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Finding bliss in the shift



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A holistic diagnosis

In the last few years, and especially since the financial-economic crisis of the fall of 2008, it has become unmistakably clear that there is something seriously wrong with our world. The media is full of reports on crises, and suggestions on what to do about them. But the diagnosis and the cure are highly sectoral and partial. There is talk about the financial crisis, and the overall economic crisis. Then of the environmental crisis and various resource-crises: energy, food, water, among others. There is also talk about consumerism, power-hunger, and greed. There is no integral, encompassing overview of what's wrong, and what is needed to correct it.

This pamphlet attempts an integral treatment of the world's health problem. It reviews the factors that make the planet sick, and suggests the nature of the treatment that would heal it.

What's wrong with the world?

A holistic analysis shows that the contemporary world is

- 1, socially, economically, and ecologically unsustainable,
- 2, saddled with irrational behaviours,
- 3, governed by obsolete beliefs and aspirations.

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The strands of unsustainability

Unsustainability in society.

The contemporary world is more and more polarized; the gap is growing between rich and poor, powerful and marginalized. The gap is usually stated in economic terms, but it is a social reality. It depresses the quality of life, and even the chances of survival, of vast populations.

The wealth and income gap is of staggering proportions. At the end of 2008 there were an estimated 946 billionaires in the United States — fifty years ago there was not one — of which 178 were added in 2008 alone. The combined wealth of the world's billionaires equals the income of nearly half the world's population: three billion poor people. Eighty percent of the global domestic product belongs to one billion people, and the remaining twenty percent is shared by nearly six billion.

Poverty has not diminished in absolute numbers. The World Bank estimates that of the total population — currently near seven bil-

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lion — 1.4 billion live on less than 1.25 dollars a day and an additional 1.6 billion on less than 2.50 dollars. In the poorest countries seventy-eight percent of the urban population subsists under life-threatening circumstances: one in three urban dwellers live in slums, shantytowns, and urban ghettos, and more than 900 million are classified as slum-dwellers.

The gap shows up in food and energy consumption, and in the load placed on natural resources.

The American places twice the environmental load of the Swede on the planet, three times that of the Italian, thirteen times the Brazilian, thirty-five times the Indian, and two hundred and eighty times the Haitian.

Social structures are breaking down in both the rich and the poor countries. In poor countries the struggle for economic survival destroys the traditional extended family. Women are obliged to leave the home in search of work. They are extensively exploited, given menial jobs for low pay. Fewer women than ever have remunerated jobs and more are forced to make ends meet in the «informal sector.» According to the International Labour Organization fifty million children are employed for a pittance in factories, mines, and on the land, for the most part in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Many more are forced to venture into the streets as beggars. In some countries destitute children are recruited as soldiers.

Unsustainability in the economy.

Resource use. The economy, in its original and basic sense, is the management of resources for the household (from the Greek oikonomia, where oikos is household, and nemein is manage). The global

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economy can be viewed as the system concerned with the management of the resources of humanity's household. In this context the global economy faces a structural crisis because, for the first time in history, the rising curve of humanity's demand exceeds the descending curve of global supply.

Until the present, human demand has been insignificant in relation to global resources. But in the six decades since World War II, more of the planet's resources have been consumed than in all of history before then. Human consumption is nearing, and in some cases has already surpassed, planetary maxima. The production of oil, fish, lumber, and other major resources has already peaked; forty percent of the world's coral reefs are gone, and annually about 23 million acres of forest are lost. Ecologists also speak of «peak water,» since henceforth the quantity of water suited for human use is bound to diminish.

Reducing excessive resource use is made urgent by the rapid growth of the population. World population has increased from about five billion twenty-two years ago to nearly seven billion today. Since the amount of available land remains constant—and is actually shrinking due to overpaving and erosion—the per capita availability of land for meeting human requirements has shrunk from 19.5 acres per person in 1900 to less than 5 acres today. This is the maximum share of the planet that's both physically available, and is sustainably exploitable.

The financial system. The precarious structure of the world's financial system is another factor in the unsustainability of the global economy. Instability in this system is not new, but it was not generally recognized until the credit crunch of 2008. Worldwide the crash re-

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sulted in the greatest loss of wealth ever recorded apart from a major war: 2.8 trillion dollars.

The structural unsustainability of the world's financial system is of longer standing than the creation and burst of speculative bubbles: it's rooted in the imbalance of international trade and in the preposterousness of endless growth.

Unsustainability in the ecology

Water. Today about one-third of the world's population doesn't have access to adequate supplies of clean water, and by 2025 two-thirds of the population will live under conditions of critical water scarcity. By then there may be only 4,800 m³ of water reserves per person.

Land. There is a progressive loss of productive land. The Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that there are 7,490 million acres of high quality cropland available globally, seventy-one percent of it in the developing world. This quantity is decreasing due to soil erosion, destructuring, compaction, impoverishment, excessive desiccation, accumulation of toxic salts, leaching of nutritious elements, and inorganic and organic pollution owing to urban and industrial wastes.

Worldwide, 12 to 17 million acres of cropland are lost per year. At this rate 741 million acres will be lost by mid-century, leaving 6.67 billion acres to support 8 to 9 billion people. This would be catastrophic, as the remaining 0.74 acres of productive land could not produce food beyond the level of bare subsistence.

Air. Changes in the chemical composition of the planet's atmosphere constitute another unsustainable trend. Since the middle of the nineteenth century oxygen has decreased mainly due to the burning of

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coal; it now dips to nineteen percent of total volume over impacted areas and twelve to seventeen percent over major cities. At six or seven percent of total volume, life can no longer be sustained. At the same time, the share of greenhouse gases is growing. Two hundred years of burning fossil fuels and cutting down large tracts of forest has increased the atmosphere's carbon dioxide content from about 280 parts per million to over 350 parts per million.

Global warming and climate change. During the 20th century human activity has injected one terraton of CO₂ into the atmosphere. Currently it's injecting another terraton in less than two decades. The rapid injection of carbon dioxide makes it impossible for the Earth's ecosystems to adjust. In the oceans, the explosive growth of CO₂ at the surface makes the water too acid for the survival of shell-forming organisms, the species that is the basis of the chain of life in the seas. On land, absorption is reduced by the destruction of the ecosystems that had previously sustained a stable climate. As much as 40 percent of the world's forest cover has disappeared, due to acid rain, urban sprawl, and the injection of a variety of toxins into the soil. The influx of greenhouse gases from human activity is now matched by the influx from nature.

In Western Siberia an unprecedented process has commenced that will dramatically worsen the greenhouse effect. A group of scientists released new findings demonstrating that the permafrost of an area of land equivalent to the size of France and Germany combined is starting to thaw and will release billions of tonnes of, up until now, trapped methane gas into the atmosphere over the next few years, a gas 21 times more lethal than carbon dioxide in its impact on the greenhouse effect. The permafrost — which is melting for the

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first time since it formed over 11 thousand years ago — covers the world's largest peat bog and is capable of producing approximately 70 billion tonnes of methane gas. According to Dr. Stephen Sitch, a climate impacts scientist of the Meteorological office Hadley Centre, the thawing process of the permafrost will likely take a number of decades meaning that the methane will not be released into the atmosphere at any one given moment. His calculations, however, demonstrate that even if the methane seeped through the permafrost over the period of the next 100 years, it would still release 700 million tonnes of gas into the atmosphere annually, equivalent to approximately 15 billion tonnes of CO₂. This is a catastrophic contribution to the greenhouse effect potentially capable of increasing global warming by 10-25%.

Climate models show that even relatively minor changes in the composition of the atmosphere can produce major effects, including widespread harvest failures, water shortages, increased spread of diseases, the rise of the sea level, and the die-out of large tracts of forest. Currently the cumulative effect of the changes includes the greenhouse effect. A shield in the upper atmosphere prevents heat generated at the surface from escaping into surrounding space.

Global warming is an indisputable fact: in recent years the average global temperature has risen significantly, and the warming is accelerating. Currently debate centers on whether warming is due to human activity or to natural causes. There were other warming periods in the history of the Earth; geologists speak of alternating hot and cold stable states — «hot-houses» and «ice-houses». The best known previous hot-house occurred 55 million years ago, when between one and two terratons of carbon dioxide were released into

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the air, most likely by the impact of a large meteorite. This caused temperatures to rise 8 degrees Celsius in the Arctic zones and 5 degrees in the tropics. It took about 200,000 years for temperatures to return to their previous level.

Conservative elements claim that today's warming is due to natural causes, at the most exacerbated by human activity. A new cycle in the fusion-processes that generate heat in the Sun sends more solar radiation to Earth and heats up the atmosphere. Unfortunately, for the most part those who ascribe global warming to solar activity dismiss the need for doing something about it — after all, what can humans do to change the chemistry of the Sun?

This, however, is a mistake. Whereas we can't do anything about the chemistry of the Sun, we can do something about reducing its effect on Earth. Doing so is indicated, whether the warming is due to the Sun, or has a significant anthropic component. In any event it's producing climate change, ecological stress, and depresses the food supply of the entire human population. (However, carbon dioxide, together with methane and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, is likely to be a significant factor in global warming. The historical record of the past million years shows that the amount of CO₂ in the air correlates with variations in temperature: more carbon dioxide goes hand in hand with higher temperatures.)

Regardless of its causes, global warming has a highly negative impact on food production; it produces nefarious changes in the climate. There are storms and violent rains in some parts of the world, and persistent drought in others. Drought has become a worldwide phenomenon.

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— California is facing the worst drought in recorded history; thousands of acres of row crops have already been fallowed. The snowpack in the Northern Sierra, where some of the state's most important reservoirs are located, is 49 percent of normal.

— In Texas the drought is reaching historic proportions; it's estimated that 88 percent of the state is experiencing abnormally dry conditions, and 18 percent extreme or exceptional drought.

— The worst drought in half a century has turned Argentina's once-fertile soil to dust and has created a state of emergency. The country's wheat yield for 2009 is expected to be 8.7 million metric tons, down from 16.3 million tons in 2008.

— Brazil, the world's second-biggest exporter of soybeans and third-largest exporter of corn, has cut its outlook for these crops after assessing desiccation damage to plants in the drought-stricken regions.

— In Northern China the drought has been the worst in 50 years, creating water shortage for 4.37 million people. The Chinese government has resorted to cloud-seeding, which produced some, but not sufficient, rainfall.

— Australia has been experiencing unrelenting drought since 2004; an estimated 41 percent of its agriculture is hit by the worst drought in the 117 years that records have been kept. The devastating firestorm of February 2009, though it was triggered by arson, was a consequence of extreme dryness in the region.

— In the drought-affected regions of the Middle East and Central Asia, total wheat production has declined by more than 22 percent.

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Major reservoirs in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria are at low levels, and irrigation supplies from reservoirs, rivers, and groundwater have been critically reduced.

Low international food reserves exacerbate the problem of falling agricultural yields. The combined average of the stock levels of the major food exporting countries — Australia, Canada, United States, and the European Union — has been steadily declining. In the period 2002-2005 the combined reserves amounted to 47.4 million tons, in 2007 they dropped to 37.6 million tons and in 2008 to 27.4 million. Quite apart from the economics of paying for the mounting cost of food imports, these stocks are not sufficient to cover the needs of the food-deficit countries.

Irrational behaviors

A holistic diagnosis of what's wrong with the world must not fail to take account of the element of irrationality in the way we manage ourselves and the environment. We have created paradoxical, unjust, and basically intolerable conditions.

— Millions are suffering from overeating and obesity, and a thousand million go hungry. Someone dies of hunger every six seconds.

— Six million children die annually of starvation, and 155 million are overweight.

— Millions are suffering from overeating and obesity, and a thousand million go hungry.

— There are millions of intelligent women ready to play a respon-

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sible role in society, but they don't get a fair chance in education, business, politics and civic life.

— Vast herds of livestock, consisting in part of intelligent and sensitive animals, are brought into the world for the sole purpose of slaughtering them, a procedure that, apart from its questionable ethical and health implications, is wasting an enormous amount of resources (it takes 1303,5 gallons of water and 16 pounds of grain and soy to produce 1 pound of beef, and not much less to produce a pound of pork).

— The wellbeing and possibly the very survival of humanity is in question, but most of us remain occupied or preoccupied with making money and holding on to our privileges.

— We fight cultural intolerance and religious fundamentalism in others, but have been, and many of us still are, willing to subscribe to virulent forms of nationalism under the banner of patriotism and national security.

— We tell children to abide by the golden rule «treat others as you expect others to treat you» but we seldom if ever treat other people, other states and other businesses as we expect other people, states and businesses to treat us.

— The problems we face call for the commitment and participation of every able-bodied human being, but we put millions out of work to save on the cost of labor.

— The problems we face also call for long-term solutions, but our criteria of success is the bottom line in annual or semi-annual corporate profit-and-loss statements.

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— The planet is bathed in energy (if fully used, forty minutes of the solar radiation reaching the Earth would cover all of humanity's energy needs for a whole year), and technologies are on-line to derive energy from sunlight, wind, tides, geothermics, and plants, but the global economy continues to run predominantly on polluting and finite fossil fuels.

— Hi-tech weapons that are more dangerous than the conflicts they could possibly resolve are being developed and stockpiled, at vast investment of money and resources.

— The ineffectiveness of military force to achieve economic and political objectives has been proven over and over again, yet the world's governments still spend over \$1.2 trillion dollars a year on arms, wars and military establishments, and similar amounts on empire-building objectives thinly disguised as national defense and security projects.

Obsolete beliefs and aspiration

Some of the beliefs that guide action and aspiration in the contemporary world are now seriously obsolete and highly counterproductive. For example:

The planet is inexhaustible. The long-standing belief that the Earth is an inexhaustible source of resources and an inexhaustible sink of wastes leads to the overmining of natural resources and the overloading of the biosphere's regenerative cycles.

Nature is a mechanism. The belief that we can engineer nature like

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a building or a bridge is producing a plethora of unforeseen and vexing side-effects, such as the destruction of natural balances and the disappearance of untold living species.

Life is a struggle where only the fittest survive. The (mal)adaptation of Darwin's theory of natural selection to society produces a growing gap between rich and poor, and concentrates wealth and power in the hands of a small group of smart but often unscrupulous managers and speculators.

The market distributes benefits. Affluent people tend to hold on to the belief that the free market, governed by what Adam Smith called the «invisible hand» distributes the benefits of economic activity. When they do well for themselves, they maintain, they do well also for society. The poverty and marginalization of nearly half of the world's population is eloquent testimony to the fact that this tenet doesn't work in the context of today's power and wealth-distorted global markets.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HEAL OUR WORLD? FINDING A CURE

The objectives of enlightened politics

Many constructive steps can be taken to cure our world, creating peace and sustainability in place of crisis and violence. They call for more timely objectives in politics, in business, and in everyday life.

Enlightened politics is democratic politics: it serves the genuine interests of the demos, the people. The genuine interests of the people include physical survival, a meaningful social role, and a likewise meaningful social and cultural identity.

Safeguarding these interests calls for political objectives that ensure the availability, and the social and economic accessibility, of the required basic resources.

Security of physical survival calls for access by all members of the community to the basic resources of life: adequate supplies of food, water, shelter, and clothing.

Meaningful interpersonal relations calls for social and economic con-

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ditions suitable for maintaining family life, and stable, meaningful, and potentially beneficial relations among individuals.

A meaningful social and cultural identity requires in turn a system of justice with social and economic equity, and a system of education and information that furthers unity through diversity, enabling people to recognize themselves as members of their ethnic group and culture, unique yet integral parts of their community.

Beyond these basic goals, enlightened politics is dedicated to objectives that are specific to our time and place. In today's world this means commitment to economic, social, and ecological sustainability both domestically and internationally.

A government embracing enlightened objectives:

- Provides incentives for the use of alternative energy and resource-saving or recycling technologies, and technologies of low or zero toxin and waste emission;
- Gives priority to eco-labelled, organic, ethical, and fair-trade products;
- Works with the business community to promote practices that incorporate criteria of sustainability in the processes of design, production, and marketing, and the disposal of manufactured products, raw materials, and of waste;
- Pays attention to the availability of natural common goods at acceptable cost, including energy, water, and land;
- Improves the quality and increases capacity of the public transportation system, creating realistic alternatives to the use (and overuse) of the private car;

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- Channels funds to reconstruct and revitalize derelict or disadvantaged areas;
- Uses safe and efficient energy and resource technologies in public services, including electric power generation, transport, and communication;
- Monitors and regulates civil and industrial activities that destroy ecological balances and despoil or reduce wilderness areas;
- Applies strict criteria for urban design and construction, requiring renewable energy technologies and efficient insulation to be part of public housing and in licensing the construction of private dwellings, commercial buildings, and industrial plants;
- Makes accessible fields, forests, rivers, streams, lakes and seas in the surroundings with adequate provisions for the integrity of ecological cycles and processes.

The social objective in business

Business is the private sector, but it's so powerful that it's no longer a truly «private» sector — it's the most public sector there is. Yet, in the course of the last century business companies had progressively excluded themselves from concern with and responsibility for society, seeking only their own profit and growth. If they are to be reintegrated in society, they need to adopt a basic social objective.

The classical objective was, and to a large extent still is, centered uniquely on making money for the owners of the company. The «shareholder philosophy» is now outdated. It became a major source of

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the world's problems: it polarizes society and leads to an over-exploitation of the environment. It must be replaced by the «stakeholder philosophy» — responsibility for all the people who are affected by the actions of the company, whether they are shareholders or executives, employees or partners, customers, clients, or members of the host community.

Classically, the business of business was said to be business. With the stakeholder philosophy the business of business changes: it's the health and wellbeing of people and society. The principal *raison d'être* of a business company is then no longer to garner the maximum profit in the shortest time, but to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number while ensuring its own economic viability.

A shift in the business world is not impossible. It requires close cooperation among the market leaders. They need to join together not to suppress competition, but to implement socially and ecologically responsible practices in their sector of industry.

There are business leaders who would be ready to take this step; they no longer subscribe to the shareholder philosophy.

Many leading companies are controlled by individuals and families who identify with the companies as founders and principal executives. They are the contemporary equivalents of the legendary «captains of industry» of the first decades of the 20th century. A Rockefeller, a Vanderbilt, a Ford, a Mellon, and a Carnegie didn't think of himself purely as a businessman, out to get the maximum money for himself and his family; he considered himself a builder of society, a force for the common good. As IBM founder Thomas J. Watson Sr. said, companies were not created «just to make money» but to «knit

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together the whole fabric of civilization».

This spirit is not extinct today. A Bill Gates and other business leaders create charitable Foundations to champion their preferred causes, much like Rockefeller, Ford, Carnegie and others did before them. But today this is no longer enough.

In the 1920s and '30s nobody doubted that the company's pursuing business as its business would have negative consequences. Society obviously had need of motor cars, gasoline, steel, and the other products and services provided by the major companies. For business people being public spirited didn't involve changing the orientation of their company; at the most it meant ensuring fair treatment for workers and staff, and espousing selected social causes on the side.

Today it's not enough to «do good» as peripheral philanthropy while being narrowly focused on «doing well» in the marketplace. The damage done by companies staying with short-term profit-maximizing strategies is not made good by funding charitable causes, however important they may be.

The need is for those who have the wealth and the power to control major companies to become a force for the public good not by philanthropy, but by re-orienting their companies. The companies can then do well and do good at the same time.

The social objective recognizes that the company's stakeholder is society itself. Embracing it brings the private sector into the fold of societal actors dedicated the cause of human wellbeing and ecological sustainability.

CURING THE CONSUMPTION ADDICTS

The end of materialistic culture

Our world is becoming smaller and smaller, and more and more crowded. The airline industry has made it possible to cover huge distances in only a few hours whilst the internet digital technology has made distances shrink in time and space. How many people travel in the world everyday? Hundreds of million, billions. We only need to think of the «virtual travels» in Google and in the big social networks.

We must view the planet as one body. It's not difficult: we only have to remember how we feel when we travel by airplane and a beautiful day allows us to see the tiny things and organisms moving on the earth below. Let's imagine ourselves astronauts, hundreds of thousands of kilometres away from the Earth. Close our eyes and imagine the planet: what are they doing, how do the two-legged creatures who inhabit this planet *live*?

More or less a third of those inhabitants do not even have water to drink; another third suffers from hunger; the remaining third lives

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well, or indeed too well. It is obvious that something doesn't make sense on this planet.

There are more than 4 billion people who wake up in the morning haunted by the constant worry: «what will I have to eat and to drink today?», and approximately 2 billion people live in an industrialized «developed» society. About half of these 2 billion behave rationally, the remaining billion is ensnared by the materialistic culture of contemporary civilisation.

With our uncontrolled and short-sighted actions we have created a crisis in the ecology; with our lack of values we have damaged our only world.

This two-legged creature is a strange animal: on the one hand it acts in a self-destructive way polluting air and water, destroying the ecosystem, establishing lifestyles that are unhealthy and threaten both its psychological and biological balance; on the other hand it invests huge resources so that science and medicine can resolve or at least mitigate, the problems they themselves have created. The two-legged creature continues to shoot itself in the foot, only to then desperately try to heal the wounds...

Fortunately there are a number of humans — for now only a minority — that have taken a better path: who **don't gorge** themselves with the consumption of material things but focus on sustaining their family and maintaining their health, job, safety, culture, and creating a future without false myths and ephemeral satisfactions.

The irresponsibility of today's compulsive materialist civilisation is about to be unmasked. What the «consumption addicts» call crisis is in fact the end of one era and the beginning of another: the civi-

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alisation of genuine values and a new consciousness.

People will cease to pollute indiscriminately; to purchase more and more cars that are more and more powerful and wasteful; build wider highways in order to flood the market with an ever greater number of vehicles; cease to build energy intensive houses and shopping centres that devastate the ecosystem; and destroy the forests, the lungs of the planet.

The addicts — and those who incite them — need not entertain false hopes: their problems will not end any time soon. It's not true that «within two years everything will go back to the way it was before». It will not happen, because change is irreversible: the world has begun a gigantic transformation, a process of veritable detoxification!

The fact is that five of the six billion inhabitants of the planet are not consumption addicts. They want to live as comfortably as possible but they don't want only material things. Maybe their ideas are still not clear, but their wish for a higher quality of life is genuine and it's gaining momentum.

Two thirds of the world's population has been subjugated by a minority that has imposed rules, methods, lifestyles and role-models that only go in one direction: the hoarding of money and the accumulation of power. Guided by the one billion conscious consumers, these two-thirds of the population will be the salvation of the planet.

This kind of process is already taking place in the United States, and it will occur also in Europe. The falsity of the idea «make money and so reach happiness» is becoming evident. Money is not everything!

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Let's look at the future optimistically. Humankind is not experiencing a negative crisis — it is experiencing one of the best eras of its existence: the era of transformation.

For the time being the consumption addicts hold the reins of power in the levers of the system, but their way of acting is beginning to show signs of wear. The more conscious people are still a minority, but they have an enormous potential for development. They possess values that apply to all people, regardless of race and creed.

After a necessary interval of crisis, also the consumption addicts will discover the civilisation of values and will seek sustainability for themselves and their families. The compulsive culture of materialistic consumption is destined to disappear.

A signal from America

Nobody would ever have imagined that this country, where the most advanced trends unfold, where the financial system works 24 hours a day where health systems only treat you if you have the money, where dealers sell guns without even asking for an identity card... Nobody would have imagined that the critical indictment of the consumer culture will start from here.

But is this merely a fortuitous coincidence?

The United States, the temple of compulsive consumerism, the country whose leadership have dominated the world, is transforming. The crisis of its financial institutions serves as an example. The mortgage crisis was the classical straw that broke the camel's

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back. Millions of citizens signed mountains of papers to buy houses (or cars) that they could not afford. The banks had stopped regulating the flow of money, they were occupied in printing it, producing not real banknotes but mountains of documents. Yet financial and business empires were built on this basis. This wealth, with its underground flows of money, exploded in a catastrophe that the world has now come to know.

Today another course is expected of the United States. President Obama is personifying a new model of sustainable development, one that other governments will also have to confront.

The United States of political cynicism, of capitalism with a top hat, of ruthless dominion over the world is destined to be confined to history. In ten or twenty years we will read that the years 2008 – 2009 were the years of the America's transformation from a cynical and pitiless system to a system committed to environmental recovery, alternative energy production, health-care for the poor, to a state no longer inclined to favour the greed of any lobby and more inclined to social welfare, to genuine assistance — to real humaneness. This, at any rate, is what we seem to be witnessing today.

A new chapter will be added to the history books, a chapter that shows the rise of an Ecological Revolution after the much acclaimed Industrial Revolution, bringing about a better equilibrium between people, nature, and the economy.

People, Planet, Profit. These three P's stands for concepts that apply always and everywhere. Always and everywhere we must envisage systems that regard people with solidarity, support, assistance, the defence of the values of civilisation and love...

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Always and everywhere we must envisage systems that consider the planet: the protection of air and water, the defence of forests and animals, the humanisation of cities and work places, the rethinking of systems of transportation for people and goods....

Always and everywhere we must envisage systems that have a concern for the economy: for production supply chains, distribution, consumption, but that also have a concern for the planet in all its dimensions, that ensure real answers to real questions, that circulate money so that there can be remunerated work for people, and that generate legitimate and fair profit for entrepreneurs, for enterprises, and for all people who do useful work.

The fifth element

But what is the process that delivers the new worlds of the conscious consumerism, of People, Planet, Profit, and generates the historical shift?

It would be simplistic to think that we have arrived at this point only because of the crisis of the old lifestyle. That is not the reason. The process is harmonious, constant and coherent as well as relatively fast, given that it's a lifestyle born only in the post-war period.

We live in the aftermath of a frightened and desolate world of continents devastated by the greatest and most destructive war in the history of humanity. Major powers were razed to the ground — Germany, Japan, France, Italy, England — there was a planetary drama of death and destruction from which we must learn to exit in a hurry.

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Men and women reconstructed cities and factories and re-launched the industrial and consumer civilisation, thanks to the contribution of the United States, a country that was not subjected to this traumatic break in its industrial development.

Today a powerful instrument is beginning to have its effects on consumers. Television literally subverts the world's markets.

Take Italy for example: from agricultural country, all tourism and naturalness, the richest in culture and fine arts, the most beautiful, has been radically transformed and, thanks to what the history books call the «economic miracle», has mutated into an industrial country: with highways, many metal mechanical, chemical and oil industries, the concrete that transforms the cities and far more. But it is also the lifestyle and mentality of the people that undergoes profound changes: the hair oil is applied; they learn about household appliances, the chemical detergents needed to make them work, and then the consumer electronics and other technologies in their home and in the workplace...

Is such progress a real advance? It has meant turning one's back on nature, urbanizing and polluting, and becoming «super-accessorized» in the ways of modern consumerism.

Our fathers, too, have learned to consume. Now consumerism has entered into the everyday spheres of people's lives, becoming the principal point of reference: consume therefore I am.

Consequently the industries, the entrepreneurs, even Italians of peasant origin have been rapidly transformed, becoming captains of industry who want to produce more and more of everything.

But the absence of values creates distortions in the system. This is a bulimic phase of consumption. Everything is produced, everything is sold, with insufficient controls on quality and wholesomeness on the products, think of the example of the Ddt: it's all indiscriminate. TV commercials fills public squares and bars and even the cinemas have been enlisted to spread the messages of the small screen.

And people consume and consume, spend and spend, sitting dazed in front of the television.

This has been the first element in building the market: quantity, the bare fact of the product, without more ado. What counts is only accessibility: *distribution*.

The second element has been the consideration that the product must also be good, in the wider meaning of the term. This mean not only tasting good in the case of food, but also a more intangible asset: *quality*. «This garment is good» my father used to say in his fabric shop.

Variety in the offer permits comparison — comparison not only of price, or rather not *only* the price: the economic boom is accompanied by a full-bodied even if embryonic hedonism that motivates paying attention to the aesthetic factor, the search for beauty. This is an activity on which Italians have much to say about. It's an essential part of the the industrial development of a country that became one of the ten most powerful economies in the world despite its the defeat in the last war and the misery at its borders.

This is the third element: *aesthetic*.

It was the birth of the art of design that changed the cards on the

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table and defined the markets for the products, including their range and their target clientele.

Gradually, as the market grew and evolved, the consumer became more demanding, and asked to be respected not only as a purchaser of a product but also as a person. At this stage consumers shifted from an attitude of awe, from acceptance, to active subjects that discriminate, consider and weigh differences. Here the product must possess still another element: it must not be harmful to health; it must be checked and controlled. Here is the fourth element. The product must be *healthy and safe*.

This is the element that brings us to where we are today. It must be healthy for whoever uses it (or, in the case of food, whoever eats it) and it must be healthy for the pocketbook and safe in regard to one's life.

The fifth element is *ethics*.

At the highest stage of development it's not sufficient for the product to be accessible, good, beautiful, healthy and safe. It must also be ethical. It must respect human beings, the atmosphere, the ecosystem, it must be eco-compatible, non-polluting; eco-sustainable, constructed with renewable resources; offered through fair trade, and not have the shadow of child labour and discriminatory practices cast on it.

People are beginning to develop a different mindset compared to that which was accepted but a few years ago. Think how quickly, for example, the relationship with the automobile has passed from status-symbol for size and luxury to a symbol for economy and ecologi-

cal responsibility. Think how quickly cities small and large decided to no longer allow access to cars to their centre, converting them into pedestrian zones accessible only to public services. Today freshness, simplicity and respect are part of the vocabulary of consumers who are less and less compulsive and more and more aware.

The new consumers are the standard bearer and champion of the market. The new brands and the companies that promote them must also, and above all, provide ethical assurances in production: respect the workers, the suppliers, the surroundings, and the environment. The companies must be concerned with the interests of the people who buy their products and perhaps invest their savings in them.

We are speaking about the social responsibility of business. This is a topic about which much has been written and said over the last few years. Now the discourse is assuming an ever more discriminating tone: consumers expect ethics even in the company's supply chain.

At this point we question everything. We question our lifestyle and our mindset, and our old and already transcended ways of living.

The cause and the effect

This is the historical moment to take a step forward, not to dwell on a problem but to take flight, to see things from above, to see them in their totality. This is the moment when we must heal the effects — but first we must find the causes.

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Poverty, Aids, terrorism, global warming, desertification, wars, perennial dissatisfaction and problems that will come are due to a lack of consciousness and civilisation. Because civilisation means the ability to respect other people, the environment, and all things in it. This is from where the crisis comes: from a lack of civilisation.

The spiral of involution, the genesis of the economic crisis stems from the non-sustainability of a business model based on limitless growth, of consumption crushed by the lack of hope for the future, and by the critical instability of markets and institutions. What we are experiencing is not a destructive crisis but a period of change that definitively and irreversibly marks the end of the era of compulsive consumerism and its materialistic values. It marks the beginning of a journey towards a society of conscious consumers, and of «three P» companies.

The true danger, the real threat for the system, to the future of humankind and the planet is the out of date consciousness of an as yet much too high number of consumers.

If we shed light on the cause-effect relationship we must now truly believe and everyone must assume their own responsibilities.

In light of this relationship of cause and effect everyone must assume his or her responsibility. This means responsibility assumed by business companies, many of whom have already given indications that they are ready to assume it. We only need to look at the communications they send out — in recent months they have assumed the tones of a real turnaround: ecology, recovery, recycling, reduction of consumption, renewable energy, CO₂ compensation, are all terms that were, until a short while ago, totally absent from their

communications, but that today are beginning to convey merit and value in advertising and promote change. How much comes from the “heart” and how much from the “brain” is not that important, important is the fact that these transformations produce positive effects in society.

The change

We have already seen where today’s historical change is coming from. Now we must try to discover the fastest and safest way to go before the effects of old thinking and obsolete values destroy the motivation for change.

That which scares many people is the idea of change itself. Yet change doesn’t necessarily mean renunciation. It was not a sacrifice to replace DDT, the CFCs that damaged the ozone layer, and to practice differentiated waste disposal, and it will not be a sacrifice to give up polluting cars and make purchases that actually exceed our means... or to choose renewable energy, to put a brake on useless consumption, to purchase seasonal and locally grown fruits and vegetables, and to maintain genuine friendships and to surround ourselves with people whom we love and who love us in turn. In short, it’s not a sacrifice to live a good life with real chances for happiness.

The new civilisation will be based on new lifestyles. We will need new role-models and points of reference, not more and more wealthy football players but people who are rich in ideals. Obama and the new politics of the United States — if actions follow words — will provide answers regarding the change we need at this historical moment, much as the LifeGate project in Italy, with its aim to con-

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vey new values and promote a new consciousness.

Initiatives can be decisive factors in promoting change. The pioneering Italian “green” enterprise Fattoria Scaldasole has become a point of reference in the birth of 60.000 companies in the organic sector in Italy, taking this country from the last to the first place in organic production. This achievement is even more significant when we consider that Fattoria Scaldasole also pioneered a new form of communication. Here is an ad that appeared in the newspaper «Corriere della Sera» on 13th January 1994:

We are living at a time that will be known in the future as the second renaissance achieved in a relatively bloodless way.
Politics, communication and industry are changing.
The rules of the game are changing.
People are asking for spiritual values.
In politics honesty and clarity, in communication truth and concreteness, in industry relationships people and environmentally oriented measures.
Nature is no longer merely an image and a persuasive argument.
We could summarise it all in one phrase: when you use your brain, leave a little room also for your heart.

The basic objective: the growth of our consciousness

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Albert Einstein said that we can't solve a problem with the same kind of thinking that generated the problem. We can apply this to the contemporary world: we can't heal our planet with the same kind of thinking that created its malady. Here «thinking» is intended in an inclusive way: it's the totality of our perceptions, values, beliefs, and aspirations. It refers to our consciousness.

Today's predominantly materialistic and ego-centered consciousness is obsolete and must change. Fortunately, the consciousness that dominated the world for the past one hundred years is not a permanent feature of the human species. For most of the twenty or fifty thousand years that humans had possessed a higher form of culture and consciousness, they didn't think of themselves as separate from the world around them. They lived in the conviction that the world is one, and that we are an intrinsic part of it. The radical separation of a thinking, feeling human being from an unthinking and unfeeling world came only with the modern age, and came mainly in the West. It prompted the uninhibited exploitation of unthinking and unfeeling nature by the thinking and feeling, and therefore superior, human race. Insightful people have never accepted this narrowly anthropocentric view, whether they were artists, poets, mystics, or scientists. Giordano Bruno, Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, Nicolas Copernicus, and in more recent times Albert Einstein, gave eloquent testimony of their belief that the world around us, though in many respects still mysterious, is intrinsically whole and meaningful.

The dominant consciousness of humankind could shift again in the coming years; and there are indications that it has already begun to shift. The new cultures emerging at the creative margins of society

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have a mindset very different from the materialistic, narrowly self-interested consciousness of the mainstream. Social psychologists, experimental parapsychologists, sociologists, and even physicians and brain researchers are discovering a different kind of perception and awareness in people, especially in young people and children: «integral consciousness», «extended mind», «nonlocal consciousness», «holotropic mind», «infinite mind» or «boundless mind».

The consciousness now emerging bears out the predictions of a few remarkable thinkers and spiritual people. The Indian sage Sri Aurobindo viewed the emergence and spread of what he termed «superconsciousness» (the kind of consciousness that surfaces in samadhi, satori, and similar states of meditation) as the mark of the next evolutionary stage of human consciousness. The Swiss philosopher Jean Gebser defined the next stage as the coming of four-dimensional integral consciousness, arising from the prior stages of archaic, magical, and mythical consciousness. The American mystic Richard Bucke portrayed this stage as cosmic consciousness, beyond the simple consciousness of animals and the self-consciousness of contemporary humans.

For the mystic Eckhart Tolle consciousness is part of the universe: the essential part. It's the intelligence, the organizing principle behind the cosmic arising of form, which is the basic evolutionary process. Through evolution, consciousness has been preparing forms for millions of years, and today it's ready to create form without losing itself in it. The next stage in the evolution of human consciousness is the state of awakening — the consciousness of mastering the art of «awakened doing».

Social scientists Chris Cowan and Don Beck elaborated the colorful

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scheme they call spiral dynamics. According to this concept human consciousness evolved from the strategic «orange» stage, which is materialistic, consumerist, and success-, image-, status-, and growth-oriented to the consensual «green» stage of egalitarianism and orientation toward feelings, authenticity, sharing, caring, and community, and is now shifting to the ecological «yellow» stage where it's focused on natural systems, self-organization, multiple realities, and knowledge. In the future it would reach the holistic «turquoise» stage of collective individualism, cosmic spirituality, and Earth changes.

Spiritual traditions, too, speak about the coming of a new consciousness. The Mayan elders predict that the coming era will be an era when the ether, the long-neglected fifth element of the universe, will become dominant. «Whereas the four traditional elements [air, water, fire, and earth]... have dominated various epochs in the past,» said Mayan spokesperson and high-priest Carlos Barrios, «there will be a fifth element to reckon with in the time of the Fifth Sun: ether.» Ether is a medium, he pointed out, it permeates all space and transmits waves of energy in a wide range of frequencies. An important task at this time is «to learn to sense or see the energy of everyone and everything: people, plants, animals. This becomes increasingly important as we draw close to the World of the Fifth Sun, for it is associated with the element ether — the realm where energy lives and weaves» (source: SacredRoad.org).

Coincidentally, but perhaps not accidentally, physicists are discovering that the ether was not correctly discarded one hundred years ago when experiments failed to detect the friction it was predicted to cause in the rotation of the Earth—the place of the ether is not replaced by empty space, the vacuum. What physicists now call

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the quantum vacuum is far from empty space: according to grand-unified theories it's the unified field, the womb of all the fields and forces of nature. It contains a staggering concentration of energy, and carries and transmits information.

In Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy the ether was considered the most fundamental of the five elements; the one out of which all the others arose. The ether was known as Akasha, the element that also connects all things — as the «Akashic Field» — and conserves the memory of all things — as the «Akashic Records». Today, in the form of a cosmic energy — and information — field, the ether regains the preeminent status it had enjoyed five thousand years ago.

A consciousness that recognizes our connections through the ether — an «Akashic» consciousness — is a consciousness of connectiveness and of belonging, ultimately, of oneness with people and nature. It's the transpersonal consciousness foreseen by mystics and philosophers from Aurobindo to Wilber, predicted by the Mayans, and supported by discoveries at the leading edge of the sciences. The evolution of this consciousness in more and more people may be a basic precondition of healing our fragmented, and chronically but not incurably unsustainable planet.

From words to actions

How can we interpret and implement today's historical shift? In other words: how can we be in tune with the change that's needed, and encourage others to do so as well? How can we build a new civilisation of values?

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Individual behaviour has become the critical factor. What we do has an effect on others and either contributes to the healing of the world or exacerbates its disease. We need conscious and responsible behaviour.

Responsible individuals adopt the objectives of improvement of life and sustainability in their own life.

They understand that their freedom must be compatible with the freedom of others.

They satisfy their own needs without reducing the chances of other people to satisfy theirs.

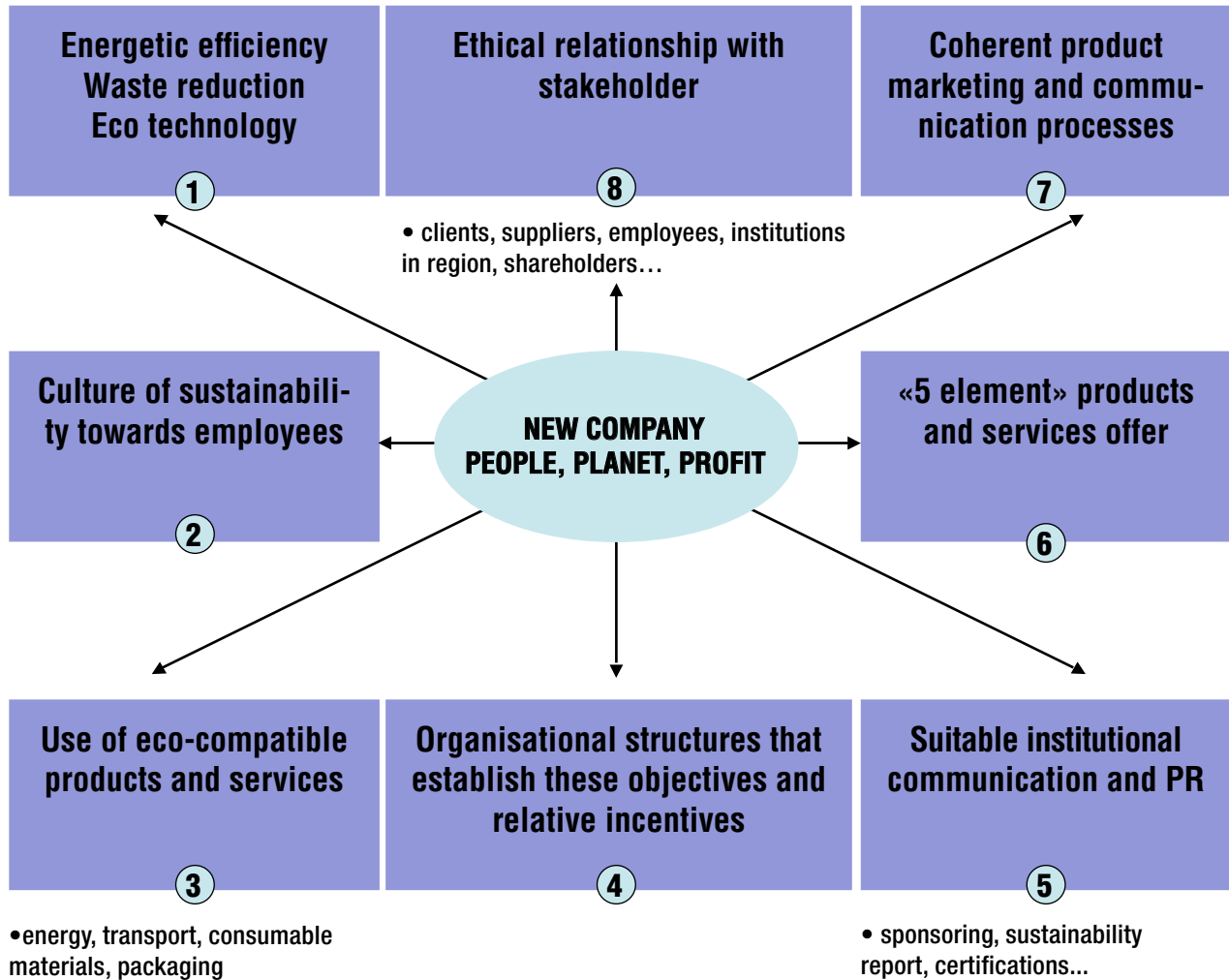
They respect the right to life and to development of all persons, wherever they live, regardless of their ethnic origin, sex, citizenship and creed.

They safeguard the right to life in a healthy environment of all the things that live and grow on Earth.

They search for happiness, freedom and personal development with consideration of the similar search of others.

They adopt a critical approach to consumption, shunning ostentation, and using products that respect people, the environment. Typically, such products are those offered by 3P companies.

The new future 3P enterprise



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Here is a reference layout that may be of help with regards to personal values.

CIVILISATION WITHOUT VALUES	CIVILISATION WITH VALUES
have	be
live on the back of nature	be a harmonious part of the ecosystem
GMO and pesticide agriculture	biological agriculture
selecting work on the basis of 'having'	selecting work on the basis of «be»
take advantage of your neighbour	consider others
live superficially	give life a sense of meaning
business is business	life is life
personal interests	common interests
public relations	real friends
exploitation	respect
conditioning	freedom
inconsiderate consumption	ethical consumption
seriousness	honesty
being a spectator	being part
money	love

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The question of time

We are now faced with the fact...that tomorrow is today.
We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now...
Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous
civilizations are written the pathetic words — «too late.»

— Martin Luther King (April 4, 1967)

We need to change, individually and collectively, but how much time do we have to change? The answer is, not much. The window of time available for meaningful change is closing faster than we had thought. There are two major reasons for this.

There are two major reasons for this.

Accelerating trends.

Critical trends build rapidly toward phases of irreversibility. Time-estimates of when these critical «points of no return» will come about have shrunk from the end of the century to mid-century, then to the next twenty years — and for some trends to the next five to twenty years.

For example, the sea level has been rising one and a half times faster than predicted in the IPCC's Third Assessment Report published in 2001. Forecasts published at the end of 2008 project global sea-level rise that is more than double the 0.59 meter rise forecast even by the Fourth Assessment Report.

Carbon dioxide emissions and global warming have likewise outpaced expectations. The rate of increase of CO₂ emissions rose from 1.1 percent between 1990 and 1999 to over 3 percent between 2000 and 2004. Since 2000 the growth-rate of emission has been greater

than in any of the scenarios used by the IPCC in both the Third and Fourth Assessment Reports.

The warming of the atmosphere progressed faster than expected as well. In the 1990s forecasts spoke of an overall warming of maximum 3 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. Then the time-horizon for this level of increase was reduced to the middle of the century, and presently some experts predict that it could occur within a decade. At the same time, the prediction for the maximum level of global warming rose from 3 to 6 degrees.

The difference is not negligible. A three degree warming would cause serious disruption in human life and economic activity, while a six degree warming would make most of the planet unsuitable for food production and large-scale human habitation.

Feedbacks and cross-impacts among the trends.

Unexpected acceleration is one reason for the reduced time-horizon, the other is the disregard of feedbacks and cross-impacts.

Most predictions take only one trend into consideration — global warming and attendant climate change; water quality and availability; food production and self-reliance; urban viability, poverty, and population pressure; air quality and minimal health standards, or others. They fail to consider the possibility that a critical point in one trend could drive other trends toward a critical point.

Yet there are multiple feedbacks and cross-impacts among the global trends, both in nature and in the human world.

In nature, all the trends that affect human life and wellbeing also

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impact on the cycles that maintain the planet's ecology within a humanly favorable range. This is the case in regard to the global water and the global carbon cycle — the alteration of these cycles by any one trend affects the way the other trends unfold.

For example, an increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere leads to global warming and that affects rainfall and the growth of forests. That, in turn, reduces the biosphere's carbon absorption capacity. Feedbacks are also conveyed by air and ocean currents. Warmer water in the oceans triggers hurricanes and other violent storms alters the course of major ocean currents, such as the Gulf and the Humboldt. And that triggers further changes in the climate.

Feedbacks can involve both ecological and socio-economic trends. For example:

— The warming of the atmosphere can produce prolonged drought in some areas and coastal flooding in others. Starving and homeless masses would then move from the highly impacted areas to less hard-hit regions and create critical food and water shortages there, too.

— A drop in the quality of the air in urban and industrial megacomplexes below the minimum required for health creates a breakdown in public health, and could trigger epidemics spreading over vast areas.

— A point of no return in the global financial crisis would impact not only on banks and stock markets, but on the world economy as a whole. International production and trade flows would be paralyzed with serious consequences for countries and people both rich and poor.

Cross-impacts among global trends reduces the time available for

effective change. There is now a distinct probability that one or another vital trend will reach a critical point within four or five years from today. If that happens, the chain-reaction catalyzed by it would engulf not only the immediately affected region and its population, but entire continents — and ultimately all continents. The bottom line is that the time left for averting a global breakdown is close to the famed 2012 prophecies of the end — or perhaps just the transformation — of the human world.

Will change actually happen in this reduced time-frame? We do not know; but we do know that it can happen. In an unstable, near-chaotic system butterfly effects can come about and they can be powerful — even initially small impulses can «nucleate» and spread with great rapidity, altering the behavior of the entire system. But the challenge is not to foretell whether timely change will, or will not, happen. The challenge is to make it happen.

A few pointers to find the bliss

How do we find happiness in change? We should first try to understand what we mean by happiness.

Certainly, happiness it's not getting a bargain, winning a competition, or cheating with taxes.

The promoters of the old civilisation of consumption bombarded us with messages that tried to make us believe that making and having money is happiness, and some of us have ended up believing it. But it's not true.

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Money at the most can give us a feeling of contentment. One of us has written in a book titled *Perché ce la faremo (Why We Shall Make It)*:

Contentment is the feeling of pleasure and satisfaction that we feel when something goes well for us, when we meet a new partner, receive a promotion, win something, we have an athletics result, when someone says «bravo» to us. It is an emotion, an ephemeral excitation, and always depends on something else.

In excess, the sense of contentment can be destructive. Think, for example, of rich and famous people who commit suicide: material wealth not only doesn't compensate for spiritual poverty and the lack of love, but accentuates it!

Happiness is, instead, a state of grace. It is not a passing mood, but something deeper, more lasting, it is a state of consciousness that grows within, independently of external events. It can be only reached if you have embedded the true values of civilisation in your own emotions.

Let's put it this way: happiness is «doing something good for yourself and at the same time for others». This may seem like a narrow definition, but it's sufficient to define the change in civilisation:

— the old compulsive materialistic civilisation incites you to look at yourself, emphasises egoism, lack of accountability;

— consciousness is the culture of the new civilisation based on sharing, altruism, love for your neighbour, and for the world around you.

It is to the extent that values and feelings intertwine that we are at peace with ourselves and are happy!

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But how do we get to this stage? Here is another key insight, although it may be painful at first.

Happiness is not driving around in a car with a blaring loudspeaker (as was once the custom) and telling people what to do and how to do it. The raising of consciousness is a very personal act, the fruit of self-analysis, of inner processes, of genuine search...

You arrive after having personally experienced a crisis in which you have touched the dryness and the illusion of the consumer myth, in which you feel the painful existential emptiness left by the race for profit as an absolute priority, in which life urges you to remember that there are things more important than any monetary amount, and that it can be the matter of a simple smile... the passage is from a life lived by values induced from outside, to a life live by one's own values, own tastes, own inner requirements of body and soul. It's not an easy leap and is often accompanied by a deep sense of unease and existential malaise. When the old myths fall by the wayside there is an unavoidable moment of emptiness before we find new points of reference, this time solidly rooted in our own mind, so as to reconstruct a consciously chosen and therefore more authentic scale of values...

At the end the new point of reference we find is ourselves. For humanity these personal points of reference are as different as the men and women who live on this Earth. But they have the same texture and the same objectives: to value ourselves, our own feelings; to have and to reach new objectives that are connected with humankind and with nature. Wealth is and will always be a myth, neither a means nor an end, but pure energy that can be oriented

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toward the good, completed by the inner wealth of consciousness and love.

Happiness is the consciousness that makes you discover a new, worthy «You» that expresses itself and can satisfy your aspirations... It's love toward your neighbour and the environment in a real, visceral way in which it satisfies your deepest instincts.

The caterpillar loses all contact with its old reality — it undergoes a drastic reorganisation before it becomes transformed into a butterfly.

ervin laszlo | marco roveda

march 2009



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