulture cultivation and the erection of impressive buildings at the service of the community and for the glory of God.

Clearly, all this was almost a natural outcome for a religion whose message came out of the son of a carpenter, who was himself a carpenter, whose disciples were fishermen and whose parables made reference to people engaged in common, practical activities. Moreover, the main propagator of this new faith was Saint Paul who had stated, in the most direct terms, that "those who do not work have not the right to eat" (*Letter to the Thessaloniciens*, II, 3) and had warned

against those who want to live in idleness, relying on the work of others.

This relative relaxation of the control on workers and this beginning of a renewed dignity assigned to manual work constituted the material and moral underpinning for the emancipation of many servants. That took place when some of them decided to abandon the land and service to their masters in order to start a new life, by engaging in new trades.

### **Trades**

During the period called the Early Middle Ages (5th century to 10th century), tilling the land, raising animals and producing food for themselves and their masters were the main activities of the labourers. The implements were rudimentary, with a very scarce use of iron tools, as if people had regressed to a more primitive state of technology.

However, the situation changed at the turn of the first millennium, especially after the introduction (from the 9th century) of a rigid padded collar resting on the shoulder of the horses, that permitted a much better utilization of the animals for ploughing the fields (i.e. faster, deeper).

The spreading of this innovation and the reintroduction of other past inventions like the water-mill (the *Domesday Book* records more than 5,000 water-mills in 1086 in England and Wales) made it eventually possible, for some rural labourers, to abandon the fields and to start new activities without affecting the level of food production that kept increasing.

A wider division of labour was then made possible by technological progress. The most enterprising of the rural labourers and some categories of people that were marginalized in society (like the Jews and the foreigners) engaged themselves in craft production and trade and some of them prospered beyond all expectation.

These occurrences introduced profound changes in the social



structure and in the way some occupations were perceived and esteemed.

The Catholic Church that, in its early time, had developed a positive attitude towards manual work, once it became a powerful and rich organization, amassing vast land properties through reclamation and donations, started changing its views. And this was especially the case of the clergy higher in the hierarchy.

The social structure, also through the representation offered by Church authorities, was seen as composed of three categories of people:

- those who prayed and meditated (the clergy)
- those who fought and defended (the knights)
- those who cultivated and produced (the labourers)

This division was presented as a natural way of organizing society, but it was not acceptable to everybody, Signs of refusal are evident in the numerous revolts that set rural servants against their masters (clerical or lay). They were the manifestations of a rage that affected the servants, who were unwilling to accept their inferior status as a permanent condition. John Ball, the priest leader of the Peasant's revolt of 1381 in England, summed up the desire for an end to servitude and subordination in the famous interrogative sentence: "When Adam delved and Evan span, who was then a gentleman?".

The technological progress, associated with the aspiration to achieve personal emancipation, introduced cracks in this social structure that had lasted for a very long period. The restructuring of the hierarchy resulted in:

- The emergence of new categories of people, the artisans, the traders and the entrepreneurs, who would play a very important role in times to come.

- The re-affirmation of the dignity of work that will be considered, in some instances, to be a form of mission (a calling) acceptable to God and so prized with personal success and good fortune.

We find here the usual pattern that characterizes almost any process of aspiration leading to socio-economic emancipation. Those who are successful in their efforts and gain, in the process, wealth

and power, are then inclined to search for a sort of religious or social recognition that would confirm that their success is in the nature of the things and that, what they have achieved, should be considered fully legitimate and acceptable to everybody.

At that moment, those who have emancipated themselves, forget their previous condition of submission to past masters and become the new masters. They then try to block further processes of emancipation, by others, that might compromise their status of wealth and power.

This happened with traders and artisans that organized themselves in guilds and associations. In this way they succeeded not only in introducing acceptable provisions for the protection of the category (mutual assistance), but also, in imposing rules restricting the access to the trade of new comers and charging monopolistic prices to consumers through accords that limited the quantities produced.

However, historical dynamics are almost impossible to control or suppress in the longer term. The introduction of better productive practices in agriculture (e.g. rotation of crops) and in the production of material goods (e.g. technical division of labour) led beyond the craft guilds and trades of the late Middle Ages to the workshops and factories of the Industrial age.

When that took place, a growing number of people moved towards the industrial districts established in villages that became towns and in the towns that became districts of the metropolis. These individuals were to become the working masses and what was required of them was to work with their hands, usually attending a machine, for many hours a day.

## **Work**

Since the Industrial Revolution the term "work" has become the common word used to refer mainly to people engaged in manual occupations in a factory.

This form of work was dominant in that period for two reasons:

- the high number of people involved in the production of industrial goods (the working class or the working masses);
- the important or even revolutionary role that has been attributed to those engaged in industrial work.

The two progressive concepts that emerged and developed in the 18th and 19th century, liberalism and socialism, have both assigned a substantial weight to work and an important role to the workers as producers.

For classic liberal thinkers, like John Locke, work, as personal effort, is the origin of personal property. A natural resource, transformed and made productive by work, becomes the property of the person who has put his energy into operating that transformation. Work was also, according to the classic economists like Adam Smith, the source of economic value.

Locke prized manual work to the point of writing, with reference to the education of a gentleman:

"I would have him learn a trade, a manual trade; nay, two or three, but one more particularly." (John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 1693, § 201).

And he proposed

"gardening or husbandry in general, and working in wood, as a carpenter, joiner, or turner; these being fit and healthy recreations for a man of study or business. For since the mind endures not to be constantly employed in the same thing or way; and sedentary or studious men should have some exercise, that at the same time might divert their minds, and employ their bodies; I know none that could do it better for a country gentleman, than these two, the one of them affording him exercise, when the weather or season keeps him from the other." (John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 1693, § 204)

Adam Smith too, while ascribing to the technical division of work

(like in the pin factory) the extraordinary increase in productivity, was in favour of overcoming the separation between manual and intellectual work. For him this was not in the nature of things as there was not much difference, at the start, between individuals involved in manual or intellectual work:

"The difference of natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown up to maturity, is not upon many occasions so much the cause, as the effect of the division of labour. The difference between the most dissimilar characters, between a philosopher and a common street porter, for example, seems to arise not so much from nature, as from habit, custom, and education. When they came into the world, and for the first six or eight years of their existence, they were perhaps, very much alike, and neither their parents nor playfellows could perceive any remarkable difference. About that age, or soon after, they come to be employed in very different occupations. The difference of talents comes then to be taken notice of, and widens by degrees, till at last the vanity of the philosopher is willing to acknowledge scarce any resemblance." (Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776, Book I, Chapter II)

In the Book V of *The Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith expressed a very strong condemnation also of the consequences brought about by the technical division of work pushed to the extreme:

"In the progress of the division of labour, the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labour, that is, of the great body of the people, comes to be confined to a few very simple operations, frequently to one or two. But the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects are perhaps always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding or to

exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life." (Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776, Book V, Chapter I)

If was left to Karl Marx to carry this analysis even further by pointing out the relationship between work and technological progress and its ambivalent results:

"It is true that labour produces for the rich wonderful things – but for the worker it produces privation. It produces palaces – but for the worker, hovels. It produces beauty – but for the worker, deformity. It replaces labour by machines, but it throws one section of the workers back into barbarous types of labour and it turns the other section into a machine. It produces intelligence – but for the worker, stupidity, cretinism." (Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*)

And this is the consequence of the fact that

"labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges

clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague." (Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*)

For liberals and socialists of the classic tradition, work is the source and essence of production, property and worthiness of personal life. The problem for them was to transform work in such a way that all the negative aspects (mental alienation, material exploitation) disappeared and the positive side emerged, namely that it became the way to satisfy human needs by way of satisfactory activities.

To this aim a series of essential measures were advocated:

- The reduction of working hours (less time taken by working)

The reduction of the working hours characterized the technological and social progress of industry in the 19th century. It was brought about by the combined action of workers struggles and the foresight of industrialists. The most attentive and progressive industrialists realized, almost from the start, that long hours spent in a factory did not translate, necessarily, into increased production. Beginning with Robert Owen, it became clear that a shorter working day was the path to obtain a much better working performance.

- The introduction of technological devices (less effort expended by working)

The introduction of technological devices was the revolutionary aspect of industrialisation. In the early phases there were episodes in which machines were smashed because they were seen as a menace to gaining a salary by working in a factory. However, it became soon apparent that industrialization could expand worker's occupation even in the presence of mechanization. In fact, the end of the XIX century and the first decades of the 20th century, that were rightly defined as the Age of Mechanization (Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, 1948), saw a consistent growth in the number of industrial workers.

Besides these measures that were progressively implemented in

the past, two other demands were put forward, especially by classic socialists and anarchists:

- The participation of everyone in productive work

The sharing of productive work amongst everybody was considered the best way to abolish privileges and to push for the maximum possible reduction of the working day. This was the condition required for the expansion of free time and for the development of the worker's personality in all his aspects (manual-mental).

- The performing by everyone of unpleasant work

The requirement that everybody should share, at least for a certain period of their life, in undertaking unpleasant work (usually manual work) was also seen as necessary for overcoming privileged positions and the reality of unappealing occupations assigned in perpetuity to the same individuals. To put it differently, this meant an end to the division between intellectual and manual work.

These two demands have not been met, as it will be shown shortly. Even when the number of people occupied grew, the figure of those directly involved in production went down. In fact, with the assistance of ever more sophisticated and high performing technological devices, a relatively smaller number of workers produced an increasing quantity of goods, in the factories and in the fields. As for overcoming the division between manual and mental work, the age of mechanization had exactly the opposite result of further separating the two and of fragmenting even more the nature of manual work. This meant that work became jobs and tasks to be performed on the basis of rules and methods decided by experts.

All this was to have widespread effects on the type of work and society that would emerge in the first half of the 20th century.

## **Jobs**

The spread of industrial factories throughout the western world, during the 19th and 20th centuries, has been characterized by:

- the growth in the dimensions of many industries
- the introduction of many technological devices

- the fragmentation of many working tasks.

The new way of organizing industrial production, qualified as the "Scientific Organization" of work, has been the result of:

- Technical motives: bigger industrial dimensions (more workers, more machines) required a higher degree of coordination amongst the different aspects and phases of production, and this was achieved by way of their standardization, specialization, synchronization.

- Economic motives: the spread of industrialization to many regions of the world, beyond England (the first workshop of the world), meant a wider economic competition and the need to produce more goods (larger market) at lower costs (competitive market). This was achieved by way of a better utilization of machines and men.

- Social motives: the workers entering the factories for the first time, some of them immigrants without any basic qualification, had to be put to work in the shortest possible time. As remarked by Henry Ford: "The rank and file of men come to us unskilled; they learn their jobs within a few hours or a few days." (Henry Ford, *My Life and Work*, 1922)

This new reality of industrial machines and unqualified individuals suited very well the managers who aimed at being in full control of the general organization of production and wanted a mass of workers who were docile and obedient.

Work then became jobs, and jobs were subdivided into specific tasks performed according to prescribed movements within prefixed times. In the USA, Frederick Winslow Taylor studied how a job should be carried out and instructed how it should be performed. In fact, the principles of the scientific organization of work prescribed "not only what is to be done but how it is to be done and the exact time allowed for doing it." (Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, 1911)

In other words, Taylor searched for what was supposed to be *The One Best Way* to accomplish a task in the shortest period of time. Similarly, the Gilbreths, husband and wife, examined the movements



made by a worker and suggested changes that reduced worker's effort and increased production.

In 1913 Henry Ford introduced the assembly-line for the production of the *Model T* car. He took the idea of the assembly-line from the slaughterhouses of Chicago where the carcasses were moved by a conveyor belt and were butchered in sequence by different individuals. With this important innovation in industrial organization, a turning point was reached in which the way tasks were performed (sequence and time) was dictated by the total machine (the assembly-line). The consequences deriving from that transformation were:

- a phenomenal increase in production that put, at the disposal of people, an incredible amount of goods at accessible prices;
- a strong rise in salaries that was the result of the high productivity achieved;
- a diffuse and manifest dissatisfaction for their jobs by the workers, the more they were becoming simple appendices to the mechanical apparatus of production.

Generally speaking, a better salary that put individuals in the condition to buy a larger quantity of diversified cheaper goods cannot fully compensate for a reduction in the mental capacity and human dignity of the workers.

This would be possible only if, what Taylor advocated, was a common occurrence, namely that the manual worker attached to a monotonous job "shall be so stupid and so phlegmatic that he more nearly resembles in his mental make-up the ox than any other type." (Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, 1911)

In fact Taylor was convinced that "the cost of production is lowered by separating the work of planning and the brain work as much as possible from the manual labor." (Frederick Winslow Taylor, *Shop Management*, 1911)

However, by demeaning the workers and the content of the work, a point was eventually reached when productivity started to wane. In the end, the refusal to work that appeared, more and more frequently, in the form of slack attitudes, absenteeism, strikes, or even sabotage,

pushed the industrial managers to search for new solutions in the way work was organized.

The first attempted solution took the form of promoting a general amelioration of the physical condition of work, on the assumption that "nothing is more certain than that uncomfortable conditions will lower output wherever the worker has the slightest influence on production." (Charles S. Myers ed., *Industrial Psychology*, 1929)

For this reason, some experts in the organization of work, while aiming always at an increase in productivity, suggested remedies like:

- a reduction in the length of the working day, because "every reduction in the working day leads to a decrease in accidents, spoiled work, sickness and absence" and, in many cases, "to an increase in hourly and daily output." (Charles S. Myers ed., *Industrial Psychology*, 1929)

- improvements in the working environment (lighting, heating, ventilation, etc.)

- a choice of methods of work appropriate to each individual instead of imposing on everybody a supposedly existent "one best way." "It is far preferable to train the workers in broad general principles and to help in the discovery of the best method of work for each individual worker in accordance with his mental and physical make-up." (Charles S. Myers ed., *Industrial Psychology*, 1929)

- a better selection of personnel in order to assign a specific job to individuals more suited to perform it, on the basis of their skills and personality.

A further step away from the "Scientific Organization" of work came when Elton Mayo was charged, in 1924, to conduct a research at the Western Electric Company of Hawthorne in Illinois. The researchers, that, initially, intended to focus essentially on the relationship between material aspects of work (salary, working environment, etc.) and productivity, discovered the existence of other important and decisive factors (listed under the generic label of "human factors") responsible for the high level of performance expressed by a group.

In fact, Elton Mayo and his associates discovered that, irrespective

of the changes, in a positive or negative direction, in the material conditions of work (e.g. better-worse heating, better-worse lighting) the level of productivity of a group of six female workers taking part in the research, not only was not affected but was on the increase in any case. This phenomenon was attributed, by Elton Mayo, to the fact that the workers had become a collaborative social unit and that trust and confidence had developed between the group and the direction. In the words of Elton Mayo:

"Management, by consultation with the girls workers, by clear explanation of the proposed experiments and the reasons for them, by accepting the worker's verdict in special instances, unwittingly scored a success in two most important human matters - the girls became a self-governing team, and a team that cooperated wholeheartedly with management." (Elton Mayo, *The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilization*, 1945)

In other word, the industrialists discovered that the best way to achieve the goals of a productive organization, that is a quantitative and qualitative high level of continuous smooth production, is to treat the workers in the best possible way in terms of material conditions and psychological factors.

This basic realization will characterize all the programs of improvement in the worker's condition introduced in the factories in the first half of the 20th century. However, even taking into consideration these transformations, we can neither ignore nor omit the fact that we are still in a situation of division between manual and intellectual work, with executors that are told what to do and executives that say what has to be done. And this sharp division, that is alien to the nature of a fully-developed human being, can operate quite smoothly only in so far we are in the presence of striking differences between individuals in the mastery of skills and knowledge.

In the second half of the 20th century, with the nearly general satisfaction of basic material needs (food, shelter, protection), higher level exigencies related to knowledge acquisition and personal devel-

opment came to the fore. A good salary and a satisfactory working environment did not, any longer, provide an adequate reward for people who wanted not only meaningful and creative jobs but also to be in control of what they were doing.

This was also the almost inevitable consequence of a general higher level of instruction.

"In 1940, [in the U.S.A.] the proportion of workers with a high school or college education was 39.1 per cent. By 1950 it had increased to 50.3 per cent and by 1959 to 62.0 per cent." "As people acquire more education, their expectations rise as to the amount of responsibility, authority, and income they will receive." (Rensis Likert, *New Patterns of Management*, 1961)

On the basis of this new reality, a new approach to the organization of work emerged, under the name of "human resources". The main aspects dealt with by the theoreticians and practitioners of this new approach were:

- The improvement of jobs
- The development of participation.

The improvement of jobs

The starting point advocated in the "human resources" approach is that "the expenditure of physical and mental effort is as natural as play or rest. The average human being does not inherently dislike work. Depending upon controllable conditions, work may be a source of satisfaction (and will be voluntarily performed) or a source of punishment (and will be avoided if possible)." (Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, 1960)

Through the analysis of the working process, the researchers discovered that jobs characterized by high fragmentation, high repetitiveness and low demand upon human skills and mental attention needed to be restructured because "nearly twice as many workers left the jobs with extreme mass production characteristics as left jobs

with moderate mass production characteristics." (Charles R. Walker and Robert H. Guest, *The Man on the Assembly Line*, 1952)

This malaise, that resulted in frequent abandonment of work (turnover), led to low performance and a general disruption of the productive process. The suggestions put forward to counteract this tendency were:

- the introduction of periods of rest that would soften the impact of the stressful rhythm imposed by the assembly-line;
- the transformation of the relationship between workers and their job.

This could be achieved by:

- job rotation "which clearly means job enrichment for the individual" (Charles R. Walker and Robert H. Guest, *The Man on the Assembly Line*, 1952) allowing him to understand and control various aspects of the working process;

- job enlargement that "is simply the recombining of two or more separate jobs into one." (Charles R. Walker and Robert H. Guest, *The Man on the Assembly Line*, 1952)

These two changes marked the realization that the fragmentation of work had reached its final point. In a total reverse with respect to the Industrial Revolution, when the minute subdivision of manual work had increased productivity enormously (as in the famous example of the pin factory), now "certain plant managers in other industries have been finding that a law of diminishing returns applies to the subdivision of jobs and that a recombination of certain fractured parts has increased efficiency." (Charles R. Walker and Robert H. Guest, *The Man on the Assembly Line*, 1952)

The development of participation

Another theoretical assumption (based on empirical evidence) of the "human resources" researchers, was that "the average human being learns, under proper conditions, not only to accept but to seek responsibility." (Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, 1960)

This inferred that people "will exercise self-direction and self-control in the achievement of organizational objectives to the degree

that they are committed to those objectives." (Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, 1960)

And to exercise self-direction and self-control means not only to be informed about the strategy (goals and means) of the enterprise, but also to have a voice in deciding the specific goals and means for implementing that strategy.

While these changes were introduced in the work organization of many industries, the general social and economic trend of the first half of the 20th century was that of a continuous movement of manual workers from the agricultural sector to the industrial sector. In 1870 in the United States 50.0 % of the workers were active in the agricultural sector. They were only 9.3 % in 1957 and still declining (3.6% in 1980). And then, from the second quarter of the 20th century, the service sector started a continuous growth that, eventually, led it to become the most important sector in the economy from the point of view of occupations.

And while most of the sons of the rural workers became manual industrial workers, the sons of what were the aristocrats of the past and of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois of the present found, increasingly, their occupation in professions and careers in the service sector.

## Professions

In the past, most individuals born to aristocratic or wealthy families never had the necessity to look for work. They had already at their disposal all the necessary means of sustenance and so they could dispose of their time in any way they preferred, even in the most unproductive or destructive one.

However, a life concentrated entirely on personal amusements, without a focus of interest outside that realm, is, for many individuals, hard to conduct. So, apart from administering their own properties or being occupied in public affairs, many so-called gentlemen engaged in professions.

These professions and the people who practiced them could be

put into three categories, assigning to their practitioners the general qualifications of “doctors”:

- The soul doctors: the priests. The clergy is one of the oldest professional bodies. During the Middle Ages and up to Modern Times, entering the clergy for the younger sons or being admitted to a monastery for the daughter of the aristocrats was a worthy way to embrace a profession and a mission of high renown.

- The social doctors: the lawyers. Lawyers existed in Roman society and they have continued to exist, since then, as one of the most consolidated professions whenever and wherever people have considered, or have been made to consider, necessary the recourse to external aid in order to resolve or get advice in a controversy.

- The body doctors: the physicians. The profession of the physician is also an old one (ancient Egypt). However, in medieval Europe the tradition was that "gentlemen did not work with their hands, and then were precluded not only from surgery, which was relegated to the barbers, but even from performing physical examinations." (Talcott Parson, *Professions*, in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1972). This reluctance disappeared in England around the middle of the 18th century.

These were for a long period of time, the only recognized professions for which a course of learning was developed in the early universities (Bologna, Oxford, Paris), in the faculties of theology, law and medicine.

With the economic growth engendered, from 1750, by what was later called the Industrial Revolution, two developments occurred:

- a new social division of labour was made possible by an extraordinary growth in productivity. This freed many individuals from conventional occupations and made it possible for them to perform new social roles;

- the performance of these new social roles or professions became more and more acceptable to the gentlemen as time passed. They found in them a source of social prestige and economic success, if not also personal satisfaction.

With reference to these new social roles, we can still use the cate-

gories previously employed, though with some adjustments and additions relating to their practitioners and practices. We have then these new professional groups:

- The soul doctors. In a secularized world where the importance of the Church and of the clergy is reduced, the priests are replaced by psychologists and psychoanalysts that take care of the inner and immaterial aspects of the individual, the psyche. To them, we could add a series of other professional figures that are occupied in shaping the minds of the people with all sorts of packaged information (from knowledge to entertainment). Working as journalists, teachers, editors, film directors, screen players, etc., they are the makers of opinions, fashions, fads, ideologies etc.

- The social doctors. The emergence of a mass society dominated by the institution of the state has generated a continuous swelling of the category of social doctors. In fact, the belief that society is, like the human body, an organism that can be regulated and cured by professionals, has justified the appearance of specific practitioners that, under the umbrella of the state, are supposed to govern supposedly existent entities known as: the economy, the market, the nation, etc. and promote goals known as: growth, welfare, security, etc. They do all this in the name of a society that is implicitly equated to the state. We see then the appearance of economists, planners, administrators, welfare officers, social carers, etc.

- The body doctors. Better living conditions, that result from improved shelter and nourishment, mean that people live longer and that more resources are allocated for the cure and care of the body. This has produced a health industry with an incredible array of health professionals, each one focusing on a specific part of the body. Besides the GP (general practitioner), new professional figures have emerged that shape, embellish, invigorate, beautify, the various parts of the body: the face, the breast, the muscles, the hands, the feet, the buttocks and so forth. We have then beauticians, masseurs, body-builders, plastic surgeons, etc.

The people belonging to these new professional categories, once they reached a certain status and grew to a certain number of practi-



tioners, organized as a group. They then demanded, from newcomers to the field, the requirement to attend a specialized course of training, at the end of which one was supposed to receive a certificate, generally recognized by the state, that allowed him/her to enter and be part of a professional body regulated and protected by the state. This certification and institutionalization of the profession, was presented as **the** necessary way to protect the reputation of the category. However, in the past it was the public (the consumers) that discriminated between good or bad lawyers, good or bad physicians, and so forth, without the need for certifications and institutionalization from the top. So, it is quite appropriate to suspect that this regulation-bureaucratization of the professions was essentially the indispensable way to protect the category from losing the control over consumers.

This was confirmed by the fact that, in order to further guarantee and enhance the fortunes of each institutionalized category, the state expressly forbade and legally punished non-registered individuals from practicing the professions. After that, only state certified doctors or lawyers, who belonged to state registered orders, could open a practice. This is the equivalent, in modern times, of the restrictions imposed, during the Middle Ages, by guilds limiting access to and practice of a trade. And, in a more stringent version, is what the caste system is all about.

It is no wonder that, on the basis of all this (certification, registration, licensing), an anti-conventional mind like that of George Bernard Shaw was induced to say that: "All professions are conspiracies against the laity." (George Bernard Shaw, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, 1906). And Jules Romains, through the doctor Knock, showed how this conspiracy, i.e. this professional swindling, could be carried out to perfection (Jules Romains, *Knock ou le triomphe de la médecine*, 1923)

In more recent times, the way professionals act has been scrutinised and this analysis has produced the thesis of the "disabling professions" providing "disabling help" (Ivan Illich et alii, *Disabling Professions*, 1977). This occurs by a process through which:

- professionals instil in people's minds the conviction that there

are new needs and new problems, and they present themselves as the only ones who hold the necessary solution;

- the ordinary human beings, after repeatedly having made recourse to them for treatment, become eventually unable to solve most personal problems for themselves and delegate almost everything to the supposed professional experts.

In general, it can be said that the professions, in the way in which they have emerged and have been organized, have been a way to grant an intellectual occupation to the sons of the aristocracy and of the wealthy bourgeoisie, in the past, and of the petite bourgeoisie in the present. However, this was not the only avenue opened to them. There was also a career in the military or in the civil service, that is, directly under the wider and growing wings of the state.

## Careers

The rise of the secular state and of the laity, especially after the French Revolution, resulted in growing opportunities offered to the sons of some strata of society (aristocracy, bourgeoisie, and also petite bourgeoisie) to embark on a career in the service of the state, which would lead to the enhancement of state power.

Within the state, there were and there still are three main distinct career opportunities:

**Politics.** Politics has always been an area of intervention for the aristocracy and oligarchy. This opportunity has existed since the time of the ancient Greek *polis* (from which the term politics derives) through to the period when the gentry and the big landlords debated in the English Parliament. For many, their involvement in politics, resulted in laws which favoured them, for instance by enlarging the size of their properties (e.g. the enclosure acts). However, at that time, politics was considered essentially as providing a service to the community, rich in prestige and power but not in direct monetary remunerations. It was only with the modern democratic state that politics became a career, open to almost everybody, and to represent the masses was an honourable way to receive a regular income (at

least for the time one was elected) and to amass a certain wealth (as a safe haven for the time one was not any longer in office).

The classic example of this can be found in one of the most dynamic and democratic of the Republics, the United States of America. In the USA, the so-called “spoils system” (the political winner gets all the opportunities to place his men in lucrative positions and in the control of lucrative activities) became the common practice from the first half of the 19th century onwards. The most successful and well-known implementation of the spoils system was Tammany Hall, a political district of New York city, where, at the beginning of the 20th century senator Plunkitt was celebrating the virtues of honest graft and the high mission of political patronage as the essential pillars of any career in politics (William L. Riordon, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, 1963).

Beyond politics, for those who wanted more discipline and action and less squabbling and babbling on political issues, there was something else. i.e. a career in the army.

Army. The army or better the practice of the army has been one of the main occupations of the aristocrats as leaders and of their followers as soldiers. As a matter of fact, fighting under the order of a chief or general has been, since immemorial time, a way to gain a living. This is demonstrated by the fact that the Italian term “soldi” (money) comes from soldiers, i.e. the pay of the soldier.

However, it was only with the French Revolution and with the *levée en masse* (1793), that the army became a very important sector of the state in terms of employment and career opportunities.

The development of the army as a professional career was sanctioned by the opening of schools of war and military academies, that prepared the necessary personnel for the task. Growing numbers were needed to direct and to perform the various military operations that big and small state powers undertook, especially starting from the end of the 19th century, when imperialistic adventures prepared the way for the two World Wars.

Imperialism was a constant source of demand for military personnel, dispatched to distant corners of the world (India, Indochina,

South Africa, Morocco, etc.) where bravery (read also: cruelty) and discipline (read also: blind obedience) provided an opportunity for advancement in the ranks.

Irish, Scots and Welsh military personnel participated in large number in the construction of the British Empire, but there was also the need for civil servants performing a purely administrative function.

So, besides politics and the army, for those who preferred less harshness and adventure and a bit more regularity and quietness in their lives, another career opportunity was open, at home and abroad, within the bureaucratic apparatus of the state.

Bureaucracy. In the course of the 19th and 20th centuries almost every state kept enlarging its sphere of intervention; to that purpose they needed a growing administrative machine to control and regulate an increasing number of aspects of social life. So many social relations and personal matters got under the supervision of the state that many citizens became oblivious of any difference between state and society and started thinking that a society (i.e. autonomous social relations) cannot exist without a state (i.e. compulsory administered relations). It is no wonder that, out of this instilled conviction, bureaucratic personnel and users of bureaucratic "services" have multiplied almost exponentially.

France has been and still is a paradigmatic example of the pervasiveness of state bureaucracy.

Karl Marx was conscious of this phenomenon already in the middle of the 19th century, when he described the French state as an

"appalling parasitic body, which enmeshes French society and chokes all its pores" with "its enormous bureaucratic and military organization, with its vast and ingenious state machinery, with a host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half a million." (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852 )

And, towards the end of the 19th century, Gustave Le Bon remarked that

"... the last of the bourgeois cannot see for his sons than a career on the payroll of the State. Instead of preparing individuals for the art of living, the school trains them to perform state functions for which no personal initiative is required at all." (*Psychologie des foules*, 1895)

Since then, the French state has grown continuously in terms of personnel and the degree of social control. The state bureaucracy, with all his departments and offices and sections, is a gigantic body that has put all groups and their social expressions under tutelage.

During the course of the 20th century the bureaucratic phenomenon which provided occupations and careers, has been present not only inside the state but also within business enterprises.

The mechanization and automation of work has led to an increase in the production, and a new career personnel was now employed in the process of registering the procurement of raw goods and the sale of finite products, through an array of buyers, accountants, secretaries, marketing and publicity experts, salesmen, etc.

In a highly productive society, this climbing of the socio-economic ladder by way of a career in non-manual occupations was the appropriate response to a series of requirements:

- employing, in quite light and appealing occupations, the sons and daughters of the petit bourgeoisie;
- obtaining their support to the institutions (the central state and the peripheral administrations) and organizations (the big business enterprise and its collateral activities) that granted them not only an income but the possibility of a betterment in their standard of living;
- strengthening the power of those at the top of the pyramid by providing them with a considerable number of people under their command or influence.

In other words, the career mechanism is a powerful device for the growth of loyalty at the bottom and of patronage at the top. This mechanism was to be replicated everywhere in order to make sure

that the masses were interested in the preservation of a system presented as the only one capable of assuring them a decent life.

For the masses to have an income became then equivalent to work under a master for a pay that (in real or monetary terms) would increase regularly. In fact two were the paramount objectives of the large majority of the people living in the 20th century: employment and growth.

## Employment

Over time, the idea that everybody had to work, from being a moral precept became also a state policy. In modern England, the revised law against vagrancy and begging (*Poor Law Amendment Act 1834*) centred on the establishment of workhouses where people received relief in exchange for work.

The Industrial Revolution generalized the condition of dependent factory work. Those who did not work were seen as people likely to fall into any vice and depravity. For the common person, to have an employment, was, at the same time, a duty but also a right.

The aim of granting employment became then,

- an economic imperative: the wealthy industrial élite had to provide work to the demanding masses because that was their economic role and also because, in so doing, they avoided social unrest.

- a social imperative: the trade unions presented unemployment as a dirty trick perpetrated by the industrial masters to generate an “industrial reserve army” that would keep salaries low and workers obedient, for fear of being sacked and replaced. So, the right to work became the main objective of trade unions.

- a political imperative: the politicians saw in full employment the way to achieve contented masses operating for the wealth and greatness of the nation. If not, through appropriate political measures, they needed to find a way of providing the highest possible number of work places.

Initially, and for some individuals, the machines were seen as the

enemy because they were replacing the workers. But soon it became clear that machines were helping in producing more goods, making them cheaper; this generated an increase in the number of consumers that, in its turn, demanded an increase in the number of producers (employed people) attending the machines. Moreover, as an added benefit brought about by the introduction of machines, it was possible to reduce progressively the length of the working day (from a maximum of 16 hours) increasing, at the same time, the amount of goods produced.

It was only after extensive mechanization in the early 20th century, with the beginning of the industrial automation that followed it, that the concern for unemployment reappeared in a quite widespread and vigorous way.

The solutions proposed could be divided into two main categories:

a) a further reduction in the length of the working day in connection with the increase in productivity per working hour;

b) a further increase in the number of additional working opportunities (whatever that meant) and in the provision of welfare assistance, irrespective of the work provided.

a) Working Time Proposals

In the past many philosophers and social thinkers wrote about the possibility of reducing the working day to just a few hours. Amongst them we have:

- Paul Lafargue, for which

"le travail ne deviendra ... un exercice bienfaisant à l'organisme humaine, une passion utile à l'organisme social que lorsqu'il sera ... limité à un maximum de trois heures par jour." ["work will not become .. a healthy exercise for the human body, a passion useful for the social organism, unless it is ... limited to three hours per day."] (*Le droit à la paresse*, 1880)

- Edward Bellamy, that envisaged a society in which

"the working hours are short, the vacations regular" and "all emulation [i.e. work competition] ceases at forty-five, with the attainment of middle life." (*Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, 1887)

- Bertrand Russell who openly stated that

"the road to happiness and prosperity lies in an organized diminution of work." This because "modern technique has made it possible to diminish enormously the amount of labor required to secure the necessaries of life for everyone." For Russell, "if the ordinary wage-earner worked four hours a day, there would be enough for everybody, and no unemployment - assuming a certain very moderate amount of sensible organization." (*In praise of idleness*, 1932)

- John Maynard Keynes who, in 1930, suggested

"to make what work there is still to be done to be as widely shared as possible." This would have meant the possibility of introducing a "three-hour shifts or a fifteen-hour week" (*Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren*, 1930)

#### b) Employment-Unemployment Provisions

Ever since the Great Depression of the 1930s, providing employment and being employed has become the mantra of every politician, economist and of all the chorus of the mass media. Full employment has been the wondrous aim of a society run by state rulers. And this aim had to be achieved without reducing the number of working hours and without stopping the introduction of automatic working devices. This was because, a very short working day could have given time for people to think about organizing their lives without the dominating presence of their national political and economic masters. As for technological progress, stopping it could have given an undesirable advantage in the competition for industrial supremacy to producers operating in other lands.

So, the same John Maynard Keynes that only a few years earlier



was suggesting a reduction of hours worked, now, with an incredible volte-face and using the weight of his intellectual prestige at that time, was advising state rulers to generate useless work in order to produce employment. In his economic vision, "To dig holes in the ground ... will increase not only employment, but the real national dividend of useful goods and services." (*The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, 1936, Chapter XVI)

The mix of policy measures devised and implemented by the ruling strata (political and economic) in order to achieve contradictory aims, namely to promote employment while, at the same time, increasing productivity via technological advancement, without any reduction in the working time, is something that seems almost unbelievable; and it is the clearest sign of the level of manipulation from the top and acquiescence from the bottom that has characterized a long part of the 20th century.

In fact, a sort of diffuse employment has been achieved through the following measures:

- employment in useless work

People have been paid to do things that have neither social nor economic value, like, just to give a few examples, opening and closing doors, pressing a button in a lift, making photocopies in a library, pointing to the entrance in a conference hall, and so on and so forth (except if this has to do with assisting quite old or handicapped individuals or in special cases of mass events). Patronage or prestige on one side and income needs on the other, can explain but certainly cannot justify these sort of occupations, especially nowadays when people can very well do this type of things by themselves or by relying on automatic mechanisms.

- employment in obstructive-destructive work

Bureaucratic and military personnel are the clear examples of employment that is not only parasitic but also obnoxious to the point that it should not even count as an occupation. To set up a huge military complex, to open embassies and consulates all over the world, to hire an army of paper-producing and paper-shuffling bureaucrats (e.g. in 2021 over 60,000 people work for the European Union and

there are 25,000 *lobbyists* with a combined annual budget conservatively estimated at more than 3bn euro that are paid to influence EU policy). All this makes for good employment statistics but is total economic nonsense.

In France, in the year 2019, the *fonction publique* (civil service) employed 5.6 millions people, that meant that one in every 5 employees worked for the state. How many of them performed a service demanded by the public at a price the public was willing to pay, could be assessed only if they were not a protected category salaried through compulsory taxation.

In the USA, state and local personnel (full and part time) for the year 2011 was over 19,4 million people. Federal personnel in 2012 was around 2,9 million people to which we must add military personnel that were in September 2012, slightly over 2 million units. All in all, more that 24 million people (that is 7.6% of the population) work for one or the other entities that make up the state machine. Not all of those employees can be considered as performing obstructive-destructive work but no one can effectively assess which ones are really necessary unless those employees, like everybody else, offered services in competition with other agencies and providers.

- wasteful-corrupting assistance

The large expansion in the number and size of international bodies and the multiplication of non-governmental organizations and charitable institutions operating in so-called under-developed countries, has generated highly sought after occupations. The work done and the assistance provided are, generally, more detrimental than useful because resources are mainly employed in producing the usual plethora of research documents in support of bureaucratic measures; or the funds allocated go to enrich western enterprises and local bureaucracies. All this has a corrupting effect upon people, making them dependent on continuous hand-outs, and has a depressing effect on potential producers that are not motivated to do any effort to get out of a backward condition.

- security staff

The violent meddling of some bully states in people's lives and

the introduction of laws forbidding the consumption of certain substances, has multiplied the need for hiring personnel occupied in security jobs (e.g. in airports, in cities) and in the manning of prisons and centres of reclusion (e.g. for immigrants). Without the existence of authoritarian and totalitarian states those occupations would not be required at all.

- planned obsolescence

A way to employ people is put into effect also by designing and building objects that have a prefixed life span, not because of normal wear and tear but because of purposefully built-in breakability or obsolescence. This has been called “planned obsolescence” by Bernard London in his seminal paper of 1932 and it was meant to provide a serious attempt to get out of the depression. Bernard London suggested that

“Government assign a lease of life to shoes and homes and machines, to all products of manufacture, mining and agriculture, when they are first created, and they would be sold and used within the term of their existence definitely known by the consumer. After the allotted time had expired, these things would be legally “dead” and would be controlled by the duly appointed governmental agency and destroyed if there is widespread unemployment. New products would constantly be pouring forth from the factories and marketplaces, to take the place of the obsolete, and the wheels of industry would be kept going and employment regularized and assured for the masses.” (Bernard London, *Ending the Depression through Planned Obsolescence*, 1932)

- consumerism and waste

Planned obsolescence is only part of a greater scheme that wants individuals to be full time employed workers and full time eager consumers. Only by constantly consuming, following the fads and fashion of the times and the fancy and fizzles of personal unlimited desires, can a society of employed masses exist in the presence of an apparatus of machines gushing out goods at an incredible pace. To

give an idea, already in 1866 Joseph Dixon had put into operation a machine producing 132 pencils per minute (7920 pencils every hour). However simple consumerism is not enough; it must be associated and reinforced by pure and simple waste, as happens, nowadays, with the average English household wasting from £250 to £400 a year in food (Article in *The Guardian*, 28 October 2007).

According to a report produced by the Institution of the Mechanical Engineers (January 2013) “due to poor practices in harvesting, storage and transportation, as well as market and consumer wastage, it is estimated that 30–50% (or 1.2–2 billion tonnes) of all food produced never reaches a human stomach.” (*Global Food*, 2013)

The consumerist society and the throw-away society are the two faces of the same reality that has its foundation in the desirability and necessity, for the ruling elite, of having people in full-time employment.

- slowing down

Full-time employment generates also situations in which some employees behave (and must necessarily behave) in the way so poignantly highlighted in the famous Parkinson's law, that is: "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion." (C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law*, 1957). This is true especially in the state sector that has witnessed the largest increase in employment. The state personnel, generally, uses the full-time working day in order to do something that can be done in half that time. Many employees have still quite long working days, as if the technological revolution in the offices (office automation or burotics) had never happened; and now even a longer working life is demanded for reasons that have nothing to do with productive work but all to do with the pension crisis (the impossibility to pay for the retirement of the employees).

- parasitic intermediation

Instead of direct action and self-help, we have a long chain of intermediaries that interpose themselves in between a certain service or good; this is especially true in the bureaucratic sector or in the professional sector where corporative interests conjure up schemes to

impose their services with the aid of the law. You have to go through those professional figures in order to reach a result that could be very well reached without them or by going straight to the end of the chain.

- paid inaction

If there are still pockets of unemployment, the devised solution is to pay people to remain calm and quiet and do nothing. The welfare state is built in order to allow the unemployable to sleep until late in the morning or to sit in a pub and drink beer. As the saying goes: "most of the cost of a pint of beer is tax; most of the tax is spent on dole; most of the dole goes on beer." Moreover, if this paid inactivity produces energy resulting in riots and broken windows, the police will intervene and the glassmaker will have a brisk business; so employment in policemen and glass workers will grow.

- total destruction

The very final solution is total destruction, either engineered by humans or unforeseen but welcomed (at least by some economists and journalists) when it takes place in the form of a natural disaster. The theoretical proponent of this solution is, once again, the most popular economist of the 20th century: John Maynard Keynes. In his major work he wrote: "Pyramid-building, earthquakes, even wars may serve to increase wealth ... " (*The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, 1936, Chapter X).

Thirty years later, the anonymous extensor (actually, Leonard C. Lewin) of the *Report from Iron Mountain on the possibility and desirability of peace* (1967) reiterated the same conceptual framework (peppered with plenty of sarcasm) when he wrote:

"If modern industrial societies can be defined as those which have developed the capacity to produce more than is required for their economic survival (regardless of the equities of distribution of goods within them), military spending can be said to furnish the only balance wheel with sufficient inertia to stabilize the advance of their economies. The fact that war is "wasteful" is what enables it to serve this function. And the faster the economy advances, the heavier this

balance wheel must be." (*Report from Iron Mountain on the possibility and desirability of peace, 1967*)

These obnoxious and obscene practices have been at work for several decades. Now, the technology of production and information associated with the reflection and realization, by a growing number of individuals, of the criminality, idiocy and inanity of these practices, is going to put an end to the mystifying world of employment and welfare, whose only justification was the fact that, in this way, people were receiving a monetary income.

In order to move beyond these absurdities, presented as solutions to impelling problems, we need to understand what has been happening in the field of technology and what subterranean social changes have taken and are taking place, even against the wishes of the ruling strata, and where these changes might lead us.

### **The end of occupations**

The 20th century has been a disastrous century as far as social and political organization is concerned. It has been the century when genocides, world wars, concentration camps, forced migrations, political persecutions and many other abominable phenomena have taken place. At the same time, in the field of science and technology, a flow of radical discoveries and continuous improvements have pushed the capabilities of producing material goods to incredible levels.

The mechanization of production that had started in the 19th century, has continued in earnest from the beginning of the 20th century onwards.

Mechanization affected every aspect and field of life. In agriculture, the McCormick reaper, invented in 1831, was perfected and introduced progressively, starting from 1846. In 1884, the year of McCormick death, there were 80,000 reapers in operation. In 1903, in the USA, Charles W. Hart and Charles H. Parr built 15 "tractors", a term coined by them as combination of the words traction and power.

In 1918 there were in the USA 80,000 tractors; the number doubled in the following year and by 1939 there were 1.6 million of them working in the fields (Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization takes command*, 1948). When machines that combined many processes (e.g. harvesting, threshing, cleaning and bagging grain) were introduced on a large scale in the first half of the 20th century, a greatly reduced number of men and women could do the work done previously by a large population of rural workers.

In the United Kingdom the occupation in agriculture went from 12% of the labour force in 1911 to 5.0% in 1951 (and down to 2.6% in 1980). In the USA, as previously pointed out, the farm workers went from 50.0% of the work force in 1870 to 12% in 1950 (and down to 3.6 % in 1980). (Herman Van Der Wee, *Prosperity and Upheaval*, 1986). This phenomenon has been common to all the industrial economies of the world.

Most of the workers, not any longer necessary in agriculture, found occupation in the industrial sector. Here too mechanization of simple tasks, that could be performed better and quicker by the machine, went apace. In fact, the fragmentation of work, that was one of the main reasons behind the incredible rise in productivity during the early phases of the Industrial Revolution, made possible to understand the basic tasks of a complex process of production and a vast number of anonymous inventors were capable of re-assembling the different components in a mechanical device (a machine).

As highlighted by Siegfried Giedion, "Invention was in the normal course of things. Everyone invented, whoever owned an enterprise sought ways and means by which to make goods more speedily, more perfectly, and often of improved beauty." (Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization takes command*, 1948)

Mechanization increased productivity (production per unit) and permitted a rise in the salaries of the workers. Ford Motor Company more than doubled the daily salary to \$5 at a time when it was, generally, \$2.34 per day. This was possible because mechanization and the assembly line had increased production tremendously and had made possible a formidable reduction in the price of model *T* (from \$850 in

1908 to \$290 in 1925). Higher salaries and lower selling prices made the winning combination for producers and consumers, so that, by 1927, total sales of Ford motor cars reached the fifteen million figure.

This dynamic was replicated in one industrial enterprise after the other, with the result that less and less people were necessary to produce more and more goods.

Clearly, in a situation when the needs associated to a more comfortable life for the masses are still unsatisfied, mechanization doesn't reduce the number of people occupied, because new personnel is demanded to attend a growing number of new machines.

However, the moment arrives when a plateau is reached: basic comfort needs are practically satisfied, and machines become not only cheaper but also more automative and can be introduced in even larger number and attended by a less numerous personnel.

In fact, the process of re-composition of tasks in a machine continues until a point is reached when an automatic mechanism, i.e. a mechanism that is the combination of different devices, is invented and introduced. At that moment the automatic mechanism relieves the human being of all manual efforts and is able to perform, on its own, a full operation or cycle of operations. A smaller number of workers are then required, these become supervisors and controllers of what the automatic machine does, charged to intervene only when a problem presents itself.

As reported by Jeremy Rifkin, "between 1957 and 1964 manufacturing output doubled in the United States while the number of blue collar workers fell by 3%." (*The End of Work*, 1995)

In more recent times, automation has appeared in the form of robots. "The total worldwide stock of operational industrial robots at the end of 2011 was in the range of 1,153,000 and 1,400,000 units." (World Robotics, *Executive Summary 2012*). The new *World Robotics 2020 Industrial Robots report* shows a record of 2.7 million industrial robots operating in factories around the world in 2019.

The introduction of automatic machines and robots in the industrial production does not necessarily mean that the general level of



occupation is drastically reduced but only that the number of industrial workers is lowered and that more personnel is assigned to other types of work, not directly connected to production, such as administration, commercialization and advertising.

And this is what happened, at least in the first phase of automation. In a dynamics similar to that of the passage of workers from agriculture to industry, in the second half of the 20th century we witnessed the movement of workers from industry to services. This process has been portrayed by some authors, notably Jean Fourastié, Victor Fuchs and Daniel Bell.

In *The coming of the post-industrial society* (1973) Daniel Bell presented, with plenty of figures, this evolution "from goods to services" as recites the title of one of his chapters.

Already towards the middle of the 1950's in the USA the number of people employed in the service sector overtook those working in the industrial sector. Nowadays, in the world's advanced economies, the employment in the service sector exceeds that of the two sectors, industry and agriculture, combined. The figure is in the region of 60-70% of people employed in the service sector. According to the USA Bureau of Economic Analysis, in 2009 "services jobs accounted for more than 80 percent of U.S. private-sector employment, or 89.7 million jobs."

This reality and this trend could be seen as a positive development, (i.e. reaping the benefits of science and technology) if it were not for the fact that, "the most important growth area in employment [in the USA] since 1947 has been government." (Daniel Bell) A large part of it, as previously pointed out, consists of people employed in the bureaucracy and in the army. It is worth noticing that the world's largest employers in 2012 are the United States Department of Defence (3.2 million employees) and the People's Liberation Army of the Republic of China (2.3 million employees).

If we consider the fact that automation in offices and, generally, in the service sector supporting the production and distribution of goods, is likely to reduce, in the future, the absorption of new personnel, it is possible that bureaucratic work in the state sector, assigned

on the basis of cronyism and for political reasons, becomes the most likely avenue open to those looking for a job.

However, these kind of occupations do not represent productive activities in terms of goods and services expressly demanded by the population. They are like social burdens imposed by political masters.

As a matter of fact, these occupations are increasingly becoming and appearing as:

- Economically unsustainable: the be in occupations where you receive an income while doing nothing productive has put an incredible, and in the long-term unsustainable, weight on the collectivity because it means to finance, through debts to be paid by the saving efforts of future generations, the consumerism of a large part of the present generation.

- Socially unacceptable: the idea that the squandering of resources by the state is the necessary condition for granting occupation to large masses of parasitic workers is socially unacceptable to those who perform a useful function in the various areas of social and economic life, producing goods and services really demanded by the public, in co-opetition (competitive cooperation) with other producers of goods and services.

- Technologically unconceivable: it is totally irrational to employ people to perform tasks that might be extensively automated. The service sector should undergo a vast process of restructuring in order to make it extremely flexible and leaner in terms of occupation. This process should be similar to when automatic switches were introduced in the telephony that abolished completely a cohort of switchboard phone operators (in the late 1940s, there were still more than 350,000 operators working for AT&T in the USA).

It is then time to imagine and introduce a social organization that is not based on work (resulting in wicked occupations) and growth (resulting in whopping consumption) because the general scenario of human existence and production has changed so much, especially in the last two hundred years, that behaving as we were still condemned

to a life of work, as starving animals, labouring in search of food and shelter, is ridiculously insane.

### **The spread of activities**

In the course of the 19th century, the time worked daily in industrial factories decreased progressively, as consequence of social struggle and technological progress.

From a peak of 15-16 hours a day at the beginning of the 19th century, it went down (in the United Kingdom) for children aged 9-14 to 8 hours actual labour in almost all textile mills, with 2 hours at school; and to 12 hours work for young persons under 18 (*Factory Act 1833*). In France, the workers achieved the twelve-hour working day after the February revolution of 1848.

The agitation of Chartists, Trade Unionists and those engaged in the Ten-Hour Movement in the United Kingdom was conducive to the introduction of the ten hour working day starting from the first of May 1848 (*Factory Act 1847*).

However, already in 1817 Robert Owen had fixed the goal of the eight-hour day of work and had formulated the slogan: Eight hours labour, Eight hours recreation, Eight hours rest.

This demand of the eight-hour working day was taken up by the International Worker's Association at its Congress in Geneva in 1866 as an essential preliminary condition for the improvement and emancipation of the working class.

This objective was reached at a later stage, in different times, in many countries, in one working sector after the other. We could say that the eight-hour working day and, afterward, the forty-hour working week, became a generalised achievement in the industrial countries during the first half of the 20th century.

After that, no movement for the progressive reduction of the working day has actually existed and no significant progress have been made in that respect. The introduction in France, in the year 2000, by law, of the 35 hours working week has affected mostly those employed by the state and has been continuously diluted and

restricted for the workers in the industry. All in all, it has been more an exercise in political propaganda than a measure to achieve personal advancement.

Nevertheless, the fact is that, the continuous gain in productivity (in the second half of the 20th century) via the introduction of automatic machineries should have led, almost inevitably, to a progressive reduction of the time allocated to work, and should not have required legislation. This move would have been economically possible, socially beneficial and technologically sensible.

Let's examine briefly an example where this has happened.

On December 1, 1930, on the eve of the Great Depression, W.K. Kellogg, the owner of Kellogg's factory, producer of cornflakes and shredded wheat, replaced the traditional three daily, eight-hour shifts in the Battle Creek, Michigan, cereal plant with four six-hour shifts. In other words he reduced the working week to 30 hours (6 hours per day) with a small reduction of pay the first year (7 hours paid instead of 8) and back to the previous level starting from the second years (6 hours work for 8 hours pay). As for production, "productivity was up, both because of the introduction of new technology and because of Kellogg's innovative approach to hours and work incentives. In essence, the management of Kellogg's was sharing the benefits of that increased productivity with the workers in the form of free time." In interviews conducted in 1932 by the Women's Bureau of the US Department of Labor "several women told the agents that the balance of their life seemed to be shifting from constraint/servitude toward freedom/control." (Benjamin Hunnicutt, *The Pursuit Of Happiness*, 1994)

However, in 1943, in compliance with the President executive order of a minimum wartime working week of forty-eight hours, the managers at Kellogg's factory reverted to the eight hour shift and never went back to the previous model. For the factory and unions bosses and for many, especially male, workers, work meant full time work and that, in its turn meant the eight hours workday (six days a week).

For many male workers, the eight hours working day attributed to them the important role of breadwinners, that have no time to perform menial domestic work. As for the bosses, their support for the eight hours workday derived from their answer to a theoretical question like: "If the most important part of people's lives is outside the context of work, who is in control?" (Benjamin Hunnicut, *The Pursuit Of Happiness*, 1994)

So, in order to be in control of people's life, the bosses need to be in control of people's working time, even when the people occupied are doing something useless or something that, relying on technological devices, can be done in half the time. As poignantly expressed by Bob Black:

"They want your time, enough of it to make you theirs, even if they have no use for most of it. Otherwise why hasn't the average work week gone down by more than a few minutes in the past fifty years?"  
(Bob Black, *The Abolition of Work*, 1985)

In the past, some of those thinkers who expounded the idea of a utopian society, introduced in their scenarios the notion of a relatively small number of working hours, with the distribution of work amongst all, and the performance by all of alternatively manual and mental activities. This was the case of Thomas Moore in *Utopia*, 1516 (no one works more than six hours a day) and of Tommaso Campanella in the *City of the Sun*, 1623 (no one works more than four hours a day).

For Karl Marx, technological progress brought about by the capitalistic mode of production would increasingly make possible the satisfaction of material needs with the least expenditure of human energy. This would allow for the transition from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom. "The fundamental condition for all this is the shortening of the working day." (Karl Marx, *Capital*, 1894, vol. III, Chapter 48)

For Pëtr Kropotkin the aim was that of "producing the greatest amount of goods necessary to the well-being of all, with the least

possible waste of human energy.” (Pëtr Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bred*, 1906)

Instead, a growing waste of human time and energy is everywhere to be seen. In more recent times Buckminster Fuller expressed his discontent about the fact that

“We keep inventing jobs because of this false idea that everybody has to be employed at some kind of drudgery because, according to Malthusian Darwinian theory, he must justify his right to exist. So we have inspectors of inspectors and people making instruments for inspectors to inspect inspectors.” (Buckminster Fuller, *New York Magazine*, 30 March 1970).

The motive is that, only by inventing useless work or by encouraging people to centre their lives on increasing consumption, the political and economic masters could succeed in presenting the eight hours working day as something necessary and in the nature of things. This massive expropriation of time in favour of dependent work is the indispensable requirement in order to keep the bulk of salaried people under control from the top. Otherwise, the risk is that individuals could activate a transition from dependent work to independent activities and from material growth to personal development.

Nevertheless, this is what technology on one side and moral and cultural factors on the other are making possible, desirable and almost inevitable if we do not want to go from crisis to crisis and from depression to decadence.

If a consistent reduction of the working day did not take place in the 20th century, now, in the 21st century, it is perhaps time to aim for a more audacious objective: the pure and simple abolition of work as a dependent occupation and its replacement, by and large, with self-promoted self-directed activities.

To do so a series of changes need to be put in place:

Automation

The introduction of automative machines and automatic

processes of production, that took a big push forward from the middle of the 20th century, needs to be pursued in earnest. The widespread use of computers for design (CAD : computer assisted design) and manufacturing (CAM : computer assisted manufacturing) is leading to a point where one could produce objects or components of them (modules) the way we now produce documents with a computer and a printer. The next phase of civilization, as far as production of objects is concerned, might be the cottage workshop where individuals or groups produce (design and manufacture) by themselves objects of daily use by way of user-friendly and versatile CAD and CAM.

Self-production (goods and services)

The existence and widespread diffusion of automatic devices, expert systems, personal digital assistants, smart sensors and so forth could bring back into the hands of individuals, families and communities the production not only of a series of goods but also of services that are now the regulated and protected domain of professionals. Kits for checking the state of the body (now performed in laboratories) and expert systems advising about possible course of treatment, could make the recourse to a doctor a rare occurrence (e.g. only in case of surgical intervention or rare ailments). The same could be said for the customized personal production of objects by way, for instance, of 3D printers.

Appropriate consumption

A problem that afflicts people living in advanced societies is not under-consumption, e.g. under-nourishment that means not having enough food to develop and function as healthy human being, but over-consumption that manifests itself in overweight and obesity. This results in bodily dysfunctions and illnesses that should not exist if we were not obsessed and manipulated by the mantra of production, consumption and growth. As a consequence of that, often we end up buying all sorts of unnecessary goods that are soon discarded in increasing number.

Waste reduction-elimination

In the consumerist societies based on buying on credit, following

the fashion, and purchasing things on impulse or only as a way to psychological gratification, the quantity of useless goods or goods that remain unused or are thrown away very soon is staggering. According to a FAO document (2011), it is estimated that “the per capita food waste by consumers in Europe and North-America is 95-115 kg/year.” On the whole, “roughly one-third of the edible parts of food produced for human consumption, gets lost or wasted globally, which is about 1.3 billion ton per year.” (VV.AA., *Global Food Losses and Food Waste*, 2011)

#### Modularity in production

The way objects are produced nowadays represents one of the biggest sources of waste. Objects, instead of being easily disassembled and their defective or out-of-order components quickly replaced, are made as compact blocks, soldered and internally inaccessible, so that when a part is malfunctioning, the entire objects needs to be replaced. This is also due to the generally high cost of getting it repaired by a professional. It is also the case when a product, like a computer, is upgraded. Instead of changing just an internal chip, the entire machine is sent to the scrap yard with enormous cost in terms of proper disposal and the unnecessary use of people's time, all in the name of employment.

#### Recycle

Recycling, one of the three famous R of the environmental movement (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) should became common practice and is, in many cases, becoming widespread practice also through the use of the Internet. The market of second-hand or vintage objects has expanded tremendously in the last decades. What is a no more useful or no more necessary for one person becomes the precious acquisition of another individual, prolonging the life of objects and making it superfluous to expend time in their production.

#### Long-lasting objects

One of the most important ways to eliminate unnecessary work is to produce objects that last. Clearly this seems not to be in the interest of producers who want a continuous and regular flow of consumers coming back to purchase their shoddy goods. That is why



a general rethinking of the relationship between producers and consumers is necessary if we want to move to a radically new paradigm.

This paradigm, centred on the spread of activities but also on the introduction of other changes, needs now to be made fully explicit.

### **Towards a new reality**

The paradigm envisaged here is based on three developments taking place progressively:

#### Shredding obsolete occupations

Some occupations can be greatly reduced in number or, in some cases, disappear, now or in the future, because the technology has transferred their tasks to the user-customer (e.g. automatic tellers). Bob Black, in a very trenchant manner, had this to say about obsolete occupations:

"Right off the bat we can liberate tens of millions of salesmen, soldiers, managers, cops, stockbrokers, clergymen, bankers, lawyers, teachers, landlords, security guards, ad-men and everyone who works for them." (Bob Black, *The abolition of Work*, 1985)

Perhaps some of those occupations are still necessary and should not be in the list. However, what should be the case is that no one should be paid out of imposed general taxation; this is the only way to ascertain how many of those employed in certain occupations are really demanded and so are justified. This means, to make an example, how many people producing warplanes will still be occupied in a situation of free allocation of funds.

#### Sharing necessary work

Some work that is difficult to automatize, not really pleasant but necessary to be performed, like cleaning the streets, should be shared by all those who are affected by the problem and relish the outcome (i.e. a clean street). These types of work should be taken as social functions, perhaps, in some cases, performed in a certain period of

life (young), for a certain period of time (months), and with a certain social recognition (merit) attached to it. By the way, this is the type of work that, conducted in groups and occasionally, for short period of time, could be considered like a social divertissement, an interesting diversion from other activities and already, in some cases (e.g. a group of young people cleaning a beach or a group of residents improving their street) is done in that spirit.

#### Starting autonomous activities

The technological devices invented and made available in the last few decades are characterized by the fact that they are (a) relatively inexpensive; (b) quite small; (c) giving high performance. This means that capital (productive tools) can be at the disposal of almost any person (or group of persons) who wants to engage himself/herself in the production of goods and services. Clearly, those who do not want to start their own activity could collaborate with this myriad of new small entrepreneurs, but it would be a different relationship than that of an industrial master and a dependent worker. These new units of production will be highly flexible and innovative workshops interconnected in a vast network of productive actors in cooperative competition (co-opetition).

These three developments will be accompanied by a general trend towards a new reality characterized by a series of re-compositions affecting human activities, as, for instance, between:

manual/intellectual

The re-composition between manual and intellectual work is possible because the differences amongst producers are more the result of the educational and cultural opportunities than caused by a natural outcome. This was very well pointed out by Adam Smith: "The difference of natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown up to maturity, is not upon many occasions so much the cause, as the effect of the division of labour." (*The Wealth of Nations*, 1776, Book I, Chapter II)

agriculture/industry

In the past there was not a sharp division between agricultural

(producing food) and craft (producing tools) activities, and the same people engaged in one or the other according to the seasons of the year (summer - winter). Nowadays, the industrialization of agriculture and the greening of industry could lead to an interpenetration between the two, with rural fields and industrial workshops scattered evenly on the land. This will also greatly reduce the need for occupations in the transport sector, putting in direct contact producers and consumers.

male/female

The social division of labour between men and women has crystallized and opposed roles and functions in such a way that both have been mutilated of some personal qualities and life experiences. In our age, the successful automation and robotization of many heavy tasks has made possible for everybody, irrespective of their sex and strength, to perform all sorts of activities. A situation might be reached (and has already been reached in many cases) where productive activities (domestic and social ) are interchangeable between men and women and what counts is the personal attitude and interest in engaging, preferentially, in some of them.

workplace/home

While costly and bulky machines in the age of industrialization have favoured the concentration of production in large compounds, the miniaturization and relatively small cost of productive devices in the age of post-industrialization, coupled with a vast communication network, have made possible a vast decentralization of production (of goods and services). Performing an activity at home and from home is a very convenient, flexible and generally pleasant way to avoid the stress of daily commuting, besides being, quite often, much more effective in the production process.

work/play

The aspiration of practically every human being is to engage in an activity so interesting and satisfying that the differences between work and play (almost) disappear. This is presently the case for many artists, writers, scientists and entrepreneurs. It might be the case for an increasing number of individuals once they start their own

creative activity, leaving behind a situation of dependent monotonous work. In fact play is a voluntary stimulating free activity, and a productive engagement chosen voluntarily, performed autonomously, putting into use personal skills, can very well have the qualities of a playful experience.

The re-compositions envisaged in this new paradigm mean that productive life-enhancing activities will be carried out by individuals that perform/impersonate various roles as:

Producer + Consumer (*prosumer*)

The term *prosumer* was first introduced by Alvin Toffler in *The Third Wave* (1980). With it the author intended to give a name to a new figure re-proposing an old practice, that is, self-production for direct use. The most popular form of it is the do-it yourself amateur, the self-reliant person that is capable of providing directly and autonomously to a variety of personal needs. This is also made possible by the introduction of working tools and service kits that facilitate the self-execution of many tasks. The example presented by Toffler is the introduction, early in the 1970's, of the do-it-yourself pregnancy test kit. As for the more conventional do-it-yourself (work and repairing in the house) a sign of the spreading of the prosumer is the fact that, in the USA, between 1974 and 1975 "for the first time, more than half of all building materials ... were purchased directly by homeowners rather than by contractors doing work for them." (Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave*, 1980).

User + Designer (*usigner*)

The availability of powerful software tools, in some cases in open access, has multiplied the number of people designing further software programs as an answer to certain needs. The time when the users will design and produce some of their own artifacts or intellectual productions and will circulate them (through direct sale or free of charge) is already with us. This is the most visible sign of a collective intelligence that is spreading everywhere. The first stage has been the utilisation of users-consumers as designers in the process known as crowdsourcing. The next phase will be the user designer becoming

direct producer. At that point most of the old divisions coming from past ages (capitalism and industrialism) will be foregone realities.

Doer + Decider (*docider*)

The biggest change in the social scenario of production and consumption is the unification between doers and deciders. This will mean the realization of the ever-present aspiration of the disappearance of the division and contraposition between masters and servants. That doesn't mean that relations based on authority (knowledge) and apprenticeship (learning) will cease to exist.

As clearly expressed by Mikhail Bakunin :

"I am conscious of my own inability to grasp, in all its detail, and positive development, any very large portion of human knowledge. ... Thence results, for science as well as for industry, the necessity of the division and association of labour. I receive and I give - such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination." (*Dieu et l'état*, 1882)

The individuals engaged in building the new reality will abandon many of the categories and terminology of the past (employment, jobs, markets, industry, etc.) and will move to a world animated by the ever-lasting principles and practices of caring and sharing.

For the first time in history we have solved, from a theoretical-technological point of view, the economic problem of satisfying basic human needs (food and shelter) for all. We have now to solve it at a practical-social level, through the engagement in productive activities that lead to our voluntary caring and sharing of resources (goods and services).

The so real and widespread opportunity to participate in personally worthy activities in a network of socially worthy individuals is, for all of us, a chance not to be missed.

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## FROM THE SERIAL MASS MORON TO THE SINGULAR HUMAN BEING

The portrayed human being  
The real human being  
The present historical reality  
The serial mass moron  
The preferable social reality  
The singular human being



### The portrayed human being

**I**n the course of history, the scholars that have focused their attention on human reality (philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, etc.) have attempted to portray the human being by assigning to him specific basic features that have then been listed and grouped under the label "human nature."

Among the most known depictions of human nature are those of Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. They present very straightforward though totally antithetic views of human nature. By offering a simple, albeit different, answer to a very complex matter,

they have succeeded in making their representations widely known. In fact, most people, even without knowing it, usually refer to one or the other image when speaking of human beings as shaped by human nature.

### **Thomas Hobbes**

For Thomas Hobbes the natural human being is a nasty creature, waging war against everybody (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) (*De Cive*, 1642). This miserable condition associated with a human nature which is intrinsically violent and selfish (*homo homini lupus*) can be kept under control only by the active presence of an external power (the territorial state) emerging out of the civilizing process. Without the territorial state as Leviathan, holding the power of life and death upon everybody, the very existence of the individuals, due to their nature, would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651)

### **Jean-Jacques Rousseau**

For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, at least in some of his writings (*Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, 1754) the state of nature is, on the contrary, almost a blessed condition of humanity, not tainted yet by the corruption and violence that will be introduced by the so-called civilization process. The human being in a natural state is still capable of expressing sentiments of empathy and sympathy towards other human beings. It is only with the introduction of relationships based on power that human nature gets corrupted and all sorts of unbalances and miseries arise.

In later times these two images got expanded and further elaborated by upholders of one or the other position, with one side equating the primitive human being to a wild animal (the beastly savage) and the other side extolling the virtue of the primitive human being uncorrupted by civilization (the noble savage).

These opposite views can be retraced, in a nutshell, in everyday conversations and in the attitudes of many contemporary people who either chastise the basic badness and depravity of the human being or praise his overall goodness and decency.

From a theoretical point of view, in common discourse, two strong characteristics are often attributed to human nature:

- Univocity : human nature is deemed to have only one dimension (either negative or positive). In addition to that, it is fair to say that the general stress has been put, overwhelmingly, on the negative side.

- Unchangeability : human nature (either good or bad) is seen as something not subject to modifications, given once and for all from the beginning of times. This position also has the general negative overtone that a bad human nature is considered unredeemable.

Many people come to hold these positions (the univocity and unchangeability of human nature) simply because they are those of the majority, or those transmitted by the political and cultural elite, or just to remain on the safe side and not be seen as gullible individuals.

Generally speaking, those who produce/diffuse information focus mainly on bad (violent) behaviour and we are likely to be more impressed and remember bad occurrences rather than the good or neutral ones. So, if we rely on superficial impressionistic notions, especially those spread by sensationalistic journalists, the case is strongly biased towards a confirmation of the basic badness of human nature.

Sometimes people vacillate from one position to another according to specific events or contingent experiences that support one view or the other.

However, from a scientific point of view we cannot underpin our general beliefs on episodic happenings even if they are important and relevant to our lives.

For all these reasons, it is appropriate to look at other scholars that offer a view of human nature capable of taking into account the rich ensemble of its various faculties and tendencies. To do so we can refer to a humanist who, within the short span of his life, has given us an admirable depiction of human nature.

### **Pico della Mirandola**

In 1486 the Renaissance scholar Pico della Mirandola delivered a famous oration under the title *De hominis dignitate* (On the dignity of



the human being). The main points highlighted in this discourse are that human nature is something:

- Complex: human nature is made of every possible feature (tendencies) existent in nature;
- Undetermined: human nature is open to every possible instance (occurrences) existent in nature;
- Malleable: human nature is shapeable according to every possible form (lower-higher) existent in nature.

In other words, Pico della Mirandola attempted to present human nature as a repository of every possible combination of tendencies, occurrences and forms, and it was the responsibility of each individual, endowed at birth of free will, to develop, out of it, and become a worthy human being. The *Oration* is then a hymn to a human life experience made up of free choices and challenges coming out of a human nature, which is open to any possible outcome. If the outcome is miserable the fault is not ascribable to human nature but to the specific human being who has squandered and misused the potentialities (human resources) that have been given to him.

This view of human nature was totally at odd with that held by religious and secular rulers, interested in depicting the human beings as intrinsically irresponsible, unpleasant and unruly minors to be kept under control and requiring guidance. It is no wonder that Pico's sudden mysterious death, at the age of 31, has been seen by some as the silencing (by poison) of what could have become a powerful voice against the mischief of a manipulative power.

It is now time to resurrect some of the positions and hypotheses held by Pico della Mirandola regarding the human being and to present a view of human nature more articulated and scientific in order to better deal with the current personal and social malaises.

### **The real human being**

The misunderstandings and biases surrounding the image of the human being have been possible because in each statement there is a grain of truth. In fact, throughout the human historical experience,

there is plenty of evidence to support one or the other of exactly opposite positions. However, this simple observation, instead of leading us towards embracing unconditionally one or the other view, should make us aware of two important aspects of knowledge in general and of human nature in particular:

- First, that it is highly inappropriate to use partial evidence to support certain views, stressing what fits into a pre-confectioned ideology and ignoring or minimizing all remaining arguments.

- Second, that what is specially qualifying for a proper study of human nature is to remark and reflect about the presence, within the human being, of a complex variety of tendencies.

The situation concerning human nature is even more complicated and subtle than it might appear to an uncritical mind, unable or unwilling to go beyond conventional polarities and superficial appearances. The fact is that the interplay between human nature and external reality is often marked by something quite unexpected and difficult to accept:

- Ambivalence: the co-existence of good and bad components, that mingle inside individuals and emerge unpredictably in many occurrences. For this reason human nature cannot be characterized in one sense or the other (good or bad) and most people cannot be assigned certainly and definitely to one category or the other. Within the same human beings, angels and devils, saints and sinners, can coexist (dormant or awake) in the course of the same existence or even during the short span of the same experience. A classic example is that of a usually quiet person who can then participate, in a crowd, in acts of violence following the spread of rumours.

- Ambiguity: the emergence of good from something supposedly bad and of bad from something generally assumed as good. There are, for instance, many cases of altruistic generosity and total devotion to other human beings (the so-called good actions) that result in producing passive individuals and dependent social groups (the admittedly bad outcomes). In other cases a misfortune (the admittedly bad) can subsequently produce something positive (the surpris-

ingly good) and this turn of events finds expression even in popular sayings such as “it’s an ill wind that blows nobody any good.”

In the past both these puzzling aspects of human nature and human experience have been remarked and elaborated upon by novelists and essayists. We have, for instance, Robert Louis Stevenson’s classic short story *The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mister Hyde* on the clash of good and evil within the same human being, and the writings of Bernard de Mandeville and Adam Smith highlighting the fact that, out of something widely considered reproachable, such as greed and human selfishness, something very positive, like industry and the reciprocal satisfaction of needs, can arise.

However all these subtleties get continuously lost, crushed by the incessant pounding of those in power who are interested in a simplified, but also stupefying, version of reality in which they portray themselves as the thoroughly good fellows fighting selflessly against the totally bad fellows, in the name of the common good. This is clearly a representation convenient (for them) but deceitful (for all).

It is then necessary to stress once more that, with respect to human nature, the reality is not so banal and the appearances are not so real as might be believe. For this reason the ambivalence and ambiguity of the human nature in the course of the human experience is something that must be discovered and examined over and over again.

That is why it makes always a lot of sense to practice the classic Greek exhortation *Know Thy Self* that encapsulates a perennial wisdom of humanity.

If we start this voyage of knowledge of the self, we discover that the real human being and so thus the real human nature, far from being a one dimensional static entity, is distinctively marked by three specific dispositions:

- potentiality: the human being at his inception is made of many raw tendencies/faculties [potentiality is connected with possible choices]
- plasticity: the raw tendencies/faculties are, at the start, highly

flexible and shapeable [plasticity is connected with preferable decisions]

- polyvalence: flexibility and shapeability allow the raw tendencies/faculties to become almost any conceivable reality within quite wide limits [polyvalence is connected with personal responsibilities].

In other words, the human being is the result of the potentiality-plasticity-polyvalence that characterizes human nature and that finds expression and realization in:

- Possible choices (expression of free will)
- Preferable decisions (awareness of alternatives)
- Personal responsibilities (acceptance of consequences)

For analytical convenience we can divide the human being and his human experience into a series of internal components and external agents. This should provide an idea of the potential complexity coming out of the interacting forces. At the same time, a true understanding of these dynamics should allow us to master the intricacies and show also, paradoxically, its basic simplicity.

The human being and the human experience are characterized by

- facets: emotive, cognitive, volitive
- dimensions: moral, mental, material
- factors: roles (functions), frames (circumstances), sets (environments)

It is the free and appropriate interplay of all these internal components (nature) and external agents (nurture) that produces the human being.

Unfortunately, in the past some scholars have unduly stressed specific tendencies emerging from human nature like, for instance, the search for power (Hobbes), profit (Marx), pleasure (Freud). This reductive view of human nature and of the related human beings obsessed by one single pursuit has been then considered universally valid and spread by popularisers that have not taken into account the specific aim and context of those studies.

In order to understand why we have a portrait of the human being that does not fully correspond to reality and, in quite a few

cases, is an almost complete distortion of reality, we have then to examine briefly the present historical situation, with some reference to its origin and development.

### **The present historical reality**

The present historical reality can be seen as one of many possible scenarios that could have taken place given the potentiality, plasticity and polyvalence of human nature. Usually what becomes reality, in the short to medium term, is the scenario which is easier to implement or that which offers the least resistance to some momentarily prevailing tendencies. This means that there is a reason (rationale) that justifies the occurrence of a certain reality but that does not equate reality with rationality.

The grounds underpinning historical reality are to be seen in the mix of facets, dimensions and factors that characterize a relevant number of human beings at a certain point in time and space. The mix is made of some components that are universal (related to the very essence of human nature) and others that are contingent (related to specific, transitory or localized aspects).

In other words, in order to understand the present reality we need to highlight those universal components of human nature that, in conjunction with some contingent aspects, have succeeded in producing the current human beings and the associated reality.

As previously said, the complex multifaceted human nature can be seen as a continuum whose opposing poles may be characterized using the easily understandable categories of angels and devils. Clearly most (if not all) people are neither angels nor devils but place themselves in some intermediate point on this continuum, moving towards one or the other of the two poles on different occasions during the course of their lives.

This simplified representation of opposing modes of being has unfortunately been wilfully exploited over and over again by those who occupy positions of moral influence and material power.

In fact, to any unbiased observer, it is very clear that an over-

whelming number of human beings occupy that neutral and quite indistinctive space within the continuum where the person is attending to his business and daily chores almost without any trace of strong (angelic or devilish) behaviour. This is, that state of normalcy so commonplace to depict, that does not attract any attention.

Moreover, if we pushed our observation even further we might discover that most ordinary human beings have never killed a chicken or a rabbit in their life and would refuse to do so unless they were starving (and even in that case with a certain reluctance and repugnance). We can add that - even for those who are instructed and given by the state a licence to kill - committing acts of violence has frequently resulted in mental pathologies and disturbing personality traits.

Nevertheless, as previously pointed out, the conventional image that rulers and most intellectuals circulate, is a gloomy picture of the human being as a violent and aggressive animal, or someone keen on pursuing his interests and pleasure at the expense of others; an individual who is totally selfish and inconsiderate of the needs and exigencies of others. In the words of a celebrated intellectual "... we must teach our children altruism, for we cannot expect it to be part of their biological nature." (Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 1976)

On the basis of this "official" view of human nature and following the introduction of technological devices that have made possible the mass-production of some material goods and services (information, health provision, instruction, etc.), the current overall cultural and social reality can be defined as a gigantic mass-society fragmented into so-called national sub-masses according to some minimum common denominator (usually the language). This mass-society is ruled by bureaucratic mechanisms and appointed representatives that are the recognized headmasters (regulators) and teachers (educators) of basically undisciplined and egocentric subjects.

The perpetuation of this cultural and social reality (the mass-society) is then made possible mainly by the widespread propagation and supine acceptance of a negative portrait of human nature.

This negative portrait, held by the Catholic Church (through reli-

gion) in the past and by the National Territorial State (through politics) in the present, is so partial that it cannot be considered other than a fabrication of reality. Moreover it rests on two very shaky pillars:

- A fallacy. If altruism is not part of the biological (human) nature, where does it come from? How could it be that some people can pretend to teach something (altruism) that is not part of their biological (human) nature? How can the high priests of power and culture (the headmasters and the teachers) be different from the rest of society and behave in a way (i.e. altruistically) that is not part of their biological nature? These are unanswered and unanswerable questions that reveal in this adopted position the presence of an inconsistent and unsupported act of faith that, in scientific discourse, is called a logical and material fallacy.

- A paradox. The fallacy is then compounded by an actual paradox arising from the fact that monopolistic positions of material power and cultural control (as under territorial state sovereignty) work in the direction of increasing the undesirable tendencies of human nature instead of minimizing them. This was poignantly expressed by the historian A. J. P. Taylor: "In the state of nature which Hobbes imagined, violence was the only law, and life was 'nasty, brutish and short'. Though individuals never lived in this state of nature, the Great Powers of Europe have always done so." (A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, First ed. 1954)

Nevertheless, this conviction of the devilish nature of the human being was and is still generally accepted and not critically questioned because of the existence of other strong tendencies which those in power try to avoid mentioning and the people are afraid to acknowledge for fear of being considered either naive or immodest.

Moreover, it must be said also that, for the common person, to rely on a working hypothesis that characterizes other human beings as mainly selfish and deceitful is not a totally insensible strategy because it leads him to be vigilant and cautious (principle of precaution). However, in actual reality, other principles and strategies prevail in the conduct of daily life and within familiar environments.

In fact it would be terribly stressful and practically impossible to conduct relationships of any type on the assumption that the other person is trying all the time to deceive and damage us. This is why we often do not abide by the principle of caution even to the point of giving extraordinary trust and power to people we do not know personally and who could generate havoc in our lives, and those of others. A classic example is political voting and being represented by absolute strangers.

After a close scrutiny, we could say that in the average human being we find plenty of professed alertness coupled with practiced ingenuousness, and this is not something we should categorise as outrageously negative. As a matter of fact, the present historical reality characterized by the existence of powerful institutions and powerless individuals, is directly related to the presence of certain basic tendencies of human nature that could be considered highly positive if they were not used by the ruling power for manipulative and exploitative purposes. The tendencies here referred to are those of:

- socialization (engaging in all sort of exchanges)
- participation (associating with all sort of groups)
- imitation (assimilating all sorts of behaviour).

On the basis of these powerful tendencies, strongly present in every human being (except those affected by pathological disorders of the personality), and taking into consideration our life and our daily experiences in a non-preconceived way, most of us can comfortably reach the conclusion that the human being, ourselves included, is most of the time:

- more gregarious than rebellious
- more compassionate than egotistic
- more gullible than deceitful.

However, the generalized presence of these features is not something that is personally and socially constructive unless they are associated with other counter-balancing ones (critical thinking, initiative taking, autonomy, etc.). On their own these human features have generated a reality made of very unpalatable and horrific aspects



(wars, concentration camps, tortures, etc.) that are not the foregone consequence of an evil human nature but the predictable actions of individuals that have been allowed to behave evilly by the accommodating lassitude and desire for a quiet life on the part of most people (the many gregarious, compassionate, gullible ones).

During the last century, the individuals that have committed large-scale atrocities have been able to do so behind the protective shield of a monopolistic territorial power called the state. This monopolistic power has also controlled the cultural educational apparatus that has shaped human beings. Considering the flexibility of human nature, it is then necessary to examine what this power has produced in terms of human beings.

### **The serial mass moron**

The society of the last one hundred years has been previously characterized as a mass-society.

If we contrast the present mass society with the aristocratically dominant society of bygone ages we find aspects that are not all negative. In fact, mass society means also that many individuals (and not just a few well-off aristocrats) are able to enjoy goods and services once the prerogative of an elite, and this is a positive factor. Moreover, many individuals have come out of a situation of passive subjection to an aristocratic master, from birth to death, and are more in control of their lives.

However, besides some positive changes, due in large measure to technological progress, many unpalatable features have also appeared. The most relevant is the fact that the mass society, especially that of the first half of the XX century, is not composed of a multitude of distinct individuals coming together. The bulk of it is made of more or less identical mass-men (*el hombre masa* depicted by Ortega y Gasset in *La rebelión de las masas*, 1930) under the guidance and tutelage of powerful political leaders (Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Roosevelt, Churchill, Franco, Salazar). Within a mass society dominated by the monopolistic territorial state, men are produced by the

rulers as serial objects in the assembly line of state-run schools, state-dominated media, state-controlled production and exchanges.

At a later stage (the second half of the XX century) with the end of the dominance of strong political leaders, we witness the emergence of figures (Adenauer, De Gaulle, Attlee, De Gasperi, Eisenhower, Macmillan) chosen to reassure people tired of conflict. Some of those almost fatherly figures coexisted with younger and more vibrant ones (Kennedy, Trudeau) who prefigured the current situation in which the leader is essentially a show-man / show-woman or is capable of acting like one. People require more and more to be entertained from politicians and being spared the effort to think and act, hoping that others will magically solve all their problems.

What supposedly characterized the society of the XIX century, namely the struggle for life and the survival of the fittest, has been replaced during the XX century by the incessant nibble of the pie and the arrival of the fattest. The current most important task is to consume and keep consuming because the economy, this magical entity that no one has ever seen, is said to need it.

Clearly all this has been possible because during the XX century, on the basis of an incredible increase of production, the warfare state first and the welfare state later have succeeded in generating what can be only named as the serial mass-moron.

Focusing on the contemporary mass moron produced by the state and by the associated weapons of mental destruction, i.e. the mass media, three aspects, shared by a consistent number of people, come to the fore. They are:

- physical obesity
- mental apathy
- moral aridity

The existence of the serial mass moron has been substantiated by experimental studies and also by real events. We examine briefly only some exemplary cases that highlight the manipulation and degeneration of people living in a mass society under state control and tutelage. Manipulation and degeneration has been made possible, as hinted previously, by the political and cultural rulers exploiting, to

their advantage, some aspects of the nature-nurture dynamics, namely:

- Prestige linked to status (human feature: docility). Stanley Milgram, perhaps one of the most unconventional and fertile social psychologists of all time, devised an experiment (1963) where a subject was given permission, by a supposed scientific authority (an impersonator), to administer (simulated) electric shocks of various intensity to a supposed learner (an actor) aimed at improving his memory performance. The fact that many subjects (in a specific case 26 out of 40) were ready to inflict what they thought were real shocks of extraordinary magnitude (450-volt) under instruction from a man in white coat (a professional) was and still is indicative of an human inclination to be obedient to authority even when highly immoral requests are put forward. (Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 1974)

- Power linked to role (human feature: compliancy). In the Zimbardo experiment (1971), a group of students was randomly assigned to perform the roles of prison guards and prisoners in a mock prison inside the psychology building of Stanford University (California). The prison guards were, almost from the start, so taken by the role and so conscious of their power that they behaved in a very authoritarian and sadistic way towards their fellow students acting as prisoners, who became, for the most part, strangely submissive and compliant. The experiment had to be terminated after only six days (it was supposed to be conducted for two weeks) because it was getting out of hand, rising moral issues of violence and psychological abuse incompatible with scientific research. (Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 2007)

- Pressure linked to number (human feature: conformity). The Asch experiment (1955) was a sort of scientific test of the famous Hans Christian Andersen tale *The Emperor's New Clothes*, where people repeat what the majority proclaims even if the statement is sheer unreal nonsense. In the experiment, a subject was put in a group in which the other members of the panel were instructed by the experimenter to give wrong answers to a series of visual clues. The result

was that in many cases (36.8%) the subject followed the majority, giving grossly incorrect responses against his senses and better judgment. The social pressure to conformity was so strong for quite a few, that they preferred to be absolutely wrong, siding with the majority, rather than perfectly right on their own. (Solomon Asch, *Opinion and Social Pressure*, 1955)

The central aspect, which is highly disturbing and worrisome, emerging from all these experiments, is that some features of human nature that are very necessary and useful for promoting sociability and smooth social intercourses (docility, compliancy, conformity) can also become, in the hands of any power, aggressive weapons to push people into committing all sorts of idiocies, misdeeds and even atrocities.

In other words, the serial mass moron so dear to the state power for his docility, compliancy and conformity, is a jolly good fellow, generally incapable of harming a fly, who could very well take part in acts of brutality and programs of mass extermination if only instructed by appropriately dressed up men (e.g. scientists in white coat or soldiers in high ranking uniform), who enjoy legal status (e.g. state servants) and are recognized and backed by a consistent number of other jolly good fellows (i.e. artfully manipulated individuals). This is what has already been qualified as the “banality of evil” (Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 1963).

So, when atrocious events take place there is no need to trouble oneself afterwards with indignant discourses on the badness of human nature and lofty invitations to redemption and conversion. These are wishy-washy perfunctory proclamations intended to cover up the really rotten mechanism that has made all that possible, namely the attribution of monopolistic sovereignty to a certain entity (the territorial state) in whose name and under whose instigation almost all atrocities are carried out. The existence of this monopolistic power constitutes **the** most appalling danger to the healthy development of human nature. Until that power is exposed and dissolved we are likely to witness or even participate in extreme cases

of mass folly (like the Rwandan Genocide in 1994) or in ordinary events of moral misery.

Let us present some of these ordinary events of moral obscenity to make even clearer what we are referring to:

- The Kitty Genovese stabbing. In 1964, Catherine Susan Genovese, commonly known as Kitty, was stabbed to death near her home in Queens, New York. The same man, who even raped her, hit Kitty Genovese repeatedly in two separate attacks. Many people living in the area were at least partly aware that somebody was being savagely attacked but they did practically nothing. Finally, after the second attack, a person called the police; Kitty Genovese died in the ambulance on her way to the hospital. The full circumstances surrounding this death, while not so horrible as then reported by a New York Times journalist (Martin Gransberg, *Thirty-Eight Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police*, March 27, 1964), are nevertheless terrifying and indicative of the apathy and indifference of people living in a mass society.

- The James Bulger killing. In 1993, James Bulger, a two-year child, was abducted and killed by two adolescents, aged ten. The boys took the child to a distant canal and to other places. During the long walk, the distressed and already bruised child was seen by 38 people but only two intervened in a mild way protesting about the way he was treated; however, like the rest, they did practically nothing. James Bulger was finally led to a railway line near the Walton & Anfield station (Liverpool) and hit with an iron bar that fractured his skull. After causing 42 injuries all over his body, the boys put the child's body across the railway line where he was cut in half by a train after they left. This episode repeats the same pattern of the previous one; many people saw that something was wrong but had not the will, the courage, the desire to intervene. For the serial mass moron intervention is the business of the state.

Now let us examine an episode in which the state was called to intervene.

- The Jordan Lyon drowning. In 2007 Jordan Lyon a boy of 10 jumped into a pond near Manchester (U.K.) to save his sister. After

leading her towards the bank he slipped down into the water because he could not support her weight. The policemen called to the scene in order to try to rescue him did not intervene because, as was later reported, they had not undertaken their water rescue and health and safety training.

What these episodes show is the diminishing of humanity and the reduction of the individuals to machines devoid of feeling, thinking, willing. The serial mass moron has abdicated his role as a human being and has delegated everything to Big Brother, the territorial monopolistic state to which he has handed over his body, his brain, his soul.

The serial mass moron generated by the Big Brother state is now:

- A master in the displacement of responsibility
- An expert in the avoidance of blameability
- A champion in the art of gullibility.

Apart from some serious instances of extraordinary individual violence, the serial mass moron can be assimilated more to a herd of sheep than to a pack of wolves. As a matter of fact the conventionally-held image of men like wolves has never been quite right and so the old (false) statement “homo homini lupus” should be replaced by a new more realistic one: “homo homini loco”. This characterization (*loco* = insane) means that we have slowly become total idiots who deceive ourselves in believing that social problems arise from the intrinsic badness of human nature while actually they are generated by the loss of any trace of human nature. Rulers have manipulated human qualities (and have been allowed to do so) in order to destroy human nature (humanity) and so justify their oppressive role of guardians. What has emerged is the “controlled insanity” so well depicted by George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where “the truly characteristic thing about modern life was not its cruelty and insecurity, but simply its bareness, its dinginess, its listlessness.”

To become a serial mass moron is the main or most likely avenue open to most people in a mass society shaped by Big Brother the monopolistic state.

However, it is not the only option for those who do not want to be

made mincemeat to be pressed into the same mould, identical for everybody (leading to the state manufacture of identities).

Paradoxically, the rulers profit especially from the most peculiar qualities of the human being (potentiality, plasticity, polyvalence) which help to make him a docile instrument, fixed in a pre-established imposed pattern and, in the end, devoid of those very qualities so specific to a fully-functioning human being. So those who are not interested in becoming serial mass morons should engage in recovering those human nature qualities that can be put fully to use in a totally different social reality that is not only possible but also preferable.

### **The preferable social reality**

The complexity of human nature and the variety of human beings and human experiences (the facets, dimensions and factors) is something we should be aware of at all times, if we only paused to think.

Once we realize this, we have also to accept the fact that goodness and badness, apathy and vitality, creativity and conformity, within the same person or as dominant traits in different persons, are expressions of human nature that cannot be modified or abolished by decree but should always be taken into account.

Given this situation, there are three important points that must be stressed when we refer to social dynamics and that should be put into effect when we deal with social organization:

1. No one (and certainly not the violent, the scrounger, the apathetic) should be allowed, separately or jointly, to define the overall reality that everybody has to comply with. Under the rule of the mass (democracy) this is unfortunately the case; a case that can never be justified no matter how apparently strong is the weight behind this imposition (the will of the majority) and how persuasively are the words with which it is upheld (solidarity, equality, security, etc.).

2. The highly rich interrelationship, which is a mixture of human nature-human beings-human experiences, requires a social organiza-

tion characterized by a mechanism that allows for this complexity and variety to be freely expressed. This requires the emergence and acceptance, side by side, of parallel societies based on voluntary forms of association set up and chosen by each individual.

3. A multiplicity of parallel voluntary societies, each one legitimate in its own right, is only possible if the power is highly diffused amongst individuals so that no one is in a position to force his/her arbitrary will on others.

In different ways, these three points reiterate the same aspiration of personal freedom and voluntary agreements, for everybody and in every context.

As already pointed out, the notion of the mass society contained certain potentialities that could have developed into something similar to parallel societies if the toxins of nationalism, monopolism, territorialism, had not been incubated by the violent and the scrounger and inoculated to the apathetic majority, channelling everybody towards national monopolistic territorial statism, with its resulting moral and material disasters.

The emergence of the masses out of passivity and exploitation was a positive outcome of modernity providing that, out of the masses, individuals had sprouted, with distinct personalities and interiorized responsibilities.

This could have been quite possible because the spell of sacral authority (impersonated by the Church hierarchy) had abated and the reverence to frozen dogmas had been broken in favour of more enlightened and scientific beliefs. However it did not happen because the struggle against Church obscurantism and social elitism was in the end monopolized by an entity, the rising national territorial state, that subsumed/assumed all the worst aspects of the power of the Church and multiplied them for its own glory.

What we have now is a mass society in which we can roughly identify three kinds of people:

- The feebles. Those who do not know and are aware, up to a certain point, that they do not know; for this reason they are also



afraid to take decisions concerning their life choices. Their aspiration: delegation of power

- The freedom-lovers. Those who know enough to be willing to take chances with their own life and are also aware of the complexity of the overall reality; for this reason they are not interested in taking decisions for everybody as they are already occupied with making the few right decisions still under their control concerning their own affairs. They want to be neither master nor servant. Their aspiration: self-power, i.e. personal autonomy.

- The fraudsters. Those who don't know enough or don't want to know how complex the overall reality is, while assuming and pretending to know a lot; for this reason they are convinced that it is highly appropriate for them to take decisions for everybody about everything, as their choices, in their opinion, are the best of all, for all. Their aspiration: arrogation of power.

The undeclared connivance of the feeble with the fraudster (in a sort of dynamics reminiscent of that between the masochist and the sadist) has largely crushed the independent freedom-lover. The mechanism of parallel society would then permit the realization of all aspirations without forcibly affecting everybody, namely those who do not want to decide for others or to delegate to others. In fact it would accommodate also those who are unwilling to take decisions by themselves, leaving them free to set up their own specific institutions, financed by them and looking only after them.

The preferable social reality here advocated is not one emerging out of extraordinary fits of imagination or feats of ambition in which only the best aspects of human nature find their place, with all the rest discarded by decree. This rosy picture that we find, in various guises and to varying degrees, in social blueprints and party manifestos, is neither what we do need nor what we can have. What we should aim at is a social mechanism, possible and practicable, that does not pretend to achieve the impossible, illusory and idiotic task of modifying human nature (for instance, to suppress forever all aggressiveness) but one that uses the basic human tendencies, even

those that are seen as negative ones like selfishness and aggressiveness, and employ them in the best and most fruitful way.

For example, cooperation and competition are both engrained in human nature and it is not sensible to praise one over the other or to try to suppress one in favour of the other, as politicians and journalists have done and are still doing frequently and pointlessly.

There was a period (the XIX century) in which competition (the struggle for life) was commonplace. In more recent times cooperation has become the mantra.

However, what is not very clear to people fixated by an ideology is that, for instance, by suppressing *competition* we might be saying farewell to *competence* and *competent* individuals (all those terms have the same etymological root) and introducing a nightmarish world inhabited by social automatons devoid of energies, challenges and ambitions; all this just in order to preserve an egalitarian situation.

As for cooperation, this could very well result in corporatism, nepotism and all sorts of nefarious activities in which local or national groups “cooperate” callously to the detriment of everybody else.

What is required instead is what has already been advocated previously, namely a social reality characterized by a social mechanism in which the many facets, dimensions and factors are left free to operate and are given shape and direction by the free interplay of all the actors, and in which no one is dishonestly backed by a superimposed monopolistic power or forcibly shielded from personal responsibilities.

If this feasible and highly preferable social mechanism is missing or is not permitted to operate successfully, then the result could be a defective, maimed social reality and consequently, and very likely, deprived, maimed individuals.

That is why a new social reality requires a human being with a new outlook and vice-versa.

In other words, in order to realize this preferable social reality open to many possible paths for all, we need a singular human being.

## **The singular human being**

The person that we should expect to see emerging from the various possibilities open to the individual, by the development of human nature, is certainly not the idealized figure of a saint or a hero on a massive scale. This scenario is not very likely and perhaps not even very likeable.

What is needed is simply a human being free to develop his/her potentialities without other human beings organized as a power entity to block this development and to subdue him/her to their own whims. Whenever this blockage succeeds we have a mutilated personality, relegated in a subordinate role, in a determined frame, within a confined set of choices.

The assaults to human beings have come for the most part from centres of power rather than from other autonomous individuals. In our time, the central territorial state, promoter and ruler of the mass society and the mass man, has been and is the main culprit. Prolonged act of organized violence are possible only through a structured entity which has arrogated to itself the monopoly of violence and the licence to kill. The only organization with these features is the territorial state.

Moreover, this monopolistic territorial power justifies its existence attributing to everybody else vices and misdeeds (deceit, aggressiveness, stealing, etc.) that are proper to its own kind.

It is then quite appropriate to sketch the contours of the singular human being here envisaged by pointing out and stressing the radical differences with the mass-moron of the mass society. To this purpose three alternative aspects come to the fore:

- Individuality vs. identity
- Differentiation vs. integration
- Distinctiveness vs. sameness

### **Individuality vs. identity**

Individuality, a term here used as meaning the process of individ-

ualization and the formation of an individual personality, is a concept rejected by the ideology of the mass society. The cultural promoters of mass society (state intellectuals and state journalists) use the term identity as a replacement for individuality. However, this is a deceitful and absurd substitution because those two terms mean exactly the opposite.

To expose the radical difference we can say that the serial mass moron has got and carries upon him an identity (usually a fabricated group similarity) while the singular social being develops and displays an individuality (i.e. a formed individual personality).

An identity, like its most common embodiment, the identity card, is something given/attributed to the person or recorded about the person by an external agent (currently the territorial state) and has the function of identifying subjects for reasons of central control and top-down organization. In a mass society people have become more or less identical, at least those living within a certain territory controlled by the nation state, and are supposed to be so because they are said and are expected to have a national identity (speak the same language, eat the same type of food, abide by the same rules, etc.).

Individuality (individual personality) is something completely different.

First of all, it cannot be attributed like a passport number. As a matter of fact the more somebody uses bureaucratic means of identification (like numbers or bar codes) the more the individual is depersonalized and loses his/her individuality. Certainly a number (like the one stamped on the arm of a prisoner in a concentration camp or that stamped on a passport given to those living in national cages) is a good way to pinpoint an individual but is totally useless for defining/describing a sense of and the reality of individuality. Secondly, individuality (individual personality) is mainly the result of a personal unique development in which the external elements may act as facilitators or stumbling blocks but in no way are to be considered the essential or principal makers of it, as in a mass society.

#### **Differentiation vs. integration**

The total neglect given, in a mass society, to individuality is

coupled with the stress put on integration. A person brought up in a certain culture, who moves to a different region of the world, is asked to integrate himself to that culture and to assimilate the modes of life dictated by the dominant group. Clearly we are not referring here to ways of conduct having universal value (e.g. tolerance, respect, etc.) because the person is supposed to observe them already. If this is the case, what is required should not be called integration but humanization or maturation. Here we are referring to the fact that the dominant group pretends to assimilate the newcomer into a way of life assumed superior in every aspect (otherwise there would be no acceptable justification for this pretence). In so doing the dominant group wants to transform what he labels as the foreigner into another national serial mass moron in order to control him better. This is a most unpleasant manifestation of arrogance and the pinnacle of that very selfishness that the rulers of a mass society seem so keen to condemn. In fact, "selfishness is not living as one wishes to live. It is asking others to live as one wishes to live." (Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, 1891)

The integration advocated by the rulers of the nation state is nothing other than the nationalization of the individual and the suppression/submission of his natural and precious tendencies towards both individualization (specificity) and universalization (cosmopolitanism). It is very unfortunate that the catchphrase "*vive la difference*" originally used in praise of the difference between sexes has not been applied also to each individual, cherishing his/her uniqueness as a quality to protect and respect.

Clearly we are not here discounting the desire of a person to be part of a group and so to be integrated into that group and assimilate its cultural features. However this should happen in a voluntary way that leaves the person totally free to choose the group (or groups) to whom he/she wants to associate and the features he/she wants to imitate.

The defining options: I link - I leave - I stand alone, with all the possible nuances and gradations, should be always available to anyone. The end result would be a distinctive human being, self-

defined and self-developed, freely and fully associated with the groups of which he/she wants to be member.

### **Distinctiveness vs. sameness**

The mass society, in which identity and integration are considered positive and necessary features, is a society based on sameness. The school and the mass media are the equivalent of the assembly line, where a serial product is manufactured by way of indoctrination, using the usual weapons of mass deception. The mass product is, in this case, the human being itself, made serially according to the specifications of the bosses, the state rulers. The fact that in the state factory the workers elect the bosses does not make much difference in terms of the sameness of the goods produced (a gloomy and largely identical existence) and is not very different from the past when the ruler was installed in power by the acclaiming crowd.

Both the past and present rulers were applauded and elected because they successfully presented themselves as the protectors of the people and the lovers of mankind. What they, constantly, do fail to add to their public profile is that they cannot really stand the singular human being in the flesh because it disconcerts and disrupts their plan of total control and top-down imposition.

That is why the aspect of human beings distinctiveness is a crucial one for those who want to go beyond mass society and mass men. It must be said again that this does not mean that the sharing of certain features is something not only expectable but also desirable. In fact we could say that the more a person expresses a mix of sharing features (a *mestizo*) the more accentuated is his singularity.

THE STRESS PUT HERE on individuality, differentiation and distinctiveness is due to the fact that in the current situation these aspects are all crushed in many ways. However, what in actual fact would be congenial to human nature is for the human being to be able to experience a continuum of social and personal realities characterized by:

- universality: the commonality of human race

- plurality: the variety of social groups
- uniqueness: the peculiarity of individual beings

Moving along this continuum the human being voluntarily chooses to place himself at various points in different periods of time, on the basis of his personal and social exigencies. The more he moves towards and mingles with people the more he is expected to share the common principles of humanity. The more he lives by himself the more he has the right to be left undisturbed and to be idiosyncratically eccentric.

All these different possibilities/avenues open to the human being are what make the singular human being as opposed to the serial mass moron.

Singularity is here characterized by three aspects:

- Specificity: to become a specific individual whatever that means in terms of differences or similarities with respect to other human beings;

- Voluntariness: to develop this specificity through personal free choices;

- Responsibility: to be fully accountable for the choices made and accept/bear all the (positive or negative) consequences.

We are returning here to the image of the human being depicted by Pico della Mirandola, as the architect of his own life by the use of a repository of tools (the human nature) at his disposal.

This is what has been stressed from Appius Claudius (*Fabrum esse suae quemque fortunae* - each human being is the maker of his own fortune) to Francis Bacon (*Chiefly, the mould of man's fortune is in his own hands*).

This is exactly what Thoreau had in mind when he wrote:

"I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscientious endeavor." (Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854)

The same concept has been later on reaffirmed by another critical independent mind with these words:

"To be fully aware of difficulties and to accept them is a distinctive mark of human life, making it different from that of domestic animals such as hens, sheep, armchair journalists, parrots, and the like." (Ignazio Silone, *The School of Dictators*, 1938)

And this is the true essence and aim of the singular human being arising from human nature.



## FROM COMPULSORY TAXATION TO VOLUNTARY ALLOCATION

Origins

Sequel

To the present

Taxation : justifications

Taxation : justifications and reality

Taxation : justifications and the hidden agenda

Some considerations

The perverse remedies

The possible solutions



### Origins

**I**t has been proclaimed often that taxes (and tarts) have always existed.

It is perhaps closer to the truth to say that, from the moment somebody seized the power to dominate, control, protect somebody else, he also took the power to extract a revenue from

those subject to him, in order to be paid for actual or presumed services, mainly security.

Usually, the menaces and assaults to people's security came not from the common person (e.g. the rural labourer) but from the same power that, while protecting and dominating its own productive flock, was eager to increase its revenues, attacking, subjugating and incorporating other territorial powers and their productive flocks.

So, it is very appropriate to apply the saying *homo homini lupus* (Man is wolf to man) not, generically, to the 'common men' but, specifically, to the 'men of power,' and, more precisely, to those hungry for more power and willing to go to war for it.

In other words, those who produced or could produce disorder and insecurity were also those who, under other disguises, were meant to impose order and security. And, for performing these two functions of war (disorder + insecurity) and peace (order + security), all of them imposed a payment that, in the Middle Ages, during feudalism, was known as 'tithe,' being one tenth of what was produced.

## Sequel

In the course of time, with the introduction (or reintroduction) of monetary exchanges, payment for goods and services was more and more performed with the use of coins.

At that point, the appropriation of those gold and silver pieces became the core interest of the power, to pay for wars and wares. More so when the power became the state.

The behaviour of the state towards money has been theorized and described under the name 'mercantilism' to mark a strong interest for all the matters related to merchandising and trafficking.

Mercantilism is focused on money and on everything affecting money (circulation, accumulation, restriction, imposition, etc.). For this reason, when talking about income extraction and allocation by the state, the word *eco-nomy* (organizing/managing the house) is less appropriate than the word *pecu-nomy* (hoarding/managing money).

Mercantilism is based on the control of production and commerce by the state with a view to the accumulation of money (gold and other precious metals) through taxation and other expropriatory measures.

To give just an example of mercantilistic pecunonomy, since the middle of the XV century, it was mandatory for foreign merchants coming to England to convert all the money received into English goods before departing (so, to leave behind money) and for the English merchants dealing abroad, to carry back at least some part of their proceeds in cash (so, to bring in money).

In other words, under mercantilism, the gold and silver coin was the point of reference around which everything connected to the state revolved. This attitude resulted in a series of restrictions, devised and implemented by the state, in order to control the circulation of money so as to retain a substantial quota of it.

The Industrial Revolution and the perception that too many restrictions and impositions could discourage production and commerce and, consequently, reduce the quota of hoarded money, led to the advocacy of freedom in production and to the recognition of the mutual advantages derived from unhindered universal commerce (*laissez-faire, laissez-passer*).

This extraordinary period of reduced economic impediments was short lived, probably because the conception and the practice of it was neither so widespread nor deep rooted, as generally believed.

The watershed on the way to the abandonment of *laissez-faire* was represented by the First World War, with the introduction of state control on commerce and high taxes for sustaining the military effort. It sanctioned the future role of the state as a machine for taxing producers (entrepreneurs, workers) and spending the revenue unproductively (from useless consumption to plain destruction).

Taxes, once introduced, can seldom be repealed or, if so, only for a short while, given the fact that the spending habit, once acquired, is very difficult to suppress.

In England, total government expenditure went from £184 million a year (before the First World War) to £1,825 million a year (after the

First World War), a massive ten fold increase that required a huge increase in tax imposition.

As a matter of fact, in England, at the start of the war, the standard rate of taxation was 6%, bringing in a state revenue of 46 million. By 1918 the standard rate had risen to 30% with a state revenue of £293 million (a 6.3 fold increase). In addition to this, an Excess Profits Duty was introduced that made the total collected by the state over £580 million, a figure seventeen times higher than that for the year 1905.

During the same period, the national debt that was £706 million in 1914, reached six years later the figure of £7,875 (more than 11 fold increase).

In the USA, the federal budget went from \$1 billion in 1916 to \$19 billion in 1919, more than doubling every year.

Through a tentacular occupation of every social and economic space, that resulted in draining and squandering resources (parasitic employment, arms production, etc.), the state generated the conditions for the long depression of the post First World War years.

And then, on the wings of the states and their protectionist and bellicist policies, a new World War was delivered, or better, the second act of the previous one.

### **To the present**

A cursory glance at historical records should be sufficient to make everybody aware that war means taxation and that war and taxation are just the two faces of the same coin that has inscribed on it: the state.

In 1939 England, on the eve of the Second World War, the standard rate of income tax was 29% (it was 6% at the beginning of the First World War), ten million people were liable for tax and the total sum appropriated by the state was £400 million. At the end of the war (1944-1945) the standard rate of income tax was 50%, with 14 million taxpayers and a revenue for the state of nearly £1,400 million (a 350% increase). An Excess Profits Tax, introduced for business, raised, in 1944-1945, an extra £508 million.

In the USA, the spending of the federal government rose from \$9.6 billion in 1940 to \$95 billion in 1945 (an almost ten fold increase) and the number of taxpayers went from 14 million in 1940 to 50 million in 1945.

This extraordinary, generalized tax contribution was, nevertheless, accepted by the populace in order to win the war and to gain peace and security.

After the end of the conflict, the state had to keep the war attitude well alive to justify the fact that vast sums of money continued to be taken out of people's pockets. It then ingeniously invented and heartily embraced two new types of war:

- the cold war, where the two figureheads, capitalism and communism, were presented as fighting for world freedom and world equality. In fact, it was just two large states and their satellites who clashed (sometimes for real) for world supremacy.

- the war on poverty, where some well meaning people thought that the state could and should play a decisive role in defeating poverty and promoting welfare for all. In the end, it all amounted to give employment and distribute gifts to cronies and crooks (besides some individuals genuinely in need) in order to keep them quiet and relatively satisfied.

These two "wars" offered the justification for a colossal enlargement of the role of the state. Big Brother had finally arrived, to promise security from outer and inner enemies. And to do so it needed money, a lot of money. The necessary solution was to tighten the familiar screw of taxation. This has been done in two ways:

- more people paying taxes

In Europe and in the United States, the number of taxpayers has increased tremendously especially when the spending of the state, totally out of control, has fuelled runaway inflation. This has, artificially, brought the nominal income of many people liable to tax or towards higher levels of taxation, even while their real income was stationary or falling. This is the so called 'fiscal drain,' a real pain for the taxpayer but a bonanza for the state. Besides that, as a final trick, the introduction and diffusion of sales taxes

(i.e. V.A.T.) have made practically everybody, a contributor to the state coffers.

- more taxes to be paid

The number of taxes has increased, especially with the introduction and rise of many indirect (and almost undetected) taxes. In England, during the last decade of the XX century, sales taxes have gone from 5% to 17.5% (a 320% increase). In contemporary France more than 50% (in some cases up to 67%) of personal income is grabbed by the state. This means that, every year, an individual works more than six months only to fill the state coffers; a condition more pitiful than the feudal serf, if it were not for science and technology that have improved the living conditions of everybody.

In some cases, as pointed out even by the U.K. Inland Revenue, taxes have gone literally through the roof, with some special rates exceeding 100% (e.g. in the U.K., 147.5% in 1947-1948 and 136.25% in 1967-1968).

Like frogs put in a pot of water on the stove, who might initially derive a pleasurable feeling of warmth before boiling to death, so the people have, generally and until recently, not complained about new taxes, higher taxes, more people paying taxes. This is because they have, consciously or unconsciously, accepted the reasons put forward by the state as justifications for higher and wider taxation.

### **Taxation : justifications**

The state has justified taxation on the basis of the following reasons:

- representation: the cost for the individual of having his/her interests represented;
- contribution: the cost of common services granted to each individual;
- redistribution: the cost of compassion as a social duty to help people in need.

In theory, there is not much to object to these motives and the only aspect to be stressed should concern the correct and continuous fulfilment of these functions, that is:

- effective representation
- efficient provision of services
- fast delivery of care to people in need (e.g. in case of calamities, disabilities, despondencies, etc.)

As a matter of fact, taxation could be very well accepted as a form and means to pay for services in a community, provided that the theoretical justifications for it were matched and supported by a consistent empirical reality.

Unfortunately, this is (very) rarely the case.

Moreover, not only these motives are totally disregarded with respect to reality but they serve only to cover a hidden agenda. For this reason, from acceptable justifications they have now become unbearable mystifications.

### **Taxation : justifications and reality**

The justifications advanced by the state, in the last decades, for the (high and large) taxation, affecting practically all individuals, are not supported by reality. We witness a situation that is the exact opposite of what is stated. To all rational human beings it appears more and more evident that:

- representation is laughable

The elected person is not bound to keep to his/her promises, or to follow in any way the mandate given by the electorate. As a consequence, people have realized that their vote counts for nothing and so, in great and increasing number, have decided not to take part in this colossal farce that has become the electoral process.

Moreover, some people (the so called "foreigners") are obliged to pay taxes without being given the right to vote in general elections, negating in this way one of the pillars of democracy that consists of "no taxation without representation."

- services are appalling

In too many cases, the services provided by the state are an insult to human dignity and rationality: the administration of justice is a slow moving lottery, the police a nest of brutal and violent individuals

wearing a uniform, the school a training ground for misinformation and indoctrination, the health service involves long waiting and, sometimes, a hard, shocking experience, the prison system a school for crime and depravation, and so on and so forth. All these disservices cost the taxpayer a fortune and to be subject to them might be a real misfortune.

Moreover, in many countries some services are not any longer financed entirely by the state (e.g. transport) or are performed, in large part, by voluntary organizations (e.g. protection of the environment, social assistance) or are supported by extraordinary earnings (e.g. lottery money for building restoration). With the result that, the main bulk of taxation is used only to feed the growing appetite of bureaucrats and politicians.

- compassion has turned into corruption

The redistribution of resources, falsely qualified as compassion, has bred corruption amongst people. Not only has it not, generally, succeed in lifting them out of poverty, but it has reinforced and perpetuated the need for assistance, with mutual satisfaction for the providers (who keep their employment) and the receivers (who keep their receipts).

If this is the reality, we should be asking ourselves how it was and is possible that an increasing and expanding taxation by the state be accepted for so long, with so little opposition by the common person.

Probably the answer can be found in the witty statement put forward by the economist Frédéric Bastiat (1849): *L'État, c'est la grande fiction à travers la quelle tout le monde s'efforce de vivre aux dépens de tout le monde*. [The state is the great fiction through which everyone seeks to live at the expense of everyone else].

In other words, the people that support or simply accept the existence of the state as a natural eternal fact, are under the illusion that some of the resources extorted from them by the state will come back to them, if not as collective services, hopefully as specifically targeted favours under the form of jobs, donations, concessions, economic protection, exclusive rights of exploitation, and so on.

For many people, the money collected by the state through taxa-



tion represents the necessary means for implementing a hidden agenda.

### **Taxation : justifications and the hidden agenda**

What is here called the hidden agenda is not really very hidden. In fact, it is plainly visible to those who bother to keep their eyes open and see. As for calling it 'the agenda,' it is, more precisely the *raison et façon d'être* (the why and way of being) of the state, that is of the people living parasitically on the resources produced by somebody else.

The term 'hidden agenda' means that behind each noble justification there are less noble or, to say it bluntly, ignoble intentions. They concern:

- representation

The concentration of power in the hands of some elected "representatives" is so high and the gap between them and the electorate so large, that only strong pressure groups (lobbies) have the time and money to ensure that their interests are well taken care of. So, a collusion is set up between those elected to power and some powerful parts of the electorate. It follows, often, that the latter pays the former in order not to pay or to pay only a reduced quota in terms of taxation. In some other cases, the mission of the elected representatives becomes the commission demanded in exchange for granting a company a specific contract.

- contribution

The taxes that are meant to pay for services, or for the building of infrastructures, have been and are used for appointing and remunerating cronies in high position, for giving employment to their own supporters in order to compensate and consolidate their obedience and fidelity and for impressing simple-minded people with pharaonic constructions used as show-cases for the magnificence and munificence of power (from l'Arc de Triomphe in Paris to the Millennium Dome in London).

The quality of services or the usefulness of the works might be

negligible, but the quantity of money spent and the number of people employed or gratified is astonishingly high, and this is what matters most.

- redistribution

Redistribution has become a means for political manoeuvring, to get approval and buy consent from influential groups. For instance, in Italy, in the 2003 state budget, the amazing figure of 5 billion euro have been set aside for redistribution amongst industries (most as sink money).

This practice is also a powerful way to keep people quiet and obedient to the state power and to attract votes for those in power.

The evidence that redistribution, per se, does not help in promoting development and eliminating poverty but encourages industries and individuals to fall into a state of dependency, is so overwhelming that no one, anymore, seriously advocate this as an instrument of progress. Nevertheless, the gains of those affected are so strong and so mutually reinforcing that no effective solution to this problem is in view while the state is in existence.

### **Some considerations**

This brief analysis of taxation, focused on plausible justifications, actual realities and hidden agenda, need to be completed by some considerations before presenting possible transformations.

State activity in matters of taxation has directly encouraged or is directly favoured by the existence of four negative aspects. They are:

- the monetization of social intercourse

Generalized taxation is only possible and can only spread if it is matched by a generalized commercialization and monetization of all (or most) social intercourse. While capitalism has operated, also, through barter and could very well survive through barter (exchange of commodities through commodities), statism and the existence of its unproductive strata are linked to the control and extraction of money and can continue only insofar as money plays a predominant and central role.

- the abnormal concentration of wealth

The state has introduced progressive rates of taxation, justifying it as a means for income redistribution, cunningly playing the role of the benevolent father. In relation to progressive rates, it is worth remarking that this kind of taxation brings in a better harvest for the state whenever we are in presence of a concentration of wealth, provided that the rates are considered either bearable or inevitable (otherwise there is total evasion). It is then a matter of fact that the concentration of wealth is in the best economic interest of the state, given that the higher the income the more is paid as a percentage. Seen in this new light, some state interventions (protectionism, preferential share allocation to big groups, exclusive rights to one or a few companies, etc.) become 'economically' (i.e. pecunomically) understandable while remaining socially unacceptable.

- the diffusion of unhealthy behaviour

The state, willing to appear as a provident father and an ecologically minded person, taxes heavily the consumption of tobacco and alcohol, and the use of cars. At the same time, we are in the presence of some very strange facts. In certain countries (e.g. Italy) the state is a producer and the monopolistic distributor of cigarettes (revenue in the year 2010: almost 14 billion euro). In most countries the state is the active builder of new roads and motor ways, felling thousand of trees and bringing destruction to the countryside. In many cases, the states are the main promoters of gambling and betting from which huge revenues can be extracted. In some countries the vicious circle of taxation, welfare assistance and alcohol consumption is very well known. All this gives substance to the belief that, to the state, in general, a person having all the worst habits of this world is so much more precious and economically valuable than a healthy one that does not smoke, does not waste money in gambling and walks or cycles to move around. Furthermore, the person with a healthy life style usually lives longer and this longevity is becoming a serious problem for the coffers of the state, unable to keep its promises of assistance from cradle to grave when the grave takes so much longer to be filled.

- the multiplication of administrative jobs

Taxation has become, in the words of the UK Inland Revenue itself, "a big business and a big employer."

Currently (2023), in the United Kingdom, there are more than 63,000 people employed directly by the Department of Inland Revenue and many times more people work in the area of taxation as tax advisers, accountants, lawyers, etc.

This multiplication of jobs is not a positive state of affairs because it has to do with often parasitic occupations that can survive only by sucking resources from productive activities, hampering them from spreading and flourishing.

Notwithstanding this incredible grabbing of revenue, the squandering has been even more incredible and many states, all over the world, have accumulated mountains of debts.

### **The perverse remedies**

The devilish remedies put forward in the past by many states to avoid bankruptcy have, mainly, consisted of the printing of money, which has led to high inflation and to people paying taxes at a higher rate (fiscal drag).

This was possible in a world of national central states, where an economic crisis was solved by devaluation (debasement of the currency) to keep the national economy competitive.

With the restarting of real world trade and the coming on the scene of regions that have been cut off or shunned by the world exchanges (e.g. Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa), this is not any longer possible.

The current solution envisaged by the states to deal with their bankruptcy is to cut spending while keeping relatively high levels of taxation.

This is all done in the most silent possible way, shifting taxation from a highly visible tax (income tax) to a fairly concealed one (VAT), it being included in the price of goods, at least in most European countries.

The state is moving towards undetectable taxes to cover its failure to provide good services or to cover the fact that it is not providing some services at all.

In fact, the state is passing on to individuals and companies (the so called "private" sector) the task of offering services that were once run (badly and expensively) by the state. Furthermore, with a creative move ascribable to its greedy instinct, the state is using people's betting habits in order to find extra sources of revenues for the upkeep of buildings and monuments (e.g. national lotteries).

So we have reached the nightmare scenario for civilization, that of high taxation (draining) meant to feed a vast parasitic machinery (squandering) while the real services are silently provided by non governmental organizations or paid directly out of everybody's pocket.

The minimum that can be said of this, is that there is something wrong and vicious in the entire matter of taxation, so wrong and vicious as to put into question the entire idea of compulsory taxation by a monopolistic organization called the state.

### **The possible solutions**

The draining and squandering of resources by the state reminds one of the similar behaviour by the aristocracy of the *ancien régime* which was still pretending to play an indispensable progressive role even after its justification for existence (as social class) had totally disappeared.

So it is nowadays with the state.

The new reality is making the function of the state superfluous and the possibility of it performing its role of general controller more and more difficult, if not impossible.

The vast movement of people settling in different regions ("foreigners" and "foreign countries" in the terminology of statism) at different times; the widespread introduction of electronic wallets and electronic currencies; the final coming into the scene of real world trade and of real competition, with providers-purchasers of goods

and services in contact from all over the world, and with immediate comparison of prices; all this, amongst other realities, foreshadows certainly the overcoming of the nation state and probably the extinction of the state tout court, the last manifestation of the *ancien régime*.

The extinction of the state does not mark the end of the world but surely the end of taxation and, as a consequence, the disappearance of the distortions caused by pecunomy, the statist version of economy.

At the same, it should lead to the extension and expansion of mutually beneficial relationships based on:

- Required **payment**

This involves goods and services used and consumed. The payment could be carried out at various times and take various forms such as, for instance:

- pay as-you-take
- pay as-you-use
- pay at regular intervals
- pay in currencies/vouchers/goods/services

- The difference from taxation is that a person pays for goods and services she/he uses and each person is the one who makes the choices instead of having somebody else (the politician) deciding how to allocate resources. In this way, the cost/benefit process is made visible and left to operate in direct relation to the capability of evaluation of the users and consumers. The better the user-consumer (more cautious), the better (more satisfactory) the cost/benefit ratio.

- Voluntary **donation**

This involves giving something (time, money, etc.) to whoever or whatever a person deems worth supporting. It could be:

- a recurrent gift to an organization (e.g. supporting people in need)
- an ad hoc extraordinary offering (e.g. disaster relief)

In the case of voluntary donation, the helper and the receiver are identifiable human beings and not social security numbers. The persons giving and those receiving are interested in the best use of the resources, otherwise they might stop giving and receiving. On the contrary, in the case of taxation and state assistance, both the social

worker and the recipient of benefits want more money, irrespective of the results. As a matter of fact, paradoxically, positive results might produce a reduction in the allocation of funds or even the loss of a job.

- Binding **contribution**

This is something that affects only those who want to belong to a community and freely use the services provided to the members. It could be, for instance:

- the fee for joining a club and covering the running costs
- the charge for a health insurance, security provision, use of education facilities, etc.

The binding contribution is a very common practice of allocating resources for purposes that affect the well-being of the person in conjunction with the well-being of other individuals.

Moreover, as the case of associations and trusts for the protection of nature shows very well, people are willing to pay for collective amenities even if they are not the only ones to use them or even if they are not the ones who will use and enjoy them. What they aim at with their contribution is the satisfaction of being part of an honourable cause. And this should put to rest the objections of those who advocate compulsory taxation on the basis of the existence of positive externalities and possible free riders.

There is no clear cut division between payment, donation and contribution; the common aspect is that they all arise from voluntary choices made by individuals who, through these free choices, become independent, mature human beings instead of being kept forever as subjected minors under the tutelage of Big Brother, the state.

In fact, payments could become contributions and contributions can be topped up by donations or by other forms of participation; the only proviso is that they all be voluntary.

The state (or whoever under its spell) will proclaim confidently and firmly that, with voluntary allocations, nobody would pay for green spaces, clean streets and modern libraries. With the same confidence and firmness, we should reply that this is not an earnest

objection; it is just an utter and plain lie, a distortion of past and present reality.

Already, in ancient Greece, many of the most splendid public buildings were constructed by rich benefactors competing among themselves for the honour. As for those who did not have enough material wealth to give to the city, they contributed with their labour. These voluntary allocations were called "liturgies" and were usually several times higher than expected.

The selfish human being, as portrayed by state propaganda, exists only in relation to the state and as a product of the state.

The common human being of any community was and is more prudent and provident than the common bureaucrat of the welfare state, who keeps bringing moral and material disaster.

We have to go forward to a higher civilization, one that existed, in part, before and will exist, in full, beyond the state.

It is time to recognize that it is only through the freedom of voluntary allocations that each one can become responsible and accountable for his/her decisions. And this is the best way for promoting and enhancing the well-being of mature individuals and their beneficial intercourse.



## FROM POLITICAL ECONOMY TO SCIENTIFIC ECOLOGONOMICS

Economy  
Political Economy  
The misleading start  
The misguided convictions  
The mischievous policies  
The mindless tenets  
The mistaken persuasions  
The miserable results  
The mystifying end  
Economics  
Ecolonomics



### Economy

**T**he term ‘economy’ comes from the Greek *oikos* (home) + *nomos* (norm, *nemein* = to manage, to care) meaning rules of the house or, more precisely, rules aimed at good household management.

Good household management is based, on the whole, on the careful use of generally scarce resources; it follows that the essential features of 'economy' are prudence, thrift and efficiency.

In the course of history, the simplicity and straightforwardness of the relations between human beings and resources meant that there was no need for a separate complex science of economy. In a not so distant past, what is now considered as economic behaviour was examined and assessed from the point of view of morality, leading, for instance, to the condemnation of usury or the advocacy of a right price. Apart from that, economy, for most people, just had to do with scarce goods produced and consumed within a local agglomeration of households.

It is only with the sustained expansion of production and trade in the XVI and XVII centuries that a series of writings were compiled focusing explicitly on goods and commerce and marking the beginning of a specific field of study.

At its start and for a certain period of time, moral philosophy, much more than any other branch of learning like politics, psychology or mathematics, characterized the outlook of these new writers.

At the same time it is worth noticing something which is not a simple coincidence, namely that the emergence of 'economy' as a new field of investigation was paralleled by the ascendance of the nation states. As a consequence, the main concern of most of those who wrote about production and trade was how to increase the wealth of the state of which they felt part, territorially and politically.

The suggestions presented to that end are quite dissimilar, as will be seen shortly. However, for almost all of the writers on the subject, the starting point of 'economy' as a topic for analysis and debate was represented by the economy of the expanding nation state.

It is here suggested that this fact concerning its origins will compromise, from the outset, the development of 'economy' as a science.

In short, and for classificatory convenience, we could characterize the evolution of the concept of 'economy' as:

- the practical economy of the ancient world : the household management of the Greeks and the Romans.

- the moral economy of the mediaeval and early modern world : the relatively limited production and exchanges among individuals under the influence of religion.

- the political economy of the late modern and contemporary world : the ever increasing production and exchanges over which politics exerts its dominion.

The focus of the present essay is on the last period and the intention is to show the main features, facts and final fall of what is used to be called 'political economy'.

## **Political Economy**

In 1615 there appeared in France a text composed by a certain Antoine De Montchrétien titled *Traité de l'Economie Politique*. This seems to be the first time when the expression *Economie Politique* (Political Economy) is employed. The treatise is nothing more than a celebration of the French kingdom, with diverse advice expediently oscillating between foreign trade and economic self-sufficiency (autarky) according to what was deemed convenient to the power of the rising French State.

At that time commercial exchanges between town and country were increasingly supplemented by trade between nation states. That is why the interest of the first modern 'economists' is centred on the role of agriculture and on the way to manage trade.

According to their scholarly interests and positions, the first economists were classified and assigned to two different schools:

- that of the Physiocrats, who stressed the importance of agriculture as the real source of wealth;

- that of the Mercantilists, who considered wealth to result from a favourable balance of trade.

Apart from those distinctions, something else differentiates them, and this is their attitude to freedom of trade, favoured by the Physiocrats and feared by the Mercantilists.

However, for all of them, the economic unit of reference was the nation state and consequently the degree of economic freedom advocated or rejected was, on principle, judged according to how well the national economy was deemed to fare in one case or the other.

This happened because, as already remarked, the first modern writers on economic matters lived in the age of the rising nation state and could not help concentrating on the ascending power of their time, assuming it to be the proper frame of reference for any economic discourse.

Moreover, the widening of monetary transactions increasingly based on national currencies favoured the identification of the proper economic unit as the one where the national currency was accepted or imposed, i.e. the territorial nation state.

It was then practically impossible for the ‘economy’ (in its modern birth and infancy) to be other than ‘Political Economy’ or *Staatwirtschaft* (state economy) or *Nationalökonomie* (national economy).

Historical events and the interpretation given to them would serve to reinforce this view and further contribute to the misleading start that would influence negatively the future formulation and resolution of economic problems.

### **The misleading start**

The first economic system that captured the attention and the admiration of past scholars was that of the Low Countries, where many people acquired wealth by shipbuilding and international trade.

What was noticed by many economists of the time was not the reality that open free trade and a general atmosphere of tolerance favoured the development of entrepreneurship and could even bring prosperity to a population quite devoid of natural resources; what was seen was the fact that wealth and power were going to the Dutch instead of them (i.e. the French or the English).

This is the sign that something had already gone awry, right from the beginning, in the construction of ‘economy’ as science.

In fact, the proposals offered by many economists to combat the affluence of the Dutch, achieved through relatively free entrepreneurship and commerce, were all in the form of state intervention to favour and protect national producers and traders, even to the point of militarily attacking the foreign competitors and driving them away.

This resulted in France in Colbertism (state aid to national manufacture) and everywhere in what Adam Smith calls the Mercantile System (the state favouring national merchants). However, the main outcome consisted in all the ignoble wars that the various state powers conducted in order to gain political and economic supremacy.

The critical analysis that Adam Smith brought to bear on the mercantile system in Book IV of *The Wealth of Nations* did not suffice to free economic thinking from the straitjacket of national politics made of national territorial borders and national balances of trade. It is quite indicative of the nature of the times that, by a twist of fate, even such a strong advocate of free trade as Adam Smith would end up, two years after having published his major work, as commissioner of customs in Scotland.

Certainly he was under no illusion about the fulfilment of economic freedom, having written that "to expect, indeed, that the freedom of trade should ever be entirely restored in Great Britain it is as absurd as to expect that an Oceana or Utopia should ever be established in it." (*The Wealth of Nations*, Book IV).

So, from the start, there were conditions that represented supposedly unavoidable fixtures for any economic analysis; and this means that, right from the beginning, modern 'economy' was equivalent to 'political economy', which is then another name for 'state economy'.

Political economy as state economy is implicitly assumed, by the economists, to refer to:

- a territorial economy (delimited by state borders)
- a nationalist economy (biased towards state subjects)
- a controlled economy (administered by state rulers).

From this misleading start, which not even the classical economists would succeed in redressing because they shared, at least in part, that same mindset as the nation-state rulers, a series of conse-

quences would follow that would be disastrous not only for economy as a science but especially for individuals as economic human beings (i.e. rational household managers).

### **The misguided convictions**

The misleading start, in modern times, of economy as political (i.e. state) economy could not produce other than misguided convictions that are still alive and well, promoted and propagated by state paid lecturers and state oriented journalists.

The misguided convictions can be summarized in three strongly held attitudes and practices:

- Trade as war
- Wealth as money
- Work as employment

Let us examine briefly each of these convictions in order to understand the dynamics of political economy and its consequences on people's lives.

#### Trade as War (state territorialism)

The state rulers in the age of mercantilism (from XVI to the middle of XVIII centuries), in the presence of a trade that was growing and widening beyond state borders, did not treat it, as hitherto, just by way of patronizing concessions and protection, but as a powerful instrument for nation-state building.

To this aim, national traders were to be placed in a strongly advantageous position vis-à-vis foreign traders and were to operate for the wealth and power of the state. Moreover, it was widely believed at this time that state wealth and power could grow only at the expense of other states, given the inescapable existence of totally conflicting interests.

For this reason, any terrible occurrence happening to a neighbouring state was considered very good news for another state ruler. Common state policy was to beggar the other state with all sorts of impediments (tariffs, blockades, patents, etc.) to their trade and industry. International trade was seen as a war between states for

economic primacy, a trade war that could be supplemented by actual military war against another trading power in order to displace it and gain total political supremacy (e.g. the English Kingdom vs. the Dutch Republic).

The aim of political economy was to dominate international trade in order to export goods in exchange for gold and silver coins. A favourable balance of trade was and is still generally considered a positive objective of political economy.

Wealth as Money (state coffers)

The increase of money (gold and silver coins) in the kingdom was the essential aim of political economy.

The fact that money was equated with wealth is easily explained from the point of view of political economy, considering that the word 'soldiers' comes from the Latin *soldum*, which means money.

So, the availability of money for the state rulers meant that they could pay soldiers, who waged wars aimed at increasing the wealth and power of the state by way of new subjects, new territories, new resources.

Many of the soldiers were previously rural labourers that were now in surplus, following the introduction of more productive ways of cultivating the soil. And this was another reason why the ruler had to have enough money constantly available, to employ them in his service.

Work as Employment (state subjects)

The formation of political economy took place in parallel with remarkable changes in the countryside (e.g. enclosures) and with the transformation of many autonomous peasants into dependent labourers in the new industrial workshops and factories.

This was the time in England when many landless individuals moved from place to place in search of work, and to counter this Poor Laws were introduced that compelled people to settle down and work in exchange for assistance.

It is from that time onward that the idea that work is mainly, if not essentially, dependent employment started to grow until it took on a life of its own.

Political economists considered providing employment as the necessary way to avoid disturbances or even revolts among discontented masses. This fitted in very well with the views of those who advocated that the state subjects be occupied for the wealth and power of the state.

These three convictions concerning trade, wealth and work represented an integrated set of ideas that survived even the critique of classical economists (notably Adam Smith) and are still with us at the present time.

They were weakened and almost abandoned (at least theoretically) for a brief season in XIX century England, but that was just a happy interlude that ended with the reaffirmation of state militarism and imperialism and the reformulation of those convictions in a more stringent way. They underlie state economic policies during most of the XX century.

### **The mischievous policies**

The misguided convictions of this economic thinking, centred on the framework of national territorial states and on the political exigencies of its rulers, have produced a series of mischievous policies that have nothing to do with 'economic' practices (i.e. ones based on appropriate and sensible use of resources).

Let us examine these policies emerging from the convictions outlined above.

#### **Trade as War**

The idea that trade is a phenomenon to be conducted at national state level caused it to be presented it as a sort of struggle between states, where the (commercial) victory of one state is connected with the (economic) defeat of the other state. The victorious state was the one whose balance of trade was positive or, in other words, the one whose exports exceeded imports. The aimed result was more coins (gold and silver) entering the kingdom than leaving it. Clearly, considering that money is only a means to an end, to aim at accumulating money instead of enjoying goods and services is not at all a rational



endeavour, unless it is a temporary and partial suspension of consumption and the savings made are directed to productive purposes that will satisfy some other consumer's needs in the future.

This conception of trade as international battle has resulted in two main state policies:

- Control of trade (Protectionism). In order to have a favourable balance of trade, the state limited the freedom of international exchanges (through tariffs and quotas on imports) and subverted (through subsidies and incentives on exports) the normal operation of trade. When some state rulers started implementing these policies, other state rulers retaliated with the result that the regular functioning of the exchanges was impeded. The impossible aim of a favourable balance of trade for everyone has contributed, in conjunction with other political absurdities, to all sorts of economic imbalances that have had dire repercussion on workers and consumers, i.e. almost everybody, in the form of business cycles of boom and bust, effervescence and depression.

- Expansion of trade (Imperialism). In order to overcome the supposed problem of finding outlets for national goods, the politicians went for imperialistic adventures presented as economic ventures by jingoist journalists and state-servile intellectuals. Marx, who cannot be suspected of underestimating the importance of the economic motive, poured scorn on the efforts of "state philosophers" intent on "discovering the *secret* and *hidden* mercantile springs" of 'perfidious Albion' "of which Palmerston is supposed to be the unscrupulous and unflinching executor"; and this search of hidden economic motives behind every political move is done even when the same Lord Palmerston "takes a step apparently the most damaging to the material interests of Great Britain." (Karl Marx, *Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century*, 1899). As poignantly remarked by A. J. P. Taylor with reference to the imperialism of state rulers: "Their measuring-stick was Power, not Profit" (A. J. P. Taylor, *Economic Imperialism*, 1952). Nevertheless, the idea that "trade follows the flag" has become a consolidated doctrine even when negated by historical reality.

### **Money as Wealth**

The idea that money is wealth is typical of a phase of economic thinking that saw the growing importance and ultimate triumph of monetary exchanges. This fact could certainly not escape the attention of the rulers who, from being the interested overseers of coins (gold and silver), became, everywhere, the monopolistic bosses of internal currency (paper money).

If money is wealth and wealth begets power, then the state rulers could not help interfering in matters of money in order to strengthen their political power. The state policies resulting from that interference are:

- Control of money (Legal Tender). In order to impose a certain currency as legal tender the state rulers have to ban the use of foreign coins from domestic trade and have to centralize its production through the establishment of a national or federal bank. Laws must also be passed to the effect that the money produced by this bank becomes, de facto, a mandatory currency that people cannot refuse to accept in every internal transaction if they do not want to incur in state sanctions (right up to the death penalty).

- Expansion of money (Printing Press). Once they had assumed the monopolistic control of money, the state rulers could play with it according to their needs, which were always grandiose and excessive. With the introduction of paper money the depreciation of the currency which had been a laborious process of reducing the gold or silver content of the coin, became the child's play of letting the printing press work full time to satisfy the exigencies of the state. Clearly at this point we are totally outside any economic discourse and the expression 'political economy' is only a misnomer for political greed and lunacy or, more simply, political swindle.

### **Work as Employment**

The idea of work as employment (in an employer-employee relationship) was the result of a patronizing attitude on the part of the rulers coupled with the fear of having idle discontented masses. Among many economists there was also the view that the state was responsible for its subjects' welfare, which was deemed to depend

largely on having a stable job and a regular salary. It follows that the proclaimed objective of political economy was to favour the employment of people.

Considering that the rulers are generally attentive to the needs of the masses when they are a force to be reckoned with, this resulted in policies for the:

- Control of work (Unionization). Political economy took into account the political strength of the various economic actors. In the case of work this resulted, under the pressure of the trade unions, in favouring nationals in any possible way, up to the point of practically closing the border to new external workers (as the USA did in 1924 with the introduction of quotas to immigration) or in making the movement of people in search of work extremely difficult (and generating the phenomenon, absurd from an economic point of view, of the so-called “illegal” workers). The state rulers in association with the trade unions also contractually institutionalized the dependency and fixity of the employed worker on the plausible pretext of guaranteeing him stable occupation. What we have now, in some countries, is the reality of super-protected legal workers side by side with second-class, deportable ‘illegal’ labour (the foreigners) and super-precarious new entrants (the young, the women).

- Expansion of work (Bureaucratization). The political economists also advocated the intervention of the state as direct provider of employment through public works. A path frequently taken was that of swelling the ranks of the bureaucracy to the point that some ministerial or municipal departments now employ many more people than a very large business company. Besides that, personnel hired for political reasons or a plethora of external consultants are also examples of those policies of work-as-employment that made the political economists so proud and self-congratulatory.

These policies are still with us but not anymore with the same level of amplitude and certitude enjoyed in the course of last century.

During the XX century other notions, which were previously latent, emerged fully and have become consolidated tenets that are no less absurd than the mischievous policies just highlighted.

### The mindless tenets

The convictions previously listed resulted in the policies briefly outlined above which, in their turn, in order to be justifiable, have generated certain tenets of political economic thinking, upheld by many economists and promoted as reasonable economic doctrine by a multitude of journalists and commentators. Clearly, from mischievous policies only mindless tenets could be expected to derive.

The main mindless tenets of political economy are:

- **The benevolence of material destruction**

Political economists seem to consider the creation of needs as a bonus for the economic process and are so entrenched in this position that they regard material destruction as a benign or even desirable source of new demand. Frédéric Bastiat is famous for his mockery of this view in his pamphlet "The Broken Window Pane" (in *what is seen and WHAT IS NOT SEEN*) and for his tragicomic suggestion: "*brûlez Paris*" [burn Paris] (in *Recettes protectionnistes*). He could never have imagined that his provocative intellectual challenge would be taken as a serious proposal and explanation for economic advancement even by people who had never heard of him. As a matter of fact this is what happened when some economists attributed the formidable economic recovery of West Germany after the Second World War to the extensiveness of its physical destruction, which allowed massive factory modernization. However, they forgot to explain why the same economic miracle did not take place in East Germany, or why the Swiss economy fared quite well (if not better) without all that destruction.

Clearly the political economists and their followers are not familiar with the material effects of psychological characteristics (solidarity, willingness to start anew) and of the social environment (freedom of activity). In fact these were the essential aspects behind the formidable recovery of West Germany. Otherwise it would be sufficient to bomb a country and all its factories from time to time,

here and there, and, out of the ashes a shining new economy would emerge.

The supposed benevolence of material destruction is certainly not presented by the political economists in such a crude way, but what to make of this statement: "It appears to be politically impossible for a capitalistic democracy to organize expenditure on the scale necessary to make the grand experiment which would prove my case ... except in war conditions." (John Maynard Keynes, Article in the *New Republic*, July 29, 1940)

The equation: present destruction = future production, could not be made clearer. No wonder that, on that basis, somebody could write an article under the headline: "Hurricane Andrew Good News for South Florida Economy." In short, absurd premises by well-respected economists leading to abominable but consistent conclusions by well-read journalists.

All sorts of material destruction is generally seen with a benign eye by political economists because, according to them, it promotes another of their favourite tenets.

- **The desirability of full employment**

Achieving full employment has become the mantra of political economists. As a matter of fact, the case, advocated by Keynes in the cited article, that could be proved by engaging in a war, was that of full employment.

Three points need to be raised in this respect.

1. First of all, the full employment of political economists is bogus. In fact, in order to keep inflation under control, they come out with the farcical idea of a "natural rate of unemployment" that they fix at the magic number of 3%. What is natural in this rate of unemployment, especially for those who are unemployed in the name of 'nature', is a mystery, or rather, an absurdity we had better not delve into.

2. The concept of full employment is difficult to pin down because people (men and women) look for jobs according to the opportunities

available. So the number fluctuates on the basis of so many parameters (type of work, working time, level of wages, transport facilities, family structure, etc.) that it is a totally arbitrary statement whenever a political economist says that full employment has or has not been achieved.

3. However, the main objection to the idea of full employment comes from a purely socio-economic perspective. The essential function of an economic mechanism is to produce goods and services in the most rational (i.e. efficient) manner, not to employ people in the most extensive (i.e. wasteful) way. Otherwise, it would always be appropriate to dig a tunnel with thousands of workers equipped with very small picks and spades (maximum occupation) rather than using a large borer or powerful drills manned by a few individuals (minimum effort).

Certainly, in a technologically backward society people will be employed instead of machines because they are readily and cheaply available. In those societies many will look for any employment in order to scrape together the means of existence. But, with the development of personal skills and technological implements leading to a growth in productivity, individuals can enjoy the fruits of a mechanized/automatized cycle of production with a progressively reduced expenditure of energy and working time. And so the mindless tenet of full employment should be replaced by the apparently shocking (to some people) rationale of full non-employment, whereby work (dependent or independent) occupies only a small (and ever reducing) fraction of the life of an individual, and the rest is available for self-chosen and self-directed activities. And the less the time necessary for work to support living expenses (i.e. the wider the non-employment) the more advanced (productive and wealthy) the members of a community should be considered. And this would turn upside down the entire notion of a society of full employment and the concept of employment that is accepted in such an uncritical way that even the most useless and meaningless work is considered reputable as long as it is legal and it brings in an income.

In fact, for the advocates of full employment the economic cycle is

functioning well when most people are employed in whatever occupation is assigned to them and spend all their wages buying the growing amount of goods that the process of production makes available. For them " 'to dig holes in the ground' paid for out of savings, will increase, not only, employment, but the real national dividend of useful goods and services." (John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory*, 1936). Clearly this statement is insane even if written by a Cambridge don and applauded by Westminster and Capitol Hill representatives. Their self-interested adherence to such idiocies is linked to another mindless tenet of the political economists.

- **The necessity of generalized consumerism**

The political economist is generally someone fearful of under-consumption (the "fear of goods" of the mercantilist writers). This is why the person paid to do something totally useless is considered valuable for the working of the "economic machine" because, not only does he not produce anything saleable, but his salary will result in some consumption, that is in the absorption of goods and services.

A quite recent advertisement on a European TV channel showed somebody walking the streets with a shopping bag full of goods just purchased and a voice in the background saying: "He is helping the Economy."

This is idiocy at its highest level, not only because Mr. or Mrs. Economy do not exist but also because it turns upside down the relationship between needs and goods.

In the absurd world of the political economist, we do not buy goods to satisfy human needs but to assure the salaries of the workers, to provide profits for the businessmen and, last but not least, to generate VAT income for the state.

So we are again, from a different perspective, within the conceptual framework that applauds any material consumption as the way to get 'the economy' moving, implying that the people work in the service of the 'economy' and not that economic relations work for the benefit of the people.

What the political economists à la Keynes could not envisage was the fact that people encouraged to increase their consumption of goods and services could become so addicted to them that the rate of production of some goods and especially of some services could not keep up with the level of demand. The propensity to save that worried Keynes so much is practically nonexistent for many people. They, like so many states, are deeply in debt and have no intention of starting to behave rationally (i.e. economically) by cutting down waste and attempting to save and invest sensibly.

However, in order to maintain the same level of spending while avoiding collapse, the political economists have had recourse to another mindless tenet.

- **The imperative of continuous growth**

If there is a tenet of political economy that is assumed as an implicit objective, upheld everywhere and by almost everybody, it is the idea of continuous economic growth.

This is taken as an imperative requirement of any national economy in order to avoid stagnation and decline.

In fact, many people wrongly associate material growth with development of many kinds (technological, cultural, personal, etc.) and fall into the trap of wishing for the former (growth) as the supposed condition for also enjoying the latter (development). This might be true in a situation where there are many unsatisfied material needs but not when a certain degree of comfort or even some affluence has already been reached. A flabby person should not aim to grow fatter and fatter until he reaches a state of full-blown obesity but, rather, should slim down (de-grow) in order to preserve his health.

Unfortunately, it is practically impossible to apply these elementary notions to those who, having accumulated huge debts, hope for a continuous growth of this mythical 'economy' and so of their income (be it a personal income or the Inland Revenue Income) as the only



way out of their insolvency in the absence of any wish to behave economically (i.e. rationally).

The imperative of continuous growth resembles that of a Ponzi Scheme. The Ponzi Scheme is an ingenious trick of getting money by paying to a lender a very high rate of interest; the scheme remains viable as long as there is a capital influx from new lenders attracted by the high interest paid, because it is out of the continuous addition of more funds from the new lenders that the high interest is paid. The scheme collapses when the growth of new participants in the scheme dries up and some people start withdrawing their money.

We have not yet reached a situation of impending financial collapse but something could happen that makes the imperative of continuous growth either very unpalatable (e.g. environmental constraints) or highly unacceptable (e.g. cultural re-orientation) well before it becomes financially impracticable.

One of the reasons for the existence of growth as the target of political economy derives from the existence of another mindless tenet.

- **The relevancy of national accounting**

Political economy bases its discourses mainly on national data and on the idea of national accounting.

If this was already a limiting and deceptive way of dealing with global/local economic processes even when nation states held sway, it is now a completely obsolete one.

Moreover, it is not just the limitation in terms of an arbitrary territory (the nation state) that is scientifically untenable in an economic discourse; it is also the fact that the monetary data on which national accounting is based have no real meaning for the lives of people, other than symbolic hints or propaganda messages.

The recording of investment and consumption could certainly be a way of expressing in monetary terms the different economic choices of the people; but the registered data could equally well cover up the squandering by the state of taxpayers' money. The GDP figure per se

does not distinguish between economically fruitful and economically insane allocation of resources and so it is, in practical terms, useless and meaningless.

Furthermore, to say that GDP has grown by a certain percentage does not say anything about the components of this growth, whether it was necessary to fulfil unsatisfied demand, whether the demand is from individuals who freely allocate their budgets or from the state who dictates a specific allocation of funds without any serious analysis of costs and benefits or record of losses and gains.

What is meant here is not the rejection of the monetary parameter but only that the monetary parameter is useful provided that :

- it refers to an individual or community enjoying free choices as to the destination of their monetary resources;
- it is linked to a mechanism of gains and losses that registers whether the resources have been allocated economically or not;
- it is supplemented by other social indicators revealing the actual availability and enjoyment of goods and services by individuals.

Only then might we have a meaningful account of the socio-economic situation of a person or group. Otherwise, huge investments by the state in services that do not work might increase the figure of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) but the real outcome is to inflate another GDP, namely the Gross Deception Problem.

The mindless tenets here briefly pointed out still dominate most conventional discourses because of some mistaken persuasions propagated mainly by journalists and too easily accepted by the public at large.

### **The mistaken persuasions**

The mindless tenets of political economy are widely shared by the common people because of the existence of mistaken persuasions that are nothing other than infantile illusions.

Political economy, as the term indicates, is a product of politicians in conjunction with economists, and refers to the sphere of political and economic relationships. The mistaken persuasions relate to these

agents and to the field of intervention that is assigned to them. In particular people are led to believe that:

- the politicians have a clearer view of the economic reality and espouse better values than the common human being;

- politics is the proper arena and dynamic for solving, on behalf of the large majority, the socio-economic problems affecting everybody;

- the economists must advise the politicians on the best course of action in relation to those problems because they understand these matters better than anybody else;

- the economy is a specific area of social life requiring constant and precise interventions by experts, otherwise it will not operate correctly.

All these persuasions can exist and survive because they are supported by an apparatus of indoctrination (state-servile teachers) and mis-information (state-oriented journalists). Otherwise, they would not withstand even a superficial critical examination. In fact, it should be patently clear to any rational human being that:

- politicians are human beings like everybody else, who do not have a better grasp of reality than many ordinary people; on the contrary, their election to parliament places them in an ivory tower of privileges and in a position where they are likely to be surrounded by sycophants and pressure groups, all of which constitutes a corruptive veil to any apperception and understanding of socio-economic problems;

- politics is a confrontational way of dealing with problems, and not only is it inept at treating economic relationships but it is the exact antithesis of economic exchanges, which are carried out because they benefit, in some way, all the contracting parties;

- the economists are not superior beings with superior knowledge on how to allocate the resources of every single person, for the simple reason that socio-economic reality is a complex whole in a constant flux that cannot be pinned down by a group of experts;

- the economy is not a separate sphere of life where *homo oeconomicus* operates; as a matter of fact neither of them (the economy and *homo oeconomicus*) exists other than as the invention of some social

scientists that have cut out for themselves an area of occupation and intervention.

On the whole, politicians and economists have a distorted view of socio-economic reality, which they see as something essentially:

- mechanical: made of levers and pulleys which they act upon as master engineers;

- material : made of money and gains which they appropriate and distribute according to supposedly superior and all-embracing criteria;

- corporative : made of states and institutions in which they are the legitimate actors, purportedly in the name of the people and under the authority of science.

To state things correctly, it suffices to say that political economy has been and still is nothing other than the so-called economy (i.e. producers, consumers) in servitude to territorial politics (i.e. national politicians and bureaucrats). It is, in fact, the agenda of the politicians articulated in technical jargon by their professional advisors, the so-called economists. This agenda is a mismatch of opportunistic expedients, pushing for consumption or saving, for inflation or deflation, for nationalizations or privatizations, according to the contingent exigencies of the ruling elite and its associates. Being so, political economy is not a science, it is not even a semi-science, it is total and utter nonsense.

As for the political economists, they should be seen and named for what they really are: political propagandists writing and acting on behalf of their employers, i.e. the political rulers, and for the promotion of the big or small “national workshop” of which they are both pampered members.

The upholding of mistaken persuasions has produced miserable results, meaning not just poor outcomes but effects that have caused widespread misery and deep despair for millions of people. Let us examine briefly some of the results of political economy.

## The miserable results

State intervention in economic matters has existed since the coming into dominance of the national territorial state. However, even a century of persistent state interventionism is not a valid reason for believing that the future will be nothing but a continuation of the past. To point to another case of interventionism, state interference in religious matters was and still is practiced in some regions of the world, but it is no longer either existent or accepted everywhere. In fact, many people nowadays would consider it a shocking and totally inadmissible intrusion into their personal life.

Actually, for a brief season, during the heyday of the Industrial Revolution, the intellectual climate, at least in Great Britain, was against state intervention in economic matters. Nevertheless, even then and there, it was quite often a cultural facade behind which the territorial state aimed at gaining national advantages and the national capitalists tried to enlist the state on their side against foreign business competition and internal workers' demands. The result was, in the end, the falling into disrepute of the idea and practice of a *laissez-faire* which had been reduced to the cunning ideology of the economically strong or influential, backed by state power.

So, towards the end of the XIX century, open and extensive state intervention eventually resumed, promoted by so-called liberal or progressive parties, even before the ideology of state socialism (Lassalle, Lenin) had made it widely acceptable and desirable.

The results of political economy reached by a highly interventionist state can be summarized as:

- National monopolies (big powers and small persons)

In 1890 the Sherman Anti-Trust Act was introduced in the U.S.A. with the aim of preventing cartel agreements between firms. The real outcome of this law was to make even more attractive the fusion of many firms into very large business companies that dominated the various sectors of the economy. If we add to this the protectionist laws that the Congress passed to favour domestic producers, and the monopolistic patents granted to these huge firms, we have a clear

picture of how much political economy did for the rise and maintenance of national monopolies.

- Planned chaos (shortages and surpluses)

Especially during the first half of the XX century, various experiments in central state planning were conducted. The general result was what von Mises defined as "planned chaos." In particular we had

- the failure of the Soviet plans of industrialization and economic take-off;

- the failure of the Chinese state to engineer a socio-economic "forward leap";

- the failure of the USA New Deal to cure economic depression.

Behind the term failure are to be found either huge shortages causing famine and death or massive overproduction of certain goods (especially in the agriculture sector because of state-supported prices).

The fact is that whenever the state imposes a certain price, if the price is too low the production of that specific good will drop, causing shortages; if the price is kept artificially high the producer will be inclined to over-expand production, being assured that the state will absorb any unsold goods. This is why any price system imposed by the state through its political economy is, in fact, state-engineered madness.

- Monetary disorder (inflation and depression)

The area where political economy has produced most disasters, and often untold misery, has been monetary policy.

The idea that the state (via a central bank) is the only institution capable and trustworthy enough to administer the means of payment in the form of a monopolistic legal tender is a conviction stronger than any religious dogma. And this notwithstanding the disasters of inflation and finally hyperinflation (Germany in the period 1914-1923) and depression (USA in the 1930's) brought about by the measures taken by the central bank.

Ruinous and protracted boom and bust periods are almost exclusively a product of monetary policies rather than a result of business cycles of expansion and contraction. Business cycles exist but they are

something limited in time and consequences and are unavoidable in relation to the technological development and changes in consumers' demands.

The pinnacle of absurdity of political economy was reached in the 1970's with the concurrent presence of inflation and stagnation (stagflation).

All these miserable results had been masked during the period following the Second World War by sustained and necessary growth made possible by a certain liberalization of trade and de-bureaucratization of economic life, after the centralistic excesses of fascism, the *Zwangswirtschaft* (Command economy) of national socialism and the New Deal. The economic recovery that took place after the war, enabling pressing housing needs to be met and resulting in a general improvement in living standards, was very marked in the less *dirigiste* economy (West Germany) and more flimsy and difficult in the more interventionist ones (Britain and France).

However, in the 1970's, once the recovery had been achieved, economic stagflation set in. This situation was not only damaging the economic process (i.e. people's standard of living) but was also compromising the means of sustenance of the state, owing to the lack of a growing productive sector out of which to extract wealth.

For this reason political economy had to undergo a radical change.

### **The mystifying end**

In 1971 Richard Nixon, the 37th president of the USA, in order to justify his interventionist measures in the economy (e.g. wage and price controls, high federal spending), which were not consistent with his professed political beliefs, made a famous declaration, saying: "We are all Keynesians now!"

Certainly he did not suspect that, by the end of that decade, Keynesianism would be increasingly abandoned by politicians and intellectuals and that political economy, i.e. the idea that the state can manage the "economy", would suffer a profound crisis of faith.

The stagflation of the nineteen-seventies, the serious budgetary problems that were affecting states like the United Kingdom and Italy, and the deep social discontent resulting in wage demands by disgruntled categories of workers, all this was leading some countries to a black future of decline unless a general reorientation of policies was put in place.

It was time to abandon Keynesianism, which had produced not only vast state deficits but also many badly-run nationalized industries and utilities and the introduction of all sorts of restrictions and distortions in economic relations. The state was finally declaring itself unable to manage companies that were accumulating huge debts and were even endangering state revenues.

The transformation of political economy as carried out by Mrs. Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the USA consisted in taking the state out of the daily running of large companies and sectors previously nationalized and leaving the entrepreneurs in charge of producing goods and services, and making profits, out of which the state could take away big chunks of money through taxation.

In other word it was the beginning of the separation of the spheres of politics and economics, with the economic sector free (or a bit more free) to operate in order to produce wealth, of which a percentage would become state receipts. It is then appropriate to see in this the first phase of the end of political economy. Debates about political economy continue almost unabated in Parliament and within political parties but the idea that the nation state controls and runs the economy is totally bankrupt, kept alive only in the minds of some deluded individuals.

This policy, generally known as privatization and deregulation, was quite attractive for the state rulers because it allowed them to fill some holes in the state budget thanks to the sale of assets and to higher state revenues. It was copied by the leaders of other industrial countries, which saw not only the general improvement in the economic situation in the United Kingdom (for instance, privatized companies in better shape and delivering services more effectively)



but the political success of the exponents of those policies (Mrs. Thatcher got re-elected three times in a row, Ronald Reagan won a huge second term mandate).

Moreover, when the political economy of planning collapsed with the end of the Soviet Union, it seemed that there was no future whatsoever for state economy and that everything would be entrusted to the spontaneous intercourse of free economic actors, with the state relegated to the role of the reassuring watchman and fair umpire.

Unfortunately this is not the case. Political economy, in the sense of the state running firms and owning utilities, is practically over, but politics, that is the monopolistic territorial state, is still in the saddle. This means that all the main problems and distortions are still there (compulsory state taxation, state deficits, state controlled money, etc.) compounded by the fact that the state can now rely on higher tax receipts from privatized companies and from increased consumerism (high VAT receipts). These new resources have allowed the state to start a new cycle of money squandering (e.g. half a million people were hired by the state in the United Kingdom during the Blair years with no improvement whatsoever being achieved thereby in the standard of services) and even to embark on crazy adventures in the name of 'exporting democracy' or 'fighting for freedom'.

We could end up reverting to a past situation if the insatiable need for further resources leads the state once more to intervene massively in the (mis)management of the economy.

- To avoid the return of political economy we need to
- put economics (i.e. economic thinking and practice) on a sound basis;
  - extend to politics the same standards of performance and behaviour considered necessary for economics as well as for any scientific or technological endeavour.

Let us now examine what economics might have been if it had followed another lead and another course.

## Economics

The pattern of political economy previously sketched in its theoretical and practical aspects was not espoused by every writer on economic matters.

In actual fact some early analysis heralded the promise of an economic science separated from politics. Economics was born with the Physiocrats. They called themselves simply *Economistes* and their ideas greatly influenced Adam Smith.

In Book IV of *The Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith criticized at length the distortions introduced into economics by the policy of mercantilism but did not go far enough to put economics on a universal basis, being still encumbered by the concept of nation (national product, national trade, national state budget).

The same could be said of Karl Marx with his ambiguous formulations about the role of the state in the economy. In his most popular text (*The Communist Manifesto*, 1848) he embraced the position that the national state had a role to play in the overcoming of capitalism (e.g. as central banker, as owner of factories and manager of public services). Later on (see, for instance, *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875) he changed his mind, but to no avail, because those hastily-made proposals previously penned at the end of the Manifesto stuck to him forever, making him one of the champions of political economy, i.e. of state intervention in the economy.

Only those writers who went beyond the narrow boundaries of the nation state were capable of offering interesting insights into the scope of the science of economy.

Some of them, like Pëtr Kropotkin, for instance, were not economists by profession. While still using the expression 'political economy', Kropotkin nevertheless gave a definition of this field of research free of any political overtone: "the study of the needs of mankind, and the means of satisfying them with the least possible waste of human energy." (*The Conquest of Bread*, 1906)

Already in 1831 a scholar like archbishop Whateley, unhappy with the expression 'political economy', proposed replacing it with the

term "catalactics" (from the Greek *katallasso* = to exchange), stressing the fact that the exchange of goods and services was the essential aim of any economic activity.

Towards the end of the XIX century, the term "economics" started to be used more and more in place of "political economy."

In 1879, in the Preface to the Second Edition of *The Theory of Political Economy*, the economist William Stanley Jevons put forward the express proposal "to discard, as quickly as possible, the old troublesome double worded name of our science" i.e. political economy, for "the single convenient term economics."

In 1890 appeared the first edition of Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics*.

However, the change of terminology should not deceive us into believing that a radical change of views had taken place. The term 'economics' was used also by people like Beatrice and Sydney Webb, the founders, in 1895, of the London School of Economics and Political Science, who were strong believers in state intervention in the economy and thus advocates of "political economy". Actually, it was from the end of the XIX century till the end of the Second World War that political economy, and not economics, held sway.

Nevertheless, throughout that period there were isolated voices that objected, implicitly or openly, to the intrusion of state politics into the dynamics of free economic choices. Those voices were either confined to a certain sphere of analysis and deemed acceptable only in relation to micro-economic matters, like the single firm or the individual consumer (this is the case of the so-called marginalists); or were totally dismissed as irrelevant to current problems and not worthy of much academic study (like the Austrian school of von Mises and Hayek).

In 1922 Ludwig von Mises in *Die Gemeinwirtschaft: Untersuchungen über den Sozialismus* (*Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*, London, 1936) had already advanced the thesis of the absurdity of central planning as an economic instrument replacing, for the determination of production and prices, the guide mechanism represented by free exchanges.

In this he had been preceded by Enrico Barone (*Il Ministro della Produzione nello Stato Collettivista*, 1908) who viewed as inconceivable a political control of the economy, because only continuous experimentation, possible exclusively under free competition, could lead to the emergence of the best coefficients of production. According to Barone, economic adjustments and disturbances, disparagingly labelled as "anarchy" by the advocates of state planning, are in reality the irreplaceable aspect of any process of production that could be qualified as economic. This reminds us of the "creative destruction" highlighted by Schumpeter (*Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 1942) as the engine necessary to drive any effective and innovative economic process.

Then, in 1944, F. A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* struck the decisive blow against the very idea of political economy, showing not only the practical unsuitability but also the moral unacceptability of the state interfering in the economic decisions of the individuals.

With the same inclination towards an abandonment of political economy, Lionel Robbins produced in 1932 a famous definition of economics as "the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses." (Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 1932).

This definition and all the other critical analysis produced against the viability of political economy as state-controlled/state-directed economy, were meant to place individuals and exchanges at the centre of the economic process.

This was a praiseworthy effort but had basic limitations due to the cultural boundaries of that time.

The advocates of economics, as opposed to political economy, were champions of the free market but were still thinking within a framework where a territorial state had monopolistic control of some aspects of the economy, like monetary matters. We had to wait until 1976 for Hayek to introduce the proposal of money denationalization (*Choice in Currency: the Denationalization of Currency*, 1976). And only in 1993 do we have the essay by an economist, Murray Rothbard,

*Nations by Consent: decomposing the nation-state*, where the monopolistic territorial state is relegated to the scrapyard of history. However, he doesn't go far enough towards the end of any territorial economic sovereignty.

Even the 'public choice' school that has produced the idea of 'government failure' to counter the thesis of "market failure" put forward by the political economists, still subscribes to the concept of the territorial nation state and economy.

So, apart from a few remarkable exceptions (growing in number and influence, however), we are still a long way off the right track and we will remain so until we discard definitively all the old rubbish of GDP and balance of trade and full employment and central bank and legal tender and national economic growth. What is required is nothing less than a very extensive transformation of the paradigm.

To do so it is necessary to abandon completely the idea and practice of political economy and move towards what is here defined as "scientific ecolonomics."

## **Ecolonomics**

Ecolonomics represents a new frame of reference that totally supersedes the old national view of political economy and also goes beyond the still limiting and unsatisfactory structure of crude economics.

It unifies the fields of economy and ecology, focusing on the following aspects:

- individuals (needs and exchanges)
- space (spaceship earth with all its inhabitants)
- resources (human, material).

The aim of ecolonomics is the study of the needs of and exchanges between individuals, and the means of satisfying them through activities resulting in the least possible waste of human energy and material resources.

The main concepts taken into account by ecolonomics are those of:

- needs (the appropriate satisfaction of human requirements)
- exchanges (the phenomenon of universal recurring reciprocity)
- activities (the free expression of human qualities).

The needs, exchanges and activities of the current generation should be satisfied and carried out in such a way as to allow future generations to have the same if not even better chances for the fulfilment of these aspects.

This means that, in view of the inescapable reality of finite resources, the idea of pursuing continuous material growth regardless of the level of needs satisfaction already achieved by individuals, should be abandoned because unsustainable and unsound. In fact, as Kenneth Boulding observed, “within the realm of common human experience all growth must run into *eventually* declining rates of growth.” (Kenneth Boulding, *Toward a General Theory of Growth*, 1953). And in another statement attributed to him he poignantly says that “anyone who believes that exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.”

Scientific ecolonomics is founded on the belief that there are universal rules for the appropriate management of spaceship earth. The task of everybody is to discover those rules on the basis of empirical observations, leading to theoretical formulations subject to recurrent verification.

It is then up to each one to accept or reject (in full or in part) those rules, bearing directly the consequences (positive or negative) for the course of action undertaken. Clearly this excludes the possibilities of behaving in ways that compromise the health and wealth of other individuals (for instance, by polluting the environment, restricting the freedom of exchange, monopolizing resources, or implementing similar damaging practices).

Scientific ecolonomics is a cognitive tool useful for making people aware of principles and practices that have proved either appropriate and valuable or harmful and worthless, in particular when individ-

uals deal with scarce material resources and their most efficient allocation. However, ecconomics does not cover the entire spectrum of human experiences/exigencies.

In fact, in real life we take into account aspects that go beyond the realm of ecology + economy. Those other aspects, which usually come higher up peoples' scale of priorities, refer to:

- ethics (the sphere of moral values)
- aesthetics (the sphere of sensuous values)
- civics (the sphere of social values).

Oscar Wilde defined the cynic as "a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing" (*Lady Windermere's Fan*, Act III). Obsessed by the imperatives of political economy (employment, money-making, consumerism, growth, etc.) the majority of people seem to have taken the cynic as their behavioural model and called him *homo oeconomicus*, confining him within the borders and constrictions of an artificial "national economy."

Actually, the figure of *homo oeconomicus* and the sphere of "national economy" are no more than fictions. Nevertheless, even figments of somebody's imagination can become very restrictive and obnoxious realities if they are upheld and imposed on everybody by a monopolistic territorial power like the state.

In reality, there exist only human beings with all their needs, wishes, feelings, attitudes, aspirations, and values, on the vast space of planet earth.

Scientific ecconomics means the re-introduction on the scene of the free and complete human being capable of making conscious and well informed choices.

The intention is not to replace a fictitious *homo oeconomicus* with an equally fictitious *homo oecolonomicus* but to set out on a new path where values, freedom and responsibilities are the main components of decisions taken by individuals and their voluntary communities, without the obstacles of crippling mental barriers or constrictive national borders.

## FROM RULERS' MONOPOLIES TO USERS' CHOICES

Monopolies

Feudal monopolies

Town monopolies

Crown monopolies

A respite from monopolies

The revival of monopolies: state-run monopolies

The extension of monopolies: state-made monopolies

The justifications for monopolies

The bankruptcy of monopolies

Beyond monopolies



### Monopolies

**A** monopoly is defined by *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1981) in the following way:

“Ownership or control that permits domination of the means of production or the market in a business or occupation usually for



controlling prices and that is achieved

- through an exclusive legal privilege (as a government grant, charter, patent, or copyright)
- or by control of the source of supply (as ownership of a mine)
- or by engrossing a particular article or commodity (as in cornering the market)
- or in combination or concert of action.”

From this lexical definition it emerges clearly that special state funding (grants) and legal privileges (charters, patents, copyrights) are considered the first cause in the formation of monopolies.

As for the other causes, it must be said that, in order to have a monopoly, the control of the source of supply should be total with respect to the good or service supplied, and this is generally possible only if a company obtains exclusive rights (of exploitation, of commercialization) from a state ruler and if those “rights” are strictly enforced. This can be done by forbidding or severely limiting the access of outside suppliers of that good or service to the territory controlled by the ruler, otherwise the basic aim of the monopoly, i.e. that of controlling the selling price, would not be achieved.

The same applies to the case when the producer succeeds in “cornering the market,” that is in getting control of such a large share of a commodity as to almost dictate its price. This can happen only if we are in the presence of rules introduced by the political power restricting trade or access to a certain area of production. In fact, in a situation of freedom of enterprise, many traders or producers are bound to emerge whenever there are opportunities for making a profit; and certainly a good number of them from all over the world would jump at the chance of trading in an area where extraordinary profits might be made (even if only for a short while).

With regard to the combination or concert of action between the producers of a certain commodity (e.g. cartels), history shows that, usually, this does not hold for very long (see the continuous squabbles of the oil cartel) due to the diversity of interests; moreover, if the prices are pushed too high the likely result would be a

contraction of sales (disrupting the profits of the weakest sectors of the cartel) as consumers seek alternative ways to satisfy those needs.

The only fairly successful monopolistic cartel that has ever existed without state support is the diamond cartel. But here we are in a very special case where a drop in prices, allowing diamonds to become an article for the masses, would satisfy neither the seller nor the buyer. In fact, it would kill not only the diamond cartel but the diamond itself as a very precious stone. And this is something that no one interested in that shiny object wants.

From what has been said so far, it is apparent that the only way to really generate and maintain a monopoly is by "exclusive legal privilege" in all its forms, that is through a political ruler dominating the economic game, favouring some people shamelessly and obstructing other mercilessly. As a matter of fact, the original meaning of the term monopoly (1596) was: "an exclusive privilege (conferred by the sovereign or the state) of selling some commodity or trading with a particular place or country." (from *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Third Edition, 1983).

And this is what has happened in the course of history as will be highlighted in this essay, which aims to offer a brief analysis of some monopolistic realities past and present and to explore possible ways to overcome them in the future.

### **Feudal monopolies**

The dawn of the first millennium presented, at least in Europe, many small territorial fiefdoms, each one under the control of a ruler.

A fief was a sort of licence granted by the strongest or most dominant ruler (the king or the emperor) to a vassal in exchange for obedience and assistance, allowing him to enjoy possession of a certain territory and to extract services from its inhabitants.

The people living in the territory became, then, dependent on the assigned master and obliged to perform certain duties.

In the course of time the feudal master, in order to assure himself

of enough resources for remaining comfortably in power, devised various sources of revenue.

This he did by monopolizing people and means of production.

The feudal master introduced and exerted various types of monopoly:

- Monopoly over labourers. The peasants were considered as objects bound to the soil and, like the soil, the property of the ruler and obliged to spend part of their time and energy cultivating the ruler's fields. They had no right to leave the fiefdom, not even to get married outside it (*forismariago*), without the express authorization of the master, who did not want to lose any labourer.

- Monopoly over producers. The peasants were obliged to use tools and equipment that belonged to or were given in concession by the feudal master under condition of monopoly. In other words, the peasants had to bring their grain to the master's flour-mill, their olives to the master's olive-press, their dough to the master's oven and had to pay (in goods or money) for the use of this and other equipment according to the rate of charge imposed by the monopolist master. What was particularly burdensome and loathsome in the monopoly of equipment (mills and ovens) was the fact that, quite often, the peasants had to cover long distances over terrible roads with their raw products only to discover that they had to wait days because the mill was busy or out of order. And sometimes they had to accept badly-ground meal or half-baked bread without the slightest possibility for complaint or choice.

Feudal history records several cases where the bailiffs of the master entered houses in order to remove and destroy millstones that had been made in order to overcome the ruler's monopoly.

- Monopoly over dwellers. The people inhabiting the fiefdom were subject to the feudal master who took upon himself the exclusive administration of justice and law and order. Clearly, in case of external attack, the burden of fighting the invaders fell in large measure also onto the peasants, but they had no voice in administrative and military matters.

From these brief remarks it emerges that the reality of the fief was

made up of a series of rigid monopolistic practices that imprisoned the life of the peasants and blocked their personal development.

It was only when the rural serfs started running away from the fief, becoming merchants and establishing small settlements that attracted more rural serfs, that the monopolistic hold of the feudal masters started to loosen and was finally broken altogether. The first free towns were, supposedly, thus established.

Unfortunately, as soon as the free men in the free towns acquired some wealth and power, they started imposing, in their turn, old and new forms of monopoly.

### **Town monopolies**

The artisans and merchants who gathered to live in the towns very soon associated themselves into protective bodies known as corporations or guilds which linked those belonging to the same trade.

What was, at the start, a union for the support of its members became, at a certain point, a very close, exclusive group of associates, opposed to the interests of all those outside it (the peasants, the artisans of other trades). All these organized bodies of producers and traders, from Venice to Genoa to the Hanseatic League, tried to monopolize the production and exchange of goods and the routes of trade.

In particular the following monopolistic aspects increasingly came to characterize the behaviour of the members of the corporations in the towns:

Work. Stringent regulations and wide-ranging restrictions were imposed:

- Juridical rules. Neither foreigners nor servants nor people born out of wedlock could be members of the corporation.

- Financial rules. Admittance into the corporation was subject to the payment of a fee, generally quite high. At the same time it was forbidden to remunerate the workers with what were considered excessive wages.

- Professional rules. In order to gain the title of master the appren-

tice had to work 7 years in the workshop and had to produce, at the end of that period, a so-called "masterpiece" (*chef d'oeuvre, capolavoro*).

**Production.** The corporations fixed the number of workers, working days and workshops allowed in a town; the aim was to keep under control the amount produced in order to avoid overproduction and a fall in sale prices. Moreover, it was forbidden to set up workshops in the countryside; this prohibition compelled the peasants to come to the town to make their purchases and gave to the towns the monopoly in craft production.

**Technology.** It was forbidden to use certain tools and machinery that could lead to excessive production; to avoid this, checks were also carried out as to the number of machines employed in the workshop.

**Trade.** It was forbidden to sell below a certain minimum price. Under pressure from the masters' guilds, the town regents issued prohibitions on anyone selling goods from other regions except on specific market days. The peasants who were under the jurisdiction of the town were required to bring their produce to the town market to be sold at controlled prices. They could not sell it to foreign merchants before a certain delay of time.

All these rules were intended to give a permanent trading advantage to the corporations by limiting the number of artisans in each trade in such a way as to keep the level of production permanently below the level of demand. In other words, the town monopolies aimed at a craft market controlled by (restricted) supply. This allowed them to fix the highest possible price, especially with respect to the peasants who, being dispersed producers, did not have the bargaining power of the town guilds. Country people and foreigners were also subject to taxes and tolls on trade from which the town dwellers were totally or partially exempt.

The result was that resources got channelled toward the towns, which became rich centres endowed with magnificent buildings, at the expense of the large populations living in the countryside. However, monopolism breeds the seeds of economic ruin, and those regions in which the most wealthy towns were located (Italy, France) would either fall into decline or move straight from town monopolies

to crown monopolies in the attempt to promote an illusory industrial development.

### **Crown monopolies**

From the XIV and XV centuries onwards the more powerful of the feudal lords in Europe started setting up an administrative network upon which the central state of later times would be built.

This is especially evident in France where the king relied, for the imposition of his will, on the *intendants des provinces*, people often recruited from the merchant class who gave up their trade and became crown servants.

Their task was to administer and regulate social life, focusing especially on the economic aspects of production and trade, out of which the crown and also the *intendants* extracted the means to live and operate.

In order to draw out an income for the crown and for the emerging state apparatus, the *intendants* suggested the introduction of measures dealing with the entire spectrum of economic opportunities and endeavours, considering them as concessions and privileges only to be granted by the ruling power at a price.

Clearly, craftsmen and traders were willing to pay for those concessions and privileges provided that exclusive rights were attached to them. In that case, enjoying a monopolistic position, they could pass the extra cost down to the consumers and still be assured of a steady flow of fat profits thanks to the lack of any competitors.

This situation was made possible through royal acts or royal letters that, in many cases, simply confirmed and sanctioned the restrictive practices of the guilds. The overall aims of this collusion between the rising central power, represented by the king, and the corporations were the usual ones of:

Inhibiting competition, by

- fixing the trading price, for instance with respect to the sale of every piece of cloth throughout the realm, or the maximum wages for journeymen;

- fixing the quantity of produce, for instance, by enjoining producers to reduce the number of wheels in a pottery shop or the number of looms in a cloth shop.

Suppressing competition, by

- giving state patents to the inventor of a new device and so granting him, for a certain length of time, an officially sanctioned monopoly, in the use and commercialisation of his discovery;

- assigning to some individuals monopolistic rights to perform an economic activity (e.g. grinding grains, exploiting mines, producing certain wares) within a certain territory or over the entire realm;

- reserving to the king's factories exclusive rights of intervention and administration especially in industries and products related to war (e.g. the making of munitions as a royal monopoly).

The income gained by those involved in these monopolistic practices was, in some cases, enormous. If we examine the salt monopoly held by the kings of France alone, the revenue in 1523 amounted to around 460,000 *livres tournais*. In 1607 all the revenues from salt were more than 6 million *livres*; in 1641 they had risen to the huge sum of almost 20 million *livres tournais*. If we include other sources of monopolistic income, at the end of the reign of Louis XIII (1643) the total annual revenues of the king seem to have reached the figure of 80 million *livres*. (John U. Nef, *Industry and Government in France and England, 1540-1640*, First Edition 1940).

To have an idea of what monopolistic practices can bring to the coffers of the state it is appropriate to compare these figures with those of the English kingdom where the rulers did not have at their disposal a state machinery like that in France, able to monopolize resources and sell them at a very high price or to assign them, on payment of a fixed amount, to the highest bidder or to friends and cronies who behaved in the same exploitative way.

During the 1630-1640 decade the annual revenues of the English king were around £660,000, equivalent to nearly nine million *livres tournais*. Even accounting for the fact that England and Wales had around a third of the inhabitants of the French kingdom, it is evident that monopolistic practices were much more extensive in France,

since they procured an income to the crown three times higher, proportionately speaking.

Having said that, even in England according to one estimate of 1621, there were around 700 royal monopolies instituted by the Stuarts, with the result of pushing up the price of many goods (like candles, coal, soap, leather, salt, pepper) and draining resources towards the king. (Christopher Hill, *Century of Revolution 1603-1714*, Second Edition 1980).

The more money went to the crown, the less was available for non-monopolistic entrepreneurs to start new ventures or for consumers to satisfy needs in a more adequate and convenient way.

However, in contrast to what was happening in France, the business and commercial interests that had a voice in the English Parliament already in 1640 had cancelled almost all industrial monopolies. It is fair to say that in XVII century England the general climate of opinion, from the common person to the members of the House of Commons and throughout the judiciary, was increasingly against any interference by the king in people's economic affairs.

That is why the Industrial Revolution did not take place in France: the essential pre-requisite, i.e. freedom of enterprise and trade, was largely absent there.

In England, by contrast, the people had succeeded in assembling the cultural and material conditions for displacing monopolies and also giving to the common person some freedom of action. The result would be that those people in England would become, at least as long as the conditions remained in place, the most industrious and prosperous on earth.

### **A respite from monopolies**

From the XVII century up to almost the end of the XIX century the English kingdom was a region where monopolies and monopolistic practices were not supinely accepted. As remarked by Max Weber, the royal policy of monopolistic favouritism was opposed for decades by the Puritans under the Long Parliament and afterwards "under the



war cry 'down with the monopolies'." (Max Weber, *General Economic History, 1919-1920*). That does not mean that monopolies ceased to exist in England. As a matter of fact in 1694 what was to become the most monopolistic economic organization of the realm was set up in the form of the Bank of England. Besides that, there was the East India Company who, in the course of its long history, received monopolistic or semi-monopolistic trading powers between India and England.

However, on the whole, freedom of production and freedom of trade prevailed in such measure that a new industrial society was able to emerge, with new opportunities and also new challenges. The difference, from previous ages and from other regions, was that now the field was open, to an extent never previously achieved, to practically everybody with initiative and energy. Once these qualities were present, financial resources would most likely be found.

This is, for instance, the exemplary case of Richard Arkwright, the barber, who had the ingenuity and drive to put the spinning frame to industrial use and managed profitably the investments that converged on that application, becoming in the process one of the richest men in England. His attempt at patenting the spinning frame failed in the end because of the opposition of other manufacturers and due to the fact that the machine was not his own invention but, as is almost always the case, the result of many minds and hands, each one improving on previous attempts and then finding economic applications and financial capital for productive exploitation.

So, the lack of support from the ruling power and the absence of popular sympathy for monopolies made possible the activation of a process of continuous personal and social development that was directed mainly to two major endeavours:

- Exploiting opportunities for enterprise. The possibility of starting a business without being impeded by those in power resulted in a flurry of activities aimed at satisfying, as far as material and technological constraints would allow, the needs of the people. This is the time when, besides manufacturing enterprises started by one person, individuals also formed associations to build railway lines, canals and

new roads for the transport of goods and passengers. And when electricity and gas became available to town dwellers, many companies were set up offering these utility services. Over in the United States, in New York City by 1884 there were six gas companies competing against each other and in 1887 six electric light companies were established. Entrepreneurs were also active in postal services, and even the lighthouses were erected and run as a business, with the fees paid by the ships that entered the harbour.

- Solving problems of social life. Industrial production gave also rise to problems like the bad sanitary conditions of the people crowding into urban quarters. Moreover, town life and the expansion of written information required a degree of literacy for almost everybody. To tackle these problems, both single individuals and associations founded hospitals, opened schools, established friendly societies providing medical care, moral and cultural betterment, financial support and even human relief. The growing wealth also permitted the allocation of funds for old age, reached by an increasing number of people. In other words, many individuals were willing to set aside money, energy and time for the solution of all sorts of problems.

In general, not only was it not considered necessary to wait for the state but it was also deemed inappropriate for the state to intervene. The only task reserved to it was that of watchman against attack on people's life and liberty; and even that was not accepted by everybody: when Robert Peel introduced in 1829 a state financed police force for the city of London (The London Metropolitan Police), opposition to the idea was quite strong.

However, just as the free towns had succumbed in the past to the allurements of the king and had traded internal freedom for commercial privileges over a wider territory, so now, it was the turn of the entrepreneurs to give up their freedom to produce and trade on the world market (*laissez-faire* and *laissez-passer*) in exchange for the assurance of protective barriers on the national market. And, after that, it was time for workers to demand laws protecting wages, employment and conditions of work, against newcomers (i.e. immigrants and young workers).

These requests, which once would have been considered corporative privileges, were now seen as legitimate rights that the nation state should promote.

So, towards the end of the XIX century the short respite from monopolies was coming to an end and a strong revival of monopolistic practices was under way.

### **The revival of monopolies: state-run monopolies**

It is very striking, although easy to explain, how the same historical pattern repeats itself as soon as the engines of innovation become forces of conservation. Once the self-emancipated artisans who established free towns had become rich and powerful, they started to defend their wealth by way of rules (town or crown regulations) limiting competition and installing themselves as monopolistic producers or traders.

The same thing happened with the entrepreneurs of the Industrial Revolution. The bold free spirits of the first phase of English industrialization became, slowly but inexorably, the rich men who were afraid of competition from other newly industrializing regions like Germany.

They found receptive politicians who, with the extension of the political franchise, relied more and more, for being elected, on the favour of the national subjects and, especially, of the most organized groups, namely the industrialists, the traders, the financiers, and the nation's workers marshalled in their Trade Unions.

Adam Smith had remarked that:

"People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices." (*The Wealth of Nations*, Book I, Chapter X).

He therefore advised the state rulers not to facilitate in any way the formation of trade associations. He was, for instance, against the

keeping of public registers that specifically listed all those dealing in a certain sector.

The reality is that the rulers not only promoted but made compulsory the registration of those associations of businessmen in public registers; and that practice was later extended to workers associations. In the end, Big Business and Big Labour allied themselves (together or separately) to Big Government and made monopolies and monopolistic practices the accepted rule.

The revival of monopolies, at least in England, started not in the industrial sector but in the field of the so-called public services (health, education, social security, transport) and public utilities (gas, electricity and, later on, telephone, radio and television). It would be carried on for decades starting from the end of the XIX century up to the moment where practically all of them would become state monopolies.

The strange fact that has been generally swept under the carpet by state-servile historians is that those services and utilities, which had been set up by associations such as mutual societies or by individuals such as philanthropists, social activists or just ordinary entrepreneurs, were not only functioning pretty well considering the resources and the technology of the time, but were going from strength to strength. The way they were organized and run was making everybody more and more autonomous and self-reliant, in so far as individuals were directly participating in building their own supporting agencies with their own funds.

The story must be briefly recounted. In 1877 there were in England 2.7 million members of registered friendly societies taking care for the provision of social security services. In 1897 the membership had reached 4.8 million. By 1910 the figure had gone up to 6.6 million. If we include the members of unregistered voluntary insurance associations it emerges that at least 9 million were covered by social security (out of a population of 36 million and around 8 million families or separate occupiers) and the number was growing every year, on average, by more than one hundred thousand members. At that point, in 1911, the "liberal" government of Lloyd George intro-

duced, against the opposition of the working class, the then unpopular National Insurance Act that made social insurance compulsory for 12 million people. (David G. Green, *Reinventing Civil Society*, IEA, 1993). It is fair to say, then, that the state intervened just when the voluntary associations were already on the way to achieving the same results that the state imposed by law.

The same thing happened with education and health provision services.

During the XIX century Education became one of the focuses of intervention by many people, from socialist utopians like Robert Owen to scientists like the Reverend Richard Dawes and many social activists and philanthropic benefactors. Dame schools, charitable schools, commercial schools, Quaker schools, Anglican schools, workers' colleges, mechanics institutes and so on and so forth sprouted everywhere in England to satisfy the demands of a population hungry for literacy and knowledge. The first comprehensive survey of education made in 1818 showed that 7% of the entire population was attending some form of school. Within ten years, a second survey recorded a doubling of the number of pupils. In 1861 the Newcastle Commission, after investigating how many children were formally educated, arrived at the figure of 95.5% in England. A similar picture emerges in the United States, where literacy in the North rose to over 90% of the population towards the middle of the XIX century.

Even in the presence of such a trend towards voluntary universal education the state considered it necessary to intervene and monopolize the field by setting up state schools supported through compulsory taxation and instituting diplomas certified by the state as the only valid certificate for most occupations. It led to the end of any commercial or charitable school other than the so-called public school for the offspring of the rich and powerful. The children of everybody else had to enrol in a state-run state-oriented school.

As for Health services provision, throughout history religious and charitable institutions had catered for the poor on a voluntary basis, receiving donations to that purpose from wealthy benefactors. During the XVIII century five new hospitals were built in London

through the financial support of some rich families (such as the Buxtons, the Barclays, the Cherringtons, the Hanburys) and with the aid of the so-called 'five-guinea subscribers'. Other hospitals were founded in a similar way in other English towns during the same century, but nothing in comparison with what happened during the following century: in London alone thirty-six hospitals were built in the nineteenth century (more than half the present number), founded by public subscription or by dedicated wealthy individuals. (James Bartolomew, *The Welfare State we're in*, 2006).

With respect to medical care outside hospital, there was an articulated system according to the specific choices and possibilities of the individual. Some people paid a fee to the doctor according to their ability to pay (with income assessed by the amount of rent paid). Some received free assistance through the intervention of charities. Some were covered by pre-payment schemes that were like insurance, with a fixed annual fee paid by instalments. In this way the medical profession was an independent profession and its members prospered according to the quality of the services rendered. And the doctors were chosen by patients who, through direct or indirect payment, supported the profession and scrutinized the competence, honesty and responsiveness of its members. (David Green, *Reinventing Civil Society*, 1993).

With the intervention of the state and the monopolistic take-over of education and health, teachers and doctors became employees of the state, secure in their jobs whatever the quality (or lack of quality) of their service.

What followed was that all the friendly and voluntary associations catering for those needs were either disbanded or absorbed by the state, which became the monopolistic provider through bodies like the National Health Service in the United Kingdom. This destroyed not only the possibility of choice but also the possibility of learning to become a responsible human being, capable of allocating resources in the most sensible way. That was to become a task reserved to the politicians, with results that will be seen shortly.

The revival of monopolies affected not only the public services

but also the public utilities. The various companies providing competitive services in a town started to be municipalized and put under the control of the city council. To understand how things developed we can refer to the documented case of the Gas Light companies of Baltimore (USA). In 1880 there were three competing gas companies but in 1890 a bill was introduced by the Maryland legislators giving to the Consolidated Gas Company a 25 year monopoly in the provision of gas to the city in return for a payment to the council of \$10,000 a year and 3% of all dividends. How the consumers could benefit from the institution of such a monopoly is hard to see. This was like going back to feudalism and to the predatory practices of the French and English kings of a bygone age.

With the rise of the nation state these types of interventions multiplied in a crescendo that resulted, practically all over the world and in less than a century, in state owned or state controlled monopolies of all utilities (gas, electricity, water, mail, phone, rail).

In parallel to that, monopolistic practices were also making their way into any and every type of business, industrial and agricultural. And something must be said about the deceitful way in which that process was implemented.

### **The extension of monopolies: state-made monopolies**

An irrational and fallacious fear grew during the second half of the XIX century, fuelled by those who were advocating statism, presented as socialism; and the fear was that the free market would inevitably end up being dominated by a few monopolistic enterprises.

Those who held those views were simply confusing the enlargement of firms seeking possible technological and commercial advantages related to economy of scale with the existence of monopolies. The fact is that the dimension of companies may change according to a series of variables related to parameters like the size of the market in which they operate and the technology available at the time. In any case, it is advisable not to fall prey to two mistakes:

- to think that a modern firm must inevitably be a big firm;

- to think that a big firm must inevitably be a monopolistic firm.

It is a truly big misconception to equate bigness with modernity and monopoly. It reveals sheer ignorance of socio-economic dynamics.

Actually, the size per se is by no means a necessary and sufficient sign that the firm is economically viable or that we are in the presence of a monopoly. Regarding monopolism, we could very well have big firms fiercely competing on the world market and relatively small firms monopolizing the national market behind the shield of state tariffs or state concessions.

However, like small children impressed more by appearance than substance, politicians, journalists and state intellectuals started campaigning against big firms, in most cases receiving financial support from those business companies who were feeling the brunt of what they called "excessive" or "cut-throat" competition, arising from the emergence of more dynamic and innovative organizations.

In fact, some highly competitive firms were cutting costs and cutting prices at the expense of other firms and for the benefit of the consumers. Certainly they were doing so in order to survive and succeed; and in a market open to competition this is what every company is supposed to do if it wants to stay in business, given the fact that new entrants, with better products at a cheaper price, are a constant and potential threat. This is why no single firm can ever dominate an entire sector for a long span of time just on the basis of better prices because somebody, somewhere, will come to outsell it with more appealing products. This is the historical experience, unless there are state laws that reduce or eliminate competition - which is what many half-baked firms were asking for and what the state delivered.

The economist Gabriel Kolko, in a highly celebrated but not well circulated book, has stressed this very aspect, calling it "political capitalism". According to Kolko:

"despite the large number of mergers, and the growth in the absolute size of many corporations, the dominant tendency in the Amer-



ican economy at the beginning of this [i.e. XX] century was toward growing competition.”

This was not at all what the big corporations wanted and that is why they looked to the intervention of the Federal state to ‘regulate’ the market in a way conducive to their long term survival and prosperity. So,

“contrary to the consensus of historians it was not the existence of monopoly that caused the federal government to intervene in the economy, but the lack of it.” (Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism 1900-1916*, 1963).

In fact, practically all state interventions in the economy had the effect of producing monopolies and favouring monopolistic practices - even those which were presented as measures against them.

Let us take for instance the Sherman Act (1890) in the USA. The professed intention was to fight collusion in the fixing of prices by many separate firms operating in the same sector. What it led to in reality was that, in order to avoid falling foul of the law, many firms regrouped and consolidated under one roof. And so more and more big trusts emerged in order to do easily and in full legality what was done before awkwardly and not always successfully, i.e. the setting up of a common selling price.

A simple solution to the problem would have been to open the American market up to overseas firms (actual and potential) making it an impossible task to fix prices on a world scale. But the very opposite happened, for reasons that will be shortly explained.

The Sherman Act, besides giving a big push towards large-scale consolidations (i.e. the combinations of small or medium-size firms into large trusts), made it clear to the business community that there was something to gain for the promoters and underwriters of those consolidations. The gain for the financiers operating for the establishment of new trusts "often amounted to from 20 to 40 per cent of the total amount of the stock issued." (Harold Faulkner, *The Decline of*

*Laissez-Faire 1897-1917*, 1951). It is in the wake of these extraordinary returns that at the end of the XIX century the industrialists (those who set up enterprises and traded goods) either metamorphosed into or came to be dominated by the financiers (those who controlled liquid assets and sold shares).

Under this new scenario made of trusts and financiers, monopolies arrived as soon as the missing elements indispensable for their emergence and survival were introduced by the state, namely tariffs (import taxes) and patents.

This is a point that should be very clear to anybody: a trust unprotected by tariffs and patents is a business like any other, even if it is the only one on earth producing a certain good or providing a certain service. Its absolute supremacy, if this is ever possible for a long period of time, derives from the fact that it is the best in terms of value for money, consumer confidence and brand appeal. In that case its position is deserved and cannot be defined monopolistic, provided that there are no institutional barriers to the entry of new producers. To use the term monopoly in that specific case would be like calling Frank Sinatra or Luciano Pavarotti monopolists because they had a unique voice and their records sold in huge numbers.

Examining the situation in the USA, some of the trusts became monopolies within the internal market or within many of its segments when the federal state introduced, the same year as the Sherman Act, the McKinley tariff (1890).

The McKinley Tariff Act raised the average level of tariffs to 50%, with high duties on textiles, iron, steel and agricultural goods. That Tariff was followed by the Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act (1894), which lowered the tariffs to an average level of 40%, only to be replaced very soon by the Dingley Tariff Act (1897) which pushed the tariffs to incredible new heights (57% on average) (A.G. Kenwood and A.L. Loughheed, *The Growth of the International Economy 1820-2000*, 1992).

It was around that time that Henry O. Havemeyer, president of the American Sugar Refining Company, came out with his famous remark that:

"The mother of all trusts is the custom tariffs bill ... Economic advantages incident to the consolidation of large interests in the same line of business are a great incentive to their formation, but these bear a very insignificant proportion to the advantages granted in the way of protection under the custom tariff." (Industrial Commission, *Report*, I, 9, Washington, 1900-1902).

The fact that a statement like this comes from an industrialist who was himself profiting from protectionism and so had a vested interest in minimizing its importance, should give us food for thought also with respect to why tariffs were introduced and are so persistently upheld. Tariffs were a very good source of income for the state, representing, in 1900, more than one third of all state receipts (\$233,000,000 out of \$669,595,000). As pointed out by an economic historian with reference to the Dingley Tariff: "No possible excuse for this could be advanced, except a Treasury deficit during the previous four years." (Harold Faulkner, *The Decline of Laissez-Faire 1897-1917*, 1951). The fact that tariffs also favour the formation of national monopolies is for the territorial nation states either an irrelevant detail or even a positive outcome if the political objective is national supremacy supposedly achieved through the existence of monopolistic national firms.

The imposition of tariffs by one state gives propaganda ammunition to other state rulers to impose protectionist barriers in their turn, and this is what happened in Europe after the introduction of the Dingley Tariff, with most European governments raising import taxes, with the exception of the English, Danish and Dutch.

The Tariffs Acts, coupled with the concession of patents, gives producers the legal means to impose monopolistic prices, something that could never happen in a system of free trade and open access to the manufacturing of any good. It should then come as no surprise to hear the statement by the economist Fritz Machlup that

"our government [the reference is to the USA federal government] has done much more to create monopoly than to destroy monopoly.

I need refer only to the tariff laws, to the corporation laws, to the patent laws, to the large numbers of franchises and licence laws in the States and in the municipalities. There are features in our tax law which foster concentration." (U.S. Senate, *Hearings on Administrative Prices*, 1959).

It could be added that the awarding of many and massive Government contracts to a few firms or the transferral of Government funds for research to a handful of companies introduces unacceptable privileges and favours the emergence of monopolies.

With reference to this latter aspect, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly, senator Estes Kefauver, remarked that

"in 1959, 100 large corporations received 80% of the research funds even if they accounted for only 41% of total sales within their respective categories." (Estes Kefauver, *In a Few Hands*, 1965).

All this makes perfectly clear that free and fair competition is not on the agenda of the Federal Government or, it could be added without exaggerating or being far from the truth, of almost any state government on earth.

The bandwagon of those interested in monopolistic practices was so strong and organized, and could count on so many people in their different roles, that it was practically unstoppable. It included:

- the state rulers interested in the income from tariffs (import taxes) and in the power over other states through a policy of beggary-neighbour.

- the financiers interested in the extraordinary gains to be had from conducting mergers (consolidations)

- the trade unions interested in a protected labour market (restrictions to immigration)

- the industrialists interested in a protected market of goods (tariffs and quotas on imports) and in exclusive privileges with reference to certain products (patents)

- the national intellectuals and jingoist journalists interested in attracting a vast audience cheaply with emotional messages of economic patriotism centred on the proclaimed defence of the down-trodden.

The monopolistic practices engendered by Big Government in association with Big Business and Big Labour had the result of creating cycles of booms and busts that were conducive to even more imbalances and, paradoxically, to even stronger demands for state intervention and thereby to the deepening of monopolistic practices.

This is what happened when the Great Depression arrived, leading to the full emergence, in the USA and in Europe, of an economic system of ultra nationalist and protectionist states dominated by monopolistic actors. It was the apotheosis of corporatism.

The end of *laissez-faire*, depicted and advocated by Keynes in a famous essay (*The end of laissez-faire*, 1926), had finally arrived, and was celebrated with joyous rapture by statist intellectuals. In actual terms it was nothing other than the full dominance of the national economy by national monopolies under the protection of the nation state. The First and the Second World Wars expanded to the utmost the role of the state, to the point that the existence of state-run state-made monopolies was accepted as a normal and permanent fixture of modern economic life. In Great Britain

"this process was aided by the elaborate system of economic controls, designed for wartime but preserved well into the fifties, which limited the role of the market as a guide to the allocation of resources. It was supplemented by the concentration of five basic industries or public utilities into nation-wide and nationally owned corporations. In both these respects Government was an agent of monopoly, as it had been before the war." (Peter Goldman, Preface to Estes Kefauver, *In a Few Hands*, 1965).

Not only had the consumers and their interests disappeared from the scene but they had become hostages of big colluding dinosaurs (state-business-unions) who were openly conspiring against the

public in order to impose their monopolistic demands behind the shield of the law. Adam Smith, who was quite cynical about businessmen, could have never imagined to what appalling levels of open deception the industrial and commercial actors would stoop, while still calling themselves advocates of free enterprise and free market. The only specious freedom they knew about was how to restrict the freedom of others by asking for privileges and subsidies.

The promoters of monopolies could justify acting in this way only through the dissemination of fallacies by pseudo-intellectuals in their service. Let us then examine briefly the theoretical justifications put forward by state economists for the alleged necessity of monopolies.

### **The justifications for monopolies**

All the justifications for the existence of monopolies were elaborated and presented many decades after the emergence of current monopolistic practices. It is then fair to say that they are more post-hoc rationalizations of what happened than serious explanations of what was inevitable or necessary according to rational economic principles.

Starting from the end of the XIX century or later, depending on the economic and cultural reality of each country, the justifications for monopolies grew out of a general climate of mistrust towards the working of the so-called free market. This is quite a strange fact considering that a real free market has never existed anywhere on earth. Nevertheless, the more the state interfered with the economic activities by manipulating the currency, by restricting trade, by imposing rules on production, the more the pretended free market came under heavy criticism because it was considered responsible for all the imbalances that were, in fact, caused by the state.

This confusion of responsibilities was favoured by intellectuals who, because of their academic position in state universities, were more sympathetic to state power, from which they derived their income, than to the realities of production and trade, which they considered vulgar, feeling disdain for manual work and business activities, and from which they distanced themselves more and more.

In short, the idea of market failure or the existence of basic imperfections in the working of an unregulated market became the accepted dogma of the congregation of economists. It was associated with the other dogma, that the state was the *deus ex machina* whose interventions would put things right in every field of personal and social life, the economy included.

The fact is that, as previously pointed out, not only has a free market never been fully in operation anywhere but that the very concept of "market" is a misnomer. The "market" does not exist; what exist in real life are exchanges amongst individuals. In fact, "the market" is only a convenient term that replaces the long expression: "multiple and generally impersonal exchange relationships between individuals concerning goods and services."

If we frame the matter in this way, it is clear that imperfections and failures are a fact of life of every individual, resulting from essential human aspects like:

- the absence of perfect information
- the presence of personal tastes.

These are features that cannot be eliminated in practice and cannot be ignored in theory if we are to remain within a scientific economic discourse. In fact, it should be obvious to all rational and moral beings that:

- no one (not even a central planner to whom all economic data are supposed to be channelled under conditions of total accuracy and transparency) will ever have perfect knowledge of all goods and services existent at every moment in time and the ability to make calculations concerning prices, costs, technical factors and all that is necessary to take objectively ideal economic decisions. And even if that was miraculously possible at a certain moment in time, the decisions taken would be immediately superseded by changes that happen all the time in the multiple dynamic phases of industry and commerce, which it is impossible to keep track of in real time.

- the tastes of individuals affecting their life should not be a matter of recrimination and so should not constitute a reason for declaring the market imperfect. Moreover, if my tastes (i.e. my

choices) lead me to make bad economic decisions, it is very likely that I will learn in the process. That is why the so-called “market failures” (which are, in reality, bad individual decisions in economic matters) are the necessary aspect of personal and social development. They cannot be eliminated because they are the indispensable means through which each individual learns and on the basis of which socio-economic relations improve and develop.

Nevertheless, the strange idea emerged that market failures could and should be corrected by political intervention. This conviction was based on inconsistent premises, namely:

- that people would make the best choice in selecting political representatives to promote the common good while they are unable to make sensible choices to promote their personal economic good (underlying assumption: perfect political process).

- that the elected politicians possess complete capability and total determination to make the right economic choices for all, while the rest of us do not possess this with respect to our own concerns as participants in the economic process (underlying assumption: imperfect economic market).

How it is possible that elected representatives have perfect knowledge of reality and enlightened wisdom on which to base universally satisfactory decisions is something that no one can explain, unless we introduce a magical political formula according to which an enlightened few are destined to lead and decide for the benighted many. And, to add insult to injury, we call this unpalatable view: democracy.

Anyway, putting aside these perplexities, let us examine what are the specific justifications for the supposed necessary intervention of the state in economic matters.

They are based on the proclaimed existence of:

**Natural Monopolies.** Natural monopolies are said to exist when the cost of entry and the economies of scale in a specific sector are overwhelmingly in favour of a very large producer of goods or provider of services. This situation was thought to exist, for instance, with respect to utilities (gas, electricity, telephone, etc.) where the existence or the emergence of a single provider was considered the natural outcome



of sound economic practices. According to this view, the nature of the commodities provided dictates that every utility service should be set up and run as a monopoly by a monopolist (usually the state), thereby avoiding un-economic duplications of effort and realizing economies of scale to the advantage of the customers in the form of cheap tariffs.

**Public or Collective Goods.** Public goods are defined as those which can be enjoyed by everybody or by a large public, even by individuals who do not pay for them, without reducing their overall availability. The classic example is public security, provided to everybody, at least in theory, irrespective of their financial contribution or lack of it. According to political economists, such goods would not be supplied in a free market situation because nobody would pay for them, preferring to free ride on somebody else's payment. That is why, on the basis of this view, it is asserted that they must be monopolistically provided by an entity like the state who can finance their provision by imposing a compulsory payment on everybody in the form of taxes.

**Positive Externalities.** Positive externalities are defined as those beneficial outcomes that result from the provision of public goods or from services that benefit everybody (e.g. education, sanitation, etc.) even those who would not pay any contribution for them. According to political economists, there must exist a monopolistic actor that collects from everybody a compulsory payment in order for positive externalities to continue to exist and operate.

To these theoretical justifications for the existence of state-run and state-made monopolies we must add another conviction that leads to monopolistic practices, namely that the state should grant a patent to inventors, otherwise nothing innovative will ever see the light of the day. However, inventions were made before the idea of patents came to light and unpatented inventions were produced afterwards by people like Benjamin Franklin, who dismissed the idea, suggested to him by Governor Thomas, of patenting his newly perfected stove, saying that:

"as we enjoy great advantages from the invention of others, we should be glad of an opportunity to serve others by the invention of ours; and this we should do freely and generously." (*Writings of Benjamin Franklin, 1907*).

As a matter of fact, patents discourage creativity and restrict the coming into being of new inventions as they freeze the possibility of universal contribution to specific research problems.

Summing up, state economists started by introducing theoretical justifications for state intervention in the economy (the proclaimed failure of the pretended free market) and, from that basis, ended up justifying the existence of monopolies in collective utilities and public goods and then stimulating their growth in various economic sectors behind the shield of tariffs and patents. And, astonishing as it might appear, the defence against monopolies is delegated to the most monopolistic institution of all, the territorial central state.

So, the majority of people, while still opposing monopolies in theory, are very willing to accept in practice the existence of a monopolistic actor (the state) that intervenes in every economic relation, eliminating or subverting freedom of production and exchange. This is a clear sign of how much the minds of ordinary people can be perverted by the continuous propaganda of self-proclaimed experts, even when they uphold sheer nonsense.

In order to start changing this gullible acceptance it is indispensable to show that these justifications are not only fallacious with respect to historical reality but are also spurious pretexts that favour those monopolistic practices. This unmasking of fallacies is all the more necessary as monopolies have shown their moral and material bankruptcy and are leading us into all sorts of trouble.

### **The bankruptcy of monopolies**

Monopolies are now bankrupt under many aspects. The justifications put forward for their existence appear now, more than ever, as empty pretexts, based on false premises and leading to appalling results. Let

us then examine briefly the false premises and the appalling results that, together, unmask the bankruptcy of monopolies.

The false premises are:

Historical fallacies: the invention of natural monopolies.

As has been shown previously, during the XIX century many companies entered the utilities market and vied for customers. It was only subsequently that local municipalities or the central state monopolized these services and declared them natural monopolies. It is quite typical of state historians to re-write history according to the demands of power; the fact remains that the theoretical notion of natural monopolies is based on an historical fallacy and so it is devoid of any scientific basis. Moreover, throughout history any monopolistic power has always favoured and justified monopolistic practices; and so, to think that the supreme monopolist, the territorial central state, would be different, is not just naïve but intellectually dishonest.

Economic fallacies: the invention of public goods.

One of the main tenets of science is Occam razor which requires not complicating the analysis with unnecessary distinctions and additions (*entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*). The separation between public goods and private goods appears to be one of those superfluous differentiations, considering that some so-called 'public' goods are 'privately' bought (e.g. security with 'private' guards, education with 'private' teachers) and some so-called 'private' goods are enjoyed by the public at large (a 'private' building, a 'private' museum, a 'private' garden like those protected by the National Trust which is a 'private' organization in the U.K. looking after the 'public' environment). Many other examples could be listed that negate or cast serious doubt on the validity of this supposed dichotomy, and so it should be abandoned as unnecessary.

Anthropological fallacies: the invention of externalities.

The political economist is a strange person. In order to explain this strangeness a social scientist (Robert Frank, *Passions Within Reason*, 1988) has put forward the thesis that either the economic profession attracts people with materialistic inclinations or that it

develops in them materialistic attitudes by always stressing, in any human action, the aim of maximum material gain. It is then understandable why economists see the human being as a cash register and why, on that basis, they have invented the funny notion of externalities, which pretends that any benefit deriving from somebody's action should be reflected in market prices or in charges for those who enjoy these so-called externalities. In the absence of that, political economists think that the economic system would stop working, with everybody free-riding on those who generate positive externalities. What they seem incapable of realizing is that all the time human beings do things that benefit others (e.g. voluntary assistance) or that benefit themselves in view of benefiting others (e.g. personal education) or that benefit themselves and indirectly benefit others (e.g. tending the front garden, redecorating the front of the house) without being motivated by any direct economic gain, which either is inexistent or could be hard to come by. The concept of externality is, then, a silly idea devoid of any practical use other than justifying state taxation.

To these false premises we have to add the appalling results of monopolies, such as:

- Moral sleaze. State-run and State-made monopolies are the repository of managers elected on the basis of political allegiance and of workers hired in order to please friends and cronies or just to satisfy the political demand for full employment. The result of this is that economic principles do not apply to these monopolies, which can then charge monopolistic prices under the protection of the law.

- Technological backwardness. Shielded from competition, these industries have no incentive to devise and introduce technological improvements, but are content to simply repeat the same processes, sure that nothing will displace them other than a political upheaval.

- Financial debacle. All over the world state companies have accumulated huge losses that have always been covered by taxpayers money. The lack of economic competition has meant that there was no need to behave sensibly in financial matters but only servilely in political terms.

For the consumer, at whose service the productive system should be, the practical consequences of the existence of monopolies have been:

- **Overcharge.** The best time for monopolies was when the prices in many economic sectors (agriculture, auto, steel, etc.) were fixed by the state (the so-called "administered prices") according to the demands of Big Business and Big Labour, taking into consideration only the exigencies of the producers, even those who were backward and grossly inefficient. Also in the state-run utilities the prices charged were far in excess of actual cost. Since privatization and the restoration of a certain amount of competition they have gone down, but we are still a long way from free and full choice and so from the mythical consumers' sovereignty. In fact, even after the de-nationalization of state monopolies the price of a train ticket for a relatively short journey could be higher than the price of a plane ticket for a much longer one. And the reason has to do with the absence of full competition and the presence of distorting mechanisms.

- **Bad services.** A tale is recounted in an Eastern European country that, when taxis were a state monopoly, people queued up to wait for them; now, after the fall of state communism and the end of the most atrocious form of monopoly, taxis are once again waiting for customers, and this is how it should be. Bad service has been the rule in many monopolistic state utilities, and not just in Eastern Europe. In Italy people had to wait ages before having a telephone connected and some small towns in Southern Italy did not have electricity until the 1970's.

- **Lack of choice.** Under monopolies there is no variety and no personalization in the services provided or in the goods sold. All this is in tune with the idea of a mass society inhabited by mass consumers that are then treated as milk cows in the hands of the monopolist and had to conform, for the benefit of those who profit from passive mass consumers and docile mass subjects.

The fact that the consumer has not rebelled sooner against this appalling state of affairs has to do not only with the power of cultural indoctrination but also with a series of other reasons that combine to

explain the perverse persistence of monopolies, and especially of the mother of all monopolies, the state. They relate especially to two other roles played by many consumers of goods and services:

- Consumers as protected workers. The huge number of people occupied in monopolistic companies has provided a bulwark against any change. Under the noble excuse of protecting the workers the Trade Unions have promoted and practiced monopolism, becoming in the process one of the worst monopolistic agents of statism and disregarding, whenever possible, any rights of individuals as consumers.

- Consumers as free riders. Monopolies are the paradise of free riders in so far as they institutionalise privileges, i.e. free riding, under the protection of the state. Monopolistic utilities and monopolistic agencies have distributed income to people for non-existent working contributions or for efforts that are not remotely commensurate with what is drawn out (welfare income, unemployment benefits). This has generated within affluent industrial societies a scramble for free riding unparalleled in history, qualified with the noble name of welfare.

In short, a large constituency of consumers have been bribed into supporting a system of privileges and inequities by sharing with them part of the spoils.

We could even say that the state itself has become more and more the free-rider *par excellence* considering that, for instance in the USA, there are more personal security guards paid directly by the people than state policemen and in the UK the voluntary and charitable sector covers many needs and funds many projects that the state, according to its own ideology, is supposed to cater for through taxation. These are just two examples of state free-riding that are multiplying in parallel with the rising of taxes and the falling in quantity and quality of state services.

However, this situation cannot last forever because, sooner or later, the reality of moral, technological and financial problems has the nasty habit of catching up and destroying illusions. After decades of fashionable statism and monopolies presented as a necessary fact

of economic life, now the cultural climate has changed. Competition is no longer a dirty word. We are still surrounded by monopolistic practices but they are no longer regarded as a result of progressive measures. Nevertheless, what has not yet emerged is a systematic critical analysis of monopolies and corporatism in every sphere of life, which would constitute the only way to finally go beyond monopolies.

### **Beyond monopolies**

On the basis of what has been said so far, going beyond monopolies means going for the abolition of all privileges bestowed by the state (or by any monopolistic organization) upon any producer/provider of goods or services.

The history of the development of freedom is closely intertwined with the fight against monopolies. The independence of India from British rule started with the struggle led by Gandhi against the salt monopoly maintained by the British Government.

Clearly, if somebody feels voluntarily bound, for any reason whatsoever, to a certain producer/provider and he wants to keep him as his sole supplier of certain goods/services, this is perfectly acceptable as long as he doesn't want to impose his choices on anybody else.

The reality of monopoly is strictly linked to the presence of compulsion and to the correlated aspect of lack of choice, absolute or partial.

For this reason a discourse on monopolies, in order to be exhaustive in theoretical terms and effective in concrete results, must bear on all the areas of monopolistic practices.

To go beyond monopolies means then to go beyond:

- Territorialism (political monopolies)

Problem: the state and its cronies as racketeers monopolizing a certain territory and plundering resources, enjoying privileges and allocating booties. Solution: end of the territorial state and of territorial borders.

- Corporatism (economic monopolies)

Problem: the state and its cronies as monopolistic economic actors within a certain territory. Solution: abolition of state licensures, cancellation of the patent system, removal of all blocks to the free circulation of people and goods.

- Nationalism (cultural monopolies)

Problem: the state and its cronies as national sects that monopolize the means of propaganda and indoctrination. Solution: no official state national idiom and state national mono-culture, end of compulsory financing of state media and state schools.

Only when these three aspects of compulsory social organization are totally undermined will we be finally free from monopolism. At that moment other concepts and practices that have already emerged are likely to develop in full, namely

- Spatialism. The possibility of moving and settling anywhere on earth or remaining wherever one is, associating (or not associating), giving allegiance (or not giving allegiance) to whatever institutions or organization one feels like. In social discourse this is called polyarchy/panarchy.

- Pluralism. The possibility of starting social or economic ventures individually or in association with others without any "legal" obstacle whatsoever and with only the general provision (universal principle) that no harm is intended or done to people nor any damage to natural resources.

- Cosmopolitanism. The possibility of living by universal principles without any type of monopolistic restriction as to territory, means of payment, juridical norms other than those of voluntariness (live and let live) and reciprocity (give and receive).

In the sphere of socio-economic relationships this means a world characterized by free contacts - free contracts, without any interference by any monopolistic agent. This will probably result in new ways of organizing the production of goods and the provision of services that already exist to a certain extent but are not yet widely practiced. We can imagine for instance enterprises and utilities which are:



- Consumer-managed. The close association or even fusion between consumers and producers could lead to some resources being managed directly by the citizens (see for instance the National Trust in the U.K. managing historic buildings and areas of environmental beauty). With the expansion of time free from work obligations, it is quite possible that some people would show an interest in running businesses and utilities in which they also have a role as consumers and users.

- Consumer-driven. The direct link between producers and consumers can be based on good circulation of information, reliable post-sale assistance and could reach the point of full customization and production on demand. This is how the system of free enterprise and consumer choice would have evolved if it had not been led astray by the sirens of monopolism (protectionism and corporatism).

- Consumer-supported. Any business should prosper or fail only in so far it remains capable of satisfying consumer demands at affordable prices. Even the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Antitrust, Estes Kefauver, acknowledged that the best way to fight monopolies is to let the mechanism of free exchanges function undisturbed and this "constitutes a form of representative government. It allows the massive aggregate of ... consumers to vote their preferences by extending or withholding their custom." (Estes Kefauver, *In a Few Hands*, 1965). And this consumer option is the only rational and equitable way to promote good producers and to demote bad ones.

Some of this is nothing new because, in fact, within any free economic system the consumers are the backbone of any business enterprise, which can survive and prosper, in the final instance, only because satisfied customers keep coming back. However, what will be new is this total reorientation towards free users' choices and away from rulers' coercive decisions. It is this radical change of route that marks the new paradigm and heralds a future of autonomous human beings instead of monopolized state subjects.

## FROM LEGAL TENDER TO VIRTUAL VOUCHERS

Money : beginning  
Money : afterwards  
Money : mismanagement  
Money : functions and mis-functions  
Money : directors, actors and extras  
Money : a forgotten past  
Money : an uneasy present  
Money : a hopeful future  
Money as virtual vouchers  
Banking as personal pooling  
The way ahead



### Money : beginning

**T**he invention of money is very ancient, older than we usually imagine.

Certainly it is conceivable that, with and within a subsistence production and a closed economy, the exchanges

and the necessity for media of exchange are very low or non-existent.

But, as soon as the number of people living together increases, then the specialization of activities (social division of labour) arises, leading to an increase of production in so far as each one focuses energies and skills, in a more active and capable way, on the endeavours he/she is keener on or better at.

The surplus that each producer makes in his own field of activity has then to be exchanged in order to satisfy a series of other needs. So, from the social division of labour emerges and spreads the desire/exigency of exchange that is one of the basic traits of any social organization, if not of human nature.

The exchanges could be conducted by:

- Barter: goods are traded with other goods. This is an effective and straightforward way of making a transaction when the range of needs is very limited and when goods are easily divisible so that a certain number of units of one good can be exchanged for the desired number of units of another good.

- The use of intermediate goods: a good that is generally accepted is employed as a medium of exchange in order to obtain the goods that are really needed.

In the course of history many goods have been used as media of exchange. They played that role for various reasons, e.g. because of:

- intrinsic use value, for instance *pecus* (i.e. cattle) from which comes the Latin word *pecunia* which means money;

- symbolic exchange value, for instance shells or beads, which were appreciated in many communities for their aesthetic attractiveness and ornamental function.

As a matter of fact this analytical differentiation might be considered unnecessary because, from the point of view of those making the exchange, what counts is to be able to reach some specific goods. If that means to receive, at a certain stage, polished stones or tobacco or something else, this is not important as long as the people involved are willing and able to continue to carry on the process of exchange and obtain, at the end, the desired goods.

Very early, in several regions of the world, metals started to be employed as media (units) of exchange. It seems that metal coins were used in China already in the 12th century B.C. under the Chou dynasty. In Greece, the judges received as recompense for their services a proportional number of iron spits called *obelos* giving them the right to obtain some pieces of meat according to the number of spits. Later one the spits were replaced with metal coins that continued to be called *obelos* (subsequently, *obolos*).

The use of metals as a medium of exchange is quite understandable because of their:

- durability
- divisibility
- measurability
- transportability

We could also add that some metals, because of their relative rarity, almost universal appeal and use as ornamental objects (namely, gold and silver) had (and still have) also the quality of general desirability/acceptability, irrespective of place and time.

The invention and diffusion of easily usable media of exchange in the form of metal coins, allowing the satisfaction of personal needs through a series of multiple exchanges and so assisting in the development of human beings and communities, can be put on a par with the invention and diffusion of other powerful and useful technological devices that have contributed significantly to human progress.

### **Money : afterwards**

In the hands of the producers-consumers money is essentially a medium of exchange. But, from the beginning, the political rulers realized that money was also an instrument of power, usable in order to control people by buying their allegiance (bread and circuses) or remunerating the services of some of them (the bureaucracy, the army) for exacting obedience on all on behalf of a few.

From a political perspective money is then mainly a sign and an instrument of command. As a monetary historian put it, "The right to

coin money has always been and still remains the surest mark and announcement of sovereignty." (Alexander Del Mar, *History of Monetary Systems*, 1896)

In Western Europe, the Roman rulers controlled the coinage, and the coins usually bore the effigy of the emperor so that everybody knew where the power resided and where their possibility of buying the means of sustenance came from. As a matter of fact, many Romans, at the centre and in the periphery of the empire, were on the payroll of the state as functionaries or soldiers, or received state assistance; at a certain stage it seems that this was the case for as many as 200,000 people, just in the city of Rome.

Besides personal affluence and the support of parasitic strata, the main reason for the rulers needing vast amounts of money is the waging of wars. For the Romans wars were necessary for getting hold of new sources of gold and silver for minting coins in order to pay a swollen bureaucracy and an army that would wage further wars. This infernal circle eventually ended with the collapse of an unmanageable empire.

During the Middle Ages, kings and rulers made recourse, sometimes, to wealthy individuals (merchants, goldsmiths) for financing their wars. This was, for instance, the case of Edward III, King of England, who received money from Florentine bankers (Bardi, Peruzzi) granting them, besides the promise of repayment, also exclusive rights of trade.

When repayment was indefinitely postponed and finally cancelled leading to the failure of those firms (the Bardi and the Peruzzi went bankrupt at the beginning of 1345), the lending from those sources dried up completely and the rulers had to think hard in order to find new ways of having access to money.

In 1694 the need to finance the long war against Louis XIV of France led to the establishment of the Bank of England. This financial institution came out of a marriage of convenience between the business community in search, as usual, of monopolistic privileges for making money and the ruling élite, who were always very short of it.

The same type of alliance took shape in France when the Duke of Orleans, regent of the king of France, in order to find a solution to the disastrous situation of the state finances, gave permission to John Law, a Scotsman, to found the *Banque Générale* (1716), which became later on the *Banque Royale* (1718). This was in fact a state venture brought into existence for controlling/manipulating the national debt and a great part of the foreign trade. The over-issue of notes and the sale of shares for unproductive ventures very soon (1720) put an end to the illusion of solving real problems with financial tricks, at least in France and for the time being.

The constant theme in history is the continuous need of state rulers for money and for more money as expenses regularly exceed revenues, and revenues cannot be increased at will through taxation for fear of a revolution or because this would lead to economic destitution, extinguishing in the process the very source of income.

Nevertheless, in order to survive and to pursue their political aims of dominion, the state rulers find it appropriate to interfere and tamper continuously with the process of money issue and circulation. This mismanagement of money has been performed mainly through:

- money misappropriation (open and hidden expropriations)
- money misallocation (destructive and parasitic dealings).

### **Money : mismanagement**

Throughout history rulers have rarely missed the opportunity of getting their hands on all sorts of resources to be used mainly for maintaining and strengthening their hold on power. With reference to money this has resulted in:

#### **Money misappropriation**

- Open expropriations

When in financial straits rulers have resorted to cancelling repayments of borrowed money (as in the case of Edward III of England and Charles V of Spain) or in simply appropriating somebody else's resources (as in the case of Constantine who confiscated the vast trea-

asures of the pagan temples throughout the Roman Empire, or of Henry VIII with the dissolution of the monasteries).

Open expropriations have been used by the state during the so-called wars of religion (against either Catholics or Protestants), at the time of the establishment of national states (e.g. expropriation of Church properties in France during the revolution or in Italy after the unification) or following the seizing of power by a new regime (e.g. in the communist states with the suppression of personal ownership).

All this has permitted the state rulers to obtain the necessary financial means either through the sale of those assets or the printing of notes (e.g. the *assignats* in France) backed by the expropriated resources.

- Hidden expropriations

In the past, when the media of exchange were gold and silver coins of a fixed weight, the rulers repeatedly debased them by reducing the weight or mixing the precious metals with alloys of less value. One of the first known cases is that of the Roman emperor Nero who reduced the gold content of the aureus and the silver content of the denarius, and was later imitated by other emperors because this was the easiest way, for the state, to pay for ever growing expenditures.

In recent times, during the XX century, with the universal introduction of paper money imposed as legal tender, the over-issuing of notes by the state printing press produced the same effect of debasing the money.

All these policies have represented a hidden (or not so hidden) expropriation actuated by the parasitic debt-ridden governments at the expenses of productive individuals that were trying to live and operate within their means. This is one of the most evident cases of sensible virtuous behaviour derided and belittled by cheating and vicious masters.

**Money misallocation**

- Destructive dealings

The most common destination of the expropriated resources has been to pay for wars. Anton Fugger, the banker of Charles V, Ferdi-

nand I and King Philip II of Spain was very well aware of the use of the money he was lending when he stated: "*pecunia nervus bellorum*" (money is the sinews of war).

The evidence in this respect is so overwhelming that Bertrand Russell could not help declaring with extreme frankness:

"In view of the fact that the bulk of the public expenditure of most civilized Governments consists in payment for past wars or preparation for future wars, the man who lends his money to a Government is in the same position as the bad men in Shakespeare who hire murderers." "Obviously it would be better if he spent the money, even if he spent it in drink or gambling." (Bertrand Russell, *In praise of idleness*, 1932)

#### - Parasitic dealings

The money that is not spent for wars is, in quite a large part, allocated to parasitic and highly protected strata (i.e. the state bureaucracy and its appendages). In 1914 in France 1 citizen out of 103 worked for the state, and the French state was already quite strong and pervasive. Now, according to data referring to the mid 1990's, one citizen out of almost ten works for the state (more than 5 million people). If we include state companies and associations subsidized by the state, it is one out of almost 8 (more than 7 million people) (Louis Beriot, *Abus de bien publique*, 1999). It is quite hard to believe that they are all necessary for the promotion of the citizens' well-being.

In order just to stay afloat the state continuously needs huge sums of money. Achieving this result is possible only because the state meddles with the currency and bends it to its own ends. It follows then that the original and proper functions of money become secondary and that money mis-functions take over.

### **Money : functions and mis-functions**

Money mis-management and the resulting money mis-functions have been and are still possible because the true functions of money



have been undermined by the state and the mis-functional uses have been fostered to the point that they play a domineering role.

If we see money as a technical device for facilitating and improving the economic and social relations of exchange and production, the functions of money amount essentially to:

- Lubricating the wheels of commerce (medium of exchange)

As Hume expressed it,

"Money is not, properly speaking, one of the subjects of commerce; but only the instrument which men have agreed upon to facilitate the exchange of one commodity with another. It is none of the wheels of trade. It is the oil which renders the motion of the wheels more smooth and easy." (David Hume, *On Money*, 1752)

- Igniting the spark of production (means for enterprise).

The production of surpluses in an economy that employs money as a medium of exchange and that is characterized by the presence of productive individuals and of attitudes to further production, results in the saving of these extra resources in the form of small or large sums of money. This leads to the pooling of these financial means for their investment in new business ventures like opening up novel trading avenues or setting up further industrial activities.

These two practical and fruitful functions of money (exchange and enterprise) require, in order to be performed, that money be linked, as source and use, to those who are associated with the production of freely demanded - freely exchanged goods and services. In this case money is only a subordinate device used for facilitating the satisfaction (through exchange and production) of human needs.

When and where this does not happen, we are in the presence of mis-functional uses and fallacious conceptions that assign to money capacities and properties that are alien to it. Money is then seen as an end in itself, i.e. a final good to be appropriated and kept instead of something to be just received and passed on in exchange for goods and services or for the investment in the production of goods and

services. Money is hence equated, without any further qualification, to:

- Wealth

A pile of gold cannot be defined as wealth any more than a pile of bricks can be characterized as a house. We could call this the Midas fallacy. When King Midas asked the gods for the gift of transforming everything he touched into gold, what he really wanted was the purchasing power of gold; for instance the possibility of getting delicious food in exchange for gold, not the reality of delicious food transformed into gold. History is full of cases characterized by this fallacy as, for instance, Spain undergoing a long economic decline while a flow of gold was entering the country from South America (XVI century) or the United States entering into a long economic depression during the 1930's while the coffers of the Federal Reserve were full of gold.

- Value

Money is neither a value in itself nor a common measure of value but only a tool for exchange. An object has or might have a certain value and has or might have a certain price but the two aspects refer to distinct realms. There is a difference between the price of an object and its value. In several cases value and price are at odds with each other, considering that what is most valuable for human beings does not fetch a high price or any price (e.g. water, air, sun, etc.). To identify price with value is at the basis of the GDP fallacy and is a sure recipe for disaster because it encourages behaviour that favours short term money earnings that increase the figure of the GDP (for instance cutting down an entire forest and selling the timber) instead of activities that care for long term value.

- Power

Money can buy people (soldiers, bureaucrats, teachers, journalists, etc.) to support and underpin power but it is not power in itself, as rich minorities (Catholics, Protestants, Jews, aristocrats, etc.) realized personally and tragically when they were expelled, expropriated, sent to the guillotine or to the crematorium. Ideas and beliefs shared by millions in the form of collective myths or collective trust, is what

power amounts to. Money on its own, without the fallacious mark forcibly bestowed on it by power, would appear for what it really is, a piece of metal, a sheet of paper or a bit of information on a computer screen.

In general, mis-functional uses of money are those when money is neither a medium of exchange nor a means for enterprise but an end in itself, whose simple possession, irrespective of the general context, is naively and erroneously equated to wealth, value and power.

A very poignant indicator of this situation (i.e. money to beget money) is the fact that

“the value of world financial transactions, which was 25 times world GDP in 1995, rose to 70 times that value by 2007 (European Parliament, 2010).” (Thornton Matheson, *Taxing Financial Transactions: Issues and Evidence*, IMF Working paper, 2011)

For these mis-functional ways of using and seeing money to prevail, the state has to play a dominant role in the economic and social life of a community. Putting forward a series of fanciful pretexts, namely that many people are unable to look after their own interests, that free exchanges do not work properly to the advantage of individuals and that money is something too important to be left unsupervised, the state has intervened, cancelling any vestige of monetary freedom, similarly to what it had already done or it was doing in the field of production (e.g. regulations) and exchange (e.g. tariffs). And, as in the case of production and exchange, the state has attributed to itself the role of supreme director, conferring exclusive privileges to a series of subordinate actors while relegating most human beings to the role of disposable extras.

### **Money: directors, actors and extras**

During most of the XIX and XX centuries we see the continuous climbing of the state to a position of supremacy and control in all social and economic areas.

The suppression of *laissez-faire* took place both in the field of production of goods (state protectionism and formation of national cartels) and in the issue of monetary media of exchange (national central bank).

The distant antecedent of this development can be traced back to the establishment of the first central bank (the Bank of England in 1694). Its origin is linked, as already pointed out, to the needs of the English state to replenish its coffers, exhausted by lengthy wars, in order to continue the fight against France. As usual in these matters the traditional practice was followed, i.e. that of conferring to a company monopolistic privileges of imposing duties on various goods, in exchange for the advance of a certain amount of money (in this instance, the sum of £1,200,000). It was like holding hostages to ransom (the hostages being the people living in the territory controlled by the state rulers) or, to put it more mildly, using the state's subjects as security and debtors for a mortgage. So, from the start, the monetary interests of the state rulers to finance wars were taking priority over people's real needs for a commerce unhampered by controls and exactions.

The same dynamic leading to the setting up of a central bank in England is visible in the United States at the time of the North-South war. The legislation introduced between 1862 and 1865 was aimed at a compulsory absorption of legal tender (the *greenbacks*) for financing the federal debt, allowing for the continuation of the war.

The same reasons are behind the establishment of most central banks. They were founded for political and military reasons that have practically nothing to do with sound economic necessities. No wonder that the state banking system is characterized by deep and widespread corruption and bad administration of which the collapse of the Banca Romana in Italy and the Panama scandal in France

(both taking place towards the end of the XIX century) are amongst the most notorious cases in history.

Nevertheless, the statist inclinations and interests were so strong that, during the first half of the XX century, through Acts of Parliament or Congress, in practically every country, national (or federal) central banks were established and were given the paramount role of managing the currency as:

- Unique Issuers
- Universal Controllers
- Ultimate Resort Lenders

In this scenario, the other banks were assigned the part of actors, whose appearance on the stage had to be approved and certified by the director (the state central bank) and whose monetary activity had to be regulated by parliamentary laws. While in the past banking originated from production and commerce and was like a by-product of it in response to the necessities of economic dealings, under state certified banking the banks arise for political and financial reasons and are subservient to political and financial interests.

The banks have accepted this subordinate role with respect to the central bank for the simple reason that, under the tutelage of the state, they enjoy exclusive, sheltered power in money dealings.

In other words, the banking system is a protected monopolistic apparatus, servicing the financial exigencies of a monopolistic master (the state and its coterie) and deriving its gains from the manipulation of money (i.e. profiting from pure and simple financial transactions) for ends that, in many cases, have little or nothing to do with facilitating exchanges of goods/services and fostering production.

In this comedy of directors (the central banks) and actors (the certified banks), most customers are the inconspicuous savers/lenders and the defenceless users/borrowers. In other words, they play the role of the exploitable and even expendable extras, like a faceless and manoeuvrable multitude in a colossal movie.

People with scant knowledge of the past assume that this has always been the case, that central banks have always existed and that

money is and must be the natural reserve of the state otherwise total disorder and social bankruptcy will inevitably ensue. So, it is necessary to throw a quick glance back to a past that offered a different scenario.

### **Money: a forgotten past**

After the collapse of the Roman Empire and the waning of an imperial authority in Europe, there was, for a long period, a lack of a centre of minting. With the revival and expansion of production and commerce, especially at the turn of the first millennium, the merchants and the artisans in the cities took over the task of providing coins for facilitating exchanges. One of the most highly-regarded coins was the Florentine florin, which was accepted as a medium of trade in many regions of Europe. This could be seen as an example, amongst others, that there is no need for a central banking authority to regulate currencies as they can very well look after themselves provided that there is the freedom of individuals to accept (reputed) good coins and refuse (reputed) bad ones. Moreover, these historical facts confirm the origin of money as having been issued by traders and producers for the requirements of commerce and industry, instead of being the result of a ruler's fiat for parasitic and destructive endeavours.

During the Middle Ages the merchants devised new forms of transferring money (like the letter of payment, the forerunner of the modern cheque) in order to avoid the inconvenience of carrying the heavy weight of coins on long journeys and the risk of being robbed on the way to a fair. This again shows that there is no need of a central authority or legislative bodies to conceive and regulate instruments of payments. They arise and are implemented following experience and necessity.

Further developments concerning the use of money were the *commenda* and the *societas maris* that represent partnerships between investing individuals and entrepreneurs/traders for the carrying out of a common economic venture. Once the business is completed, the

resulting profits (or losses) are shared by the associates according to the rules of the agreement.

Over and over again historical events show that, given the freedom to set up contracts, people are bound, sooner or later, to find amongst themselves arrangements for the fruitful use of resources, without the need for external intervention.

With regard to poor people, access to money resulted from the initiative and care of groups that had nothing to do with the state. In 1462 the Franciscans in Italy established *montes pietatis* that granted to the poor loans (initially free of interest) secured by pledges (to be eventually sold at auction in case of default). In later times, during the industrialization of Europe, savings banks, credit co-operatives, building societies and the like, serviced and supported the workers and the needy. So, even when affluence was not widespread as it is in our age, people left free to intervene without suffocating state regulations were capable of inventing and setting up instruments for the circulation of money down to the most penniless strata. We can only imagine the variety of caring and prosperous economic associations we might have by now if that freedom had been kept alive.

Besides all these experiences in the management of money, expressing the true function of it as facilitator of exchanges and stimulator of productive enterprises, what is most forgotten and wilfully avoided in state-oriented economic teaching is the interesting history of Free Banking in Holland and Scotland.

Holland, a region relatively poor up to the XVI century, became, in a quite short span of time, a centre of long distance trade and of free banking. The freedom of trading and industry generated all sorts of profitable opportunities and channelled money (for economic investment) towards Holland, further increasing exchanges and production and making it, at the beginning of the XVII century, the richest region of Europe. While Spain was decaying under the weight of plundered gold and state regulations, the Bank of Amsterdam, that is the shareholders and the depositors, were financing trade and related production on a huge scale. At that time, every year more than 600 ships were leaving the port of Amsterdam for the Baltic

regions, more than 60 were heading to the Far East and around 80 to America, without the state placing any impediment on the movement of goods in and out of the country or on the means and forms of payment.

An experience of (partial) free banking took place also in Scotland between 1716 and 1845. It was characterized by free access to banking activity and the existence of various currencies issued by banks in competition; there were no specific banking norms but the common law of contract was applied. During the free banking period, Scotland was transformed from a poor agricultural economy with a personal income half of that in England to an industrial region with pro-capita income almost equal to that in England.

All these experiences have been minimised, obliterated or considered just impractical in the state dominated world of the XX century. This position might be acceptable if the financial situation of the world during that century had not been characterized by either depression or inflation and, ultimately, by a combination of the two called stagflation. These phenomena have taken place even in (or thanks to) the presence of a series of national and international banking institutions, dominated by states, with substantial regulatory power.

It is then necessary to focus briefly on the recent and current situation of monetary affairs under state management.

### **Money : an uneasy present**

The monetary situation during the first half of the XX century was characterized by:

- The end of the convertibility of national currencies into a generally (i.e. internationally) accepted commodity like gold or silver. This, in conjunction with increasingly protectionist state economic policies, led to a collapse of international trade and to a long depression.
- The coming to total dominance of central national banks geared to satisfying state interests of a purely political and financial nature,



like state expenses for the bureaucracy, the army, the nationalized enterprises, the welfare recipients and so on. Most central banks presided, until recently, over the monopolistic issue and compulsory circulation of national currencies.

Throughout most of the XX century, a part from small coins, money was (and could only and exclusively have been) a piece of paper printed by the state (legal tender) whose issue was not necessarily backed by any economic reality (goods and services) nor strictly linked to people's needs for exchange and enterprise. The monetary sphere was the exclusive reserve of the central bank whose decisions were subservient to the political and financial exigencies and aims of the state.

These two aspects were still predominant in the post world war period with the remarkable exception represented by West Germany, where the shocking experience of the hyper-inflation of the 20's led to the re-establishment of a central bank (the Bundesbank) quite independent from the central government (except for government granted legal monopoly and power in monetary matters).

During the second half of the XX century a monetary reality dominated by the state brought about a situation of continuous inflation. "Inflation" - as pointed out by Milton Friedman - "occurs when the quantity of money rises more rapidly than output [of goods and services]." (Milton Friedman, *Money Mischief*, 1992). When the issue and circulation of money is free from political meddling and is under the responsibility and risk of the producers-consumers of goods and services (within a totally free dynamic of investments and exchanges) the necessary amount of monetary instruments would result through a series of continuous and voluntary adjustments. Failure to do so (constantly and willingly) would be tantamount, for the economic dealers, to self-inflicted damage.

It is a different case when money is issued and put into circulation following the requirements of a political agenda. In actual fact, the institution that promoted inflation, i.e. the state, is also, not by chance, the one most rewarded by it. An inflationary policy brings to the state:

- Political gains

Inflation, originating from the issue of money for political reasons, equates to the manufacturing of illusions. It gives to producers and savers the impression they are bettering their situation because there is plenty of money, or more money, in their pockets. However, if their economic situation has really improved (materially and not just monetarily) this is mainly because of technological progress that increases production and reduces costs. It is certainly not because of monetary arrangements by the state like the printing of sheets of paper called money.

- Financial gains

The state as recipient of money through taxation enjoys higher revenues as a consequence of inflation because the taxpayers are pushed towards higher tax brackets (direct progressive taxation) and because, when prices rise, so does the absolute quota going to the state on exchanged goods and services (indirect taxation like VAT).

Moreover, in the presence of inflation, when the state borrows funds (selling national bonds) it repays its due with depreciated money (even taking into account high monetary rates). As pointed out by Milton and Rose Friedman, a USA ten year state bond purchased in 1968 for \$37.50 would have been repaid at \$64.74 in 1978; but, by that time, it took \$70 to buy as much as \$37.50 would have bought in 1968. If we add to this the fact that the investor had to pay a tax on the difference earned we discover that he "would have ended up paying for the dubious privilege of lending to [the] government." (Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose*, 1980)

Summing up the monetary policies of the state central banks during the XX century it is appropriate to say that they caused first a huge depression (during the '30s) and then continuous inflation. Needless to say, the state has pointed to every possible culprit (workers, business, foreign governments, etc.) for causing inflation. One of the favourites was the increase in the price of petrol in 1973. With regard to this, the economist John K. Galbraith (who could hardly be suspected of anti-statist tendencies) remarked that "around three-fourth of the price increases [in goods and services] of 1973 occurred

before the [Yom Kippur] war and before the oil prices went up appreciably." (John K. Galbraith, *Money*, 1975)

In the last part of the XX century state economic policies even made possible what is hardly conceivable (either in theory or in practice) if individuals were left to run their own affairs and to look after their own interests instead of being run by the interests of state affairs. We refer to the contemporary presence of stagnation and inflation, namely what has been called stagflation.

At that point a change of policy became almost unavoidable, considering also that other factors were appearing on the scene:

- the crisis of state communism, which not only would weaken the stranglehold of western nation states on their citizens and their pretence of being the indispensable bulwark against communism, but would also make very clear that the idea of controlling and planning production from a central point of command is sheer hubris and folly;

- the development of information and communication technologies, which would pull down barriers to the flow of ideas, prelude to the free circulation of people and goods over ever wider horizons.

All this has had and is having repercussions on monetary arrangements. By the end of the XX century, after the abandonment of national planning, the illusion that a national central bank could control the issue and circulation of money has equally been laid to rest.

Meanwhile the information power of the human being has grown tremendously and is leading to the re-appropriation by the individual and the small group of a series of roles and functions previously dominated by the financial institutions (banks, investment funds, etc.)

In the XXI century upholding centralization and intermediation while individuals and technology are ready for decentralization and disintermediation is not any longer possible. The seeds of a very different monetary future have already been sown.

## Money : a hopeful future

At the beginning of the XXI century three aspects concerning money are steadily becoming more and more actual and relevant:

- The dematerialization of monetary forms. In the course of centuries money has acquired different forms, with a continuous tendency towards symbolization. The intrinsic value of the media of exchange (e.g. cattle) has given way to money as socially held value (e.g. gold) and then to money as nationally imposed value (e.g. paper money). The fulfilment of this process is the passage to a totally symbolic money to be used in parallel with a variety of forms of money. This symbolic money is similar to the electronic bits of data that flow through the Web and like the Web is the result of a myriad of small interconnected nodes (e.g. traders, customers, investors, donors, etc.) impossible to manipulate and control from a centre.

- The decentralization in the issue of monetary media. The interacting nodes are large and small producers and consumers of goods and services (e.g. material objects, information data, etc.) and they are taking over the process of producing monetary media for the requirements of production and exchange. This is still a phenomenon in its infancy but it will gain momentum when some prestigious and trustworthy firm or community engages itself in experimenting with digital money and promotes and carries out a successful experience.

- The disintermediation in the allocation of monetary means. The present record of banks and financial institutions concerning the management of savings is very poor indeed. Their performance is not better than that of a software program that examines the relevant data and suggests some investment moves. What is also outrageous is the fact that those who manage people's money take a considerable cut out of the saving entrusted to them by the customers, irrespective of the results achieved. On the whole they are not good value for money and so it would be more sensible - and this is quite likely - that people (individually or in small associations) take back the control of their investments, using the technology already existing for doing so

(e.g. share dealing via Internet) or new technological tools still to be devised.

What these tendencies and potentialities amount to is a reversal of past realities and the opening-up of a sounder and more hopeful future that should be consciously promoted and built by responsible individuals and communities. The negative aspects to be overcome and the positive ones to be implemented, for this hopeful future to come to fruition, concern:

- The issue of money. The issue of money from political and financial institutions (not linked to the production and exchange of goods and services) should be replaced by the issue of money from individuals and groups (communities, firms, merchants, entrepreneurs, etc.) involved in the production and exchange of goods and services.

- The circulation of money. The circulation of money for political or financial reasons (not motivated by the production and exchange of goods and services) should be replaced by the circulation of money oriented towards the requirements for the production and exchange of goods and services.

- The allocation of money. The allocation of money to political and financial groups (not providing goods and services required by individuals and communities) should be replaced by the flow of money to individuals and groups that provide or are willing to provide goods and services needed and demanded by other individuals and groups.

The implementation of these aspects requires a total change of scenery, already partially underway, from centralistic practices (central bank of issue) and monopolistic privileges (banking system of circulation and allocation of funds) to an open and free system based on:

- Money as Virtual Vouchers (for exchange)
- Banking as Personal Pooling (for production).

### **Money as Virtual Vouchers (for exchange)**

The primary function of money is that of facilitating exchanges between different producers and consumers. The starting point of

any exchange is clearly the production of something (good, service) exchangeable with something else. Money, in whatever form it appears, can be seen as a sort of voucher registering and attesting the right of a producer to receive something in exchange for what he has freely and willingly given or put at somebody else's disposal. In our time (beginning of the XXI century) money is taking the form of virtual vouchers.

The use of the qualification "virtual" to characterize money-vouchers is intended to stress two qualities of money, a formal and a substantial one, namely:

- virtual as formal quality: money is a virtual (ethereal) piece of information that does not need any material form (metal, paper) to circulate;

- virtual as substantial quality: money is the prize for virtuous (prize worthy) behaviour fruitfully and successfully applied to the production and provision of goods and services.

Value on the whole is generated through this virtuous (i.e. beneficial) behaviour. Virtuous behaviour in the economic field is the expression of

- enthusiasm (thrill)
- effort (will)
- expertise (skill)

resulting in the production of (exchangeable) goods and services.

All this has implications for the distinctive features characterizing virtual vouchers compared with legal tender. The features concern the following aspects:

- **Issue**

Everybody capable of producing goods and/or providing services demanded by other people generates value.

Goods and services containing economic value are generally exchanged through the medium of money. In other words, money is not only strictly linked to the production of goods and services but we could even say that it is nothing else than goods and services under a different guise. The only reason for its existence is to bring about the

desired mix (type and quantity) of goods and services amongst individuals.

If exchangeable goods and services are (equivalent to) money, it follows that every producer of exchangeable goods and services is also an issuer of money, and this is how it happened to be at the time of the merchants and artisans and how it should be in any functioning economy. In contrast, whenever and wherever a non-productive entity takes upon itself and monopolises the issuing of money, we all precipitate in a very unsound state of affairs.

The *Law of Say* (the production creates its own demand) is valid only when the free production of goods and services satisfying the needs and requirements of individuals (as producers and consumers), is complemented and coupled with the free issue of the media of exchange. This does not mean that, all of a sudden, everybody will be issuing virtual vouchers day and night, out of thin air. We shouldn't apply past statist images to new post-statist realities. If we are not producing goods and services to the liking of individuals that have, in their turn, produced exchangeable goods and services, there are no virtual vouchers to be issued and put into circulation. Virtual vouchers emerge only when individuals are part of a network of exchangers as givers and receivers. This is how it is/should be, even taking into account the fact that, at least for a certain time in their life, some people might be mainly givers (the young, the able-bodied, etc.) and others mainly receivers (the old, the invalid, small children, etc.).

The free flow of information permits us to continuously re-adjust the balance between production and demand, on the way to a world of instantaneous matching (between production and demand) via production-on-demand.

Even if we reason in terms of the old paradigm of over-issue or under-issue of money, it is conceivable in this case that the producers will try to avoid both situations for the simple reason that otherwise either they will be left with unused goods/services even when there are unsatisfied needs or they will receive for their goods/services depreciated or depreciating money. On the consumer's side, the issue of vouchers by untrustworthy, or just unsuccessful, producers is

simply resolved with the refusal of their acceptance so that, in the end but quite soon, solid vouchers will drive out bad (or less attractive) vouchers just as good or better products are generally preferred to bad or inferior ones at the same price. The only proviso for this to happen being the universal enjoyment of complete freedom (of information, of production, of exchange, etc.).

From what has been said so far it follows that only through free production of goods and services and free issue of media of exchange can we expect a sound economic balancing that avoids the statist recurring scenarios of inflation and depression.

In the presence of a monopolistic central bank and a compulsory legal tender those adjustments were/are neither practiced (because of political and financial interests antithetic to the interests of producers and consumers) nor practicable (due to the enormous/insoluble requirements in terms of information acquisition and processing by a top decisional centre).

#### **- Circulation**

The issue of virtual vouchers by producers and providers of goods and services is clearly linked to the trust that those issuers inspire amongst individuals and the validity/acceptability enjoyed by the vouchers as a result of that trust.

Considering that we are referring to freely accepted virtual vouchers issued by different producers, it is clear that there will be different levels of validity/acceptability as, for instance:

- Local Specific. The voucher is exchangeable in a specific area and in a specific number/type of outlets. We could imagine virtual vouchers issued by an association of local shops (and progressively replacing legal tender) with discounts linked to the use of this medium of exchange.

- Local General. The voucher is exchangeable only in a specific area but is so popular (trustworthy and convenient) that it is accepted by everybody. This could be the result of the voucher being issued by a highly reputable local firm or association.

- Universal Specific. The voucher is exchangeable everywhere in the world but only at specific outlets. We can imagine the case of



vouchers accepted at auction sites on the Web or at specific electronic malls.

- **Universal General.** The voucher is like a world currency accepted by practically everybody, not dissimilarly from what happens now when using a credit card for making payments everywhere for whatever goods or services, but without the high transaction fees or conversion charges.

THE USE of electronic cards (or so-called smart cards) for automatic registering of the deals will take care of this plurality in the validity/acceptability of the media of exchange and should make the transactions smoother and safer than they are now.

Furthermore, the freedom in the choice of media of exchange will give more power to the individual, who will become more responsible and careful in looking after his/her own interests in the management of this variety of virtual vouchers.

- **Allocation**

Virtual vouchers allow for a more flexible and more personalized allocation of money as investment in productive activities and ventures.

It is conceivable that the end of legal tender and the emergence of a variety of virtual vouchers, safely and easily transferable without the need for any intermediary institution or company, will have a huge impact not only on the circulation of goods (introducing a world of small dealers to a world of exchanges) but also on the allocation of money (introducing what is here called personal pooling).

Banks and financial institutions (e.g. investment funds, pension funds, insurance companies) currently manage most personal savings. This might not be the case in future if a full liberalization takes place that makes the process of investment easier and less costly and eliminates the monopolistic role attributed to existing financial intermediaries.

### **Banking as Personal Pooling (for production)**

The banking system that has taken shape since the formation of the Bank of England (1694) and especially in the course of the XX century is characterized, on the whole, by the paramount aim of funnelling money to the state coffers.

The facts of history show that the main reason for establishing a central bank and for subjecting all the other banks to the control of the government (via the central bank) was to raise revenues for the state. In actual fact, a predominant part of the bank reserves have generally been represented by the government debt (national bonds). Under statism the banks have become a ring in the chain of state extortion (taxation) and state misallocation (destructive and parasitic uses) of money. So, the entire banking system, strictly controlled if not directly owned by the state (like in Italy and France up to recent times) has been nothing else than a sort of Aladdin's lamp, that would produce money for the ruling élite once it was (gently or roughly) massaged.

The banks have acquiesced to this "rub and rob" practice by the state in exchange for a series of favours centred on the privilege, shared with the few admitted to the banking club, of making money out of money, i.e. out of purely financial transactions. How perverse the system has become emerges from the fact that the gains from those transactions are higher than the profits for producing real and useful goods and services. For instance, in 1996 the shareholders of the seven largest US banks had an average total return of 44 %, much higher than the 28.2 % that went on average to the shareholders of the 30 USA corporations whose stock prices determine the Dow-Jones Industrial Average. This is nothing unusual. Even during the most famous depression in history in the '30s the financial circles got quite a nice return. The total income of the commission business of brokers and investment bankers (brokerage fees, interest charges) between 1928 and 1933, most of them years of economic depression, amounted, before taxes, to \$2.4 billion, a very high figure that would nevertheless

be surpassed in the following years. (Charles R. Geisst, *Wall Street*, 1997).

It should then not come as a surprise to know that “in 2006, over 30% of the profits of [USA] corporations classified as ‘industrial’ came from financial transactions, not from the production of goods and services, and financial assets constituted almost 48% of the total assets of non-farm, non-financial corporations.” (Lawrence E. Mitchell, *Financialism. A (Very) Brief History*, 2010).

As reality has shown over and over again, even when individuals lose some or all of their invested money, the only ones who always gain are those in charge of the investment because, whatever the result (profits or losses) they take their commission every time they deal in pieces of paper called stocks or in new financial instruments called derivatives. (Frank Partnoy, *Infectious Greed*, 2003).

In 2002 the performance of the shares administered by the investment funds in Italy registered a loss of 31 billion euros. The same year, the same investment funds made gains of 7 billion euros in management fees. The financial portfolio of an investor in Italy is totally changed every 8 months and this is mainly due to the fact that every transaction results in the exaction of a fee and so represents a gain for the investment funds even if it doesn't improve the financial situation of the investor.

With reference to financial speculations that involve other forms and types of money and have no (or little) connection with the production and exchange of goods and services, it is fair to say that they represent a sort of huge money-spam. It follows that the freedom to speculate on currencies (i.e. reject and drop certain currencies) can be accepted only when the imposition by the states of those currencies as legal tender has been overthrown. Only in that case speculation, if it still exists, can perform the useful role of squeezing out unsound currencies and practices.

The combination of state and financial interests has resulted in

- starving productive exigencies. In England, even state promoted committees (Macmillan 1931, Wilson 1977, Cruickshank 2000) found that the flow of financial resources to industry (especially small and medium size firms) was insufficient to their needs, exposing the reluc-

tant attitude of most British bankers towards lending for industrial development. (Glyn Davies, *History of Money*, 2002).

- feeding parasitic strata. Money goes to parasitic strata forcibly (through taxation), cunningly (through inflation) and mischievously (through financial intermediation). The parasitic alliance between state and finance is all too evident in the expansion and administration of the state debt, which constitutes a bonus for parasitic strata (for instance, as commissions for the allocation of state bonds) and a burden for productive individuals (for instance, as higher interest rates).

We are in the worst possible scenario, where there is plenty of money in wrong/undeserving hands and for wrong/unsavoury ends while there is a dearth of it for worthy individuals and worthy endeavours.

For all these reasons and taking into account the possibilities of disintermediation offered by technology, it is necessary to envisage and promote a future where not only central banks cease to exist but also banks as purely financial institutions disappear from the scene.

Individuals and groups have to re-appropriate for themselves control over the allocation of their financial means. This is nothing new or revolutionary. In the past, as previously pointed out, artisans and merchants pooled together resources and financed new industrial and commercial ventures. Out of those pooling came practically all economic and social improvements.

In the XXI century we should see a growing number of individuals selecting projects they want to assist, anywhere in the world, and directly channelling their funds (small or big) towards them at the touch of a button. In this case they can really influence and shape reality instead of passively accepting the decisions of some banker or investment fund manager, generally more interested in short term gains and financial profitability than in his clients' long term benefit and personal well-being. Too many uneconomic or even immoral and destructive ventures (for instance, arms production and arms dealing) have been financed with people's savings, thanks to their continued trust in the present undeserving banking system.

Personal pooling requires, clearly, no interference or even worse, blocking measures by the state concerning the allocation of personal funds, anywhere in the world and for whatever venture. Another important requirement is the total absence of any taxation on the allocation and disposition of funds. Those who undergo a risk promoting productive endeavours should certainly not be penalised by an unproductive entity like the state.

What is needed is:

- a free and wide circulation of information concerning any economic activity;
- a modicum of personal care and acumen in administering the allocation of personal funds;
- a social mechanism that guarantees the observance of contracts everywhere and to everybody or, at least, provides the information about and the possible isolation of those who (intentionally) fail to keep their contractual obligations.

These are conditions that existed for a few in the XIX century, before the dominance of national statism, during the heyday of the international economy. With the present communication and information technology these conditions are in place for a large and ever increasing number of individuals.

## **The way ahead**

The situation at the beginning of the XXI century is in full swing.

Towards the end of the XX century, a series of financial crises centred on the state and banking system have shown the weakness and shallowness of these institutions.

The legal apparatus concerning monetary and banking matters has produced a distorted reality where:

- Financiers/speculators buy shares with money they haven't yet earned: this is a problem because it feeds even further the speculative frenzy, attracting more and more people and pushing the prices of stocks to levels that have nothing to do with economic reality. The "pump and dump" stocks have been current practices of investment

banks during the '90s. (Frank Partnoy, *Infectious Greed*, 2003). The ensuing disasters have not only negative economic repercussions for the savers but also dire personal consequences for many individuals and communities.

- Bankers loan money they haven't got in reserve (fractional reserve banking). Fractional reserve banking is the legal right the banks have to lend money in excess of their reserves (even 90% in excess). This practice allowed by the law is inherently inflationary especially if the money so generated is employed in generally parasitic allocations (state bonds) or dubious ventures (financial speculations of all sorts) that give high returns at the start but spell disaster in the medium-long run. And the money lost compromises the redeemability of people's savings unless the state central bank intervenes, spreading the losses on to everybody (through inflation and taxation).

- State rulers spend money they haven't got but hope to get through taxation: this is also a generally inflationary behaviour as the money of the taxpayers is employed mainly to pay the politicians, the bureaucrats, the military personnel and other parasitic strata and is not allocated for building infrastructures and providing services that will balance/repay the money borrowed.

Furthermore, given the fact that the spending almost always far exceeds the receipts, the state is condemned to rely on continuous growth of the economy in order to get a continuous increase in tax revenues. All this is like a huge paper castle based on misplaced hopes; it is bound to collapse when the weakest link of the chain defaults on its obligations (probably a big state cancelling its debts by decree) and the situation will appear very clear to the eyes of an increasing number of individuals. At that point the trust in the state legal tender and in the state banking system will evaporate.

For the time being a crisis is resolved with an intervention by the International Monetary Fund that unloads on to everybody the burden of paying for the speculative follies of some banks and financial institutions. These supposed remedies are totally iniquitous, temporary and illusory. In fact they multiply the number of players

that follow crazy rules, and this means the multiplication in number and size of the problems and the growing impossibility of finding a solution, at least within the present paradigm.

Within the current financial system dominated by the states and the banks, the small players (i.e. savers, producers, consumers) are more insecure and more at somebody else's mercy than if they were gambling in a casino. In fact, in a casino you cannot buy chips if you don't pay fully in advance; even in the underworld of gambling somebody must have the resources in order to play or he does it at the risk of his own life and limb. In those cases no central bank or international financial institution will come to the rescue of gamblers and cheaters as happens in the statist cuckoo land - where, by the way, the higher the indebtedness the more likely the rescuing intervention.

In a rational and free world, as a matter of principle, if some people (politicians, financial speculators, bankers) use a currency to play games that alter the exchange power of that currency, nobody should be obliged to accept it as legal tender. This sensible and rightful rule would pave the way for the disappearance of the very notion of legal tender.

Another notion that should be put to rest is the idea that there should be and there might be a supreme central body capable of determining the amount of money needed at any moment by the economic system through general instruments like the discount rate fixed by the central bank. This is an absurd conviction that has all the connotations of an illusory myth; it is on a par with the other myth of bygone times purporting that a central planning agency could direct an entire economic system.

In order to overcome all these fallacies we need a new paradigm.

Conceptually and practically the new paradigm requires embarking on a very different path characterized by:

- the re-collocation of money to its proper functions linked to exchange and enterprise because only exchange and enterprise can be the proper source for issuing and the proper reason for using money;

- the re-appropriation by individuals of control over the allocation of personal funds in order to avoid their misuse (arms and wars), their misappropriation (state bureaucracy) or even their whittling down (because of hidden taxes, rapacious banking costs and transaction fees, disastrous financial speculations, and so on).

It is quite appropriate to say that the promotion of peace is strictly linked to the re-collocation of money to its proper functions and the re-appropriation by individuals and communities of control over the media of exchange and over the means for enterprise.

There are already many hopeful (albeit timid) signs that individuals are moving in a different direction. Producers of services like the Post Office (for instance in Japan and Switzerland) have entered the business of issuing smart cards. They might be imitated by supermarket chains or electronic firms, thereby implanting the concept that money is linked to production and distribution of goods and services and not to the wishes (and voracious greed) of a dominant or purely financial institution.

In the area of personal pooling, some companies already address themselves to single investors and there are good signs that newcomers on the business scene don't like the mentality of short term financial gains but prefer to allocate shares to individual savers looking for a long term investment. If these experiences multiply we could shortly see the emergence of a plurality of smart wallets managed directly by small investors who, without any financial mediator, allocate their funds to groups of producers having some specific qualities (e.g. ecologically sound, educationally oriented or based in a specific area). The micro credit of some original organizations (for instance, the Grameen Bank) has already started playing its part and showing some possible ways forward.

When these experiments and experiences reach a certain number and weight, many conventional images and myths will collapse. The human beings that in the past have moved from regional currencies to a national one and recently from national ones (the Deutsche Mark, the French Franc, the Italian Lira, etc.) to a supranational one (the Euro) will not be deterred from embarking on new experiences



like virtual vouchers and personal pooling once they discover that this is possible and practicable and that their (short and long term) interests are better safeguarded if they do so.

We only need somebody (an individual, a community, a firm) somewhere (in a physical place or in the hyperspace) with a sincere heart and a practical mind, to start a new path (John Zube, *Stop the legal tender crime*, 1976).

Money is information that needs to find the equivalent of a reliable and friendly hypertext transfer protocol to flow everywhere, unhampered by state robber barons.

When that moment comes many who refuse to be either despotic directors or disposable extras will take the chance of being, finally, responsible actors.

## FROM FALLACIOUS POLITICS TO SOUND CIVICS

Politics

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Politics

**P**olitics has been defined as "the science dealing with the regulation and control of men living in society," "a science concerned with the organization, direction and administration of political units (as nations or states) in both internal and external affairs." (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1981)

Regulation and control take place by direct or indirect intervention:

- Direct: by the individuals affected, as self-regulation and self-control (self-administration)

- Indirect: by a group of people professionally and institutionally in charge of regulating and controlling (representation).

Regulation and control are usually based on authority (esteem, prestige) or power (supremacy, force).

- Authority prompts the acceptance of a belief and the observance of a behaviour. The underpinning motives for authority are, generally:

- competence (connoisseurship) on the part of the leader/master

- conviction or custom (habit) on the part of the follower/disciple.

- Power imposes the acceptance of a belief and the obedience to a command. The underpinning motives for power are, generally:

- force (violence) on the part of the ruler/subjector

- fear (weakness) on the part of the ruled/subjected.

These four instances (direct-indirect and authority-power) can be represented on two continua according to their grade of intensity.

Direct regulation-control and authority do not produce, generally, problems of attrition even when the norms followed derive from the past and are not the product of the person who follows them, as long as they are freely accepted and interiorized by each individual.

As we move more and more away from the area of direct regulation and control based on authority to that of indirect regulation and control arising from power, we witness the appearance of politics. In other words, politics arises when a (small) group of people gain the power to regulate and control individuals, mainly as result of overwhelming force and minimally as the outcome of personal prestige.

### **The working of politics**

Power is the central aspect of politics.

Politics is then concerned, essentially, with:

- gaining power
- using power
- maintaining power.

In order to gain and use power, both the ruler and the ruled need justifications, confirming the former in the right to command and conforming the latter in the duty to obey.

In general, rulers have justified their access to power either by reference to God (power transmitted by God) or to the people (power conferred by the people and exerted in their names).

Clearly, God and the people were and are only noble (or ignoble) excuses and pious mystifications. Besides that, history has repeatedly shown that, the less those in power were certain of being supported by God or by the people, the more they were reasonable and behaved within limits of decency (towards God and the people); on the contrary, the more they thought heaven and earth were on their side, the less they acted kindly and reasonably (to say the least).

As for maintaining power, all sort of lies and tricks has been devised and delivered in the course of history so that political history is mainly a tale of the cunning or clumsy deceits perpetrated by the rulers.

For this reason, given that mystifications and deceptions occupy such an important role in gaining and maintaining power, politics should not at all be considered as a science. The name of science should be given only to the study of power (gaining-using-maintaining power) not to the practice of it.

Furthermore, for something to be defined as a "science" it should be characterized by an ethos based on:

- Universalism. "Universalism finds immediate expression in the canon that truth-claims, whatever their source, are to be subjected to preestablished impersonal criteria: consonant with observation and with previously confirmed knowledge."

- Communism. "The substantive findings of science are a product of social collaboration and are assigned to the community. They constitute a common heritage." "The institutional conception of

science as part of the public domain is linked with the imperative for communication of findings."

- Disinterestedness. "A passion for knowledge, idle curiosity, altruistic concern with the benefit to humanity and a host of other special motives have been attributed to the scientist."

- Organized skepticism. "The temporary suspension of judgment and the detached scrutiny of beliefs in terms of empirical and logical criteria." (Robert K. Merton, *Science and Technology in a Democratic Order*, 1942)

Politics has been and still is based on methods and behaviours that run exactly counter to the basic ethos of science, on which scientific endeavours are based. As a matter of fact, politics relies on:

- ideological sectarianism (vs. universalism) that makes truth dependent on a certain ideology, beyond the need for empirical confirmation and corroboration.

- petty corporativism (vs. communism) that means keeping data and ideas for yourself, preoccupied only to present your stances in the best light, while shaming and blaming all the others, all the time.

- vicious vested interests (vs. disinterestedness) that favour the diffusion of false opinions instead of the development of true beliefs.

- organized propaganda (vs. organized skepticism) that encourages the blind/soporific acceptance of ideologies instead of the stringent verification of beliefs. Through political propaganda, words are used with distorted meaning (e.g. anarchy = disorder) as convenient to the group in power.

If we add to the lack of scientific values, the lack of scientific methods (e.g. operationalization of hypotheses, post-factum verifications, etc.) we are bound to conclude that the definition of politics as a science ("the science dealing with the regulation and control of men living in society" - Webster's Dictionary) is totally inaccurate and misleading.

Furthermore, while science is free from fallacies (otherwise it would not be science, i.e. knowledge), politics is intrinsically fallacy-based/biased; in other words, it fundamentally relies on the cultivation and propagation (conscious or unconscious) of fallacies.

## Fallacies

A fallacy is an error in knowledge or in knowledge engineering, that is in the way knowledge gets organized and presented.

Fallacies can be classified into three main categories:

- material fallacies: false knowledge (lack of truth). The data contained in a statement are devoid of truth.

- logical fallacies: invalid knowledge (lack of validity). The statements are linked in a way that makes the argument devoid of validity.

- psychological fallacies: irrelevant knowledge (lack of relevancy). The beliefs (e.g. hypotheses, theories) advanced to support a statement are not relevant to the matter under examination.

In the process of putting forward an argument, it might happen that we make mistakes of one sort or the other, committing fallacies pertaining to these three categories.

While we might do it occasionally, either consciously (e.g. lying for personal reasons) or unconsciously (e.g. ignorance of the matter), in politics fallacies are routinely employed, being, for a large part, the tools of the trade.

In order to show the validity of this statement, some examples of political practice are presented in relation to each of the three categories of fallacies.

### Politics : material fallacies

Presenting wrong evidence - Denying sound evidence

In politics, manipulating historical reality, that is stating something that is not true, is the most common way to keep afloat.

The biggest distortion of reality, common to all political actors, is that of presenting the state as the originator of order and the granter of peace and security while, actually, it has been and still is the main source of disorder and the chief warmonger. In this respect, a classic example of manipulation of reality concerns nuclear testing and the massive weapons build-up carried out by states, presented as a way to keep peace and promote security.

Denying sound evidence is the other half of the coin. If something goes against a political position, the weapons of politics are concealment if possible, denial if necessary.

Take for example the case of state intervention in the economy. The evidence against a state-controlled economy is overwhelming. History has even produced a sort of laboratory experiment in the case of divided countries (East-West Germany, North-South Korea) where the side with less state control has been the more economically successful. Even so, there are still politicians (and so called political scientists) talking and writing positively about state intervention in the economy and warning about the risks deriving from economic freedom.

Besides these macroscopic examples of denial of evidence, we have the infinite list of daily political lies, where what is said is the opposite of what is or will be done.

Without these distortions and manipulations, politics and politicians would be too naked to survive the brief space of a season.

#### Faulty generalization

The fallacy of faulty generalization is a classic fallacy present in almost every political discourse.

In fact, politics being the pure and simple promotion of some (personal) preferences and their dispensation (as propaganda) to everybody in view of their imposition (as laws) upon everybody, it elevates this fallacy to some sort of supreme guideline.

Party politicians play continuously with generalizations as deemed suitable to their aims. Their profession consists in trying to pass off the will of somebody as the will of everybody and the interest of some individuals as the interest of each and every one.

Another example of faulty generalization might be considered the attribution to everybody (i.e. to individuals from all walks of life) of one dominant characteristics. For instance, for Hobbes, all people are power or security hungry; for Marx (or better for his naive followers), all people's actions are determined by an economic motive, and so on. These absurd generalizations fit well with the strong impulse to homogenization and simplification proper to political ideologies.

### Faulty causal connection

One classic example of faulty causal connection can be taken from the economy: if there is an economic growth and a rise in employment it is attributed (self-attributed) to the policies of the government; if there is a slump and a rise in unemployment, it is attributed (partly or totally) to the international situation, for which the national government cannot be reproached. The opposite is true for the party in opposition.

It is like an iron necessity of politics that the explanation of events be made in such a way that some roles are enlarged or minimized according to the rules of convenience and opportunity. Needless to say, all this has nothing to do with the advancement of knowledge.

## Politics : logical fallacies

### Non sequitur

In the fallacy of "non sequitur" the premisses put forward are not pertinent or not substantial enough to support the conclusion.

In politics, for instance, the introduction of a state law is considered a necessary premiss for the existence of order in a specific field as if order is a logical consequence of the presence of a law. But this perhaps logically plausible sequence is contradicted by historical evidence. For instance, contracts of exchange have existed and have produced orderly trade long before commercial laws have been enacted by the states. Other examples of this fallacy are : the implicitly accepted causal relation between number of policemen and levels of security; the view that sees parties indispensably connected to the working of democracy; the conception that associates the state with the spread of civilization. These are all logical fallacies based on material fallacies (i.e. ignorance of reality).

### Inconsistency

The fallacy of inconsistency arises when an argument is based on premisses that cannot all be true (or not all true at the same time).

Politics as the tricky art of squaring the circle or, in other words,



of having it both ways, is very prone to this type of fallacy. The most striking example is the claim that individuals, left to themselves, would be dominated by power and greed. So politics comes to the fore to put these malevolent drives under control. The inconsistency resides in the fact that this argument assumes, implicitly and improperly, that the controllers (the politicians) are not motivated by power and greed.

Another example of inconsistency concerns the relation between the growth of production-consumption on one side and the protection of the environment on the other. Generally, politicians claim to be, at the same time, for continuous growth (of production and consumption) and for the protection of the environment. In this case, they are putting forward two premisses

(a) the prosperity of people is based on continuous growth of production and consumption;

(b) the prosperity of people is based on the careful protection of the environment;

These two premisses lead straight to an inconsistent conclusion, namely:

(c) favour an unlimited growth and advocate limits to the exploitation of the environment.

The inconsistencies of politicians is the reason why nothing much can be expected of them in controversial areas, where rational decisions and actions are urgently needed.

#### Hypostatization

The fallacy of hypostatization is to attribute empirical reality to theoretical constructs. Politicians fall regularly into this fallacy when they talk about state, society, nation, public good, general interest, and so on as if these were actual realities, having a life of their own, and not relations between individuals, and so existing only in that respect. The most evident example of hypostatization is the use of the name of the country (e.g. "la France," "l'Italia," "the USA") as referring to a living being/entity. This because the politicians are, as a whole, too attracted by spuriously lofty concepts (the nation) and big impres-

sive numbers (the masses) to take notice of a real individual of flesh and blood.

#### Circularity

The fallacy of circularity is the most clear example of the working of politics. In this fallacy, the conclusion is used to uphold the premisses instead of the premisses being capable of supporting the conclusion.

To clarify the point, state politics is generally based on nationalism (national interests), racism (xenophobia), militarism (army build up). This pestiferous concoction of myths and attitudes (the premisses of state politics) brings clashes that generate insecurity (the inevitable conclusion). Political leaders take the conclusion (existence of insecurity) not as an outcome of certain premisses (nationalism, racism, militarism) but as a starting point in order to justify the existence of those premisses. In other words, in politics, more insecurity demands more of those policies that have created insecurity, in a sort of vicious circle, a continuous tit-for-tat leading to universal disaster.

### **Politics : psychological fallacies**

#### Improper appeal to authority

A fallacious appeal to authority is a way of blocking a discussion about a contentious subject by invoking some authority considered as beyond dispute because of his prestige or ascendancy.

In the political arena, more importance is given to the relevant historical personage (e.g. Lenin, Mussolini, De Gaulle, Mao, etc.) or the powerful contemporary figure than to what they said or say. Their words had/have the magical aura of being beyond criticism. This situation is best shown by the phrase circulating in Italy under fascism: *Mussolini ha sempre ragione* [Mussolini is always right]. It is only at a later stage that the critical examination of those statements takes place and their deviousness or plain emptiness is brought to the attention. But for a certain period these figures are the undisputed point of reference in whose name every critical and creative discourse is blocked from the start.

#### Improper appeal to majority

An improper appeal to majority is a way of answering a contentious question or sustaining the reasonableness of a certain point by putting forward and accepting, without critical questioning, the opinion and the will of the biggest group.

Politics is fundamentally based on this fallacy insofar as, in its current most popular formula, i.e. democracy, it gives absolute preeminence to majority decisions. And, even in the case of a dictatorship, the majority has to be, at least, acquiescent, for the dictator to be able to dominate. In actual fact, in the course of history, abominable rulers (Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin) had the support of large majorities, making their regimes truly democratic, in the real etymological meaning of the term. This should make everybody wary about appealing to the might of number in order to support the right of an idea. As forcefully expressed by Hippolyte Taine: *Dix millions d'ignorances ne forment pas un savoir* [Ten millions ignorant do not constitute knowledge]. Nevertheless, the appeal to the majority in matters of regulation of personal behaviour is one of the pillars of politics in the age of democracy.

#### Abuse and ridicule

Abuse and ridicule are ways of diverting or distracting the attention from the pertinent question to trivial or irrelevant aspects as a pretext for dismissing, lightly and surreptitiously, the entire matter.

This fallacy is the bread and butter of political fight. To make a mockery of the adversary and to caricature his arguments are highly regarded skills that score very well in the political arena of parliamentary debates. Certainly, it introduces some lightness (of a devious sort) in sombre places; but, at the same time, it reinforces the conviction that politics has nothing to do with science (that is, knowledge and knowledge seeking) because science has nothing to do with abuse and ridicule.

#### Loaded question

A loaded question is one that implicitly:

- freezes the situation (e.g. Have you stopped destroying the economy with your policies?);

- points to the answer (e.g. Surely you are all for X, aren't you?).

It uses words in an emotional way intended to distort the answer in the direction wanted by the person who poses the question

A politician who is unable to formulate loaded questions is not worth the name of politician, this being one of the basic tools of the political armoury.

Once again it emerges that politics and politicians have nothing to do with the scientific endeavours of a scientist who is interested in posing intelligent questions in search of truthful answers.

#### Problem banalization

Problem banalization (or excessive simplification) is the faulty reduction of a problem to a black and white alternative, even when the problem is a complex one and requires that several options be examined.

Politics is, fundamentally, the reduction of everything to simple alternatives in order that a simple decision be taken, that will then be applied to everybody. For this reason, politics is very much identifiable with the fallacy of problem banalization. By means of this fallacy, politics perpetrates all the time the crime of banalization of the entire society, that is the homogenization and massification of each and every individual.

### **Beyond fallacies**

The argument as presented so far stresses the fact that politics is based on a series of fallacies, material, logical, psychological, one inside or on top of the other, with the psychological ones prevailing to the point of obscuring, in some cases, both reality and logic.

When A is made to appear non-A, that is when war becomes peace, ignorance becomes knowledge, slavery becomes freedom, then it means that politics, that is politicians and their paid servants, is in total control of reality and of the entities once called individuals.

Without reaching these points of absurdity, we still generally have to accept our daily parcel of nonsense. For instance, politicians want us to believe that a part (i.e. their party) metamorphoses into the

whole (that is, the guarantor of the whole society) once put into power; or that particular interests become, all of a sudden, general interests just because they are the interests of the new ruling clique.

Nevertheless, even while odd ideas keep a hold on people's minds, something new is taking place that might assist in the unmasking of deception and illusion. We are referring to the ubiquitous-instantaneous diffusion of data through the worldwide electronic network.

This ever expanding and ever quickening circulation of data seems likely to herald progression along a path consisting of:

- **information:** the getting hold of relevant data against the misinformation and manipulation of power;
- **knowledge:** the structuring of information into meaningful patterns;
- **wisdom:** the utilization of the world wide web as an instrument for the development of world wide wisdom.

If this is the reality of things to come, the detection and disclosure of fallacies will be everybody's game, through the exchange of information (against material fallacies) and the sharpening of knowledge (against psychological and logical fallacies)

This will build up confidence and capabilities for the production and experimentation of new thinking and acting in which the role and place of fallacies will be greatly reduced, if not removed.

And going beyond fallacies means also going beyond politics.

## **Beyond politics**

Politics is the new sectarian cult of the statist age.

It is based on:

- centralized state (i.e. power) against civilized society (i.e. freedom);
- dialectics (i.e. polarities) against dialogue (i.e. pluralities)
- parties (i.e. factions) against persons (i.e. individuals).

Contemporary politics is characterized by the presence of the octopus-like party system. The political parties are the impersonators

of fictitious roles and the real protagonists in the manufacturing of fallacies. In relation to the role currently played (in power, in opposition), parties' fallacies are meant to cover two main aspects that characterize their existence and activity:

- corruption

Those in command, especially if their power extends over many aspects, as is the case of modern politics, are in permanent danger of corruption, that is of using power for exploiting others to their exclusive and excessive gain.

- disruption

Those in opposition, especially if they are excluded from all gains, are in permanent exercise of disruption, blocking or ridiculing all initiative of their opponents, and the cleverer the proposals, the more vigorous and subtle the resistance. To let others do something good, or that appears good, would not bode well for the attempt by the opposition parties to gain/regain power.

If we are not emotionally misled by the words, we can see that this dynamic of corruption and disruption is what politics is all about: on one side (those in power) the distribution of rewards to friends and supporters; on the other side (those in opposition) the objection to almost any proposal and measure, whatever its content, just because it comes from the rival faction. History is full of figures and parties that, while in opposition, have vigorously fought and rejected the ideas of those in power, but have appropriated and implemented them once the inversion of roles has taken place or the adversary has been eliminated (politically or physically).

Furthermore, corruption and disruption are not limited to politics at the local or national level. These are political tools on the international scene in the form of bribes (corruption) and wars (disruption). War, in particular, "is not merely a political act but also a real political instrument, a continuation of politics carried out by other means." (Karl von Clausewitz)

The main progressive social conceptions and movements (liberalism, socialism, anarchism) have all advocated, at least in theory, the

reduction or even the extinction of politics and of the organization in which politics takes place, the state.

Nevertheless, politics and the state have survived up to now because of theoretical and practical justifications:

- reality as contraposition (theoretical justification)

The conception of reality populated by wild beasts in perpetual mortal combat (*homo homini lupus*) has still a strong grip on the minds of people. The paradoxical thing is that this maxim applies more to people in power (state) than to people engaged in daily intercourse (society). In fact, where a society would soon collapse without smooth interaction and free cooperation, a state prospers through violent attrition and imposed submission, with the ruling power in the role of the *lupus* towards all the *homines*.

- reality as illusion (practical justification)

Politics is, for the masses, the cultivation of illusions about their future state. The role of the *deus ex machina* of the Greek tragedy, whose providential intervention was capable of solving every problem, has been taken over, in the world of contemporary politics, by the machinery of government. If we rip the curtain of illusion, we see that politics, conducted under the cover of the 'benevolent' state, has been the means for unconfessed despicable interests to gain respectability under the label of common general interests; the place where dissipation of resources has taken the name of social investments and the way through which the oppression of individuals has been called maintenance of public order.

Now, both these justifications (theoretical and practical) are being shaken to the foundation by the emergence of a new more acute perception of past and present reality. The results are:

- diversification

Reality is no longer seen as made of contraposition but of diversification. The obtuse simplification imposed by state politics becomes, day by day, a variegated multicolour tapestry. This diversification is becoming too rich and complex for politics to master. There are no longer any homogeneous majorities linked by the same position on many themes and interests. There is, instead, a concert of many

multifarious voices ('anarchy' according to state terminology) which is badly suited to the world of state politics where the imperative is for one (leader, party, government) to get hold of (all) the levers and to act in the name of everybody.

- disillusion

The individual sees and realizes, more and more, that politics is not the way/means to solve problems but to manufacture them, be it tyranny, terrorism or whatever terrifying event we can conceive. Moreover, the bankruptcy of the state has greatly reduced the room for manoeuvre in terms of favours bestowed upon people to buy their support. The fiction is coming to an end.

If this is the reality in progress, going beyond politics means going beyond parties and all that they represent, that is the imposition on everybody of sectorial interests portrayed as general interests, of restrictions presented as guarantees of freedom, of violence justified as the preservation of order and civilization

What is needed is a real variety of positions expressed by individuals and organizations of individuals (clubs, associations, learned societies, companies, communities, families, partnerships, cooperatives, etc.) to replace and displace the fake differences impersonated by parties, all having the same concern, that is to gain or maintain power at whatever cost, through whatever tricks and lies they deem fit to use.

The end of politics marks the coming onto the scene of something that, while always present in the life of society (i.e. in the relations between individuals), has not (yet) been openly recognized for the central role it has played: **civics**.

## Civics

Civics is the art and craft of personal course (conduct) and social intercourse (contact).

It is based on:

- moral attitudes
- creative energy



- applied knowledge.

To go beyond politics and to develop civics, a series of steps needs to be undertaken.

First, there are some aspects, belonging to the past/present, that should be progressively lessened, up to the point of their disappearance. For instance, it is necessary:

- to reduce the area of representation (to go for direct involvement or for subsidiarity, that is the power to decide about something goes to the individuals most affected by the problem);

- to reduce the distance of delegation (to diminish the knowledge gap, to highlight fallacies, to bring vested interests into the open, etc.);

- to reduce the sphere of delegation (to transform delegation into a short term, precisely defined mandate).

At the same time, some aspects need to be affirmed and developed. They concern:

- **principles** (discovered and accepted)

These are the basic universal norms for civilized decent living, affecting individuals all over the world and concerning the intercourse amongst them, and between them and nature (in other words, what it means to be human and to act humanly towards all living creatures and world entities). No organization, no group, no individual should attack or disown the principles without sparking off a reparative intervention from other human beings.

- **mores** (developed and transmitted)

These are specific local norms, the habits of each community, all acceptable unless in conflict with universal principles (for instance, damaging life on earth). In this case cultural pressure should be applied to encourage a positive evolution of some customs.

- **rules** (chosen and implemented)

These are, as in a game, the signposts that delimit the area of permissible moves or the standards that suggest the way to recommended moves. Rules refer to practical matters and should be in harmony with the principles and not in contrast with the mores.

These norms should come into being as answers to precise needs related to:

- **existence** (principles)

Principles are the source and the guarantee of the existence of human beings and of the whole environment. They are few and universal.

- **experience** (mores)

Mores are the result of past experience and have the function of transmitting that experience, for assessment and consequent acceptance or refusal by new groups and generations. They are many and local.

- **expedience** (rules)

Rules are the product of expedience, like the standard guidelines for the performing of a task, or the worked out arrangements for some endeavour. They are appropriate in number and general in use, emerging from the requirements of the situation or derived from similar specific situations.

To sum up, civics is the theoretic condensation and practical application of the wisdom of the past as expressed, for instance by Ulpiano's definition of right as "the art of the good and the just" (*ius est ars boni et aqua*) and his depiction of human behaviour: "live honestly, to nobody do harm, to each one give what is due" (*honeste vivere, neminem laedere, suum cuique tribuere*).

To promote civics we do not need parties (factions) in competition for total power, but experimental communities and creative individuals in emulation for betterment.

The hundred of thousand of laws produced by hyper-centralized states need to be put aside and replaced by:

- a few universal principles (valid for everybody)
- many local mores (freely accepted by members of a specific group)
- some basic essential rules (appropriate in number and general in use).

At that point, conditions will be more favourable for the development of the cosmopolitan person to replace the national subject, wherever and whenever somebody wishes it. This cosmopolitan person is the one who has interiorized the few universal principles,

becomes quickly familiar with many different mores and is happy to adapt to and adopt the specific rules of the organization of which he/she is willing to be participant.

The network for civics is already there. We need only the creative brainwork and energy to put it to use.

## FROM STATE POLICING TO COMMUNITY RIGHTING

The starting point: *ethos* and *nomos*

The slippery turn: *cratos* and *lex*

Policing

State policing

The deceitful foundations of state policing

The contemptible aims of state policing

The absurd reality of state policing

The perverse results of state policing

A different conception

A different practice

A different scenario

Towards community righting



### The starting point: *ethos* and *nomos*

It is an often overlooked fact that the most complex phenomena of human life, like the origin and development of languages, of ethical principles, of behavioural norms, are the result of innumerable individuals and their spontaneous actions and interactions, over the ages.

It is then very likely that, at a certain point in time, when a relevant amount of experiential materials have been produced such as common forms of speech and behaviour, somebody will intervene to structure into formal rules what had already become, in large measure, consolidated practice.

From here it is only a small step to thinking and believing that the systematizers are also the originators of those practices, because to the human mind it appears very plausible to attribute a particular social phenomenon to the existence of a specific maker/inventor at a precise date or period.

This "social creationism," according to which, for every complex experience there is a superior entity that has designed and produced it, has been especially characteristic of those historians for whom history is reducible to what Popes, Kings, Presidents, Parliaments or the likes have devised and decided in the course of their existence.

Clearly, this view represents also the vested interest and manipulative effort of those in power, eager to attribute to themselves ingenious social capacities they do not have, in particular the ability to design norms that are then accepted by the people at large.

As a matter of fact, all norms that have emerged in the course of history, everywhere on earth, are the result of spontaneously produced and persistently recurrent actions arising out of human needs and aspirations. In other words, they are successful habits of behaviour that have developed and set firm over time and are shared by a growing number of people through imitation and internalization. *Ethos* (attitudes, ways of life and beliefs) gives rise to *nomos* (norms), i.e. what is then taken as normal behaviour, characterizing and binding the members of a group together.

Roman law and Common law have no different origins. They both come from the development and refinement of *mores* (customs) of individuals in communities. This fact has been obscured and forgotten as soon as any type of domineering power, be it religious or political, arrived on the scene.

### **The slippery turn: *cratos* and *lex***

Roman civilization has been largely identified with the system of laws that regulated social and contractual relationships and facilitated the resolution of conflicts between Roman citizens (*ius civile*) and between foreigners and Roman citizens (*ius gentium*).

What is not always clear is that those laws had their roots in religious practices and revered traditions passed from generation to generation.

The first written juridical formulation in the history of Roman Law consisted of the Twelve Tables, made at the request of the plebeians who complained that the patrician consuls administered by resorting to obscure juridical uses in an arbitrary way. After ten years of arguing about this, a code of law was compiled as a summary of what were then the best juridical practices in Greece and Rome, and a final text was produced between 451 and 449 B.C.

The lawyers themselves, in the process of solving controversies between their clients, gave the impulse to the development of laws, intended as norms that came to be repeatedly applied in litigations. Thus, a law was something discovered by the parties involved in a dispute and a means capable of resolving it through their consensual application. There was no a priori legislation regulating civil matters and so there were no such things as ready-made laws, covering all cases, to be imposed on the parties.

For that to start happening we have to wait until the end of the Roman Empire in the West and the advent of emperor Justinian. Around the year 533 a written text known as the *Digest* or *Pandects* was produced which systematized ways of behaving and of dealing between people that had been practiced throughout Rome's long

history. To those usages the emperor gave the force of laws, backed by the power of the state.

The Institutes of Justinian (*Codex Justinianensis*) are the clearest example of the incorporation of social conventions and ethical norms into a code of laws to which the power (*cratos*) gave its seal of approval and support.

Another example from later times is the absorption of the *Lex Mercatoria* (autonomously developed and administered by the merchants) into Commercial Law (exogenously decreed and imposed), a process that was first started by the feudal kings and was then completed by the rulers of the nation states.

The *Lex Mercatoria* arose out of the practices and conveniences of the merchants that were crisscrossing Europe trading wares. They devised and refined norms that ostracized dishonest dealers and promoted security and ease of transactions. It could have continued in this way if it were not for the totalitarian nature of power that is eager to invade any sphere of life, especially if there is something to gain from it. It seems also that some dishonest merchant, in order to avoid being punished by his own colleagues for some misdeed, put himself under the protection of the king and of his law. This spelt disaster for the survival of the *Lex Mercatoria* as an autonomously administered set of principles and norms.

By then the germs had been spread for a replacement of *ethos* (moral practice) by *cratos* (political power) and the passage from the spontaneously devised norms of the people to the top-down enacted laws of the state.

## **Policing**

From the year 1000, with the expansion of trade and the renewal of artisan production, Europe gradually became a more and more urbanized civilization. In parallel, there emerged new forms of administration of law and of the keeping of public order that can be characterized under the name of policing.

The terms *policy*, *police* and *policing* all derive from the Greek word *polis* (city).

Policy is the art and science of government applied to the inhabitants of a polis.

To police means “To prevent or detect and prosecute violations of rules and regulations” (*Webster’s Dictionary*) and, generally, safeguarding the smooth proceeding of life in common.

During the Middle Ages, the task of keeping order was performed at a local level by various bodies. The cities had special patrols and watchmen to protect property and people. The lord of the manor counted on the peasants to provide security services under his personal guidance. Even the Church and the monasteries had their own protective institutions.

When trade and crafts spread wider and wider, and cultural life flourished again, artisan guilds and universities had their own guards to supervise regular events and activities.

A relatively recent example of this direct and differentiated security provision is the Thames Police of London established in 1798 with funds coming from insurance companies and with the aim of reducing thefts in the London port and recovering stolen goods.

Apart from these instances, it should also be noticed that in many places people had no need of any external or institutional power, operating on a permanent basis, for the regular business of life to be carried on without any trouble. In the small communities, the reprobation and ostracism of an individual found guilty of some 'offence' were motives strong enough to deter from immoral or, simply, unorthodox conduct. As a matter of fact, over the centuries, conformity and compliance with current moral norms were more widespread traits than dissension and revolt, unless the survival of the individual and his family was at stake.

Out of this dynamic of acceptable or reproachable behaviours emerged, in the course of a long history, consolidated modes of conduct that became the habits of a social group.

So, before the existence of the concept of policing as the art and science of government, people living in communities were already



practicing self-restraint and implementing communitarian order through the spontaneous formation and consolidation of social norms not mediated by any institutional power.

## **State policing**

The absolute monarchies that dominated in Europe up to the French Revolution tried to put under their control the administration of justice and the maintenance of order.

To superintend the realm, a series of centralized bodies came into effect that absorbed many of the roles and functions previously performed by other institutions (the commune, the parish, the guilds, etc.).

In France, for instance, in 1692 Louis XIV replaced town magistrates with royal intendants. This was aimed at facilitating the exaction of taxes from the towns and quelling fiscal revolts. So, as usual, policing the kingdom was coupled with draining resources towards the centre.

Nevertheless, the so-called absolute power of the kings over their subjects was never very strong and never succeeded in marginalizing or dominating the other existing authoritative bodies like the Church, the aristocracy and, later on, the bourgeoisie of the Third Estate.

It is only with the coming to dominance of the central state that any intermediate body was practically abolished and the task of policing was assumed totally by the centre and was based on the production of laws whose compulsory observance was equated with the keeping of order.

It could be said that the struggle conducted by the king (the most important feudal master) against the Church, the aristocracy and the free towns, in order to assume control of a series of roles and prerogatives previously exercised by those powers, came to completion only when the king disappeared (or remained merely as a figurehead) and a new feudal master emerged: the central nation state.

This monopolistic and highly pervasive power resulted from the

French Revolution in conjunction with the reforms introduced by Napoleon Bonaparte.

It is to the French Revolution and to Napoleon that we owe the first centralized police force, put under the command of a single minister, Joseph Fouché (1799-1802 and 1804-1810).

In 1812 was formed the *Sûreté* (which would be the model for later investigative bodies such as Scotland Yard and the FBI), headed by an ex convict turned police informer, *François Vidocq*, who boasted that, whenever three people congregated in Paris, one of them was on his payroll.

The pattern of development of policing in France was imitated by other central states in Europe, all on their way towards setting up an apparatus of state control whose functions were basically those of:

- surveillance and repression
- prosecution and punishment
- imprisonment and detention

So, at the end of a long process, the absolutism of kings was perfected and carried to new heights by the totalitarianism of the states. For this to be accomplished, the force of brute power had to be sustained, as usual, by the manipulative force of ideas.

### **The deceitful foundations of state policing**

As already highlighted, throughout history, any form of power has tried to replace normative customs spontaneously formed and accepted with legal rules enacted and imposed. This happened because uniform regulations coming from the top were deemed a better way to homogenise and control people (i.e. nation-building) than multifarious local customs brought into play from the bottom.

The reaction to legal rules imposed from the top is manifest in two currents of feeling and thinking, namely:

- The school of juridical naturalism, for which the origin of rights resides in human nature;
- The historical school, for which the origin of rights is to be found in the culture of a community.

Both those tendencies, as long as they remained living realities, opposing centralization and oppression in the name of individuals and communities, were strong bulwarks against the heavy weight of power, ready to reduce everybody to an obedient subject.

Many battles for civil liberties have been fought in the name of natural right, and many liberation struggles had as their motivating impulse the desire to follow the rules historically shaped by the community instead of those artificially imposed by an external power.

Unfortunately, the continuous widening and strengthening of the power of the nation state, from the French Revolution onwards, have negatively affected also the notions held by these schools of thought.

Two juridical scholars have observed the following outcomes:

Juridical naturalism. "The advocates of natural right, intended as a right outside the state, and based on human nature, end up by demanding state laws that implement that natural right." (Eugen Ehrlich, *Fundamental Principles of the Sociology of Law*, 1913 German Edition).

Historical School. "The final outcome of the Historical School, as Sir Ernest Barker has pointed out, was a vindication of 'national law'." (Alessandro Passerin d'Entrèves, *Natural Law*, 1951).

So, in the end, we got a total distortion of the premises on which those normative conceptions were based. Instead of promoting individual rights and a variety of normative systems emerging from local communities, all within a universal framework of autonomy and mutual respect, even the exponents of those schools of thought went for top-down homogenization by means of national laws imposed on everybody who happened to live within the territory of the nation state.

Many who considered themselves quite progressive, thought that this was not bad, after all, because it could lead to the eradication of backward local customs. Moreover, to the classical liberal the business of keeping order everywhere was considered the proper task of the state, the supposedly benign watchman in charge of protecting people and redressing wrongs. So, even those who were not wholly

sympathetic to state power did not oppose state policing because, in their minds, it amounted to the existence of a minimal state administering law impartially and granting security effectively.

However, this rosy picture never materialized - indeed, in its stead, other highly unpalatable phenomena took place. For instance, natural law was invoked in support of a presumed racial superiority, claiming, for instance, that non-white races were 'naturally' inferior and so laws sanctioning slavery and segregation were 'natural' laws. Or, some state rulers thought that their national laws were superior to those of other communities and so came to the conclusion that it was their 'progressive' right to invade other territories and impose those laws on other people.

Even the supposedly appealing idea of the minimal state as just a provident watchman and nothing else was so distorted, in some cases by the very liberals that were advocating it, that eventually it disappeared from the scene.

In fact, that 'liberal' illusion had not taken into account the voracious appetite of state rulers and functionaries for more and more power. The tendency, postulated by Adolph Wagner, of the state to grow in parallel with industrial growth, was an already visible reality at the time the idea of keeping the state in the limited role of watchman was upheld.

Nevertheless, this very flawed idea carried the day and, without much thought, we moved from the Brotherly Watchman with a lighting torch (like in the Statue of Liberty) to the Big Brother with a long heavy stick. The Big Brother took to himself the power to invent and impose laws for everybody, calling them 'positive' laws and he assumed the monopoly of violence within a given territory, calling this the keeping of 'order'.

Let's see a bit more precisely, then, what are the aims of this state policing as "law and order."

## **The contemptible aims of state policing**

State policing is based on the state having granted to itself three monopolies:

- the law-making monopoly
- the violence-using monopoly
- the sentence-passing monopoly

In any monopolistic situation, the monopolist can usually impose his will on everybody. Clearly that will must take into account, in a democratic as well as an aristocratic regime, the feelings and wishes of the populace at large, or of its more vociferous parts, in order to avoid the emergence of widespread discontent and eventual rebellion on which opponents can rely for replacing the existing power.

For this reason state policing is characterized by:

- opportunistic laws. The laws of the state, while they are not accidental, are highly dependent on the vogues of the time and the whims of popular opinion. Quite often they lack any strong rational basis in the sense that what is introduced and imposed is only a facade of bigoted restrictions, or a bogus progressive measure, according to what is more popular and vote-catching at that time.

- targeted violence. The openly violent actions of the state are certainly not perpetrated on the totality or even the majority of the population but on specific groups, according to what seems necessary to those in power. Those various groups, targeted by the state in both the past and the present, are characterized e.g. by race (Blacks, Jews, Arabs), religion (Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, etc.), occupation (for instance, the working classes as dangerous classes), political orientation (communists, anarchists, fascists, etc.), legal status (foreigners) or other qualifications.

These distinctive traits characterizing opportunistic laws and targeted violence are clearly visible in the main aims of state policing, which are:

- To favour the strong corporatist interests of those who are part of or are connected to the ruling elite. Under this aim we can list:

- laws restricting freedom of commerce by applying tariffs on so-

called foreign goods and quotas for so-called foreign producers, in order to favour national firms;

- laws granting long-term patents to certain firms or individuals just because they happen to be the first to have devised or simply introduced certain products/procedures or just because they paid for their registration, legally stifling others who could have come to the same ideas at a later stage or who did not bother to patent what they had already discovered;

- laws protecting categories of national workers through licenses and professional registers that exclude outsiders and discourage new entrants, in order to limit artificially the number of practitioners and protect the existing corporatist bodies of professionals.

- To impose on minorities the modes of conduct of the majority. We are not referring here to universal principles of behaviour (do not kill, do not steal, etc.) for which there is no question of majorities and minorities, but to specific rules that the state wants to impose on all 'national' subjects as a code of what is politically correct. Examples of this are:

- laws prohibiting the consumption of alcoholic beverages (from the USA in the twenties and early thirties of the last century to Saudi Arabia in the present) and the use of stimulating substances, apart from those sanctioned and taxed by the state;

- laws prohibiting certain sexual practices (e.g. homosexuality) or certain relations (e.g. extra-marital affairs, inter-racial marriages) as if the state had the right to intervene in the most personal experiences of free individuals;

- laws discriminating against and segregating minorities according to the colour of their skin, ethnic origin, religious faith, political convictions, country of origin, or other, in order to favour the national racial element (whatever that means) or the religion of the majority or the dominant political ideology, or any other arbitrary aspect.

- To safeguard at all costs the existence of the state. This is by far the main preoccupation of the state and it results in a huge number of laws designed just for that purpose. We have for instance:

- laws against free movement of people seen as a threat to the nation state (or to the federal state) on the basis that foreigners are more difficult to homogenise and integrate under the dominant ideology;

- laws against religious practices or political activism wherever religion or politics is seen as a menace to the stability of the state and to the diffusion of its own brand of religion or political ideology, i.e. fascism, communism, laicism, Catholicism, Islamism, etc.;

- laws against dissidents (groups, individuals), now easily qualified under the very convenient and all-embracing label of terrorists;

- laws against those who refuse to take part in state-organized violence (pacifist conscientious objectors), considered as traitors to the fatherland;

- laws against the free flow of ideas, in order to censor those newspapers, books, web sites, radio stations that are against the current state power or express opinions not totally aligned to the state propaganda;

- laws against any free activity not licensed and regulated by the state and from which the state extorts its heavy toll in the form of tax revenues.

The list is so long, and still lengthening, that it led to the common saying: "Many are the laws producing criminals!"

The above short catalogue of state interventions by way of laws should have made it quite clear, by now, that the prevention of offences and the redressing of wrongs are not high on the agenda of state policing.

In reality that agenda is dominated by interests that have very little to do with the protection of individuals and communities and a lot to do with the manipulation and control of everybody in the interest of the state elite and its cronies (bureaucrats, professionals in the state social services, protected businessmen, other assisted categories, etc.).

This agenda is based on three main aspects (laws, crimes, prisons) that need to be critically examined if we want to have a clear view of the absurd reality of state policing.

## The absurd reality of state policing

Since the intervention of the territorial nation state in the field of policing, the issues involved and the instruments employed have been the same, namely:

- the promulgation of laws
- the prosecution of crimes
- the detention in prisons

It is necessary, then, to focus on the reality of these issues and instruments.

- **Laws**

Under state policing, positive laws, that means laws promulgated by the state, are deemed to be the universal fixing tool whenever a social problem arises.

Like the magic words pronounced by a sorcerer to cast away a bad spell, the laws promulgated by appointed wizards assembled in a special room are taken to be the magic formulas that will deal prodigiously with every evil. This primitive thinking is still, unfortunately, the cultural foundation of every state.

However, justice existed before positive laws. Montesquieu makes it very clear right at the start of his *Esprit des Lois*:

"Avant qu'il y eût des lois faites, il y avait des rapports de justice possibles. Dire qu'il n'y a rien de juste ni d'injuste que ce qu'ordonnent ou défendent les lois positives, c'est dire qu'avant qu'on eût tracé de cercle, tous les rayons n'étaient pas égaux." ["Before laws were made, relations of justice were possible. To say that there is nothing just or unjust but what is commanded or forbidden by positive laws, is the same as saying that before the tracing of a circle all the radii were not equal."] (Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, 1758, Book I).

Moreover, as pointed out by Eugen Ehrlich long ago:



"In our time, as well as in any other past time, the centre of gravity for the development of right lies neither in the process of law making nor in the juridical sciences, nor in the law studies, but in society itself." (Eugen Ehrlich, *Fundamental Principles of the Sociology of Law*, 1913 German Edition).

Another scholar, in more recent times, added that:

"Many conform to the law without being guided by it. They conform because they have other reasons for doing what the law requires, reasons which have nothing to do with the fact that these actions are required by law." (Joseph Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, 1975).

In other words, some laws, at best, only slightly anticipate and promote what is becoming acceptable behaviour; or, more often, they register what is already generally practiced behaviour.

Apart from that, most laws are exclusively the result of the will to coerce of the territorial state rather than of natural social dynamics. They are not suitable levers for addressing and controlling those dynamics. Otherwise, it would follow that the more severe and exhaustive the laws, the lower the rate of crimes committed. Only if this were true could we start to take the supposedly magic power of law-making seriously.

In reality, it seems exactly the opposite takes place: the more laws, the more crimes; and this is quite understandable if we focus on the second aspect of state policing: crimes.

- **Crimes**

The multiplication of laws, regulating and sanctioning every aspect of social life leads, inevitably, to the multiplication of crimes, that is of behaviours that come under the prohibitions and penalties of the law.

The plain English definition is "Crime: an act which is against the law." (*Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English*, 1981).

Considering that nowadays law is a state-made and state-administered affair, it follows that it is up to the state to decide what is and what is not crime. State-promoted ethnic cleansing could then be taken as a perfectly legal (i.e. non criminal) scheme of action, while crossing a river without a state permit could be registered as a criminal act (border trespassing).

By the way, all this is perfectly in line with the etymological root of the term “crime”, which is: to scream, to cry out. Presently those who own/control the means of communication and the apparatus of education are those who can shout loudest and, by doing so, can play the role of accusers. In fact, the first meaning of the word 'crime' is: recrimination, accusation. That is why in Latin the term *criminator* (the one who advances a recrimination or accusation) has a double meaning, of accuser or slanderer (*calumniator*).

No wonder some individuals that have been kept in jail or executed according to state law as convicted criminals, have later on, with a different government and in a different political climate, been rehabilitated and extolled as heroes or even martyrs.

That is why criminal charges by the state, even when confirmed through a trial, should always be viewed with a lot of caution, and should be totally dismissed in at least two cases:

- victimless crimes. These are acts from which no one suffers any harm (like smoking marijuana or gambling or hiring unregistered workers) but which, nevertheless, are considered crimes by the state for reasons that have nothing to do with rights and justice. The absurd fact is that smoking licensed drugs (tobacco), courting chance (playing the lotto) or hiring workers is all very well as long as it is done under state control. (For a detailed treatment of victimless or consensual crimes see Peter McWilliams, *Ain't Nobody's Business If You Do*, 1996)

- crimes of lese-majesty. These are acts against the current power (like printing and circulating forbidden literature such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* under Eastern European state communism, or promoting demonstrations to overturn the government). Clearly, in the eyes of the power they are terrible actions to be condemned and

repressed with the utmost vigour, but in fact there is nothing unjust and unworthy in them. On the contrary, they are signs of a healthy independent human personality.

For the convicted 'criminal' the consequences of committing a crime are, in many cases, detention in a prison. And here we come to the third aspect that characterizes the absurd reality of state policing.

- **Prisons**

Under state policing, prisons have become the main instrument for dealing with people who have committed actions condemned by the law.

Prisons are reputed to be the best means of:

- punishing the perpetrator of a crime
- warning other people about the consequences of committing a crime
- protecting the people at large from those who have committed crimes, by excluding the perpetrators from society.

However, prisons fail on all these counts because:

- detention at the expense of the taxpayers (and that includes also those who have suffered the offences) is a dumb way of punishing people. For the chronic petty delinquent a period in jail is like a time of rest before resuming his normal activities. In the U.K. quite recent official figures (2003) show that 61 per cent of offenders were reconvicted within two years, with the re-offending rate for male adolescents (aged 15-18) at 82 per cent. Cases have even been recorded where people have committed further offences in order to get back into the secure, all-expenses-paid environment of a prison.

- prisons as warning is an idea that totally lacks empirical foundation. It is reported in history books that burglars and pickpockets were operative in towns when people congregated to watch the hanging of a thief. So, on the whole, it is fair to say that those who want to commit offences are not deterred by the penalty of detention or by even harsher punishments. With reference to this diabolic double act of offences and retributions, Cicero wrote in *De Re Publica*:

"the worst fate of all is to engage in the everlasting struggle of doing and suffering injustice." [*miserrimum digladiari semper tum faciendis, tum accipiendis iniuriis*] (Book III, 13).

- prisons as protection of the people is a total con. They are, at most, a temporary protection only from the offences that some people might commit. In fact, every day there are other people who get out of jail and, in many cases, are ready to start from where they left off or, more likely, eager to embark on committing bolder offences after having absorbed in prison the relevant expertise in higher delinquency.

In this respect, countless pages and poignant words have been written denouncing "the prisons as the nurseries for the most revolting categories of breaches of moral law." (Pëtr Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons*, 1887)

This condemnation of prisons as schools for offenders has even prompted a U.K. Home Secretary (Douglas Hurd) to write in a government paper that "prison is an expensive way of making bad people worse"; and another Home Secretary (David Blunkett) stated in 2001 that "undoubtedly people learn more about crime in prison than they will learn anywhere else in their lives."

Nevertheless, since the time the central state has been in charge, no different way has been seriously sought, tested or implemented for dealing with offenders. On the contrary, the prisons are more crowded than ever (in the U.K. the number of inmates went up from 44,500 in 1993 to around 80,000 in 2007, a rise of almost 80%) and new prisons have been built and more would be built if it were not for the usual financial problems.

In the presence of this, it is perhaps time to realize that state policing is a highly expensive and nefarious way of making bad situations even worse. However, what is bad for honest individuals and peaceful communities is not at all bad for the state which, through the prisons as schools for crime, can count on a steady number of trained offenders that justify its existence as the (supposedly) essential monopolistic provider of security.

That is why prisons are still and will remain the principal instru-

ment of repressive state policing, at least as long as the state keeps its territorial monopoly on law and order.

Laws, crimes and prisons as the three pillars of state policing have produced appalling and perverse results that will now be briefly exposed.

### **The perverse results of state policing**

In the last two hundred years, scientific and technological progress has given a tremendous boost to the standard of living of many people in many regions of the world.

Nevertheless, the standard of civility and of social organization not only has not advanced in equal measure but, in some cases and for some periods, has regressed abysmally.

Considering that the state has been, at least since the French Revolution and, especially, during the XX century, the main social actor and the one responsible for an orderly development of social relations, it is fair to say that the results have not lived up to promises or expectations.

The fact is that state policing, far from contributing to solving problems of social life, has exacerbated them and made them a congenital part of (almost) everybody's life. These problems will stay with us as long as we remain trapped in the state paradigm of state laws and state 'order'.

The main perverse results of state policing are the following:

- Institutionalizing criminal organizations through law-making.

Laws forbidding the consumption of alcohol or the use of drugs or the movement of people, have given rise to the formation of organizations that satisfy the demand for those things. These organizations then start using violent means against competitors or against opponents in order to expand their gains. So, organized crime, in certain areas, is the direct result of some state regulation. The law that prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages in the USA (1920-1933) was a godsend to certain groups, who quickly got involved in those high-risk but also highly profitable activities,

leaving behind a trail of violence and corruption while attempting to consolidate their very lucrative position. The same is presently true in the field of drugs, with a considerable number of individuals ready to commit offences in order to procure the money to pay the artificially high price of the outlawed stuff. In summary, the professed best intentions generate the worst possible results.

Presently, the attempt to control migration through law and police enforcement has brought into existence organizations that smuggle people into a country, subjecting them to horrendous and sometimes fatal journeys for which they are charged an extortionate price. All this is made possible thanks to the laws of various states.

So it is correct to say that the state creates crimes and criminals, and those crimes and criminals, in their turn, justify the existence of the state (police, judiciary, bureaucracy).

It is an alliance made in hell.

- Producing 'criminals' that become real offenders.

The growing morass of statutes and regulations results in an increasing number of people being in breach of some state law. This is especially true of many 'foreigners' who are pushed into the precarious situation of being considered illegal immigrants (a qualification invented by the state and that certainly did not exist when the white man was roaming all over the earth) or illegal workers (as if carrying out an activity that satisfies a felt need could ever be considered something illegal). If certain rational ways of behaving are obstructed, many might be motivated to explore and exploit other avenues. In that case, from criminals according to the state they might become real offenders against other individuals. After all, in the present reality this is not an irrational choice, considering that many offenders are never caught or, if caught, are, in many cases, treated quite ineffectively by the system of state policing.

- Dealing ineffectively with offenders.

It is a fact that those directly responsible for law and order (the police, the judiciary) often conduct themselves in an appallingly incompetent manner.

First of all, the lack of trust in the performance of the police is so

widespread that offences such as stealing and house breaking are, in some cases, not reported by the victim; and when they are reported, it is most likely that they are not properly investigated given the fact that the police content themselves with writing and filing reports of the incident rather than actually conducting investigations; and even if the offence is seriously investigated, the likelihood of apprehending the culprit is very slim indeed (less than 15% of recorded domestic burglaries were detected in 1999-2000 in the U.K.) unless the person is already well known by the police for a series of similar misdemeanours; and in the rare cases where the culprit is apprehended, the likelihood that he will continue his delinquent activity is very high because the state system is not intended to deal in a reparative way towards the person offended against or in a truly reformatory way with the offender. In fact, the wrongdoer either finds a soft judge who dismisses the case or gives him a very light sentence, or a harsh one who sends him to prison. In the first case he receives a signal that he can carry on committing offences without much of a problem; in the second case he is given the opportunity to go to the school of crime (prison) where he can hope to acquire the expertise to commit even bolder and more vicious offences in the future without getting caught. So, the same unsatisfactory outcomes are likely in every case, as long as the current state system is in place.

- Weakening the self-protective impulse of individuals and communities.

Another strong signal given by the state power to the citizens is to be totally weak and passive when on the receiving end of some offence or violent action, or when witnessing them. The much celebrated sentence: "Don't take the law into your own hands" is an immoral hymn to apathy that should make any decent person shiver with disgust. And those who do not want to feel disgusted with themselves and decide to take self-protective action, after having experienced the futility and inanity of the more conventional ways of dealing with an offender, then fall prey to idiotic state laws that treat them as criminals. To offer just one example of life under state policing, in the United Kingdom people who have simply stopped chil-

dren intent on a rampage have been arrested on a charge of kidnapping.

In short, the state rulers want the individual to be completely defenceless against any violence or offence, entrusting to themselves or to bodies licensed by them the task of dealing with offenders. And this is where they have added insult to injury.

- Imposing a double burden on individuals for security provision.

Given the appalling result of state policing, with 80% of offences being undetected in Italy (2003) or, to quote another figure, with 92 % of burglaries in London in recent years being committed with impunity, it is no wonder that people are investing more and more money in security locks, house alarms, video surveillance and so on. Besides that, the number of so-called private policemen (that is guards hired directly by citizens and firms) has grown to such a point that now, in the USA, they exceed the number of state policemen paid through taxation.

This, apart from destroying the pernicious myth of security provision as the proper role of the state and only of the state, shows also that we are charged with a double burden in matters of security, whether we realize that or not.

In fact, through compulsory taxation we are forced to pay the state for the illusion of being protected; and then we pay again, in the higher price of goods and services, for the cost of "private" guards in and around supermarkets, banks and other businesses.

On the whole, this situation is not new. Already in 1791 Wilhelm von Humboldt remarked that:

"If it were possible to make an accurate calculation of the evils which police regulations occasion, and of those which they prevent, the number of the former would, in all cases, exceed that of the latter."  
(Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, 1791).

So, the fact that state regulation and state police have brought misery to too many existences and made a mess of an otherwise pretty orderly social life is something that should be well understood



by now. However, a situation is not changed simply when many individuals realize that it is not conducive to any good but when they also know how to transform it by implementing an alternative system that promises to be a better (fairer, more effective) one.

That is why it is necessary now to start sketching the lines of possible alternatives to the current system of state policing.

### **A different conception**

In order to start envisaging a new conception of a smooth and satisfactory development of social life, we need to abandon the conventional notions on which state policing is based and introduce radically different ones that have been sidelined with the advent of the centralized nation state.

#### **Norms**

The term norm comes from the Latin *norma*, designating the carpenter's square, and so indicating an authoritative rule or standard. In other words, a norm points to what is acceptable according to a rule having the quality of a standard.

This is in sharp contrast with the concept of state law or positive law where what is important is not the authoritative content but its formalistic origin, i.e. the fact of coming from a state body according to a certain ritual. For this reason *ius* (law) has become synonymous with *iussum* (commanded) and not with *iustum* (right).

In reality the law, being aimed at imposing a certain conduct, is supported by a set of interest groups, and the more powerful the group, the more successful it can be in promoting and enacting laws. So that, in the end, "law is right" only in so far as, under territorial statism, right is equivalent to might. In other words, law as right is simply what the most powerful groups within a society want as general rules. We are here clearly concerned with a game in which strength is rewarded and is equated to and defined as "right".

A law is then merely what the current power holder, be it an autocratic ruler or a democratic government, prescribes and imposes on everybody by way of legislation. The differences between these two

cases, which appear so antithetic, are, in reality, negligible in so far as both are based on commands by a super-ordained entity (the state) superimposed on society (human relations).

In contrast, a norm, be it a principle, a standard or a functional rule, is not something that can be invented and modified through a session of Parliament, but is a reality that grows, sometimes over a very long period, and comes into being only by way of wide acceptance, having demonstrated its usefulness and effectiveness.

The most nefarious effect of state law-making is the blocking of this process of social and personal norm-finding and the stifling of the feed-back mechanism that plays a fundamental role in free social intercourse and is capable of self-generating norms in view of producing order. Alternative approaches, institutions and methods for solving problems are either prohibited to groups of volunteers or made dependent upon state licensing or permits involving regulations that make them largely ineffective as free experiments.

Moreover, the production of innumerable laws results in the criminalization of large parts of society. That is why, besides moving from laws to norms, we have to abandon the concept of legally-defined crime in favour of a more substantial notion.

### **Offences**

As a compulsory rule is whatever the state has decided it to be by law, so wrongdoing is whatever the state has qualified as such by law and called crime.

In most western societies now, when considering the merit of an action, people are more accustomed, as a result of state education, to ascertain whether it is legal, rather than to evaluate if it is moral. The displacement of morality by legality is probably the most revealing sign of the rottenness introduced by the system of state policing because it highlights the loss, by too many individuals, of an inner moral sense.

Recovering a moral sense means not leaving to the state rulers the task of deciding what is right or wrong according to their whims and interests. Instead, we have to discriminate between right and wrong according to principles that refer essentially to the free will of the

individual and by ascertaining if this free will has been unjustly coerced and offended.

This is why the widespread existence, under state laws, of victimless 'crimes' is an absurdity. If no one has been offended (i.e. forcefully or deceitfully wronged) by somebody committing a certain action, the intromission of the law is equivalent to an act of violence committed by the state rulers or by some individuals in the name of the state. Nevertheless, a large percentage of state prison inmates all over the world are there for having committed victimless crimes (use of drugs, prostitution, being non registered migrants, etc.).

If we are against the use of force other than in self-defence, we should certainly not condone it when committed by state officials in the name of combating state defined wrongdoing. As a matter of fact, state defined wrongdoing can very well be community experienced well-being, as in the case of a nurse looking after an elderly person being expelled from the country because she is without the official papers required by the state. The absurdity of these legal regulations is most clear when the "criminal" worker becomes, from one day to the next, a "legal" worker just because new state rules are introduced.

All these are more than sufficient reasons for the abandonment of the concept of crimes in favour of the more substantial and pertinent concept of offences.

It is also the way to free people from despotic controls and interference by the state into their lives and activities, leading, in many cases, to absurd detention or expulsion.

And this takes us to another notion that needs total revision, that of punishment by way of detention.

#### **Actions (Reparations-Interventions)**

As already pointed out, prisons are nowadays the main way of punishing those who, according to state criteria, have committed illegal actions. A period in prison is deemed to be an appropriate means for punishing people and protecting the public. No wonder that the prison population has reached record levels both in the USA (over 2 million in 2013) and in the UK (around 80,000 in 2018).

However, the reality is that this type of punishment does not work

in the sense of deterring the detainee from committing other similar actions in the future, and this for reasons that are intrinsic to the prison as an institution and to the attitudes that are likely to be developed in that institution.

It would be like expecting a full recovery by a patient sent to mingle with highly infective carriers of all sorts of viruses. The likelihood that the person will catch one of those viruses would be very high.

Moreover, the fact that the person is detained for a certain period of time and then released after the sentence has expired (and rightly so) creates only the illusion of protecting the public. If the person who has committed real offences has not matured and improved his character (which is highly unlikely in an environment like a prison) he will simply go on to commit more daring offences with which he has become acquainted while in state custody.

What is then required is a totally different approach that replaces the passivity and inanity of prisons with the responsibility of performing actions that will make amends for the original offence. Only where this fails for reasons of physical or mental incapacity, will the offender be taken into custody and treated by the community (through specific bodies) with the care required by a sick person.

Let us then sketch briefly what could be the aspects of a different practice in dealing with real offenders, that is people who have done real wrongs, and who need to be helped to re-orient or re-build their life.

### **A different practice**

The analysis so far conducted has shown that state policing deals with the complexity of social life and individual personalities with the primitive method of detention in a prison, with the result of worsening, in most cases, the delinquent inclinations of a person.

This is why we need a totally different practice, variously articulated so as to give appropriate answers to different problems that might arise in the life of communities and individuals.

Here we refer to three major areas of problems.

### **Conflict resolution**

The first condition for a peaceful development of social intercourse is to have available for use different instruments for the resolution of the conflicts that might emerge out of billions of human interactions.

To this end the following measures seem to be pertinent to the task:

#### - Information

The best way to understand a situation is to rely on the best data, in this case on the most accurate evidence about the conflict situation, in order to be clear about:

1. where the supposed rights and wrongs reside according to universal principles or group values,
2. the position of each party with reference to rights and wrongs, and
3. the possibility of moving towards a satisfactory solution, e.g. by reaching a compromise between the different positions (considering that quite often no one is totally in the right or totally in the wrong).

If the availability of clear information is not sufficient to lead to a direct resolution of the conflict between the parties, then it is appropriate to move to a different level and to a different instrument.

#### - Mediation

Mediation is performed by the intervention of a person who is formally or informally entrusted by the parties to assess the situation from an external point of view and devise a way out that might be satisfactory/acceptable to both parties.

In this case, information of a more sophisticated nature (e.g. data about similar previous cases) is relevant to achieving a resolution of the conflict. However, if this channel also fails, a further instrument can be employed.

#### - Arbitration

Arbitration means having a person or persons voluntarily chosen by the parties (usually before engaging in an interaction like a commercial transaction), carefully studying the case and coming to a

solution which the parties declare themselves beforehand to be willing to accept, and are bound to accept if they want to keep a reputation as honest dealers.

This is the way chosen by many large firms for overcoming business conflicts, where expertise and promptness in solving the case are required. In fact, conflict resolution is more effectively achieved by relying on arbitrators expert in the specific matter rather than on state judges more apt to legal casuistry.

### **Offence prevention**

The best way to deal with offences is, clearly, to prevent their happening, as far as possible.

Contrary to what many people assume, repressive societies with bureaucratically controlled relationships are more likely to generate a climate where offences are committed than communities where individuals enjoy the widest range of freedoms. In particular, for the prevention of offences, these three types of freedom seem quite likely to bring security and order in social relations:

#### - Freedom of circulation

By freedom of circulation is meant the full array of physical, social and economic movements of individuals, between regions of the world (no exclusions, no borders stoppages), between social groups (no discrimination, no segregation), between activities (no licences, no work permits).

The freedom to improve one's life through personal efforts, without senseless obstructions and restrictions, is the best way to direct one's personal energies towards meaningful purposes instead of being pushed towards vicious practices. However, if offences are nevertheless committed for reasons that have more to do with some moral sickness of the individual (e.g. inclination to sexual violence) rather than with the deficiencies of the social environment, then other preventive measures can be activated, first of all that of documentation.

#### - Freedom of documentation

Freedom of documentation is the possibility of getting all the rele-

vant information about offenders in order to put in place all the precautionary measures that are felt necessary.

This means that there are no secret data known only to the police, because this is how the police and the offenders get the upper hand over the community, bringing about a situation of chronic insecurity and anxiety.

The offender has the right to be forgiven and his offence forgotten if he has not committed any wrongdoing for a certain period of time, or if he has provided compensation for the offences he/she previously committed. In such cases a record about his offences will not be held any longer. At the same time, the individuals in a community must be in a position to check if serious offenders live amongst them, and which type of offences they have committed, how recently and how often, in order to be on the alert.

Publicity or openness of this kind does not mean the right to interfere in any way with the life of a person who has committed wrongs or to invent an easy scapegoat for any offence or accident that happens in a community. What is here envisaged is a process of learning how to deal with a recent offender without becoming either nasty tormentors or defenceless prey.

Certainly no one in his right mind will delve into the databases in search of offenders, eager to become the executioner within the community in which he lives. This scenario is only good for Hollywood films and in the wake of the insecurity generated by state policing. The person living in a post-statism age will, for his peace of mind, assign the task of security maintenance to a protective agency, just as he/she selects an insurance company to indemnify him against possible damage to his possessions (home, car, etc.). For this to work effectively we need freedom of selection.

- Freedom of selection

Freedom of selection means the lack of a monopolistic entity like the territorial state to which any problem of security and justice must be referred. Instead, we may have a variety of agencies, some of them set up, manned and run by the users, which offer their services, at different prices, for different types of security provision and justice

administration, according to the requirements and demands of different individuals.

It is very naïve to expect security to be granted by a strong monopolistic power. Experience shows that monopoly breeds inefficiency and arrogance. Inefficiency means lack of protection from offenders, while arrogance leads to being maltreated and crushed by the very monopolistic power that is supposed to protect us.

That is why freedom of selection is so important for the prevention of offences. In fact, through freedom of selection, the most inefficient protective agencies (like the territorial state) will, in due course, go out of business, and no one will be in a position to monopolize the scene, forcing their repressive practices and uneconomical tariffs on everybody.

#### **Offender-Victim conciliation**

Once an offence is nevertheless committed and a security/protective agency has found the person responsible for it on the basis of solid evidence, the current practice is for the state to treat the case as if the offence has been committed against the society as a whole, represented by the state itself.

In other words, a game starts between the state prosecutor on one side and the offender plus his defence lawyer on the other. The person capable of the best tricks in terms of presenting the evidence, dissimulating the truth, fabricating a plausible alibi or framing the defendant, wins the game. This is the way the current adversarial juridical process works.

The person offended is totally out of the picture and is lucky if he/she can, for instance, recover some of the stolen goods or receive compensation for the wrongdoing suffered (unless it is a tabloid case where the publicity generates absurd levels of compensation for the victim).

This kind of proceeding is a nonsense, useful only for increasing the power of the state, the irresponsibility of the offender, and the insignificance of the person offended against.

Some social researchers (Gresham Sykes and David Matza, *Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency*, 1957) have found that



that denial of the injury caused and denial of the victim are two of the most potent factors which cause the offender to carry on offending.

More recent research has shown that being obliged to confront the victim is a very effective step for shaming the offender and starting a process of re-assumption of responsibility for the actions committed.

However, this is not enough. If such course of action is to be successful, it has to be carried a bit further, and the best way (for the offender and the victim) to do this is to reach an agreement whereby some action is undertaken by the offender in order to redress, as far as possible, the wrong done. This could take the form of:

Restitution i.e. return of what has been stolen, be it cash or goods, by way, for instance, of regular payments.

Reparation i.e. redress of the damage caused, by restoring something to its original condition or paying compensation (fixed by an arbitrator).

Remission i.e. forgiveness granted to the offender whenever this seems appropriate to the victim (e.g. minor nature of the offence, unintentional offence, apologies presented to the victim, sincere contrition manifested by the offender, etc.).

In this way we go beyond the current practices of retribution/repression that provide no positive results for the offenders and no practical satisfaction to the victim. In fact, if the offender is convicted and sent to jail, the victim pays, as a taxpayer, for his maintenance in prison, so adding further insult to the original injury.

Clearly, we are always referring here to offenders as human beings endowed with at least a modicum of rationality. As remarked by Immanuel Kant:

“There is no one, not even the most consummate villain, provided only that he is otherwise accustomed to the use of reason, who, when we set before him examples of honesty of purpose, of steadfastness in following good maxims, of sympathy and general benevolence, does not wish that he might also possess these qualities.”

(Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 1785).

As for individuals with personality disorders or with pathologies that impel them to commit certain actions (kleptomaniac, pyromaniac, etc.), they should be taken care of in communities composed of sensible/sensitive individuals through appropriate therapeutic means, which are certainly not reclusion in a prison or in a mental asylum.

It has already been pointed out that:

"Studies of prisons and asylums indicate how overwhelmingly such institutions produce the very behaviour they are designed to correct. In one experiment, almost all the members of a group of persons diagnosed as hopelessly insane, asylum inmates for over twenty years, were discharged as cured within a few months of being placed in a 'normal' environment. In another experiment, a group of persons diagnosed as dangerously insane were allowed to institute self-government among themselves and managed without incident." (Everett Reimer, *School is Dead*, 1971).

By putting Offenders and Victims at the centre of the effort to reach a solution, we activate a fertile process of social involvement and social learning that will reflect positively on the previous two points examined, that is conflict resolution and offence prevention.

Clearly, these practices represent a complete overturning of state policing and would undermine the state in its pretence of being the only one capable of providing security and order.

That is why none of them is likely to be implemented while the monopolistic territorial state is still with us, and that is why we will witness more law-making, more crime-prosecuting, more prison-building. And this will happen up to the moment when the sheer inanity and idiocy of all of this will be clear to an overwhelming number of people.

At that point, we will be ready to see the need for a different

scenario that will represent the theoretical framework for the practices here highlighted.

### **A different scenario**

The present reality is based on state policing at a national level with some sprinkling of international intervention, especially in the field of human rights.

This is not at all adequate for the dynamics of globalism and localism that characterize the beginning of the XXI century. What is needed is a more articulated system, founded on a central core of stable universal principles and on a series of voluntaristic personal norms capable of being re-adjusted and adapted to changing situations.

The framework here envisioned is one in which:

1. everybody agrees on a common standard of behaviour within the world wide relational sphere
2. each individual is left undisturbed to behave as he/she wishes within his/her specific personal sphere
3. some practices (such as those previously highlighted) are put in place for dealing with those that do not observe points 1 and 2.

The resulting scenario is a pluralistic system of behavioural patterns and signposts that is valid irrespective of supposed state nationalities or state territorial claims over legal matters. Within this scenario we have the following realities:

- World Cosmopolis (universal principles)

The world cosmopolis is composed of all the inhabitants of planet earth who regulate their relationships through universal principles that have always existed, even when they were kept in the background.

Cicero (first century B.C.) in *De Re Publica* wrote on this subject:

"There is a true law, a right reason, conformable to nature, universal, unchangeable, eternal, whose commands urge us to duty, and whose prohibitions restrain us from evil. This law cannot be contradicted

by any other law, and is not liable either to derogation or abrogation. Neither the senate nor the people can give us any dispensation for not obeying this universal law of justice. It needs neither expositor nor interpreter. It is not one thing at Rome and another at Athens; one thing to-day and another to-morrow; but in all times and nations this universal law must for ever reign, eternal and imperishable. He who obeys it not, flies from himself, and does violence to the human nature itself." ["est quidem vera lex recta ratio, naturae congruens, diffusa in omnis, constans, sempiterna, quae vocet ad officium iubendo, vetando a fraude deterreat ... huic legi nec obrogari fas est, neque derogari aliquid ex hac licet, neque tota abrogari potest, nec vero aut per senatum aut per populum solvi hac lege possumus, neque est quaerendus explanator aut interpret ... nec erit alia lex Romae, alia Athenis, alia nunc, alia posthac, sed et omnes gentes et omni tempore una lex et sempiterna et immutabilis continebit ... cui qui non parebit, ipse se fugiet, ac naturam hominis." (Cicero, *De Re Publica*, III, 22)

In the past, universal principles were qualified as *Ius Gentium* (Right of the People). The Roman jurist Gaius (2nd. century) wrote:

"Ius gentium is quod naturalis ratio inter omnes homines constituit." (Gaius, I 9 D, de just.I, I.) ["The right of the people is what natural reason prescribes amongst all human beings].

Universal principles emerged through observation of common values and practices and through rational reflection on human nature and the requirements for the preservation of life on earth.

A characterization of universal principles is the Kantian imperative:

"Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." (Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1785)

Universal principles are to be necessarily followed when a person relates to mankind at large, that is to individuals in other communities and to those outside his close circle. They are always observed if a person is keen to live and act in a cosmopolitan way.

- Voluntary Communities (group mores)

Voluntary communities (also called intentional or elective communities) are the only ones that deserve to be called communities. The qualification *voluntary* stresses what should be an essential characteristic of all societies, that is the fact that people have freely associated and are willing to respect and to help refine the norms (*mores*) of the community of which they have decided to become members. Group norms are then a free and personal choice.

Some group mores could be in contrast with universal principles, indicating, in some cases, a certain backwardness or roughness of a specific community, but this should not be a problem as long as those mores and the behaviour attached to them are practiced voluntarily only within the members of that community.

If a person no longer shares the mores of a community of which is a member, he/she should be free to secede and join another community or live a separate life with a minimum of social relations. In this case, whenever coming into contact with other people he/she will follow whatever is appropriate, i.e. either universal principles or specific group mores.

- Human Beings (personal rules)

In daily life there are a series of situations where the individual can very well follow personal rules without this disturbing or offending anyone.

This sphere of personal rules should grow as we put more value on individual responsibility, individual entrepreneurship, individual agency.

Personal rules are not only those directly produced and accepted by a single individual, but also those that emerge and are agreed between two persons. The persons affected by the rules which do not involve external groups of people are the most appropriate judges about what they want or do not want, about what is or is not in their

interest, and thus about all the personal rules that will guide their conduct.

If they are wrong, they will pay the consequences, and this is called learning by direct experience, whenever they succeed in modifying their behaviour as a result of it. However, in most cases people will copy successful personal rules or adopt group rules of thriving communities, and this is called learning by imitation.

From whatever standpoint we see it, the existence of personal rules, i.e. rules not imposed by any external power, is the best guarantee for the development of healthy human beings.

What has been said so far needs only to be completed by some considerations on community righting that attempt to clarify a bit better the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the entire proposal.

### **Towards community righting**

The practices envisaged in this alternative model, are here defined as community righting.

This expression is intended to suggest that to put things right is a task that requires a cooperative effort of individuals in a community, and that no one should be left unaided to sort out problems caused by the offensive behaviour of other people, unless the matter can be easily dealt with by the two parties. The individuals can also hire protective agencies and these agencies are then, in a way, community agents directly at the service of an individual but, indirectly, of assistance to the entire community.

More specifically, "righting" means that the aim is not retribution as in state policing, but the redressing of wrongs, the repairing of damage, the restoration, as far as possible, of the situation prior to the perpetration of the offence.

This righting process has therapeutic effects on the offender, who is faced with the wrong done and is given a chance to rehabilitate himself and become a worthy human being again. It also has a beneficial effect on the victim in so far as it reduces his rage about what

has happened to him and obviates the distress caused by the impersonal and unsatisfactory way things are handled under state policing.

Clearly, community righting is incompatible with a monopolistic territorial state and with national laws imposed through a state police force and a state judiciary on everybody living in that territory.

Those state laws are introduced, modified and applied in order to maintain the reasons of power (*ratione imperii*) and not to assert the power of reason (*imperio rationis*).

Any careful observer of social life would soon realize that individuals do not need the enactment of detailed rules of conduct in the form of laws imposed on everybody, but the knowledge of standards of behaviour that are then very likely to be observed by those willing to take part in social intercourse.

The principle that should inform these standards of behaviour is voluntary reciprocity.

If we take logic as the art and science of reasoning and civics as the art and science of social relationships, then we could say that what consistency is to logic, so voluntary reciprocity is to civics.

Without consistency there is no proper (i.e. rational) arguing. Without reciprocity there is no proper (i.e. rational) behaving and interacting. The only proviso for reciprocity is that all the acts of behaviour (the original one and the one that follows as reciprocation) be voluntarily accepted and not compulsorily imposed.

With respect to reciprocity, it is fair to say that if a system of rules decrees the superiority of those who administer the system (e.g. allowing them to commit violence in the name of the king or the country) and does not bind them to the same rules imposed on everybody else, that system is fundamentally unjust and rotten. And this is exactly the basis of statism and the way state rulers behave, by assigning to the state (i.e. to themselves) the monopoly of violence.

This is what Sigmund Freud had to say in 1915 at the start of the First World War:

"The individual citizen can with horror convince himself in this war of what would occasionally cross his mind in peace-time - that the

state has forbidden to the individual the practice of wrong-doing, not because it desires to abolish it, but because it wants to monopolize it, like salt and tobacco." (Sigmund Freud, *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, 1915)

Nowadays there is no Church and no religion (which are, by the way, realities based on voluntary adherence) that demands such a unilateral kind of obedience and is based on such inconsistent tenets as the state, with its dogmatic ideology, statism.

The lack of reciprocity that exists in the relationships between the common person and the state rulers is the pinnacle of irrationality and immorality. The state rulers do not feel themselves bound by the same moral code (don't kill, don't steal, don't lie, etc.) that binds the rest of us. The so-called "reason of state" or "national interest" justify all misdeeds, however appalling.

There is a strong moral thread that links rationality with reciprocity which is totally absent in state laws and state behaviour (i.e. in rulers' laws and rulers' behaviour). This connection is expressed through sayings like "*Do ut des*" [I give and I expect you to give] or "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Any norm, to be rationally accepted, needs to be based on voluntary reciprocity, which, in its turn, results from the inner persuasion of what is right and proper, matched by outer behaviour consistent with those convictions.

The sources of order are then reciprocity and voluntariness:

- reciprocity as the expression of fairness (equity)
- voluntariness as the form of freedom (autonomy).

In the past *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* equated anarchy with liberty and declared *La liberté non pas fille de l'ordre, mais MÈRE de l'ordre* [Liberty is the mother, not the daughter, of order] (*Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Solution du problème social*, 1848).

There must be a good deal of truth in this view considering that,



whenever people are free to attend to their activities and to profess their convictions, security and harmony, i.e. order, tend to prevail.

By contrast, the more laws and regulations there are, restricting the free flow of activities and movements, the more frictions and injustices, i.e. disorder and insecurity, exist.

Statism is a crime-generating and crime-based system because of the simple fact that crime gives to state apparatuses (police, judiciary) and state-related corporations (lawyers, solicitors, accountants) the perfect reason to exist, prosper and extend their existence forever.

Once we have realized this we are already on the way to personal autonomy, responsibility and care, that is towards community righting.

## FROM TOTALITARIAN DEMOCRACY TO LIBERTARIAN POLYARCHY/PANARCHY

Politics as democracy

Democracy : etymology (descriptive)

Democracy : ethics (prescriptive)

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### Politics as democracy

**T**he current form assumed by contemporary politics in most countries is democracy.

Nowadays, there is no politician nor political party who does not call himself a democrat.

Democracy is a magic word, referring partly to historical reality and partly to fairy tales.

This magical aura that surrounds the word democracy has its foundations on:

- historical reasons. Certain societies (e.g. the Athens of ancient Greece, the States of the early American Federation) that have prospered in the past, are said to be founded on democracy.

- theoretical appeal. Many famous and highly esteemed persons (Rousseau, Tocqueville, Lincoln, Jefferson, etc.) have celebrated the virtues of democracy as the best system of governance.

During the XX century, the full appearance of the masses and their movements (socialism, syndicalism, trade unionism) on the political and economic scene, with the pressing demands for recognition of their role and rights, added new impetus to the claims and aims of democracy.

From that moment onwards, in many countries, politics became associated with democracy or with the fight for democracy.

Given the importance attributed to the term/concept "democracy" it needs to be analysed in its:

- etymology (descriptive)
- ethics (prescriptive)
- praxis (practice).

### **Democracy : etymology (descriptive)**

The word "democracy" comes from the Greek *δημος* (people, multitude) + *κρατος* (power), meaning the power of the people.

If we take democracy in its simple etymological sense, as power in the hands of people (the multitude), it would refer simply to any instance when many people have assumed some decision, autonomously, on any subject.

From this it would follow that, a lynch mob and a gentlemen's country club, both with power in their hands, should both be included under the label of democracy. Certainly, feeling would resist this wide application of the word democracy, but logic should insist unless further qualifications are added to the term.

This is why, based only on etymology, the term democracy does

not refer, necessarily, to a noble or progressive reality, unless it is complemented by ethics, that is by prescriptive characterizations and qualifications.

### **Democracy : ethics (prescriptive)**

In his famous definition of democracy, Abraham Lincoln characterized it as "government of the people, by the people, for the people." (1863)

In practical terms, this definition stresses the fact that power is located in the hands of everybody (the people) and is exerted directly by them, in the interest of everybody.

According to this very appealing definition, a democratic organization is the one in which the government (governing body plus ruling decisions) is:

- composed of everybody (i.e. assembly of the people)
- run directly by everybody (i.e. decisions taken by the people)
- in the interest of everybody (i.e. benefiting all the people).

With respect to this view, only the concomitant presence of

- universal personal participation
- universal active involvement
- universal positive benefices

makes the use of the term democracy appropriate and the striving for it worthwhile.

In fact, the persistent appeal exerted by the word derives from the (implicitly assumed) contemporaneous presence (or pretence of presence) of these three factors.

It is then necessary to endow the word democracy with these strong qualifications given the fact that the term is universally used as indicating the best way, from an ethical point of view, of administering a society (i.e. conducting common affairs, solving common problems). Because of this deep and wide positive characterization, no ambiguities should be attached to the word otherwise it might be used to cover all sort of abominations.

We need to see how this prescriptive characterization fares in current reality.

### **Democracy : praxis (practice)**

In the course of history, democracy, while keeping the same positive emotional connotation, came to represent in actual fact something very different from what Lincoln had expressed in so noble words.

Keeping the same appealing term while altering or adulterating both form and content, it is one of the most (ab)used tricks of political discourse and practice.

Contrary to its professed nature, the reality of democracy, especially during the XX century, has been characterized by:

- delegation. Universal personal participation (as in a general assembly of a village debating topics of common interest) has been deemed infeasible and impractical as towns grew in population and the territorial nation states took over, controlling very large areas. So, participation in political activities was limited to particular occasions (the electoral process that replaced the town meetings) and to particular people (those whose name was in the electoral register with the exclusion, for instance, of so-called foreigners). The delegation of responsibility through a vote, without proper discussion, unless we include propaganda as a way of debating, became the rule.

- representation. Once participation had gone, it was logical that universal active involvement could not exist any longer, it being a further and deeper exercise of participation. The concomitant result of delegation was that some quick-minded individuals offered their services in the huge untapped market of political representation as the paid voice of "the people."

The deliberations on social topics and the carrying out of political acts became the prerogative of a few particular personages who acted in the name of the many. So, professional figures took over the (political) decision-making process while the individuals were taken out of it, except for the few moments necessary, every so many years, to cast their vote and chose their masters.

- imposition. The safeguard and enhancement of the interests of everybody, that is of each and every one composing the people, was deemed an impractical unworkable factor for the implementation of the new version of democracy (delegated representative democracy). In the new democracy, the majority would rule in the name of the "public" interest. No serious objection was raised that the so called "public" interest could very well be contrary to the interest of a relevant number of people and certainly was not the interest of all the people.

The imposition on everybody of the will of the majority (real or fictitious) replaced the attainment of universal benefits via the political process. The particular gains of some people (the so-called majority) became the legitimate hallmark of democracy even if that meant crushing the way of life or the life altogether of other people (the so-called minorities).

In order to affirm its power, the presumed majority at the ballots has also used bullets whenever a presumed minority has tried to go its own way (from America in the XIX century to Europe in the XX century).

The updated version of democracy could, very well, be characterized as government imposed to all the people, without the consent of many people, in the name of all the people.

### **The pre-conditions for democracy**

This new (fake) version of democracy took over and became the creed and deed of XX century politics because the pre-conditions that favoured the development of the original (true) democracy had all but disappeared.

As a matter of fact, the idea and the practice of democracy had started emerging within the circumscribed reality of some Greek cities, in the local assemblies of the Vikings, in the alpine communities of Switzerland, in the popular government of mediaeval cities and, later on, in the town life of New England.

All these experiments and manifestations of democracy were characterized by three factors:

- **small:** democracy developed within a small entity, and the smaller its reality, the more pregnant was the democratic experiment and the more effective its performance.

- **free:** the towns where some democratic experiments took place were free territories or freer (e.g. offering more choices) than the surrounding countryside. As the saying went, "town air makes free"; and the freer the town the more democratic its government and the more flourishing the arts of life.

- **abstinent:** a limited territory and a circumscribed intervention, focused only on some aspects of life in common, characterized the temperate non-intrusive government of the best democratic experiments.

These three aspects of classical democracy sustained and reinforced each other. Restrictions of freedom in one town could make people move to the next town or, even, push them to found a new settlement, diluting the concentration of power. The undue interference by the rulers could lead to an uprising and to the driving out of those in power who had become a nuisance to the inhabitants of the city.

### **The disappearance of the pre-conditions**

Probably, only in a few very limited historical cases, the co-presence of these three factors took place. For instance, in some towns of the New England in the early phase of colonization or in some communities in the Swiss mountains.

Certainly, with the outbreak of the First World War and the coming into overall dominance of the nation state, the bucolic image of small town life based on democratic practices was totally shattered, at least in Europe, surviving perhaps as a folkloric example somewhere in the plains and mountains of the Helvetic Confederation

In its stead, the new reality, centred on the nation states, was characterized by the following aspects:

- big vs. small

The cult of bigness became the new creed of the XX century: "Big is good and more is better" could be taken as a typical slogan of that century. The highest building, the largest ship, the biggest city, the richest country, all these became matters of pride and propaganda even when the gigantic size was associated with gigantic troubles, as the tragedy of the *Titanic* showed in an exemplary way.

- monopolistic vs. free

The monopolization, by the state, of the means of communication (radio, TV), the monopolization of the territory (called national sovereignty), the monopolization of the exercise of power and violence, the monopolization of the conferring of licenses and professional titles, the monopolization of the internal market (protectionism); these are only some aspects of the new climate that characterized XX century version of democracy.

- absolute vs. abstinent

The (centralizing) nation state got into the habit of intervening in every field, putting forward a law for every occurrence or possible case, exercising an absolute sovereignty over everybody and everything within its jurisdiction. The so-called absolutism of the kings of the *ancien régime* pales if compared with the range of controlling and intervening power in the hand of the so called "democratic" states (i.e. their "democratic" rulers) and the means at their disposal for exercising it.

These new aspects made the survival of democracy as depicted and advocated in Lincoln's words, a practical impossibility. In its place emerged, more and more, strong, centralized governments, with wider and wider powers of intervention on every aspect of social and personal life.

Nevertheless, the magical feeling associated with the word democracy remained and so the word got preserved and it is still in current use even if its form and content have been totally modified.

In fact, the disappearance of the pre-conditions led, during the XX century, to the disappearance of the tempered classical democracy based on individuals and small communities and to its replace-



ment by the totalitarian contemporary democracy centred on nation states and large bureaucracies.

### **The totalitarian democracy**

Totalitarian democracy is here intended to mean a system of government centred on the nation state and on the silent acceptance of its overall supremacism. This translates into:

- exclusive territorial sovereignty

The state arrogates to itself the topmost power over everything (e.g. rights of expropriation) and everybody (e.g. rights of imposition) within a specific territory. From the subjugation of native Americans to the destruction of the Chechnyan town of Grozny, exclusive territorial sovereignty has meant the crushing, by the central state, of any independent or slightly unruly entity.

- extensive decision-making sovereignty

The state, in a totalitarian democracy, has the power to intervene in relation to most of the aspects (almost the totality) concerning the life of individuals under its territorial jurisdiction. To justify this extensive power, totalitarian democracy has accepted the myth of the general will as the expression of the majority. It would be more correct to say that, through the myth of the general will, the individuals count for nil while the generals (i.e. the army élite, the political élite, the economic élite, etc.) count for everybody. The might of numbers (majority rule) becomes the right assigned to a few to impose wide ranging/all inclusive decisions.

In this respect, it is perhaps not pointless to remember that, in the past, Socrates and Jesus Christ, among others, have been condemned to death by the will of the majority or by representatives of the majority. In more recent times, overwhelming majorities have supported/imposed fascism, national socialism and communism (to refer to the best known cases) or have been more or less willing accomplices of the atrocities perpetrated by the state rulers in the name of the majority.

Throughout history, when exclusive and extensive power has

been conferred on anyone (be it a single person or an organization) under whatever justification (be it the will of God or the general will) crimes and misdeeds have, almost inexorably, followed.

In the second half of the XX century, many states have lost some of their most aggressive features but they still remain big organizations with the pretence of monopolistic power that they try to exert in an absolute way. In other words, the cosmetic changes towards a more liberal state of affairs, still cover a totalitarian democracy whose real brutal face comes to the fore in situations of crisis, reaffirming its power through the usual armoury of statism (i.e. bombing, blasting, beating).

### **Democracy as statocracy**

During the XX century, society has died by suffocation because the state has invaded and occupied the entire scene previously taken by individuals and communities. Totalitarian democracy is then a better characterization of democracy in the age of statism; totalitarian democracy can also be defined as statocracy (everything for the state, from the state, by the state).

The main characteristics of current totalitarian democracy, i.e. statocracy, are:

- minocracy

The personal feeling of impotence in changing the political situation through voting for parties that repeat more of the same and behave even more the same, has bred disillusion and disaffection in the electorate.

This means that a compact minority can dominate, through state power, an entire society. If only 60% of the people bother to cast their vote, in a majority system with two parties, 31% of the electorate can impose its will on the remaining 69%; with three parties competing, 21% of the people could rule a country through an appointed élite.

This 21% can give to a party a huge parliamentary majority so that not every representative's vote is necessary for the passing of laws. So, like Russian dolls or Chinese boxes, power is exerted by the smallest

piece deep inside (the inner core) while the largest one on the outside (e.g. the Parliament) performs only the function of the "democratic" cover (justification for unlimited action) and shield (protection from indiscreet looks).

For example, an American President, concentrating in his hands an incredible amount of power with respect to the entire world, can be designated by less than 30% of the votes of the national electorate (e.g. Ronald Reagan in 1980 with 27%). As for representatives allegedly elected by the majority of the adult population, only 35% of the electorate turned up to vote for the USA Congress in 1978.

In the U.K., in 1974, the Labour Party gained a Parliamentary majority with 39.2% of the vote. In 1983, the Conservative gained 61% of the seats in the House of Commons with only 43% of the vote. And the situation has since deteriorated as far as participation to the polls is concerned.

- mediocracy

Totalitarian democracy is dominated by some individuals (leaders), supported by lobbies and surrounded, very often, by a cohort of mediocre people. This has the effect, sooner or later, of transforming even clever individuals called to positions of responsibility into total morons. So, when total morons are themselves elected to high office (for instance the Presidency of the USA), we can only imagine the menace to peace and well-being they represent.

Mediocrity becomes then the rule, procrastination the practice and unlimited irresponsibility one of the privileges associated with totalitarian democracy. With the justification of a popular mandate, the politician has been given the licence to squander resources and bring chaos into the world without being accountable for it.

- bureaucracy

The state and the parties that dominate the state are made up, mainly, of professional figures, that is by people whose exclusive activity, throughout their life, is to meddle in politics and in political administration.

Here is the real power, that gives reality and continuity to the implementation of the totalitarian democracy.

The role of the bureaucrats is, essentially, to run people's lives; they are at the service of any power, once they are granted that their role, i.e. their existence, is not questioned.

Bureaucracy is the pillar of totalitarian democracy.

### **Beyond totalitarian democracy : polyarchy/panarchy**

Towards the end of the XX century something has started changing with respect both to exclusive and extensive sovereignty of the state.

Nevertheless, we are still totally stuck with an empty word (democracy) and with obsolete practices that state propaganda wants us to believe are the highest attainments of humanity, i.e. the best of all possible worlds as far as social organization is concerned.

On the contrary, this revised version of democracy, the current mino-medio-bureau-crazy, in one word, this monster of statocracy, is a backward and obsolete form of organization that survives only due to the inertia of the many and through the cheating perpetrated by the few (sometimes a large few) who have a big stake in parasitism. Most of the people are only unaware hostage of the state power.

To individuals and communities who want to count, that is to be in control of their lives, the only message of current democracy is: let's have another election, the result of which is to have the same or similar unaccountable representatives, elected by an even smaller minocracy, imposing on everybody even more deadly strictures called state laws.

To get out of the confusion, created by the misappropriation and misuse of the magic word *democracy*, might require we drop that word altogether.

To do so, more than a revolution, that is always an affair of imposition, we need a personal re-evolution, a peaceful profound re-orientation of minds and hearts and deeds by willing, conscious, responsible individuals and communities.

Democracy, to be real and effective, needs to regain the pre-requisites of smallness, freedom and, most of all, abstinence from intrusion in people's lives even if committed in the name of the people.

A more appropriate word to characterize democracy in future might be *polyarchy/panarchy* because it conveys the idea of variety that could exist but only if the three pre-requisites (smallness, freedom, abstinence) are satisfied and the catering of all personal exigencies is realized (*unicuique suum* = to each their own).

Democracy, especially representative democracy, is based on the contrast between a dominating majority and subjected minorities. Polyarchy/Panarchy goes beyond the opposition between majority and minorities because it supersedes the very ideas of majority-minority in favour of the idea of variety, dignity and acceptability of existence of any entity (provided it does not want to impose itself on others, reintroducing the devious opposition of majority vs. minority).

Polyarchy/Panarchy is characterized by the move from the central state, one and indivisible, to the individuals forming communities, many and multipliable (from *ex pluribus unum* to *ex uno plures*).

Polyarchy/Panarchy is the networked organization of small/appropriate entities based on

- **universal principles** (ethica: existence)
  - **local customs** (historica: experience)
  - **specific-general rules** (practica: expedience)
- sustaining and promoting the:

- **Empowerment of individuals**

The technological progress of the last centuries is giving individuals enough free time to attend to civics (administration of specific interests held and shared in common). In conjunction with cultural progress, this means that we can stop delegating to professional representatives (i.e. people who practice representation as their profession) and start delving into problems in order to design solutions. Problems and solutions are and should be:

- limited to what concerns and affects the individual(s)
- limited by the power and freedom of the other individual(s).

This means, for instance, getting rid of all sorts of repressive laws

concerning behaviour that does not damage anyone and whose only aim is to control and restrict the freedom of movement, settlement, action of a person.

- **Empowerment of communities**

Communities result from the linking of affinities and sympathies amongst individuals not necessarily in close spatial proximity. One of their tasks is to tackle problems and devise solutions:

- limited to what concerns and affects the community
- limited by the power and freedom of other communities.

Each community should leave to its members the power and freedom of:

- getting off: the possibility of leaving one community for another, wherever in the world.

- opting out: the possibility of dropping out of some proviso in the community provided that no damage ensues to anybody.

- splitting up: the possibility, for a group of people, of seceding from one community, club, association, to start a new one.

- linking in: the possibility of networking with individuals belonging to various communities (e.g. for the solution of problems affecting humanity at large).

- setting criteria to: the possibility of applying selective membership provided that it does not affect the universal enjoyment of natural personal rights (e.g. the rights of movement, settlement, action, in a broad sense).

Up to now parties and people have tried in different ways to transform the state and to implement democracy. Now the time has come to extinguish the territorial state and to go beyond majoritarian representative totalitarian democracy.

To do so, each one needs to participate in the effort to elaborate a paradigm of personal and social life that does not rely on the impositions of the state but on the empowerment of individuals and communities and leading, through them, to the direct satisfaction of common needs.

The effort should bring to a flourishing of free experimentation and joyful emulation between individuals and communities, where mirroring (imitation) of the best experiments is interspersed and superseded by marvelling (invention), that is the coming into existence of extra-ordinary and more appropriate ways of dealing with problems, old and new.

And so Life evolves.

## SUMMING UP

Knowledge as science  
The choking of knowledge  
The splitting of knowledge  
The current state of knowledge  
The basic aspects of knowledge  
The development of knowledge  
The new paradigm of knowledge  
Epilogue : the paradigm facing reality



### Knowledge as science

**K**nowledge is the gathering and linking of data (bits of information) and their structuring in an intelligent (*inter-lego*), i.e. meaningful and useful, way.

In the course of time, some highly structured knowledge, circulating amongst learned individuals (sages, savants) came to receive the name of science (from *scire* = to know).

These educated, or just curious individuals, explored reality as an



interconnected whole, without separating phenomena into different (or even opposite) fields of inquiry.

The epitome of the inquirer is Leonardo who applied his ingenuity and skill to a rich variety of endeavours in various centres of Europe.

Up to the time of Leibniz (end of XVII century), the knowledge seeker was a true philosopher, that is a friend-lover (*filos*) of knowledge-wisdom (*sofia*) who did not limit either investigation or reflection to any circumscribed area of experience.

Besides that, the philosophers were also cosmopolitan individuals, in touch with each other, without territorial or cultural borders restricting their movement or the circulation of their ideas.

### **The choking of knowledge**

This freedom of investigation and circulation of ideas was not general and, certainly, not totally without limits.

In fact, throughout the Middle Ages and after, the advancement of knowledge was retarded or even blocked by some suffocating aspects as, for instance:

- the pedantic exegesis of text (e.g. of Aristotle's writings) instead of the productive analysis of experience;
- the sterile discussion of terms (e.g. the debate between nominalists and realists) instead of the fertile observation of facts;
- the forced conformity to the power (e.g. the Church's doctrine) instead of the free investigation of reality.

The prosecution of Galileo, his trial (1633) by the Inquisition, his condemnation and forced recanting of the Copernican system, marks the high point of interference by the Church in the advancement of knowledge.

After that episode, following the decline of the authority of the Church and the coming to preeminence of the state, some aspects of knowledge were emancipated from the tutelage of the ecclesiastical dominion and found encouragement and support by the state rulers who saw their utility for military and commercial purposes.

### **The splitting of knowledge**

With the increase in the amount and depth of knowledge, a sort of re-organization took place, that is a specialization of knowledge into separate fields of investigation, each one with its own tools and techniques.

The most visible aspect of this specialization came to be represented by the sharp divide between the so-called natural (material-physical) sciences and the social (moral-human) sciences.

The natural sciences became detached from current diatribes and devoid of emotional overtones, more experimental and less esoteric, subject to more rigorous methods of investigation of phenomena and corroboration of beliefs.

In contrast, the social sciences were more and more the preserve of individuals linked to and supported by some powerful patron (Hobbes and Charles II) or entity (Hegel and the Prussian state).

In the course of time, this resulted in an increase in the split between natural and social knowledge, with the former extending and deepening the domain of theoretical understanding and practical uses while the latter was intent on producing grandiose syntheses (e.g. positivism, materialism) based more on wishful thinking than on careful observation and experimentation.

It was then almost inevitable, from the middle of the XIX century, for the word science to be generally associated only with the knowledge of matter and nature.

The fact is that the stumbling block to the investigation of nature represented by the Church had been removed only to be replaced by the stumbling block to the analysis of human beings and communities represented by the new power: the state.

### **The current state of knowledge**

As previously pointed out, in the Middle Ages, the cult of Aristotle, the empty diatribes of the nominalists and realists and the heavy

hand of the Church contrived to slow down the development of the knowledge of nature.

When the suffocating influence of the Church was overcome, the sciences of nature started developing and flourishing and the advancement has not stopped ever since.

In more recent times, the cult of Marx, the use of magic words and the heavy hand of the state, have succeeded in slowing down the development of the sciences concerning human beings in communities.

In fact, the present state of the social sciences is one of total disarray. The social sciences have relied for decades on pre-cooked ideas presented as the miraculous solution (e.g. mercantilism à la Keynes) and are painfully rediscovering, as an absolute novelty, views that have been expounded ages ago (e.g. Hayek's road to serfdom).

What characterizes the social sciences seems to be:

- servitude: the social scientists (economists, sociologists, anthropologists) are mainly paid/supported by the state (universities, research centres) and under the tutelage of the state (juridical status). Not a situation apt to encourage the development of creative and critical thinking.

- divarication: the gap between fields of knowledge has never been so wide and the inability of most social scientist to make sense of the (whole) reality has never been so deep. In fact, some original ideas spanning many aspects of knowledge have come from physicists not sociologists.

- backwardness: the social scientists, or most of them, are stuck in the XIX century, with some reference to the first half of the XX century. The basic armoury of ideas (political, social, economical) comes from that period. We are not referring to universal values and methods, but to outdated positions and practices. What the social scientists do is just to add footnotes, erratically, from time to time.

The way out of this bleak situation, in which social myths are accorded the status of true beliefs (knowledge) consists, as in the past, in abolishing the interference of power (in this case state power) on social thinking and acting. Moreover, in order to start anew the

process of knowledge in the social sciences, we need to make clear, once again, what are the basic aspects of knowledge and how the development of knowledge takes place.

### **The basic aspects of knowledge**

Knowledge is characterized by and is based upon three main aspects:

- freedom

Knowledge can develop and flourish only in an environment where freedom is a common attitude and practice. Only freedom gives full rein to curiosity, ingenuity and critical thinking.

For this reason, the advancement of knowledge requires freedom as an essential pre-condition: freedom from external constrictions, freedom from internal conformities.

- consilience

Knowledge is concerned with reality and with the way we perceive and organize reality. Reality is characterized by unity (consilience) within variety and so should knowledge be.

The consilience or unity of knowledge means that the multiple data of information, in order to become meaningful and useful, must fully represent reality as a variegated integrated whole.

- progression

Knowledge advances (grows, deepens) because it relies on past knowledge. We see further because we are, as the saying goes, on the shoulders of giants, that is of all the previous knowledge seekers. We do not look down or behind them but forward, on top of them.

Without progression every generation will be busy rediscovering the same truths and falling into the same fallacies, running in circles and remaining always in the same place.

On the foundations of these three basic aspects of knowledge, let us see the dynamic process of its development.

## The development of knowledge

The development of knowledge takes place through a process of generation and selection of ideas.

Let us assume, as is often the case, that there are different interpretations of a phenomenon and different solutions to a problem. They freely compete for attention and acceptance; methods are employed to assess their worth; some interpretations and possible solutions become adopted and then extensively used while others are tried and soon discarded. Eventually, one or a few of them prevail on account of their fertility, utility, elegance and become a widespread theory or technique.

If this does not happen it is because vested interests, in conflict with the interests of knowledge, prevail to obfuscate the issue and put obstacles to its resolution.

To avoid this happening, some tricks and tools, devised in the past, should be used for unblocking the development of knowledge. We point out three of them:

- Ockham's razor (*entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*)

Usually, an old theory, in order to survive in the presence of radical transformations of reality, undergoes a series of modifications that multiply the provisos and subtract simplicity and elegance. Ockham's razor cuts through this growing invasive jungle and points the way to the discarding of obsolete useless theoretical constructions grown to an abnormal pathological size.

- Turing's test

In the social sciences, the observation and interpretation of a phenomenon should be affected by openly declared values not distorted by hidden preconceptions. Turing's test, applied, for instance, to the analysis of political behaviour, means that political entities (e.g. parties) should be studied without knowing their name and their proclaimed/presumed cause, in the same way as, in the analysis of intelligent behaviour, we should ignore if the entity replying from behind a door is a human being or an electronic

computer. An extensive use of Turing's test could assist in getting rid of duplicitous concepts and fake alternatives.

- Kuhn's paradigm

A paradigm is a way of looking-thinking-acting with respect to the world; it is an attitude of mind that becomes a practice of life.

A good paradigm allows for a better interpretation, conception and construction of reality.

The activity of building a new paradigm should be the task of any critical mind whenever and wherever the conventional tools are unable to make sense (explain, forecast) of reality.

We have now reached the point where a new paradigm of knowledge is needed more than ever.

### **The new paradigm of knowledge**

A paradigm is like an observatory tower from which meaningful and useful patterns are identified that make possible to understand reality in a rich and fruitful way.

Some of the aspects that should animate/compose the new paradigm of knowledge are:

- **open fluxus/nexus** of many-various entities

Reality is an open system where relations take place amongst entities. The main aspect that characterizes the entities and their development is just this multiplicity of relations. Furthermore, there is a strong link between openness-fruitfulness of relations and cognitive multiplication. The open fluidity and fertility of relations stimulate flexibility and adaptability, i.e. learning, with the result of strengthening the entity. In contrast, a reality characterized by a closed system is one where learning stagnates and the entities keep weakening.

- **dynamic equilibration** of many-various entities

Reality is seen as a dynamic inter-play of entities capable of self-organization and self-renewal through learning and the mechanisms of feed-back and feed-forward. This is in contrast with the banalization of reality centred on mono-linear causality and on mechanistic

order imposed from the outside. The mono-causality of explanation is generally matched by the mono-solution of intervention and by the false conviction that order can be only achieved externally, univocally and forcefully. Examples of this, in history, are the imposition, whenever possible, of one power, one religion, one language, one provider, one carrier, etc.

In contrast to all of this, in a dynamic equilibration the cause(s) act on the effect(s) and the effect(s) act on the cause(s). On the whole, the new paradigm sees order as emerging from the free (internally motivated) interactions produced by dynamic equilibration of entities and views disorder as the likely result, sooner or later, of forced (externally contrived) interferences.

- **multiple continua** of many-various entities

Reality is composed of a plurality and variety of entities (and their factors-fields-features) without sharp contrapositions (e.g. human-animal) or clear-cut divisions (e.g. natural-social).

The strong mental attitude that characterized the old paradigm, based on contrapositions of entities and on the justification of their clashes and differences, gives way to an image where entities are arranged on multiple continua, where the distinctions are like tonalities on a musical scale or colours on a painter's palette.

In brief, the new paradigm sees reality as composed of multiple continua of many-various entities and their factors-fields-features in dynamic equilibration through an open flow of relations.

For this paradigm to come not only into existence but to be widely accepted and adopted, an essential value needs to be placed as its firm foundation, as the ground (*humus*) upon which it is based: humility.

A reflection on human history shows that the advancement of knowledge is marked by a reduction of hubris and a development of humility. The displacement of the earth as the centre of the universe allowed for the development of astronomy; later on the displacement of the human being as a superior and totally different being with respect to all living creatures allowed for the development of all the biological sciences, ecology amongst them. Now, humility as the basis

of the new paradigm, should operate for further positive displacements, in particular:

- the displacement of the state or of any self-appointed or elected body as legislator and planner, in charge of controlling and addressing the life of individuals;
- the displacement of any territorial power from the exploitative ownership of the natural environment and, with it, the end of the self-assumed right to dominate nature as it suits power's greed more than people's needs.

### **Epilogue : the paradigm facing reality**

When Thomas Hobbes was, prematurely, born on April the fifth, 1588, the son of a choleric father and an anxiety ridden mother, the news of the impending invasion of the Spanish Armada was filling the air. He later recounted that his "mother gave birth to twins, myself and fear."

It is then not surprising that, in order to suppress fear, security became his main/exclusive concern and that, to this aim, he championed the absolute power of the state. Fear is the cornerstone of every power, especially state power, and so the pillar of statism in every form and content (fascism, communism, welfarism).

The healthy human being is the one free from fear "for it is not death or hardship that is a fearful thing, but the fear of death and hardship." (Epictetus)

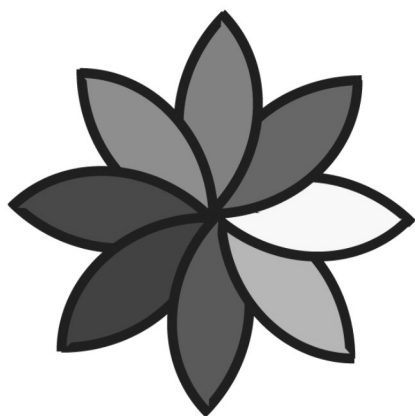
It is again not surprising that, only from human beings free from fear and keen on free thinking and free exploring, will the new paradigm emerge and put to test.

And the testing can only happen through a variety of small scale experiments, prototypes of personal/family/community life, in emulation with each other, aiming at learning from each other.

If this is so, the simple, clear message for those who care for the further advancement and diffusion of knowledge is:

Let Polyarchy/Panarchy Be





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