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# CIO letter — TO —



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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, THE CLIMATE WALL AND THE HUMAN FACTOR

### PART 2: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

**“YOU SEE, IN THIS WORLD THERE’S TWO KINDS OF  
PEOPLE, MY FRIEND: THOSE WITH LOADED GUNS  
AND THOSE WHO DIG. YOU DIG.”**

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY – SERGIO LEONE, 1966

In the first part of this letter, published in September<sup>1</sup>, we looked at the economic and political theories that have culminated in the human factor being eliminated from the economy. We discussed how an economic system based solely on the quest for exponential growth is putting itself in a climatic, social and financial predicament. This globalised development model, centred around Western culture, has prioritised efficiency over resilience, the global over the local, lower prices over higher wages, companies over individuals and standards over human beings. We sought to point out how reintroducing the human factor into the economy could forge a path towards a more sustainable economic system and a reunification of knowledge, which would bring about a rise in consciousness by considering humanity as a whole. Our analysis continues here with a focus on relationships between individuals.

Why follow up on our previous letter? Because our entrepreneurial culture prompts us to challenge the norm, as well as making us realise how difficult it is to step out of our comfort zone. And yet, although the limits of our economic system are now clearly visible, most people seem to simply accept the idea that it is fine to continue down this path and make only marginal changes. Why is this the case? Perhaps because there is a certain level of comfort in not diverging from the norm, to avoid being excluded from a system that is so dysfunctional it threatens the survival of the human race. Questioning one’s beliefs and convictions creates feelings of discomfort that are all too familiar to an entrepreneur, and this is one of the reasons for our renewed focus on the topic in this letter.

<sup>1</sup>. Tikehau CIO letter – Human after all, September 2022

This letter therefore aims to zoom in on the previous letter, with a greater focus on human relationships. We will attempt to go beyond the debate surrounding the measures that can be put in place to help us move towards a more sustainable model (sustainable growth or degrowth, private efforts or those of the state, an incentive-based or restrictive approach) in order to propose the idea that humanity will only be able to find the solution with a rise in general consciousness, which means questioning our accomplishments, our beliefs and the fears that divide us. **We will also attempt to demonstrate how the destruction of our relationship with living beings creates alienation, and how such alienation is partially compensated by the illusion of freedom offered by our economic system. This partial compensation instils a level of comfort that is difficult to relinquish. It allows for a certain amount of social stability, but also gives rise to suffering. The comfort offered by our model is seductive because it is built on ethnocentrism (the appealing idea that humans are the most evolved life forms and should justifiably rule over the natural world) and the idea that pleasure (which results in enjoyable addiction) can be a substitute for happiness.**

However, the current crisis is highlighting the inconsistencies in our system even further. There are so many differing economic, political and strategic

interests in the world that it will be very difficult for states, companies and international organisations to reach an agreement on a common way forward. The transition to renewable energy, the relocation of means of production close to consumers, the quest for sovereignty over supplies and the rearmament of states are all contributing to a rising demand for raw materials in a world with finite resources. Deglobalisation will deprive some developing countries of the growth brought by globalisation, which assigned them the role of producers of low-cost goods and services, at a time when these same countries are disproportionately suffering the consequences of global warming. Against this backdrop, conflict, migration and economic, social and political tensions are bound to increase, as developed countries adopt more protectionist policies and elect less immigration-friendly governments. **We must therefore ask ourselves the right questions; now is the time to step out of our comfort zone, not by imposing restrictions that people will never accept but by adopting a more internal approach that entails questioning our convictions, knowledge and prejudices.** The solution for the collective requires work on the part of the individual. Questioning our norms and standards in order to reshape our relationship with the living world (the human factor) seems a difficult but necessary exercise. It is this exercise that we are seeking to kick-start here. Although we cannot be certain that the

points we raise for consideration below are the most pertinent, we would like to think that the individual work carried out by each and every person with the courage to read right to the end of this letter can contribute to this rise in consciousness, which can only serve as a glue that holds us together on our journey towards this difficult goal: to harness knowledge and inclusivity in order to avoid self-destruction and move towards a sustainable economic model.

This letter explores divisive issues such as education and beliefs in greater detail. Our intention is not to cause offence or take sides, but rather to provide our investors with insight that goes beyond the usual food for thought by drawing on what we have read in widely available essays and papers. We remain convinced that capitalism is the best economic system because it advocates freedom of action and speech, but we acknowledge that it is neither sustainable nor durable in its current form. Our aim is, as usual, to propose avenues for reflection that will help us invest better by being less naive about the purpose and consequences of our decisions. The title of this second part – The Good, the Bad and the Ugly – is a reference to the iconic Sergio Leone film, but it also frames our attempt to analyse three characteristics of human behaviour that help explain why we are, or are not, questioning our economic model: our connection with the living world (the Good), violence (the Bad)

and deception (the Ugly). These three concepts will therefore serve as the backbone of this second instalment.

We concluded our previous letter with the following words:

*It is clear that Western culture – founded on the rule of law, norms and standards, and the separation of peoples and knowledge – does not promote inclusive thinking. And this is a great shame, because the sciences championed by Western culture have contributed to tremendous advances in knowledge and understanding. Simply taking into account age-old traditions and practices, together with the contribution of science based on calculations, measurements and standards, would allow us to increase the effects of progress and, above all, to move in a direction towards the reunification of knowledge, of the human race and of our relationship with nature. Unfortunately, our patterns of thinking have been “militarised” by an ideology that seeks to associate them with the concepts of liberty and prosperity. An unshakeable faith in these ways of thinking, based on individualism and the consumer society, could in fact hold our societies in a kind of Plato’s Cave, where we perceive reality in a way that is distorted, and in particular where we become aggressive towards anyone who manages to escape, see what is happening, and warn the rest of us.*

## LET'S EXPLORE THE CONCEPT OF PLATO'S CAVE

**"A MAN ALWAYS HAS TWO REASONS FOR DOING ANYTHING: A GOOD REASON AND THE REAL REASON."**

J. P. MORGAN

In "Republic", the Greek philosopher Plato uses the allegory of a cave to explain the conditions in which humans can acquire and share knowledge. The allegory centres around several men who are trapped in a cave, who can only see the projected image of objects representing reality outside the cave. They therefore believe they are seeing the truth, when in fact they are only witnessing a likeness of it. The cave symbolises ignorance and stubborn belief. The outside world symbolises the freedom of knowledge and reality. If one of the men were to leave the cave to see the truth, he would initially be dazzled by the light, which would cause him to suffer. But he would soon become accustomed to it. However, if he were to return inside the cave to describe what he had seen, he would likely be violently attacked and accused of lying by his fellow men. Why would the men react like this?

In their book "The Elephant in the Brain"<sup>2</sup>, researcher Robin Hanson and author Kevin Simler look at how the human brain is built to act in our own self-interest while trying not to appear selfish to others. Consequently, **our brains' actions are driven by two main motives: selfishness and self-deception. As human beings, the majority of us refuse to face reality if it challenges**

**our own prejudices because questioning what we have been taught or the biases we hold requires an enormous effort, while it is easy not to think or to stick stubbornly to our own beliefs.**

Remaining true to our beliefs offers a form of intellectual comfort. Challenging our beliefs not only means losing our bearings, but also clashing with those who promote the status quo. Therefore, disruptive ideas that cast doubt on many beliefs are seen as first stupid, then dangerous, and eventually become part of the norm once evidence of their validity seems indisputable. In the first part of this letter, we cited two books by the Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti. In a third book<sup>3</sup>, the author addresses this notion of intellectual comfort. In his view, beliefs and prejudices are divisive because **the human mind is constantly looking for psychological security. It seeks to evade uncertainty, which generates fear. Certainty reassures us in what we know, what we experience and in the relationships we hold. It protects us from anything that might upset us. It is this desire for certainty that prevents us from asking ourselves the questions we need to be free.**

These words should ring true to entrepreneurs who, to some extent, seek to break free from existing practices to tweak them into something that will create value. According to Krishnamurti, those who seek the truth reject the authority of any book or person. They are continually dissatisfied. Individuals

<sup>2</sup>. The Elephant in the Brain: Hidden Motives in Everyday Life – Robin Hanson, Kevin Simler – 2018

<sup>3</sup>. Jiddu Krishnamurti – Liberation through Action – a transcript of discussions held between 1949 and 1950

who are satisfied with money, status and ideas are blinded to the truth. Only dissatisfied individuals seek, observe, question and can visualise the truth. Self-deception is therefore strategic. It is a stratagem used by our brains to create an illusion, setting aside our own beliefs and accepting the shackles of education or religion; in other words, the norm. Fear sometimes makes it preferable to **ignore the truth that is staring us in the face. It is a defence mechanism.** Strategic ignorance offers the comfort of not having to challenge our own prejudices. It would seem, therefore, that the division of humanity is rooted in fear. In a series of lectures given at the University of Nantes<sup>4</sup>, medical professor Thierry Patrice attributes wickedness – a human trait not found in any other known life form – to fear.

## FEAR

**“FEAR LEADS TO ANGER. ANGER LEADS TO HATE. HATE LEADS TO SUFFERING. FEAR IS THE PATH TO THE DARK SIDE.”**  
MASTER YODA – STAR WARS

The famous Star Wars trilogy may be an entertaining work of fiction, but this reference to fear is particularly interesting. The study of fear by philosophers is not a recent phenomenon. Thierry Patrice explains that human beings alone in nature are physically weak in every area needed for survival: speed, resistance and sensory reactivity. We are fragile. In order to survive, we are therefore compelled to group together, but we do not like living in a society. To do so, we must accept the rules



## ONLY DISSATISFIED INDIVIDUALS SEEK, OBSERVE, QUESTION AND CAN VISUALISE THE TRUTH

of group living: morality, an important concept appearing in Adam Smith's views<sup>5</sup> in what remains “the Bible of capitalism” to this day<sup>6</sup>. Pierre-Henri Tavoillot, a philosopher and professor at the Sorbonne<sup>7</sup>, argues that the most solid foundation of morality is that human beings cannot live in society without it. Those who do not abide by moral standards are condemned on the grounds that life would be impossible if everybody did as they do. Morality is therefore necessary, but not necessarily fair. Morality alone is not enough. It does not prevent suffering, fear or regret, but it does allow us all to grow together by creating a kind of collective glue. Morality, therefore, serves the purpose of offering a life in society that is acceptable to the majority. For the famous naturalist Charles Darwin<sup>8</sup>, humans are fragile beings whose species has only been able to survive through developing social instincts, first in small groups and then by expanding the circle. A tribe united in solidarity is more

4. La méchanceté est-elle le propre de l'Homme ? (Is wickedness a human trait?) – Thierry Patrice, YouTube 2015 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPvltkvi3jc>
5. Tikehau CIO letter – Human after all, September 2022
6. The Wealth of Nations – Adam Smith, 1776
7. The Moral of This Story – Pierre-Henri Tavoillot, 2020
8. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* – Charles Darwin, 1890

likely to prevail in the event of conflict. For Darwin, morality is therefore not a sign of human superiority, but a natural evolutionary process. The difficulty in complying with these rules leads to wickedness. This is because being forced to compensate for our natural weaknesses by living in society breeds fear of “the Other”, fear of missing out and fear of dying. On a different note, the cyclist Guillaume Martin argues in his book “La société du Peloton” (The Society of the Peloton)<sup>9</sup> that cycle racing, which consists of selecting team members who all contribute their individual qualities to support the leader, reveals something about human nature: “We are selfish and solitary beings, but we can’t do anything without the collective”. Humans are social animals, not because they like to be, but because they have to be, and the fear of cooperation breeds wickedness.

In his book “Éloge de la peur” (In Praise of Fear)<sup>10</sup>, mountain lover Gérard Guerrier examines this feeling, which is reportedly responsible for our resistance to step out of our comfort zone. In the ‘fear hierarchy’, genuine risks are distorted disproportionately. For example, the fear of terrorism far outweighs the fear of dying in a traffic accident although the odds of being in a car crash are much higher. In fact, responses to fear are less and less collective. The prevalence of traditional social units such as parishes, sports clubs and neighbourhood associations is declining. Solidarity is delegated to the state, the authorities, the internet and voice bots answering “model questions”. Having thousands of friends on

social media is not enough to stop people from being left alone to face their fears. The author cites the work of American psychology researcher Jean Marie Twenge, who argues that the world has entered an age of fear. As it were, in the United States, fear is the second most common reason for consulting a psychologist after depression. But why? In a world that is actually far safer than it used to be, it is unsurprising that the threshold for fear is higher in settings where people risk their lives every day. Gérard Guerrier points out that the concept of stress was unheard of until the 1950s. Feelings of fear do not, therefore, diminish with development and progress – quite the contrary. **And therein lies the problem: to overcome the risk of total destruction of the human race by our own technology, we will have to face our fear of “the Other”, fear of missing out and fear of dying in order to adopt an inclusive approach that will allow us to use knowledge for collaborative value creation rather than for confrontation or competition.** Here we can clearly see the importance of the human factor. J. Krishnamurti supports this idea. For him<sup>11</sup>, **fear arises when we have an incomplete understanding of our relationships. We relate to people, nature and ideas. “As long as that relationship is not fully understood, there must be fear. To be is to be related and without relationship there is no life. So long as the mind is seeking isolation, there must be**

9. La société du peloton – Guillaume Martin, 2021

10. Éloge de la peur – Gérard Guerrier, 2019

11. Jiddu Krishnamurti – The First and Last Freedom, 1975



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**TO BE IS TO BE RELATED  
AND WITHOUT  
RELATIONSHIP THERE IS  
NO LIFE. SO LONG AS THE  
MIND IS SEEKING ISOLATION,  
THERE MUST BE FEAR**

**fear. There can be freedom from fear only when there is self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom, which is the ending of fear.”**

In other words, overcoming fear first requires self-knowledge. Fears give rise to beliefs and prejudices, which cause wars. If we had no beliefs, but consideration for others instead, there would be no war. Kindness and goodwill come from self-knowledge, and primarily from keeping our ego in check. **Our ego motivates us to overcome our fears so we seem brave. However, it distances us from reality and our true abilities as it glorifies appearances. Self-esteem becomes dependent on other people’s opinions and this can lead to dangerous situations. The freedom derived from overcoming our fears thus requires self-work.**

Those who can see clearly take the risk and step out of their comfort zone (the Cave) to face reality, even if that means questioning everything they know. According to the mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell<sup>12</sup>: “If thought is to become the possession of many, not the privilege of the few, we must have done with fear. It is fear

that holds men back. (...) No institution inspired by fear can further life.”

**Individuals who are unwilling or unable to go to the trouble of leaving the Cave and challenging their prejudices fall back on two simplistic narratives to explain the world: conspiracy and war, two acts that result in humanity’s division into castes.**

The combination of the two offers a simple, universal frame of reference. Conspiracy makes it possible to interpret the world without stopping to reflect and understand the intricacies that give rise to individual behaviour. It explains everything yet proves nothing, which is what makes it so accessible. War makes it possible to blame every evil on a unifying enemy, which is reassuring as the enemy is then at least known. Everything is explained in terms of a fight between the good guys and the bad guys, concealed behind the pretence of a clash of civilisations, religious confrontation or civil war. According to Russell: “If men’s actions sprang from desires for what would in fact bring happiness, the purely rational arguments against war would have long ago put an end to it.”

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**NO INSTITUTION  
INSPIRED BY FEAR  
CAN FURTHER LIFE**

<sup>12</sup>. Principles of Social Reconstruction – Bertrand Russell, 1916

# The Bad

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In Part 1 of this letter<sup>13</sup>, we discussed the theory that the main driver of economic value creation may lie in human nature, which turns individuals into reckless predators unable to control their thirst for conquest, accumulation and domination over nature and their fellow human beings. The notorious exploitation of humans by other humans. Looking back over thirty centuries of war, extortion and subjugation, explained by human beings' inability to shake off fear, this apparently simplistic explanation begins to appear more credible. The quote from Sergio Leone's film that opens this letter perfectly symbolises the exploitation of humans by other humans. **However, we will see that this simplistic explanation is little more than an illusion and that the main reason for this suffering may lie in our growing distance with the living world.**

The origins of subjugation date back to around 11,000 BC, with the advent of food production! At that time, the peoples of the world still lived in hunter-gatherer societies. In some parts of the world, wild plants and animals were starting to be domesticated during this period, leading to

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## THE FIRST TRACES OF SUBJUGATION CAN BE FOUND IN FOOD PRODUCTION

the consumption of livestock products and crops. The first traces of subjugation can be found in food production. How is this so? The American anthropologist Jared Diamond explains how in his book “Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies”<sup>14</sup>: in hunter-gatherer societies, leaders had no privileges and lived in the same type of dwellings as other members of society. Decisions were made simply: there was no need for any specific organisation as every individual provided for their own needs. Agricultural production soon led to demand for specialist skills, such as those needed for

<sup>13</sup>. Tikehau CIO letter – Human after all, September 2022

<sup>14</sup>. Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies – Jared Diamond, 1997



irrigation work or equipment manufacturing. Guilds emerged. Specialists were unable to meet their own basic needs on their own, so a class of politicians, bureaucrats and financiers rose up to coordinate society. As organisation became more structured, leaders began taking on more responsibility and relying on other members of the community for provisions. By selecting and cultivating plant and animal species, and then using natural fertilisers and animals to increase agricultural yields, the proportion of edible biomass on a given piece of land rose from an initially tiny percentage to a significant share. This resulted in the production of significantly more food to feed peasants, soldiers, workers and the clergy. From that point on, populations settled near their production areas and became denser; storage, which had been unknown to the nomadic hunter-gatherers until then, began to be used. Food stocks were essential to feed soldiers, bureaucrats and priests – who were not involved in production – which explains why hunter-gatherer societies never had armies. Proximity to the animals led to an increase in diseases such as measles and influenza, which decimated communities but also triggered the production of antibodies absent from population groups who did not engage in food production. The need for storage brought about developments in accounting and literacy. From then on, a political elite could take control of the food supplies produced by others. Writing first appeared in the Sumer civilisation in 6,000 BC, but its primary

purpose was far from educating the masses. On the contrary, writing was initially used by scribes for agricultural accounting and became an instrument of subjugation. Later on, writing gave the conquistadors a significant advantage during the colonisation of the New World as it allowed them to circulate information quickly, while the native peoples did not have this ability. Priests provided religious justification for wars, workers produced weapons and animals could be used as a mode of transport to travel longer distances. Colonisation was facilitated by a combination of the germs exported to conquered areas, the production of weapons and the ability to read and write; this theory is as surprising as it is reassuring, as it effectively eliminates any suggestion of racial superiority of Whites over other peoples. The colonisation of the world by Whites can therefore be explained through geographical factors: the sheer scope of Eurasia, the mild Mediterranean climate and the changing seasons allowed a greater number of plants and animals suitable for domestication to grow than anywhere else. **This is how a civilisation capable of colonisation and subjugation was born through food production. A civilisation based on norms, standards and law, which overlooked the traditional, intuitive knowledge of the conquered peoples.** This is why Jared Diamond points to the advent of food production in Asia Minor and Europe around 11,000 BC as the primary explanation for European domination of the world from the Renaissance onwards.

## DEBT AND SUBJUGATION

The first traces of debt appeared in Mesopotamia around 5,000 years ago. Archaeologists have found evidence of debt restructuring in the region between lenders from the ruling class and borrowers from among the populace. Surprised? Not if we bear in mind that **the economy in Mesopotamia was not isolated from social ties**. Debt was one facet of community life, and cancelling or restructuring debt was part of social relations. But the situation changed when private moneylenders appeared. Rome was the first ancient society where lenders were not necessarily public or royal figures. The first traces of violence between the strong and the weak justified by debt appeared around this time. In the 2nd century, 25% of the population of Rome was enslaved because of debt problems. Debt between people of the same rank could be negotiated, but if the balance of power was unequal, debt was a legitimate reason for violence. Since then, debt problems have become the leading cause of revolt in the history of humanity, far ahead of any other reason. Non-repayment of debts serves as justification for crime when the lender is a mobster or tyrant, or for imprisonment or expropriation when the lender is in a position of power. **When the human factor is taken out of debt, lenders can easily become torturers. It is clear, then, that levels of violence in social relations increase when the human factor is removed and communication breaks down.**



## THE CRIMINALISATION OF POVERTY IS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE DIVISION OF HUMANKIND INTO CASTES

This dehumanisation of debt leads to abuse. **By criminalising poverty and imprisoning bad borrowers, a market economy detached from the human factor creates a section of the population that is easy to subjugate and exploit.** As in the Renaissance, when multiple conquistadors made their fortunes by going into debt and then freely exploiting a resource that could be “monetised”, the Industrial Revolution saw the same money-making schemes occur simultaneously: entrepreneurs quickly founded economic empires, due in part to their talent but also to their exploitation of a workforce that was insufficiently compensated for the added value of the work performed. In those days, huge industrial fortunes stood in stark contrast with abject poverty among a working class whose social status was not far removed from slavery. **The criminalisation of poverty is a consequence of the division of humankind into castes.** The poor are seen as inferior, unsuccessful or lazy. This rhetoric can even be found in some ultra-liberal theses. They are mocked by all, including the political class that is supposed to protect them. They are accused of being welfare leeches. The ruling class does not want to be associated with them because they do not contribute anything. They are not the

stuff of dreams. They do not help society shine. We would rather say that we know a rich person, even if all they have done in their life is inherit, than mention a poor person whom nobody knows.

This demonisation of the poor with the intent to divide society can be found in papers by James Madison, fourth President of the United States from 1809 to 1817. In “Profit Over People”<sup>15</sup>, MIT professor and libertarian writer Noam Chomsky cites Madison, who considers the state’s main responsibility to be “to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority”, “in a just and a free government the rights both of property and of persons ought to be effectually guarded.” The Madisonian principle is that the government must safeguard the rights of people in general, but must also provide special and additional guarantees for the rights of a particular class of people: property owners. Madison foresaw that the threat to democracy was likely to become more severe over time because of the increase in “the proportion of those who will labor under all the hardships of life, and secretly sigh for a more equal distribution of its blessings.” He was therefore concerned by the “symptoms of a leveling spirit” and warned of the danger of placing “power over property in hands without a share in it”. “Those without property, or the hope of acquiring it, cannot be expected to sympathize sufficiently with its rights.” His solution, therefore, was to keep political power in the hands of those who “come from and represent the wealth of the nation” and “the more capable set of men” rather than the fragmented, disorganised general public.

## CONSPIRACY AND WAR

We have explained that the human brain’s tendency to refuse to stray from its beliefs and prejudices in a quest to find the truth was reinforced by two comforting concepts: conspiracy and war. The French historian Raoul Girardet<sup>16</sup> states that conspiracy theories originate from the search for a hidden reason that provides a simple explanation for facts that are complex or result from a series of factors. “There’s no smoke without fire” is their basic principle. They are an oversimplification aimed at winning over a group of people who are seeking a simple explanation. These theories answer all questions simply and provide the missing links required to justify the distress or trauma of target groups. Conspiracy theories have proven to be very useful to influential groups throughout history, whether they belong to the ruling class or those seeking to destabilise it. In all cases, they are powerful tools for dividing and partitioning humanity. War is no less powerful as a tool of division, as it allows an enemy to be constructed who can be accused of every evil and used to rally a community. The French diplomat Pierre Conesa<sup>17</sup> looked into the techniques used to manufacture an enemy. He observes that an enemy is a construct, a sociological and political process. An enemy represents a social need: “it is another self that must be made into an Other, that must be

15. Profit Over People – Noam Chomsky, 2004

16. Mythe et mythologies politiques (Myths and Political Mythologies) – Raoul Girardet, 1986

17. The Making of the Enemy – Pierre Conesa, 2011

tarnished and made threatening in order to justify using violence.” Preparing and readying people’s minds when selecting an enemy is highly important in building collective support. The enemy is identified in the name of the public interest, so war is not merely the prerogative of a glory-seeking ruler but a matter for the whole population. Contrary to what we might have been told, democracy does not in itself bring peace. If it did, colonisation in the 19th and 20th centuries or the “just wars” in the 21st century would not have occurred. The role of the elite is more significant than the nature of the regime. There are authoritarian regimes that are not hostile, while some democracies that cite duty of obedience or duties of the police are particularly aggressive. All democracies need enemies to cement national unity and divert people’s attention. This is probably why Alexander Arbatov, diplomatic adviser to Mikhail Gorbachev, told the American diplomats with whom he was discussing the terms for dismantling the Iron Curtain in 1989: “We shall render you the worst possible service, we shall deprive you of an enemy.”

**Violence is therefore rooted in reality, but also in ideological constructs, perceptions or misunderstandings. An enemy is a construct.** To kill another human being requires conditioning, seeking out an argument to justify the act. Before examining the different forms of violence, it is worth looking at how it is rendered acceptable and legitimate. **“History is always written by the winners. What is history, but**

**a fable agreed upon?”** This famous quote by Napoleon applies not only to the history of nations, but also to the global imposition of the capitalist model associated with the notions of freedom and prosperity. In this way, the European powers that colonised the world were able to write a history of technological progress and development that erased all local distinctiveness and ancestral traditions preceding the rise of this progress. Traditional techniques were therefore wiped out and looked down on. Although progress gives humanity a sense of elevation, it also prevents us from seeing everything that has been lost. According to the Italian professor of anthropology, Stefano Boni<sup>18</sup>, “Any decline established by economic indicators is perceived as a worrying phenomenon since our system is built on the principle of exponential and infinite growth. The beatification of technological advances stems from society’s inability to take a critical look at the reassuring dogma of continuous, beneficial growth.” Those who do not have access to modern technology are considered underdeveloped and backward. People who dared to question the legitimacy of progress were marginalised or isolated, some even massacred or turned into a tourist attraction. Their opposition to the prevailing model is condemned as an ideological reaction. They are kept out of public debate to ensure that their vision is suppressed.

<sup>18</sup>. Homo Comfort – Stefano Boni, 2019

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## IF WE FEEL LONELY, IT IS BECAUSE INDIVIDUALISM DESTROYS TRADITIONAL SOLIDARITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

In almost every sphere of life, it is clear that extreme individualism results in conflict. Each side sincerely believes that they are entitled to see their ideas triumph. If we feel lonely, it is because individualism destroys traditional solidarities and relationships. Individualistic capitalism makes the individual sacred, but they no longer have anyone around them. Individuals are supposed to be equal and worthy, yet they feel deprived and disregarded. **Everyone is invited to join a clan, a community that will find enemies and use conspiracy narratives to justify its hardships and moral distress.**

In short, human suffering and wickedness are rooted in the fear of missing out, the fear of “the Other” and the fear of dying. This fear gives rise to the division of humanity and knowledge in such a way that the different castes created by this division lock themselves away in their beliefs and prejudices, their own Plato’s Cave. This confinement breeds violence, which is amplified by the removal of the human factor from the concept

of debt. Conspiracy and war conveniently do the rest, providing simple explanations for our concerns and the enemies responsible for them. This brutality, symbolised by “The Bad” from Sergio Leone’s film, goes hand in hand with the primitive state sustained by impostors, who will be represented here as “The Ugly”. Who are these impostors? They are individuals who seek to maintain humanity in a divided state, often in an attempt to preserve their own privileges.

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## HUMAN SUFFERING AND WICKEDNESS ARE ROOTED IN THE FEAR OF MISSING OUT, THE FEAR OF “THE OTHER” AND THE FEAR OF DYING

# The Ugly

14

**A**fter subjugation by force, the development of the democratic model in the industrial age gave rise to new forms of conflict and cooperation. Over the course of the 19th century, the transition from coal to oil as the main source of energy for economic development led to a significant acceleration in value creation. Oil's incredible energy efficiency made it possible to boost labour power by using machines and reducing the workforce. The violent subjugation of conquered or colonised peoples thereby became less of a priority compared with securing access to oil concessions. The forms of colonial control therefore shifted from military order to the capitalist one<sup>19</sup>. This strategy was made possible by the contribution of technology. The ability to transport or carry military power by plane and to impose their culture by radio, television and cinema enabled the great economic powers to develop a new, less formal kind of subjugation based on voluntary servitude in a democratic regime. Less costly in terms of military expenditure and more effective than

physical violence, **this type of subjugation can only work if the dominated people are deprived of informal social ties and if individuals take pleasure in the comfort of being “informed” rather than thinking for themselves.** Let's focus on the mechanisms that allow a ruling class to create this state of voluntary servitude.

## EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SERVITUDE

In order for the mind to be conditioned, effective education is essential. Education is a sensitive issue as it determines whether the individual receiving it is motivated to think independently, at the risk of becoming dangerous to the educator, or is encouraged to stick with the status quo. The matter is all the more delicate when it concerns religion, politics or the rules governing life in society. One of the philosophers who advocated

<sup>19</sup>. Oil, Power, and War: A Dark History – Matthieu Auzanneau, 2015



independent thinking, British mathematician Bertrand Russell<sup>20</sup> made an observation that unsettled “academic” thinking was pronounced at the time when the First World War was raging. In formal education, if children were treated individually, educators would not try to make them adhere to a specific ideology or religion. They would attempt to make them think, not through their teachers but by using their own brains. Children should be educated with the knowledge and mindset necessary to form an independent opinion. This requires a deep respect for personality. In Russell’s opinion, disregard for a child’s personality in education is unfortunately widespread around the world; children are encouraged to subscribe to an economic, political, religious or even social ideology. We teach them about the history and literature of our own country, but not about those of other countries. Emphasis is placed on the merits of our own nation, our own religion and the faults of others. “It comes to be universally believed that one’s own nation, because of its superiority, deserves support in a quarrel, however the quarrel may have originated.” In his view, preserving the status quo is the main objective of education everywhere: to ensure a child fits a mould so that they accept the rules of the current system and to guarantee that they will convince themselves that their own community is good while all the others are bad. “To be ordinary, and to acquire the art of getting on, is the ideal which is set before the youthful mind, except by a few rare teachers who have enough energy of belief to break through the system within

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**EDUCATION OUGHT TO FOSTER THE WISH FOR TRUTH, NOT THE CONVICTION THAT SOME PARTICULAR CREED IS THE TRUTH**

which they are expected to work.” For Russell, the greatest institutions and schools instil a worship of “good form” in most of their students, which is “as destructive to life and thought as the medieval Church”. Good form creates “assurance of its own rightness, and its belief that correct manners are more to be desired than intellect, or artistic creation, or vital energy, or any of the other sources of progress in the world”. “Education ought to foster the wish for truth, not the conviction that some particular creed is the truth.” This sentence is perhaps the most significant. The problem is that it is creeds that hold men together in fighting organisations: churches, states, political parties. **It is intense faith in a belief that produces efficient fighting.** Victory comes to those who feel the strongest certainty, with no room for doubt, yet doubt is the only rational attitude. **In other words, an authority will always prefer not to question its beliefs and to be wrong, rather than seek the necessary balance in the quest for truth.**

<sup>20</sup>. Principles of Social Reconstruction – Bertrand Russell, 1916

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## MEN FEAR THOUGHT AS THEY FEAR NOTHING ELSE ON EARTH—MORE THAN RUIN, MORE EVEN THAN DEATH

“Perfect assurance, by itself, is enough to destroy all mental progress in those who have it. The result is the domination of prejudice and the inability to develop alternative ideas in children who are taught in this spirit. And when good form is combined with contempt for the angularities and awkwardnesses that are almost invariably associated with great mental power, it becomes a source of destruction to all who come in contact with it. Good form is itself dead and incapable of growth; and by its attitude to those who are without it it spreads its own death to many who might otherwise have life. The harm which it has done to well-to-do Englishmen, and to men whose abilities have led the well-to-do to notice them, is incalculable.” These views are echoed in essays and papers written by the authors of “The Elephant in the Brain”<sup>21</sup>. **If higher education could explain the value of the university, then why not franchise the Ivy League?** Why not allow more students to benefit from it? This will never happen because the best schools are put on such a pedestal as a result of zero-sum competition. It appears that the governments with the greatest need to indoctrinate their citizens pay for more schools.

**Teachers systematically reward children for their obedience. Children are also trained to accept being assessed, graded and ranked, often in front of others. This operation, which typically continues for over a decade, serves as a systematic exercise in human domestication.** According to Bertrand Russell: “Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth—more than ruin, more even than death. (...) Better men should be stupid, slothful, and oppressive than that their thoughts should be free. For if their thoughts were free they might not think as we do.” Thoughts have no pity for privilege, established institutions and regulated behaviours. “Thought looks into the pit of hell and is not afraid. It sees man, a feeble speck, surrounded by unfathomable depths of silence.”

But education is not enough. It is also necessary for adults to remain committed to this form of servitude. In his books “La fabrique des imposteurs” (The Factory of Impostors)<sup>22</sup> and “La fabrique de nos servitudes” (The Factory of Our Servitudes)<sup>23</sup>, the sociologist Roland Gori explores these concepts and asserts that **this state of voluntary servitude is made possible through globalisation, by imposing a Western culture based on practical and formal rationality, i.e., law and standards, which supersedes the informal ties between individuals. This is what enabled the rise of the great Western powers and their domination**

<sup>21</sup>. The Elephant in the Brain – Robin Hanson, Kevin Simler – 2018

<sup>22</sup>. La fabrique des imposteurs – Roland Gori, 2013

<sup>23</sup>. La fabrique de nos servitudes – Roland Gori, 2022

over the world, first through colonisation and then through globalisation. According to Roland Gori, in order to promote voluntary servitude, freedom in the sense of interaction with others has been reduced to a version of freedom confined to private spaces and reduced to seeking pleasure in consumption. From here on, **happiness no longer resides in interaction with others but in possession and consumption.** The value of things is reduced to their market value. Gross Domestic Product therefore becomes the main measure of happiness, and we saw in the Part 1 of this letter how using this indicator alone makes it possible to assert, with supporting evidence, that economic development creates wealth for the vast majority of human beings. **By removing the human factor from the economic equation, individualism is outweighed by consumer self-indulgence, which reduces happiness to the market value of what can be freely consumed.**



**HAPPINESS NO LONGER RESIDES IN INTERACTION WITH OTHERS BUT IN POSSESSION AND CONSUMPTION**



**TRUE FREEDOM LIES IN THE HUMAN FACTOR**

## FREEDOM

Let's pause for a moment to consider the vital concept of freedom. Freedom, in the traditional sense of the word, is inseparable from the notion of human dignity. For the philosopher Hannah Arendt, **"the life of a free man required the presence of others"**<sup>24</sup>. **This therefore has nothing to do with the modern Western concept of freedom, which is to enjoy our material possessions privately and do or consume whatever we want without anyone objecting.** In other words, true freedom lies in the human factor. **Freedom in the Western, democratic sense is no longer anything more than a prescribed rhetoric employed as a pretext for promoting voluntary social submission.** You must behave in a certain way to be free and happy. The German playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote<sup>25</sup>: "Nothing is worse than covert slavery. For if slavery were evident, if it were recognised for what it was, there would, at least in principle, be another state: that of freedom. But if actual slavery were called freedom by all, freedom would no longer even be conceivable. Not only would enslavement become a natural state, but freedom would become an unnatural one."

<sup>24</sup>. Roland Gori – Faut-il renoncer à la liberté pour être heureux ? (Do we have to give up freedom to be happy?) – YouTube

<sup>25</sup>. Bertolt Brecht – Writings on Politics and Society, 1967



The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze expanded on this concept in his work on societies of control, which we will discuss later<sup>26</sup>: the defining characteristic of freedom is connection. Servitude is the absence of connection. In an authoritarian or slave-owning regime, the aim is to cut the ties between people so that they are deprived of their capacity for dialogue or debate and are more receptive to the information they are provided, i.e., the instructions they are given. **Freedom has nothing to do with our ability to do what we want. Freedom is the potential to create informal bonds with our fellow human beings. By contrast, the freedom marketed by an economic model stripped of the human factor is a projection, a virtual freedom that brings pleasure rather than happiness.**

**THE DEFINING  
CHARACTERISTIC  
OF FREEDOM IS  
CONNECTION.  
SERVITUDE IS  
THE ABSENCE  
OF CONNECTION**

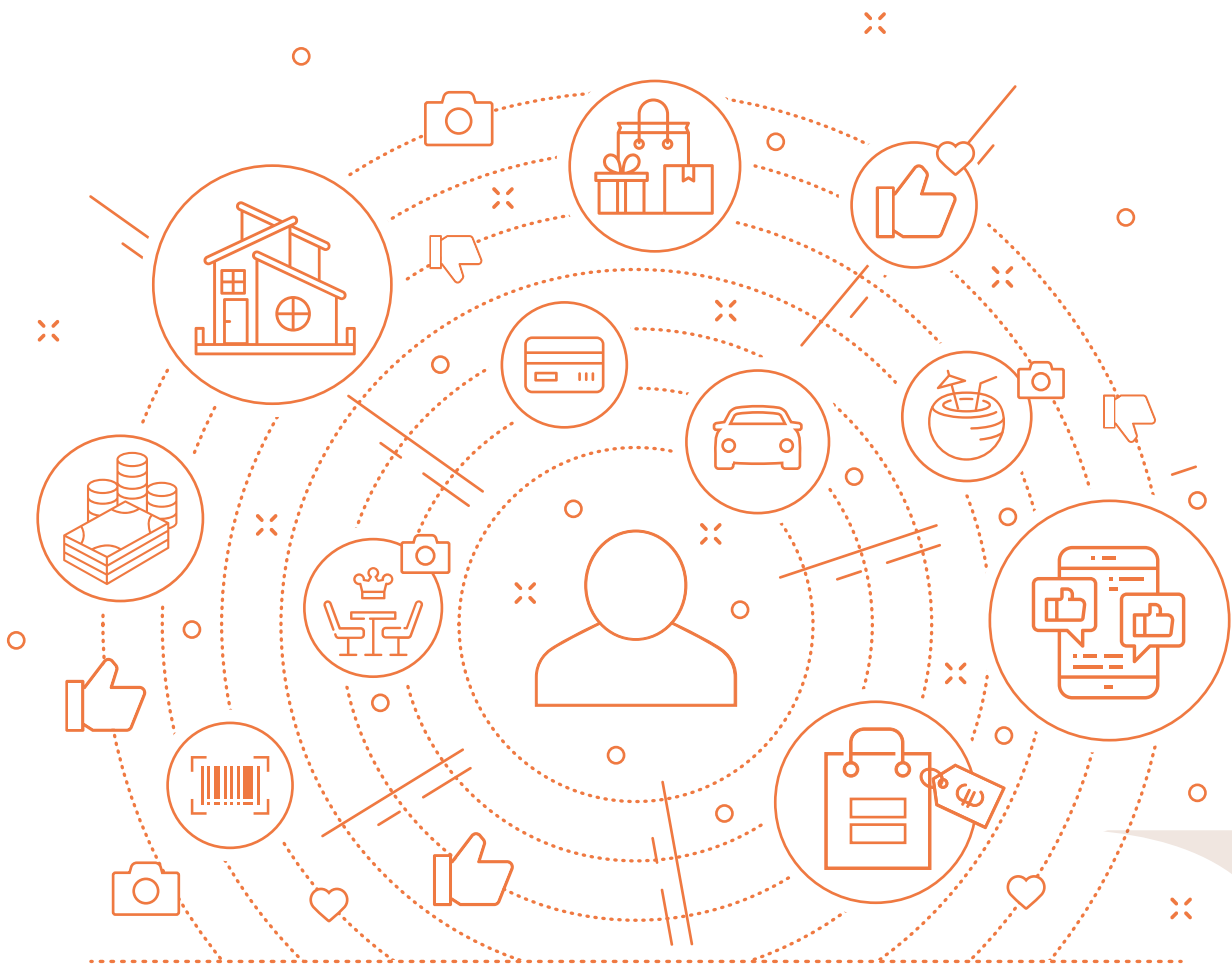
addiction. Pleasure is linked to the notion of “taking” and “receiving”, whereas happiness is associated with “giving”. Our reaction to pleasure is “that’s nice, I want more”, while our reaction to happiness is more along the lines of “that’s nice but I don’t want any more because I don’t need it”. According to Dr Lustig, nothing that can be bought is capable of generating this feeling of happiness. In his eyes, interpersonal connections are what create happiness because physical interaction causes serotonin to be secreted. Empathy, for example, is triggered by this neurotransmitter. Social media, however, is not a source of happiness as it offers no physical interaction and is governed by “likes” that deliver pleasure in the form of dopamine and lead to addiction. Consumerism has transformed the notion of wellbeing from a state achieved through spiritual exercises to a hedonism related to the idea of pleasure. **Wellbeing is understood not only as an expression of economic affluence closely linked**

## HAPPINESS OR PLEASURE?

In “The Hacking of the American Mind”, Dr Robert Lustig<sup>27</sup>, Professor of Paediatric Endocrinology in the United States, differentiates between happiness and pleasure from a chemical viewpoint. He identifies two very different neurotransmitters: serotonin and dopamine. Both of these neurotransmitters are produced by the neurons in the brain. Serotonin regulates our mood and feelings of happiness. Dopamine generates feelings of pleasure, but it also triggers aggression. Dopamine stimulates the neurons. Serotonin is an inhibitor so it cannot stimulate the neurons, unlike dopamine. Dopamine encourages us to increase our dose of pleasure, making us want more, which leads to

<sup>26</sup>. <https://iphilo.fr/2018/01/12/gilles-deleuze-linformation-cest-la-societe-de-controle/>

<sup>27</sup>. The Hacking of the American Mind – Dr Robert Lustig, 2017



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**CONSUMERISM HAS TRANSFORMED THE NOTION OF WELLBEING FROM A STATE ACHIEVED THROUGH SPIRITUAL EXERCISES TO A HEDONISM RELATED TO THE IDEA OF PLEASURE**

**to wealth, but also as a harmonious physical and mental state.** The objective of consumerism is to arouse feelings of permanent dissatisfaction or even frustration, pushing consumers to constantly covet a product or service that they do not have. This is the idea behind “upgraded” versions of products. Even if the improvement is paltry, consumerism seeks to trigger a

sense of inferiority among consumers, making them feel like social misfits until they have purchased the product.

The impacts of our economic model go beyond homogenisation and massification. It does more than just artificially create new desires and needs. It reinforces our drive to seek a more intense, enjoyable life. The world of

television and cinema supplies aesthetic poetry like a soft drug to individuals subjected to the prosaic nature of everyday life. It offers a playful, intense, loving, adventurous life by proxy. The development of globalised civilisation has led to intellectual, affective and moral underdevelopment. Robert Lustig goes on to explain that our industrialised food culture, heralded as a sign of progress, causes dependence and addiction, especially to sugar. Food standards agencies have allowed multinationals in the food industry to fuel this addiction (for example, by authorising manufacturers to label sugar in more than 50 different ways). This addiction generates income for the sector, but it also causes diseases (cancer, obesity, diabetes) that the pharmaceutical industry seeks to cure. Through this addiction, the continuation of intensive agriculture, monoculture and the fertiliser and pesticide industry can also be guaranteed. Healthy food (vegetables produced using sustainable agriculture with short supply chains) does not lead to addiction. This lifestyle contributes to perpetuating the population's dependence on consumer society. Addiction to food preserves this relationship of domination, whereas healthy food paves the way for emancipation. Roland Gori confirms this, citing philosopher Hannah Arendt: "Making a better place for ourselves to live in this world has changed the world but has caused us to lose sight of the meaning of life. We want to live as well as possible in a standardised, globalised system, but we have overlooked the meaning of life."



**MAKING A BETTER PLACE FOR OURSELVES TO LIVE IN THIS WORLD HAS CHANGED THE WORLD BUT HAS CAUSED US TO LOSE SIGHT OF THE MEANING OF LIFE. WE WANT TO LIVE AS WELL AS POSSIBLE IN A STANDARDISED, GLOBALISED SYSTEM, BUT WE HAVE OVERLOOKED THE MEANING OF LIFE**

**It seems, then, that it is the human factor that produces feelings of happiness through respect for "the Other" and the natural world.** This may explain why people do not suffer from depression in poorer societies with strong human bonds and ties to nature. Western economy is based on pleasure (which Roland Gori refers to as hedonism) rather than on happiness. As for our economic model based on GDP, which dominates nature and converts natural resources into consumable goods and services, and has thereby led to the destruction of local solidarity and informal relationships, it offers a level of material comfort that marketers call "happiness". However, this happiness is far-removed from traditional understandings and from modern scientific knowledge of how the feeling of happiness is generated in the brain. Degrowth economist Serge Latouche<sup>28</sup> speaks of

<sup>28</sup>. Le temps de la décroissance (Time for Degrowth) – Serge Latouche, Didier Harpagès – 2010



an ideological shift: “The useful has become a litmus test for the good and the useful is understood as material improvement. We slide sequentially from happiness to wellbeing and from wellbeing to wealth.”



**WE SLIDE SEQUENTIALLY  
FROM HAPPINESS TO  
WELLBEING AND FROM  
WELLBEING TO WEALTH**

## THE SOCIETY OF CONTROL

So, what conditions must be in place to keep a population in this state of servitude without physical violence? In Part 1 of the letter, we saw how consumer society developed in sixteenth-century England with the enclosures and the expulsion of self-sufficient peasants to the cities in order to transform them into workers forced to take on debt to buy what they had once produced for free to feed themselves. When economic actors lose their freedom of choice and their independence to generate economic growth, consumer society finds its salvation in debt. The use of credit allows the middle classes to consume practically everything that is available. Yet this consumerist dream is combined with a form of cultural servitude that is linked to the excessive promotion of consumption.

**In a consumer society, not consuming or not having the latest fashionable product can be perceived as a weakness or a kind of failure.** Purchasing on credit is preferable to not purchasing at all. Societies that produce consumer goods increase their revenues by shortening the product cycle and creating needs among consumers, sometimes to the point of making them forget that they do not really need the product. Is buying very expensive painkillers that may be too strong and prove toxic for

obese patients without doing anything to change their lifestyle the only solution? Planned obsolescence is the outcome of this phenomenon despite making little sense in terms of consumers' interests, manufacturers' reputations and environmental concerns. This planned obsolescence can be a source of human tragedy. GMOs are one example of this, showing that even life itself may be viewed as a commodity. By destroying a plant's ability to reproduce, its seed is turned into a consumer good that farmers must purchase every year, often on credit, to obtain their harvest. This is a form of servitude comparable to the expropriation of English farmers in the 16th century, as it changes their ability to live off their land and draws them into an economic system in which they are forced to take on debt to purchase what they were previously able to obtain for free through their own labour. This alienation is combined with the purchase of pesticides to which plants have become immune. These products deplete the soil and their cost pushes farmers into debt. The failure of this model is clear from the high suicide rates in the agricultural sector in both developed and developing countries. In the 20th century, the creation of non-vital needs as part of a consumer culture based on debt was

a major factor in deepening inequality, leading to the emergence of vast fortunes and to the impoverishment of certain sectors of the population, comparable to a kind of servitude: slaves to consumption who have lost all ability to meet their own needs, with disastrous consequences for the environment as an added bonus.

As we have seen, education plays a fundamental role in keeping a population in Plato's Cave, in a state of voluntary servitude. Consumer culture also plays a part, making people dependent on debt and addicted to purchasing goods and services that they do not need. But in order to maintain this system, the ruling class needs to establish a society of control, and it does so rather perversely by using technology. Technology appears when we think about the means but not the ends. Bureaucracy is a relatively pure illustration of technology's reign. It blurs the boundaries between what makes citizens' lives easier and what controls them, between what improves their lives and what overwhelms them. Artificial intelligence is another example of technology with similar characteristics. We hand over our personal data for our own good, but it can also be used against us. Bureaucracy and artificial intelligence are two examples of how technology can result in the alienation of freedom and the establishment of a kind of despotism.

In Part 1 of this letter, we broke down Walter Lippmann's theory of neoliberalism, which consists of controlling a population incapable of adapting to the capitalist economic model on its

own by imposing the norm and relying on the media and experts to tell people what they should think. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze theorised the society of control. In a 1987 interview<sup>29</sup>, he said: "When you are informed, you are told what you are supposed to believe. In other words, informing means circulating a watchword... Information is a system of control." Control is achieved through the gradual suppression of what makes us human, or in other words, the practices that encourage us to question our prejudices and emerge from our caves to preserve our freedom: social sciences, poetry, philosophy. Information is a controlled system of watchwords. Counter-information is effective when it becomes an act of resistance. Art can be an act of resistance. Deleuze cites another philosopher, Michel Foucault, who differentiates between societies of sovereignty and disciplinary societies, which are authoritarian regimes. Disciplinary societies need hospitals, prisons and schools, i.e., spaces of confinement. Deleuze adds that **the future lies in disciplinary societies evolving to become control societies, where those watching over us no longer need spaces of confinement because they have technology instead**. Recent examples of health crisis management in some regions of the world may be considered to confirm this hypothesis.

<sup>29</sup>. <https://iphilo.fr/2018/01/12/gilles-deleuze-linformation-cest-la-societe-de-controle/>

## CONTROL THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Technology causes the price of goods and services to fall. The scarce resource is the consumer's attention span. Accumulating data on consumption habits and on what draws internet users' attention has become key. Capturing users' attention for as long as possible is now the main source of economic value creation. In *La Nouvelle Servitude Volontaire* (The New Voluntary Servitude),<sup>30</sup> Philippe Vion Dury goes further still, arguing that an individual's relationship with the media is being reversed. The individual is no longer merely an actor who comes to consume a service. The service comes to the individual, entering their intimate realm to create an offer perfectly suited to them, something that will trigger further demand. This reversal is often perceived as inoffensive, as it serves the consumer's interests by more effectively targeting what they enjoy. But by exploiting the cognitive bias that encourages individuals to be satisfied with information that confirms their own point of view, the system traps consumers in what Eli Pariser<sup>31</sup> describes as "a filter bubble": everyone can choose their own truth without having their beliefs challenged by exposure to contradictory opinions... **in other words, a digital Plato's Cave.**

The consequence of this is that **our era is deemed to be pluralistic and open, yet it does not tolerate disagreement. The slightest contradiction is perceived as an insult and leads to confrontation.** Unlimited access to

information makes it harder to engage in democratic debates and express opinions. Anyone in the world can access an article published in a country's national press. An opinion expressed and accepted by the population in the country where the article was published may not be well-received by a governmental, religious or community authority on the other side of the world, where the cultural context may be completely different. The problem is that the article's publication may trigger a diplomatic crisis or ethnic tensions, even terrorist attacks. As a result, the globalisation of information leads to a depletion in our ability to debate ideas, with the number of topics open to debate diminishing in proportion to the degree of susceptibility of one group or another, even if they are halfway around the world. Therefore, these phenomena pose a threat to dialogue and, by extension, to freedom.

Social media imposes the de facto standard in language. British economic historian Niall Ferguson<sup>32</sup> observes that Generation X (born between 1960 and 1980) is likely to have been the last generation where young people were free to say almost anything they liked without being reprimanded on social media. Yet it is by talking rubbish that we come to realise we are wrong. This is what allows us to grow. According to Ferguson, social media

<sup>30</sup>. *La Nouvelle Servitude Volontaire* – Philippe Vion-Dury, 2018

<sup>31</sup>. Eli Pariser – The Filter Bubble, What the Internet is Hiding From You, 2011

<sup>32</sup>. History of Money, Power, War, and Truth – Niall Ferguson – Lex Fridman Podcast #239 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xF6x1ftN-H4>

has given rise to a kind of totalitarianism when it comes to language. A standard is set and must be strictly obeyed to avoid shocking others, restricting thought as if in a dictatorial regime. This technique can be found in the militarisation of free market capitalism through systematic accusations of extremism or even terrorism directed at anyone expressing alternative views, or in a religious context with the notion of the “miscreant”.

At another level, it is interesting to observe how the way in which we follow “other people’s lives” has changed. Before the advent of technology, the “celebrity press” largely fulfilled this “need”. This section of the press and its popularity began to decline with the arrival of social media, which offered us the opportunity to follow our friends’ lives online. Since then, the emergence of “professional friends” – influencers and other YouTubers – has replaced our habit of looking at photographs posted by our “real friends”. These days, “professional friends” are threatened in turn by anonymous accounts posting videos that are in line with the interests of the targeted individual. In other words, content created by people whom we do not know but which reflects the tastes and opinions that reassure us. The next step in this trend may well involve artificial intelligence capable of suggesting completely personalised, targeted content. **So why is it important to talk about this? Because this shift transforms the person targeted from a free individual into a slave.** They are free as a consumer to purchase a gossip magazine without handing over any

personal information at all to the content provider, not even their name. They are enslaved by an interface that not only collects all kinds of personal data, interests and opinions but also creates a filter bubble trapping the consumer in a world that echoes their prejudices and satisfies their dreams and desires. In other words, a bubble that **isolates them completely from any interaction with their peers and keeps them shut up in their own reality, where they create their own “truth” and find their own Plato’s Cave.** The metaverse may be considered the ultimate version of this modern-day Plato’s Cave. In this virtual world, each individual is able to live their own life, build their own reality and establish their own truth for their own comfort. Instead of looking out at the reality of the world through the window, humans can develop their own reality by wearing a headset over their eyes. Beyond the incredible potential for entertainment offered by this new innovation, the danger of the metaverse lies in the way it encourages our ego to become complacent. The metaverse places the self at the centre of every action. It permanently cuts ties with other people. Consumers have the impression of being free, despite being completely captive. This is the dream of authoritarian regimes the world over.

We might also reflect upon the impacts of remote working on our freedom. Of course, working from home offers employees greater flexibility. But if it is practised extensively, it can undermine and even break human ties in professional contexts. As well as making organisations less agile by

formalising interactions (to talk to a colleague, you need to schedule a call or a meeting whereas you can simply meet at the coffee machine or “pop by” their desk if you are working at the office), physical isolation cuts employees off from human relationships within the company. If employees are no more than a face behind a screen for their colleagues, how will human relationships be affected? What will be the psychological impact of this new way of working if it is used too much? This observation overlaps with the idea of comfort studied by Stefano Boni, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Modena. In *Homo Comfort*,<sup>33</sup> he presents one of the few existing analyses of the notion of comfort, which partially explains the rapid growth of capitalism. According to Boni, comfort, which consists of delegating complex and/or tedious tasks to other people or to technology, partially accounts for the impoverishment of our sensory experiences and the alteration of some of our faculties. The omnipresence of technology in our lives brings with it a reduction in the tangible experiences that have formed part of human learning since the dawn of humankind. The disappearance of sensory relationships that are not mediated by a device triggers changes in our feelings, practices and knowledge. Our norm-based culture seeks homogenisation of the senses. A reliable food product is one that always tastes the same. The use of artificial flavourings and the standardisation of production processes make it possible to achieve this. Even wine, which derives its nobility and value from the differences in

taste between two vintages or terroirs, is no longer spared this requirement: the notion of brand names is now present in champagne (fortunately not all of them), for example, just as it is in soft drinks and beer, where a unique, distinctive taste is associated with each brand.

Comfort revels in the subjugation of nature by humans using increasingly sophisticated technology. Authorities must ensure that the economy continues to function even in the face of natural hazards. If trains are delayed because of storms, that is unacceptable. Nature must be kept in check to ensure that the world is a predictable, reassuring place which offers a certain guarantee of comfort to subjugated populations. According to Stefano Boni, technology has taken hold as an inexorable process that allows us to shape the environment, animals and bodies to our liking; even the human genome is being moulded, leading us towards transhumanism. However, the proliferation of natural disasters shows that technology cannot protect us from everything all the time.

Comfort is not an evil in itself, but the sensory consequences of its spread to consumers around the globe have been insufficiently studied. This lack of research has allowed the idea to take root that technological progress has always been beneficial for the human race. **“But the spread of comfort provided by technology has cemented**

<sup>33</sup>. *Homo Comfort* – Stefano Boni, 2019

our indifference to the destruction of the subtle bonds connecting us to our environment, not to mention the disasters that occurred throughout the 20th century and were viewed as tragic mistakes (world wars, nuclear bombs and accidents, industrial disasters, endemic pollution).” The subjugation and exploitation of nature are the product of a convergence of interests between consumers and companies, governments and financial institutions, all influenced by the technological system.

Ultimately, by reducing human beings to a digital profile, we transform them into instruments that can be scored and evaluated. Social media and sports or wellbeing applications where we share our data with others embody a metastasis of the ego. Sharing training data with a community of sports enthusiasts has no other aim than to flatter our ego, but this comes at the cost of a kind of servitude. Agreeing to our location being “tracked” and our training data shared in exchange for some kind of kudos subjects individuals to a form of control. This is especially true when the machine undermines the individual’s own judgment and influences their actions by recommending the ideal recovery time or heart rate. **Freeing ourselves from ego takes us one step closer to freedom. The society of control flatters our egos in order to enslave them more effectively.**

This results in a community capable of scoring individuals. The ability to rate, judge and evaluate everything gives the impression of great freedom. But, in reality, this digital dehumanisation is synonymous with servitude. By accepting scores from friends and strangers on our sporting performance, the quality of a service received or recommendations for holiday destinations or restaurants, we place ourselves in a relationship of servitude. In a previous letter, we talked about the ambiguous relationship between technology and freedom. When used wisely, technology can offer us a certain freedom or help us break free from totalitarian control. But it can also contribute to keeping the population in a state of servitude without the need for physical violence. In this respect, technology enables the society of control.

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**FREEING OURSELVES FROM EGO TAKES US ONE STEP CLOSER TO FREEDOM. THE SOCIETY OF CONTROL FLATTERS OUR EGOS IN ORDER TO ENSLAVE THEM MORE EFFECTIVELY**



## THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

Imposing a norm-based society makes it possible to exert control. This is why libertarian thinkers like Francisco Ferrer are dangerous to the ruling classes. They advocate reflection, a predominance of the local over the central and trust rather than control as the basis for relationships with their peers.<sup>34</sup> Capitalism's greatest strength is ensuring that it is conflated with democracy in the minds of the majority. As a result, **the idea that capitalism is the only regime capable of guaranteeing freedom has become entrenched.** American libertarian researcher Noam Chomsky, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1955 to 2017, attempts to demonstrate in his work<sup>35</sup> that it is possible to advocate participatory democracy while simultaneously championing capitalism or any other class-based society. This echoes Krishnamurti's views, although the latter was far-removed from these ideological struggles. According to the American professor, neoliberalism is simply the contemporary version of the battle waged by the ruling class to restrict the political rights and civic powers of the majority of the population by obtaining their consent. In his view, free trade regulated by a dominant power is akin to imposing authoritarian rules on dominated groups or countries and runs counter to the construction of a democratic society. Consequently, globalisation is the product of domination by a power that imposes trade agreements on the peoples of the world to enable its large corporations to dominate

markets wherever possible and, unlike "classic" imperial domination, with no obligations whatsoever to their people. The doctrine that free trade brings freedom and wellbeing to dominated countries amid a kind of obscurantism is then hammered home by the media in an attempt to obtain majority consent, including within the dominant power. Robert W. McChesney,<sup>36</sup> founder of Free Press, an organisation calling for media reform, and Professor of History at the University of Illinois, relays this dissenting vision in his publications on the role of the media in capitalist democracies.

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, philosopher Guy Debord<sup>37</sup> describes the outcome of the process that gives rise to voluntary servitude. Happiness is presented to us as a commodity or spectacle. Spectacle is the opposite of dialogue: when we attend a spectacle, we receive information but we do not discuss it. Spectacles skilfully put our brains into autopilot so that we do not exercise our own judgement. This absence of dialogue undermines democracy. All that is left to be done is to arouse the desire to consume through advertising, marketing, fashion or even planned obsolescence to give an illusion of freedom. To keep people feeling happy and free, they can be fed data about themselves and others via smart watches that tell them what they need

<sup>34</sup>. Tikehau CIO letter – Human After All, September 2022

<sup>35</sup>. Profit Over People – Noam Chomsky, 1999

<sup>36</sup>. Robert Waterman McChesney is an American professor who teaches the history and political economy of communication, and the role played by the media in democratic, capitalist societies. He is a professor at the Department of Communications at the University of Illinois

<sup>37</sup>. Guy Debord – The Society of the Spectacle, 1967

to do to feel good: how long they need to spend exercising, how long they should rest for afterwards. They can also be encouraged to put their data on social media to give the illusion that telling virtual friends about their activities proves the extent of their freedom.

The omnipresence of the norm leads to a culture of quantity: quantity of data, quantity of “likes” on social media, quantity of positive ratings for a driver or restaurant, or quantity of research publications (regardless of quality) in university rankings. This means that a medium may be valued, not for the quality of the content that it produces, but for the number of “likes” and comments it attracts. The value of work is assessed quantitatively based on its contribution to a society of commodity and spectacle. In this regard, the Chicago school’s vision of work as nothing more than human capital has emerged triumphant. By asserting that “the proletarian is not simply exploited, he has been stripped of his function of knowledge”, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan<sup>38</sup> confirms that the dominated are divested of the knowledge and expertise inherent to the worker as an artisan. Workers must now deal with scores, assessments, audience figures and ratings. They are transformed into agents performing meaningless, standardised acts. This humiliation strips workers of their freedom and leads to servitude. In *Brave New World*, the British novelist Aldous Huxley<sup>39</sup> goes further still: **“The perfect dictatorship would have the appearance of a democracy, but would basically be a prison without walls in which the prisoners would not even dream of escaping. It would essentially be a system of slavery**

**where, through consumption and entertainment, the slaves would love their servitudes.”**

In *Democracy in America*,<sup>40</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville writes: “I see an innumerable host of men, all alike and equal... Over these men stands an immense tutelary power, which assumes sole responsibility for securing their pleasure and watching over their fate... It would resemble paternal authority if only its purpose were the same, namely, to prepare men for manhood. But on the contrary, it seeks only to keep them in childhood irrevocably. It likes citizens to rejoice, provided they only think of rejoicing. It works willingly for their happiness but wants to be the sole agent and only arbiter of that happiness... Every day it thus makes man’s use of his free will rarer and more futile. It circumscribes the action of the will more narrowly, and little by little robs each citizen of the use of his own faculties... The sovereign, after taking individuals one by one in his powerful hands and kneading them to his liking, reaches out to embrace society as a whole. Over it he spreads a fine mesh of uniform, minute, and complex rules... He does not break men’s wills but softens, bends, and guides them. He seldom forces anyone to act but consistently opposes action... Rather than tyrannise, he inhibits, represses, saps, stifles, and stultifies, and in the end he reduces each nation to nothing but a flock of timid and industrious animals, with the government as its shepherd.” Despite being written in 1848, this quote speaks for itself and

38. The Other Side of Psychoanalysis – Jacques Lacan, 1969

39. Aldous Huxley – *Brave New World*, 1932

40. *Democracy in America* – Alexis de Tocqueville, 1848



could just as well be applied to life at most large companies in the 21st century. For the MIT linguistics professor Noam Chomsky<sup>41</sup>, the most effective way to restrict democracy is to transfer decision-making to unaccountable institutions. In his eyes, the corporate takeover in America in the 19th century was an attack on democracy. “Less government” is a way of transferring decision-making to institutions that are unaccountable to the people, which could be described as private tyrannies. George Lakoff, Professor Emeritus of Cognitive Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, observes that the main barriers to democracy are attempts to protect domestic markets in countries whose interests are being served. Democracy is thus reinforced when decisions are passed over to private tyrannies. Meanwhile, the state authorities, which are accountable to the people, are shrunk in the name of economic and political principles. In Chomsky’s view, what is referred to as advancing democracy is actually the imposition of the principle of “survival of the fittest” by institutions that are unaccountable to the people.

## THE IMPOSTOR – THE UGLY

A society divided into castes, where human ties are severed and knowledge compartmentalised, is ripe for experts to reign. Knowledge is so fragmented and specialised, and normative complexity is so great, that we must turn to learned individuals in order to lead a decent life, whether we need to obtain information, receive medical treatment or simply stay within the law by paying our taxes or abiding by complicated rules. In *La Fabrique des Imposteurs*

## AN IMPOSTOR IS SOMEONE WHO FINDS A WAY OF ADAPTING TO OTHER PEOPLE’S EXPECTATIONS AND DESIRES

(The Factory of Impostors), Roland Gori describes these experts. Impostors use figures and statistics to support their propositions. In Western societies, we tend to believe in figures as the absolute truth. How many times have we heard battles over numbers or calls for arguments to be backed up by figures in televised debates between experts or politicians? Our normative mindset is predisposed to assign great credibility to figures, despite impostors being able to make the figures say whatever they want. Experts replace critical thinking: thinking for oneself is a waste of time. By unpacking information on our behalf, experts make us believe that they are saving us time by telling us what we should think. This leads to the destruction of debate and of social ties, exclusion and, ultimately, deprivation of liberty and servitude. **A society that prioritises form over substance, means over ends, reputation over accomplishment and audience over merit, and that targets immediate profit, is a society where impostors can easily multiply. An impostor is someone who finds a way of adapting to other people’s expectations and desires. They thrive in societies that seek to prevent people from thinking and ask them to adapt.** This relates to the

<sup>41</sup>. Who Leads the World – Noam Chomsky, 2016

work of philosopher Barbara Stiegler<sup>42</sup>, which we referred to in Part 1 of this letter. Experts are key components in societies of control. According to Pierre Conesa,<sup>43</sup> modern warfare is influenced by experts, who spread biased messages in the media to consolidate support among the population and legitimise violent action. In order to force a population into submission to benefit an elite, an enemy must be created and identified. Against this backdrop, Pierre Conesa explains that accusations of genocide or conspiracy quickly appear in enemy-building discourse. Dividing humans into castes is vital when creating an enemy. And this is not limited to the reactions of those attacked. The attackers also contribute to the process by demonising their victims. They evoke the undeclared war on the attacked to justify the use of force. Any resistance to their peacemaking activities is labelled as terrorism. They transform the occupied into bandits and insurgents, sometimes manipulating them from abroad. The attacker can also seek to justify their actions by their supposed cultural or racial superiority: they are helping the attacked by introducing them to a more advanced civilisation.

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**DEBATING IDEAS IS  
CRUCIAL BECAUSE IT  
ALLOWS COMPLEXITY  
TO BE UNDERSTOOD**

By contrast, debating ideas is crucial because it allows complexity to be understood. Debate discredits “impostor experts” who deliver simplistic, divisive analyses. For those who dare to step out of their Caves, reflection gives rise to doubt and allows them to move closer to “the Other” in order to understand them better. In doing so, they are able to break down the walls of the cave that isolates them.

## MANUFACTURING CONSENT

Edward Bernays, Sigmund Freud’s nephew, is considered one of the main proponents of American consumerism from the 1920s onwards. After working with President Woodrow Wilson’s government during the First World War, he created his own public relations agency and began to promote the idea that human fulfilment lies in consumption. Convinced that opinions could also be manipulated for commercial purposes, he was one of the first to industrialise the psychology of the subconscious to influence public opinion, despite objections. He is considered both the father of modern propaganda, providing a source of inspiration for some authoritarian regimes, and the father of marketing, thanks to his work on using the unconscious to serve corporate interests. In his view, intentional, intelligent manipulation of the habits and opinions of the masses is an important part of a democratic society. To perform this vital task, the intelligent minority must make systematic use of propaganda as

<sup>42</sup>. Adapt! On a New Political Imperative – Barbara Stiegler, 2019

<sup>43</sup>. The Making of the Enemy – Pierre Conesa, 2011

they alone can understand the mental processes and social customs of the masses, which enables them to pull the strings controlling public opinion. People in democratic societies have implicitly consented to free competition being organised by their leaders. The purpose of public relations, advertising and marketing is to trigger non-essential needs. **By encouraging consumerist behaviours, individualism eventually severs social ties and reliance on the essential. Populations are now driven by a desire to consume and accumulate, lured away from any inclination to think for themselves. Marketing only heightens consumers' desires, increasing reliance on debt and promoting a culture of "having" over a culture of "being".** Controlling the population through consumption serves its own interests. This notion of individualistic motivation underpins the capitalist theory promoted by Milton Friedman's Chicago school. Manufacturing consent is a method of control. The public relations industry emerged during the First World War with the British Ministry of Information, which was replicated not long after by Woodrow Wilson's government in the United States. It is interesting to note that the industry originated in the "freest" countries, before being copied by authoritarian regimes in the 20th century. Public relations entails instilling in the population what they must think, resulting in the marginalisation of anyone who thinks differently. Education is used to train consumers influenced by marketing rather than humans capable of thinking for themselves. Before Edward Bernays, the American economist Thorstein Veblen<sup>44</sup> examined

buyers' motivations in the economy of the late 19th and early 20th century. Even then, his writing conveys the importance of flattering the ego to encourage conspicuous consumption and the idea that consumer society leads to the destruction of human relationships.

**The democratic system is based in part on the spread of comfort. "Comfort is a consensual political agenda with unanimous support from governments and companies, banks and savers, mass media and citizens",** says Stefano Boni. He asks: "Has any government or political party ever attempted not to implement but simply to advocate reducing consumerist production?" According to French economist Serge Latouche, the rise of a consumerist version of modernity is akin to a steamroller leaving a homogenous world in its wake<sup>45</sup>. Comfort proves to be the main source of the social consensus that has accompanied the rise of the current economic system. This could be likened to an implicit pact between the ruling class and the rest of the population, who offer docility in exchange for comfort. In a previous letter, we mentioned this type of implicit pact between the government and the population as a factor explaining the speed of economic development in China<sup>46</sup>. The same may well be true elsewhere. **Comfort is a particularly valuable incentive as it entails consuming products and services that give us pleasure. In this respect, it may be viewed as a way of ensuring that a population remains submissive.**

44. The Theory of the Leisure Class – Thorstein Veblen, 1899

45. The Westernisation of the World: Significance, Scope and Limits of the Drive Towards Global Uniformity – Serge Latouche, 1989

46. Tikehau CIO letter – All Under Heaven, January 2022

## RISK AVERSION IN A SOCIETY OF CONTROL

The society of democratic control has altered the relationship between individuals and risk. The passionate mountaineer Gérard Guerrier<sup>47</sup> noted that Western societies no longer accept the possibility of risk. In this respect, adventure becomes anachronistic. Before heading off on a trip to another part of the world, we take out insurance in case our luggage gets lost or the trip is cancelled due to COVID-19. In some countries, climbers or extreme skiers who are unable to accomplish their goal because of weather concerns can make a claim against the organiser of the trip. The principle of caution has become unavoidable and it drives us to try to control everything and find someone responsible for everything. Adventures are filmed, staged and recorded for shows or documentaries, and posted on people's social media stories. This has created a space where impostors can flourish alongside experts on our television screens. Controlling every aspect of an extreme activity, even if it is to provide thrills and conquer fear, is still a form of submission – not freedom. It is the opposite of adventure, which involves accepting uncertainty. **Paralysed by fear, Western culture has established a principle of caution through rules as the basis for life within our society.**

Freedom comes hand-in-hand with a certain level of accepted risk. By eliminating risk at any cost, this principle of caution leads to servitude.

The American environmentalist Aldo Leopold<sup>48</sup> believes that an ethics of the land would allow humankind to transition from our role as conquerors of the planet to one of citizens within a community of many others who inhabit this world. This would allow us to perceive the world as a system in fragile harmony, where humanity is a dangerous loose electron. This vision establishes a principle of caution which takes into account poorly understood risks with potentially irreversible consequences. However, the original subtlety of this principle shatters quickly to become synonymous with the idea of zero-risk, which implies prioritising inaction and establishes a boundary between prudence and caution. Caution seeks a world without risk, whereas prudence accepts uncertainty. The former implies submission and a rejection of agency, while the latter implies freedom and dialogue. Dialogue, given that prudence involves discussing the nature and probability of a danger or threat.

47. Éloge de la peur (In Praise of Fear) – Gérard Guerrier, 2019

48. Aldo Leopold, 1887–1948, was an American forester and environmentalist who worked to protect natural spaces



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## ADVENTURE MEANS OPENING UP TO OTHERS

### ADVENTURE IS AT THE END OF THE PLATFORM

All it takes to find it is to step outside your professional, social or even racial comfort zone. More precisely, **adventure means opening up to others**, rebuilding dialogue and inclusivity. It means taking the risk and leaving Plato's Cave, as well as questioning your own beliefs and prejudices. **The price of freedom is accepting the unknown, and to achieve that, we must conquer our fear of the unknown. When a free person comes to terms with their fears, they take back control of their destiny. Until they do, their life is no more than a calm river which they can float down without having to question themselves, fenced off with their prejudices in their own community, searching for simplistic explanations for their frustrations while rejecting any responsibility for others and without seeking any kind of dialogue.** It is for this reason that adventure-seekers often speak about a feeling of being alive while risking death. **When we stay in our caves, we**

**go through life having accepted that we are already dead.** Fear and anxiety do not correlate to the reality of the danger, but to a perception of that danger. Given that each of us perceives risk in a unique way, we all generate our own fears. Here, too, we can draw a parallel with the entrepreneurial attitude and the notion of “free enterprise”. An entrepreneur is someone who faces their fears, accepts uncertainty, and brings to life their own ecosystem. By refusing to fully submit to the norm, they create a space for freedom.

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**WHEN WE STAY IN  
OUR CAVES, WE GO  
THROUGH LIFE HAVING  
ACCEPTED THAT WE  
ARE ALREADY DEAD**

# The Good

34

**I**t is undoubtedly much easier to exclude and distrust what is different, and to behave aggressively towards it, than it is to show kindness. Unfortunately, our social, political and religious beliefs confine us to this sense of exclusion to the point of intoxication. We have already seen that the combination of urban development with bureaucratic, industrial, capitalist and even individualist thinking exclude the human factor in such a way that the negative consequences of the benefits we continue to enjoy are growing exponentially. **By refusing to leave our caves and by convincing ourselves, with the support of statistics and figures, that development and technical progress have led us to a higher plane of life, we are embracing the idea that only the Western development model based on standards and law is viable. As such, stripping other populations of their backward and outdated traditional practices becomes a service that should be rendered to them, so that they too can aspire to comfort, happiness and freedom. This process of self-deception, whereby only statistics**

**that confirm this idea are taken into consideration (focusing on GDP growth while ignoring the spread of depression), has led to the eradication of any alternative thinking within Western culture.** This is a shame, because the combination of technology with the ancestral heritage of Asian, African or American cultures could enable us to introduce the necessary changes to the capitalist development model in order to make it more sustainable.

Surprisingly, this process even affects the sciences, which should be using new ways of thinking to bring about new innovations. As a result, it has taken several decades for Western medicine to take notice of the benefits of diet and traditional Eastern medicines in the treatment of serious illnesses such as cancer. Western medicine comes from a practical, rational and patriarchal culture. It has enabled us to eradicate a great many diseases and is therefore now held up as the only credible medicine, much to the detriment of ancestral and local practices. Though it is effective, it is also divisive,

specialised and, above all, dismissive of other types of medicine from other cultures which use ancestral traditions to prevent illnesses and more. Even if we think of GDP as the sole indicator of growth, Western curative medicine has made it possible to treat a huge number of human beings and thereby lift them out of poverty. It is also better for economic growth than ancestral preventative medicine, in the sense that prescribing medicines to treat or relieve an issue produces more immediate comfort for the patient, but also boosts GDP more than the prevention of these issues through a better-adapted lifestyle.

The same goes for agriculture. Modern techniques introduced by Western culture have made it possible to produce more food than ever before. Here again, if we stop at this fact, we could conclude that technical progress has undeniably provided us with the solution. However, intensive monoculture cultivation and industrial livestock farming ruin the soil, destroy biodiversity and interrupt the regeneration of ecosystems, meaning that the land, which should be an asset, loses its own economic value the more it produces, leading the system to its own destruction. Ancestral regenerative agricultural techniques have been written off as outdated and relegated to the category of archaic practices, whereas considering their application alongside modern techniques could help us to establish a regenerative form of agriculture that reduces CO2 levels rather than increasing them. What's more, this kind

of combined system also makes complete sense from a financial standpoint, as the intensive use of water and pesticides is ruining the soil to the point that its long-term financial value could be reduced to zero, whereas regenerating the soil would make it possible to reduce our water and pesticide usage, but also return financial value to this asset. The Financial Times has addressed this crucial issue with their remarkable video entitled "Reinventing farming and food post-globalisation"<sup>49</sup>.

Medicine and agriculture are demonstrative of the other sciences and of a culture of global knowledge, which the economy forms a part of. **Prior to the advent of the globalised capitalist model based on calculations and standards, ancestral practices, be they medical, agricultural or artisanal, were founded on intuition, tradition and the observation of nature.** The dominant Western culture has enabled the development of medicine, agriculture and industry, all based on precision, modelling, calculation and now, data. However, **a lack of inclusivity sets these two approaches at odds, as Western culture seeks to dismiss, ridicule and even label as dangerous any practice that fails to meet its standards. The dehumanisation of the sciences is leading to both the division of humankind into castes, and the destruction of our relationship with nature.** The return of ancestral practices is often

<sup>49</sup>. Reinventing farming and food post-globalisation – Financial Times, 2022 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAlq3JUALHY>

associated with a return to an archaic past, whereas in fact, **combining the power of modern science with the intuition and sensitivity of ancestral practices could not only hugely extend the reach of our knowledge, but also contribute to the promotion of a more sustainable development model, rather than leading us to a dead end.** Globalised capitalism, by virtue of being built on the foundations of a norm-based culture within a patriarchal society, has squeezed out any form of alternative practices without integrating them, including any consideration of the human factor, all in order to affirm its own superiority. Those who promote a model centred around Eastern practices have found a way to hack away at this superiority with incontestable criteria, such as the infant mortality rate in medicine or GDP per capita in economics.

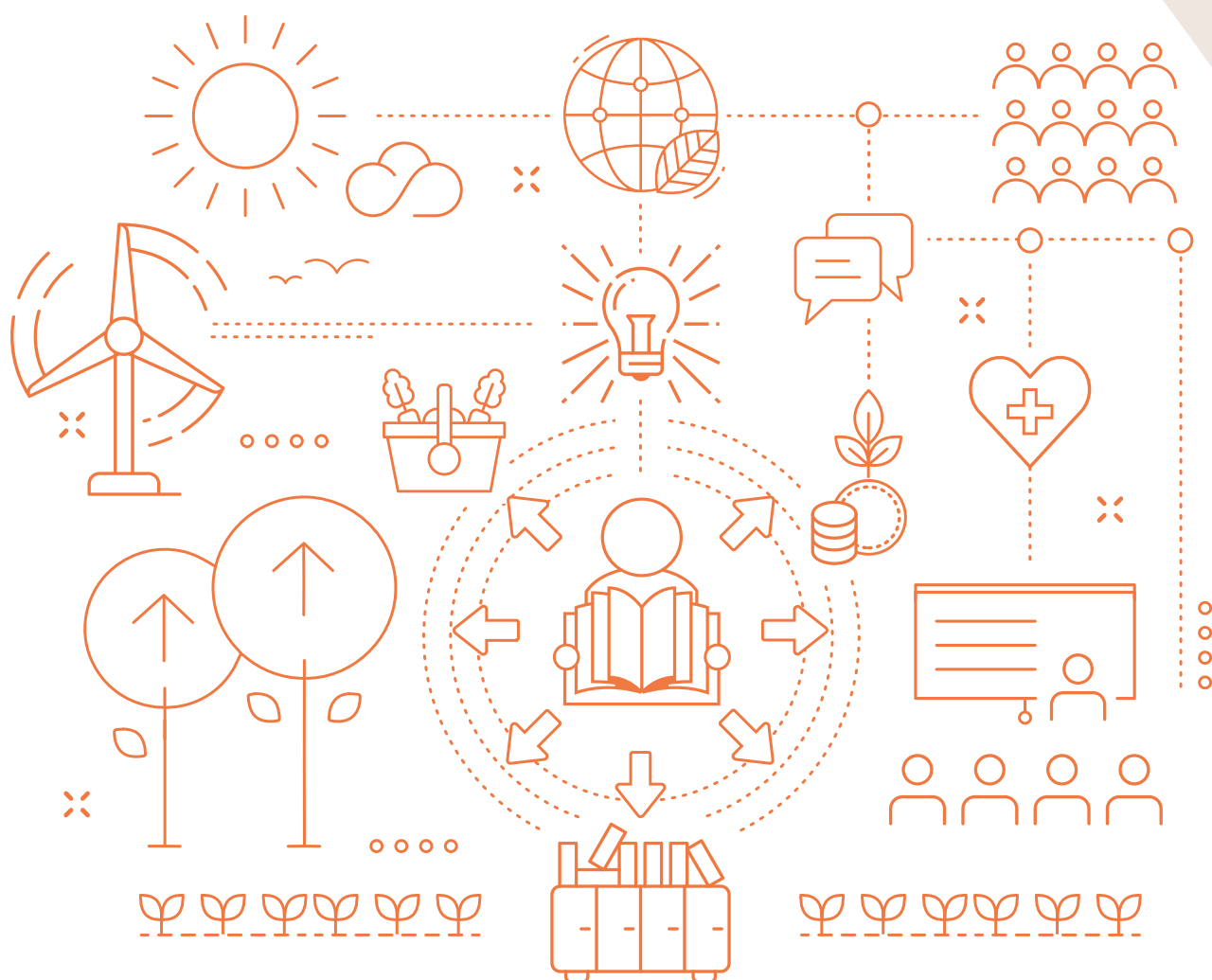
However, this approach is evolving, and the reintegration of a relationship with living things is making a reappearance through the potential importance of biomaterials, which could serve as a possible alternative to manufacturing goods using finite natural resources (energy and metals). An awareness of renewable materials from living organisms, such as algae or fungi, opens up new economic possibilities with the potential to significantly disrupt every domain of the sciences (medicine, information technology, physics) and the economy (construction, energy, transport, industry, agriculture). Even art is exploring the potential for using living organisms, as evidenced by the recent MOOC “Art and Ecology” run by the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris<sup>50</sup>.

## MOVING TOWARDS A KNOWLEDGEABLE SOCIETY

In our previous letter, we mentioned the Meadows report from 1972<sup>51</sup> on how incompatible the desire for infinite short-term growth is in a finite world. It is essentially impossible to achieve infinite growth in a finite world. This is because everything that is material is finite. There is a finite amount of material within the observable universe. Given that economic growth is predicated on the exploitation of finite natural resources, infinite growth remains an illusion with a heavy cost, since the quest to achieve it is destroying biodiversity, altering the climate, deepening social inequalities and engendering the misallocation of capital. Knowledge, on the other hand, is infinite, so an economy of knowledge could experience infinite growth. If humanity were able to transcend its capacity for destruction with weapons and the devastation of our environment, we could perhaps create an economy capable of infinite growth based on knowledge. However, this would most likely require us to overcome fear, since the fear of missing out or of dying are the driving forces behind the wickedness that leads to the division of humanity, war and conspiracy. Infinite growth brought about through an economy of knowledge can therefore only be envisioned in a world where humans have adopted an inclusive approach that considers humanity as a single whole and brings knowledge together. Such a world would use knowledge not as a secret to be jealously

<sup>50</sup>. <https://www.fun-mooc.fr/fr/cours/mooc-art-et-ecologie/>

<sup>51</sup>. The Limits to Growth – Denis and Donella Meadows, with support from the Club of Rome, first published in 1972 and updated in 2002



stored away in order to develop more effective weaponry, but as a common and shared good. In other words, as long as our economic system encourages hoarding and dividing knowledge, the fear of “the Other” will reign supreme, and conspiracy and war will allow us to find enemies and simple explanations to our problems. Individuals prefer to stay in their comfort zone, their Plato’s Cave, where the information they receive conditions them to remain in ignorance.

An exchange of knowledge, however, jump-starts scientific progress. This can be seen in the Renaissance period. The philosopher Edgar Morin<sup>52</sup> takes up this idea and claims that instead of hoarding knowledge and overspecialising to create experts in complex subjects, thereby making the general public dependant on them, we should combine knowledge just as Leonardo da Vinci did.

<sup>52</sup>. La Voie (The Way) – Edgar Morin, 2012

On the other hand, the problems caused by the exclusive application of Western science and the distrust of local practices manifests itself in other ways, such as rates of cancer, obesity and suicide, which serve as evidence of the partial failure of an approach centred exclusively around Western sensitivities. Seventy per cent of deaths caused by cancer in the world occur in developing countries, despite the fact that the illness was, for a long time, primarily found in rich countries<sup>53</sup>. This uprooting also manifests itself more violently in desperate – sometimes inexcusable – acts, which we prefer to explain away with simple causes or dismiss as madness or obscurantism. Pierre Conesa<sup>54</sup> looked into this sensitive subject. He believes that when the West is struck by a shocking terrorist attack, you can often find articles in the news asking: “Why are we so hated even though our values are based on freedom, happiness and prosperity?”. This question, which comes from an admirable attempt for understanding, is often answered with the sledgehammer argument that we are goodness incarnate, whereas the terrorists are the embodiment of absolute evil. While the actions of terrorists are unquestionably inexcusable, the reasons behind them are too often masked behind the idea that the civilisation under attack is faultless and the attacker is simply dangerous and insane, and is therefore unworthy of any attempt to understand why they acted as they did. For Edgar Morin, religious extremism is one of the consequences of the destruction of informal ties within societies, where such bonds were a feature of an ancestral

culture, by a globalised capitalist system that ignores local distinctiveness and seeks to universally impose its own standards and laws. Rather than attempting to address the root of the problem, here we find the idea developed by Plato in his allegory of the Cave: **we prefer a truth that is biased but easy to understand over having to make the effort to question our own prejudices and knowledge in order to obtain a better understanding.**

**It would therefore seem that the kindness which individuals need to have in order to tame their fear of “the Other” comes not only from the reintroduction of the human factor into the economy and social relations, but more broadly from a reconnection with life itself.**

## THE CONNECTION WITH LIFE

In Part 1 of this letter<sup>55</sup> we explained that whatever form the dominant regime might take (democratic or authoritarian, capitalist or communist), **a normative and ethnocentric culture based on ego is built on the superiority of humankind over nature, which must be dominated.** Humanity is great and nature represents a living mass that humans can shape in their image in order to extract wealth from it. Nature can therefore be considered a commodity destined to be exploited, but also brought to heel, for

<sup>53</sup>. <https://www.euractiv.fr/section/aide-au-developpement/news/les-pays-en-developpement-concentrent-les-2-3-des-deces-dus-au-cancer/>

<sup>54</sup>. The Making of the Enemy – Pierre Conesa, 2011

<sup>55</sup>. Tikehau CIO letter – Human after all, September 2021



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## A NORMATIVE AND ETHNOCENTRIC CULTURE BASED ON EGO IS BUILT ON THE SUPERIORITY OF HUMANKIND OVER NATURE, WHICH MUST BE DOMINATED

our comfort. For Gerard Guerrier<sup>56</sup>, the commodification of the return to nature, as defined by a consumer society, is setting spatial and temporal limits on this exposition to nature. These activities are restricted in order to minimise the risk of any incidents, and therefore the effort involved must be manageable and the commercial offering adapted to the constraints of the consumer. This commodification is also evident in the provision of a range of goods, often at inflated prices, manufactured using raw materials that could otherwise be made available for free using artisanal practices. According to the professor of anthropology Stefano Boni, in our Western societies, contact with nature is a cause for embarrassment or even disgust. The sensations, the smells, and even certain sounds make us uneasy to the point where contact with the natural world, despite its documented links with wellbeing, must be closed off, time restricted and sanitised. The Western way of life is in fact distanced from nature, except where the latter has been conquered and controlled (by restricted touristic experiences or natural parks with defined borders). **This rupture with the organic world is altering the**

fundamental cognitive processes that were once common across different civilisations, before the emergence of a Western culture obsessed with the “purification” of our sciences and the conquest of nature. This dominating relationship with nature is causing us to lose the knowledge and the subtle mechanisms that contact with nature had always provided to ancestral civilisations. The illusion that technology brings us comfort and serves as an advantageous substitute for contact with the natural world locks us in a Plato’s Cave which, under cover of material comfort, deprives us of human connection and, ultimately, of our freedom. However, this material and intellectual comfort drives us to move through life without questioning ourselves or leaving the beaten path. As we saw in Part 1 of this letter, it generates significant distress, which manifests itself as an explosion in the rates of suicide, depression, cancer, obesity, aggression and exclusion. **It is therefore possible to live in comfort while struggling severely**, as we content ourselves with the comfortable role of a passive consumer.

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## IT IS THEREFORE POSSIBLE TO LIVE IN COMFORT WHILE STRUGGLING SEVERELY

<sup>56</sup>. Éloge de la peur (In Praise of Fear) – Gérard Guerrier, 2019

JANUARY 2023

**CIO**  
letter  
TO

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## MAN IS NATURE BECOMING CONSCIOUS OF ITSELF

The concept of the complete domination of nature is at odds with most ancestral practices in traditional societies, which consider nature as a fully-fledged living being. The French geologist Elisée Reclus explained in 1905 that **“man is nature becoming conscious of itself”<sup>57</sup>. In other words, considering humankind as a single whole reconnects the individual not only with others, but with all of life itself. It is this effort to reconnect, which can only come from within, that could make our society aware of the fact that seeking a more sustainable development model is the only viable long-term solution.** Such a model cannot be based entirely on laws and standards, since the informal dimension of the economy – the human factor – is not bound by norms. And when it comes to the law, this is an arbitrary concept. Éric Julien is a French geographer who was fortunate enough to be saved by an indigenous tribe called the Kogis in Colombia during a research expedition on which he suffered a pulmonary oedema at 4,500 meters above sea level. The Kogis are a native American people with 4,000 years of tradition, and one of the last pre-Colombian peoples to remain outside of the globalised culture, preferring to live in economic and intellectual semi-autocracy. This people group, who consider nature to be a living being, believe that their mission is to “take care of the land”, which they call “mother”. The Kogis have maintained an incredibly

strong cognitive connection with the natural world, to the point of even developing, through intuition, a level of knowledge that is astonishing to the world’s greatest astronomers, doctors and geologists. Since his accident, Éric Julien has spent a large part of his life helping the Kogis reclaim their ancestral lands. He also invited the members to “diagnose” nature at his own home in the Drôme Provençale region of France. He reports<sup>58</sup> that the first questions asked by the Kogis were around the presence of barriers or fences designed to restrict the access that animals or people have to certain areas such as bodies of water. Who decided to collect all the water in this stream? Humans did, of course, and they did so unilaterally. However, doing so had displaced animals and forced them to move elsewhere, upsetting the plant ecosystem of the area, drying up the water sources and forcing an explanation to the Kogis of how certain areas of the local forest, although green, were in fact dying.

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## CONSIDERING HUMANKIND AS A SINGLE WHOLE RECONNECTS THE INDIVIDUAL NOT ONLY WITH OTHERS, BUT WITH ALL OF LIFE ITSELF

<sup>57</sup>. Man and the Earth – Jean-Jacques Elisée Reclus, 1905

<sup>58</sup>. Éric Julien – Les Indiens Kogis : gardiens de la planète (The Kogi Indians, guardians of the planet), YouTube – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g65Jq2nQKNU>

Neuroscience is rediscovering the effects this connection with nature has on human health. The neurosurgeon Michel Le Van Quyen<sup>59</sup> looked into how the human brain reacts to contact with nature. He cites Japanese studies on the effects that walking in a forest can have on the human body and brain which include, for example, our bodies generating the cells that combat tumours and viruses much faster. On the other hand, the lack of such a connection with nature condemns humans to find pleasure in consuming and possessing, a pale imitation of the well-being generated through a connection with living things. However, this imitation generates suffering. Éric Julien<sup>60</sup> refers to the concept of apoptosis in biology. Apoptosis is the programmed death of cells – a cellular process that is essential for our health, but which can lead to numerous pathologies, including cancer, if unregulated. This “cellular suicide” occurs when a cell stops receiving information about its usefulness. Éric Julien compares this phenomenon with our social behaviour. A human is a collection of cells, after all. In our societies, the disappearance of human connections is leading to a form of death through the unhappiness it creates. This could explain, in part, the tragic phenomenon of work-related suicides. The isolation caused by a lack of consideration or of human contact can lead to despair as the individual stops receiving any information about their usefulness... just as with apoptosis. In this respect, inclusivity can generate life for others. Descartes’ famous “I think therefore I am” could equally be worded as “You think therefore I am”.

The American doctor of cognitive psychology Donald Hoffmann<sup>61</sup> is one of several modern scientists studying both physics and philosophy simultaneously. The materialism necessary for capitalist theory to blossom (humans are biological machines) eliminates intuition from any scientific advances. Intuition, however, is at the heart of ancestral cultures, and has facilitated some of the greatest scientific discoveries in human history. Éric Julien gives several examples of unquantifiable scientific intuition by recounting the knowledge developed by the Kogis (Éric Julien et les Kogis<sup>62</sup> in the fields of astronomy and geology, despite the complete lack of any of the calculations and technology used in Western science. Despite this, **science rejects intuition in order to present itself as a noble and pure discipline, purged of anything that cannot be measured or quantified. The problem is that when we consider the possibility of infinite material growth in a finite world, this materialism brings about the division of humanity through confrontations over these finite resources. David Hoffman believes that materialism is today in a state of crisis. He believes that something is missing, and that this something could be the unquantifiable and informal product of a connection with life.** Here, we could bring up the matter of the interests of transhumanism, but that is a whole other issue. Quantum

59. Pourquoi la nature guérit votre cerveau (Why Nature Can Heal Your Brain) – YouTube – interview with Michel Le Van Quyen, neurosurgeon

60. Éric Julien et les Kogis (Éric Julien and the Kogis) – YouTube – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INEdPtOcJgk>

61. Observer Mechanics: A Formal Theory of Perception – David Hoffman, Bruce Bennett, Chetan Prakash, 1989

62. Éric Julien and the Kogis) – YouTube – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INEdPtOcJgk>

physics teaches us that we cannot truly know what is real. Reality escapes us and is not always quantifiable. Einstein contemporary Erwin Schrödinger's experience with his cat<sup>63</sup> illustrates simultaneously the concepts of superposition (a particle can exist in two different states at the same time) and decoherence (the cat can be both alive and dead at the same time until the box is opened to check). As long as we are not observing reality, we cannot know what state it is in. Saying that something is real is a biased assumption.

To complement Western science based on calculations and measurements, the return of intuition and observation could form part of the solution to promote a more sustainable model. **Our knowledge and our comfort do not relieve us of the need to pay attention to detail, as it is this attention to detail that enables us to question our beliefs and transform comfortable servitude into absolute freedom.** To top it all off, this attention to detail keeps our cognitive qualities sharp and creates economic value. In a social experiment carried out by the Washington Post in 2007, over the course of 45 minutes, American violinist Joshua Bell played six pieces by Bach on a Stradivarius in the Washington DC subway, dressed in jeans, a T-shirt and a baseball cap. Of the 1,097 people who passed by him, only seven stopped to listen, and the musician collected a total of \$12. What can this experiment tell us within the context of this letter? It tells us that **careful observation of our environment pushes us to question things and seek answers, thereby leaving our Cave to potentially glimpse a version of reality that is different from the one we accept as true. In this uncertain and volatile market environment, paying attention to detail and to minute signals**

**is essential in creating economic value. However, this experiment shows that this comes, above all, from a respect for others. Ignoring others in order to remain locked away in our Caves undoubtedly provides a certain level of comfort, but it destroys value.**

Observing the world free from any prejudices, without all our conditioning and with no fear of "the Other" or the unknown allows us to envisage our crossing a point of no return, which would mean our self-destruction. In his book *A Wise Man Doesn't Have Ideas*, China expert François Jullien<sup>64</sup> recounts Laozi's views that: "the wise man is able to put things in perspective. He is never for or against anything, he explores the extremes to make of them a synthesis. There is *yin* and *yang* in everything." This attitude, which encourages inclusivity, seeks to put ego aside and reintroduce femininity into our patriarchal society, which is now so unbalanced that it faces its own destruction.

## BOLD BUT KIND...

**"I DON'T LIKE SPEAKING BADLY OF PEOPLE, BUT SHE IS INDEED NICE"**

THIERRY LHERMITTE –  
LE PÈRE NOËL EST UNE ORDURE  
(SANTA CLAUS IS A STINKER)<sup>65</sup>

Capitalist development has contributed to advances in production, trade and communication, and has destroyed mutual aid, unity and conviviality. Daniel Herrero<sup>66</sup> believes that

<sup>63</sup>. <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/Schrodingers-cat>

<sup>64</sup>. *A Wise Man Doesn't Have Ideas* – François Jullien, 2013

<sup>65</sup>. *Santa Claus Is a Stinker* is a French comedy film released in 1982

<sup>66</sup>. Daniel Herrero is a charismatic rugby coach who has worked at RC Toulon

**human connection is what makes us happy, and is also the key to an organisation's success.**

In his view, kindness is one of three qualities of a great manager or team captain, alongside courage and strategic vision. The coach himself admits that this might be a surprising quality to consider essential in a great leader, when we have a tendency to label those who show kindness as “weak”. However, he is convinced that no rugby team captain has ever been able to get the most out of their players, or become world champions, without this quality. In another context, in his book *The White Darkness*, the writer David Grann recounts the story of the exploration of Antarctica<sup>67</sup>. He mentions that Ernest Shackleton, the first explorer to have attempted to cross Antarctica in 1915, was a great leader because he prioritised the wellbeing of his crew above all else. He shared the menial tasks with them and showed empathy, making it a point of honour to keep his team happy and optimistic. This allowed him to win over the acceptance and trust of his whole crew for the duration of his venture. Of course, this facet of human connection affects business in much the same way. Conference leader Simon Sinek<sup>68</sup> observes that in a company, while the least experienced employees need to worry about doing their job well, the managers, as well as doing their own work well, need to worry about taking care of the people they are responsible for, and support the business' employees in their work. He believes that the two key qualities of a leader are perspective and empathy. He mentions that he is often surprised by business leaders' responses to the question: “What is your priority?” Faced with this question, many managers reply that their clients are their priority,

even if most of them have not come face-to-face with a client in years. Others say that their shareholders are their priority. For Sinek, this would be equivalent to a sports coach admitting that their priority is not the players, but the fans or the sponsors! Few directors say that their priority is the wellbeing of their employees, i.e., the wellbeing of those who actually serve the clients and create value for the shareholders. However, if employees do not have a positive view of their company and do not convey the right message, clients will have a hard time trusting the organisation. Sinek believes that empathy means caring about people and not only what they produce. GDP is concerned only with what is produced. We have seen that for the Chicago school, winner of numerous Nobel Prizes, human beings are productive capital. This idea is penetrating management approaches around the world. The difference between “you haven't achieved your objectives, that's not good at all” and “you haven't achieved your objectives, is something wrong? Is there anything I can do to help?” is enormous, and sums up the idea of introducing the human factor into the economy. Empathy can be a source for creating economic value. In his book *Réformez ! par le dialogue et la confiance* (Reform! Through Dialogue and Trust)<sup>69</sup>, former CEO of the French Post, Jean-Paul Bailly, describes management as an exercise in kindness and expectations. Kindness cements human connections within an organisation. So, why work to devalue bringing the human factor into relations between individuals?

67. The White Darkness – David Grann, 2018

68. Simon Sinek – Understanding empathy – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi86Nr9Mdms>

69. Réformez ! par le dialogue et la confiance – Jean-Paul Bailly, 2016

# Conclusion

**“STAY IN POLE POSITION, UNCOMFORTABLE, BUT THAT’S OKAY, I LIKE THE CHALLENGE. WEARING THE JERSEY BEARING THE MARKS OF THOSE WHO DISAPPROVE IS AN HONOUR FOR ME.”**

SUPRÊME NTM – THAT’S MY PEOPLE<sup>70</sup>

**M**ost people go through life without questioning themselves and accept the beliefs and practices imposed on them by their education, through social pressure or by force. These people assume that the world will be their ally as long as they keep in line. Unfortunately, making the effort to leave the Cave to call into question what we have learned, what we know and to challenge our prejudices requires us to break with convention, overcome our fears and also confront the majority of people who choose the comfort of the Cave. Those who choose the difficult path accept a kind of marginalisation, even borderline violent exclusion, before eventually receiving some recognition. This is probably why some philosophers and scientists are considered crazy or eccentric. It is also why they have sometimes been eradicated altogether, from Socrates to Giordano Bruno. **This uncomfortable position is very familiar to entrepreneurs, which is one of the reasons we explored it in this letter.**

44

The problem is that we now face a unique situation in human history, a matter of necessity for us to liberate ourselves from a society that is relatively efficient, rich, powerful and that largely satisfies the material and cultural needs of humanity. A society that distributes its benefits to an ever-growing part of the population. We are therefore facing “liberation from a society where liberation is apparently without a mass basis”<sup>71</sup>. **The majority of people have accepted their own subjugation in exchange for a comfortable life. A culture of development based solely on the law and standards cannot be founded on exclusion. It promotes the isolation of individuals and the destruction of the connection between people and nature. Consumer society and the use of debt project the illusion of comfort on the individual, although the price to pay is a form of servitude, which leads to suffering. Such a culture can only divide individuals and partition knowledge. In the long run, it can only lead to a dead end. This dead end is the final destination of our current economic model, which is why we felt it was important to ask ourselves the questions covered in this letter.**

Because the risk of leaving the Cave is most likely worth it in the end: those who make the effort to think of humankind as a single whole realise that an inclusive approach opens lots of doors, addresses lots of issues and answers lots of questions, including some of the most complex ones. Furthermore, **challenging our convictions guarantees a certain kind of freedom.** Freedom does

<sup>70</sup>. Suprême NTM are a French rap band – the lyrics are from their song *That’s My People*

<sup>71</sup>. Herbert Marcuse – *Liberation from an affluent society*, 1968





## CHALLENGING OUR CONVICTIONS GUARANTEES A CERTAIN KIND OF FREEDOM

not mean having the privilege to consume whatever we want, however we want and whenever we want. What our economic system labels as “freedom” in actuality creates servitude. It does not even imply knowing or believing. **Freedom means striving to understand. Striving to understand means reflecting and thinking critically, engaging our intuition, alone, but while re-establishing a connection with our living environment and therefore with others – in all their diversity (the human factor) – and with nature. This is what ancestral cultures were able to incorporate, probably thanks to their sense of intuition. And this is what the ultra-dominant Western culture has failed to take into consideration.** Because it has neglected this aspect, our culture breeds mental distress and a development model that leads to a brick wall. Leaving the Cave is an uncomfortable experience. It is a difficult decision to make, but it is a necessary one in order for us to break out of the cocoon that has imprisoned us in a system leading us to our doom. The failure of an economic system based on infinite growth leads us to the conclusion that a more local development model with more space for the human factor, a connection with nature and informal relationships, and that seeks to unify knowledge is likely the only viable way to prevent our self-destruction. This would involve questioning the relentless hunt for material and intellectual comfort. In a certain sense, this is the approach taken by entrepreneurs at an economic level. Others apply it to the entirety of their existence with similar consequences: loss of comfort, acceptance of uncertainty and questioning norms in exchange for access to a wider view of reality and a certain kind of freedom.

The COVID-19 crisis, the escalation of armed conflicts and the fact that the climate wall is now a reality should provoke a kind of general elevation of consciousness, which is necessary if we are to avoid the point of no return. It involves every one of us working to conquer the fear keeping us in our caves, which has been the cause of most of the suffering over the many centuries of human history, centuries that ultimately represent only a microscopic dot on the timeline of a universe that has existed for over 13 billion years. Could a combination of the humility inspired by this fact and an inclusive frame of mind not serve as the doorway to a sustainable model of growth and progress? It truly seems that the only possible way forward is to reintegrate a connection with life into our culture and to revive the human factor... Human after all.

NOTES

JANUARY 2023

**CIO**  
letter  
TO

JANUARY 2023

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