

To Make a Success of the Anthropocene Age

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Summary:

*Numerous specialists currently employ the concept of the Anthropocene to characterize a new geological age: following on the Holocene age, they believe that the role of the human species has become so decisive that it is capable of disrupting the climate, or of being at the origin of a sixth great extinction of species. Yet, this view of the Anthropocene seems purely negative and may even lead bona fide supporters of ecology to adopt a misanthropic stance (cf. the title of an environmentalist's book *Humanity Will Disappear, Good Riddance!*).*

Obviously, resistance to this destructive aspect of Anthropocene is paramount. But, rather than falling into despair over the humanity's future, we must more than ever imagine and build a positive facet of this new era.

As we look around at our own Earth house in flames, our human community is increasingly feeling the destructive impact of its own lack of responsibility. We have just entered, as the United Nations informs us on launching their Agenda 2020-2030, a decade of great consequence. A decade during which— it is hardly an exaggeration to say— the future and the very Life of our humanity may depend on it. This is true of biological life that is threatened by the destruction of our vital ecosystems: climate change, destruction of biodiversity, pollution impacting shared resources as essential as air, water, earth, as well as devastating pandemics. This also holds true for a threat of which we are less aware, namely that of an accidental nuclear winter ensuing from the automation of weapons of mass destruction that could plunge us into an inferno if we prolong our recklessness in this sphere as well.

This example of the weapons of mass destruction alerts us not alone to the extent of a potential tragedy for humanity, but also to the means to opt for the path of Life rather than that of fatal dead ends. Indeed, we are currently endangered because certain forces, be they individual or collective, have put their intelligence at the service of destruction rather than at the service of our capacity to peacefully live a fully human life. A life threatened by a renewed arms race as well as by the potential annihilation of our terrestrial habitat.

Hence, in this critical decade into which humanity has entered, two paths have since opened up: the first is that of massive collapses, partial or systemic, but increasingly frequent and ever more serious: the worsening climate change and the extinction of species, major financial crisis, violent social crises, identities built around inward looking attitudes, fundamentalist regressions of spiritual traditions ... We know this trend all- too-well: it is war in all its diverse forms: civil, international, ideological or religious.

The other path is that of a qualitative leap for humanity in its global awareness of these challenges. It is the idea that our human species can and will only be saved by becoming once and for all *sapiens-sapiens*, though it is more today, as the philosopher Edgar Morin calls it, a species of *Homo sapiens demens* whose intelligence oscillates between madness and this wisdom which is now essential for us to confront this decade's colossal challenges.

The key that might lead us to the abyss could also usher us toward the path of hope. Were we to irrevocably become *sapiens-sapiens*, if we were able to invest all our mental intelligence at the service of this emotional intelligence that is wisdom, then this present decade, which has started out so poorly, could conversely become that of an awakening, that of the dawn of a new era in the

history of humankind. A new era engaged not only in the long-drawn-out biological process of hominization but equally in the political, ethical, spiritual path of its complete humanization, as has been proposed in the “Dialogues in Humanity” ever since their creation at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit.

This challenge is within our grasp if we know how to make a similar shift in approach and viewpoint that fighter pilots executed when they became, or some of them at least, astronauts. While right at the heart of the logic of war, domination, destruction, they yet came to understand whenever they viewed our Earth from outer space, how another path was possible: one that combines wonder at the beauty of our Blue Planet, an awareness of our fragility, and the demand for that we assume responsibility. As one of those astronauts remarked, if the first day we looked at our own land, very rapidly it was the Earth as a whole and this “people of the Earth” in their entirety that became dear to us.

Do we need to travel into space in order to comprehend the need for this shift in attitude? Obviously not. Each and every one of us can understand it, provided we open our eyes and bring to life this spirit of solidarity evoked by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet, in order to combine the demand for social justice, for ecological responsibility, and for human rights, we need to operate a transformation in relation to our dominant vision of the economy and of politics. In terms of the economy, we need to re-start from the true wealth of that which matters, of what allows us to live fully and to ensure that what we call money is a means at the service of life itself and not an agent in its destruction. As for politics, we need to come to understand that our most critical challenge is the art of living peacefully amongst a community of free and autonomous citizens, but this time round the community of the Earth. Only in such a case will we be able to combine ecological responsibility, social justice, championing human rights, and the freedom derived therefrom. We must henceforth devote ourselves to a new form of humanism reinterpreted through the principles of conviviality and the ecological requirement of respect for the Living.

For a New Realism

Should we find ourselves confronted with the fact that hundreds of millions of human beings find themselves having to temporarily or irrevocably leave lands that have become uninhabitable on account of too hot a climate or an increase in sea levels, then realism, if we want to avoid deadly wars, will entail global public policies for regional development on our planet so as to develop new lands that will eventually become habitable due to global warming (Siberia, Greenland are cases in point), cities built on water, modern or ancient means of transport revisited (airships, for example). Realism will not resign itself to the fact that less than ten individuals have the income of half the world’s human population (cf. the Oxfam report), that multinationals greedily consume fossil fuels, that tax havens embezzle colossal sums, or to know who will be the predominant political power in the 22nd century. Realism will ensure that there will be a 22nd century for humankind, that living species will not be extinct and that therefore, our children will consider inequalities, tax havens and ecological irresponsibility as part of an absurd and nightmarish phase, in the same vein as bygone world wars and weapons of mass destruction.

In this global battle currently being waged against the lethal forces of ecological irresponsibility, the violation of human rights and social regression (cf. the call to conscience for a global citizen resistance initiated by the international network of Dialogues in Humanity), those social actors who are nowadays being treated as marginal idealists will tomorrow be humanity’s heroes in the making, such as *Aquarius* and other vessels rescuing migrants at sea. ...

Henceforth, realism will entail that we fully bring to life the project of a Republic of the Earth, originally advocated by the pacifist activist Garry Davis and his founding friends in the “Citizens of the World” movement.

Pessimism of Intelligence and Optimism of Willpower

Obviously, if we merge the pessimism of intelligence and the optimism of willpower (cf. Gramsci and Romain Rolland), the world confronted with fresh pandemics such as the prevailing coronavirus will reveal several aspects that are far from inspiring. Even if the French president's bellicose rhetoric has proved itself totally inadequate in characterising the necessary mobilization against the pandemic,¹ it does nonetheless hold some truth in terms of classic geopolitics if we analyse the prevailing confrontation, for instance, between China and the Western world. The Western world will probably come out of the current pandemic greatly weakened. Its internal contradictions (financial capitalism's destructive impact, criminal irresponsibility by the likes of Trump and Bolsonaro, Brexit, inner European divisions...) have actually been aggravated by the adept use that China has made of the pandemic. China possesses, for example, the wherewithal to win this battle, for whom it is decisive, of 5G in exchange for the masks it supplied to the most impacted Western countries. Containment measures do indeed call for a growing demand for technological connectivity and distraction, and health security has increased the demand for technological traceability, as can be noted for example in South Korea. 5G and technological social control, which are major assets for present-day China, are thus on the way to becoming priority vectors for the new Silk Road project. The authoritarian security model as embodied by China, and of which Putin's Russia has become an ally, may thus be able to win the prevailing new Cold War, just as the United States was able to achieve success in the previous one in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Empire.

This victory, however, might prove to be insubstantial, for the weak point in any authoritarian system is namely that which enables it to temporarily succeed in the technological sphere: information. By its very nature an authoritarian system is lacking in information. And, as we have already observed in China, the initial month lost while seeking out the cause of the epidemic came down to the fact that the whistle-blower was prosecuted for disseminating false rumours instead of being properly listened to. That he was subsequently to become a national hero, hailed on social networks in the wake of his death, indicates significant fragility in the system. As powerful as the gulags of totalitarian systems are, they invariably end up collapsing under the effect of Solzhenitsyn's barbs ...

In this sense those projects that may now seem idealistic and marginal, projects such as the Dialogues in Humanity's "council of conscience" or "human security," are so imperative. They will effectively nurture this creative resistance and prepare the ground for the new post-authoritarian era.

The challenge is thus not only to confront the risks of upheaval or even ecological, social and financial collapses, but also that of a decline in democracy and a diminishing of human rights. And, in this regard, citizens' movements around the world are more able to make the citizens' voices heard than the States that deem themselves owners of their peoples and their territories. We have observed this with women's movements against sexual violence, with the climate marches where young people have played a considerable role. More recently, we have seen it once again with marches worldwide against racism following the death of Georges Floyd.

Toward a Planetary Citizen Archipelago?

To make a success of the Anthropocene age thus entails working to forge conditions for recognizing, in the face of a standardizing market globalization, the uniqueness of peoples, cultures, languages, and traditions. It also means learning to constitute a people of the Earth capable of perpetuating Life and the desire for humanity on a habitable planet. This is where the archipelago form as

¹ Editor's note: In his televised speech to the French public on 16 March 2020, President Macron declared that France was at war against the Coronavirus.

proposed by the West Indian poet Edouard Glissant could be of great assistance to us. We can observe, for example, how it is the form best suited not only to the best of Europe's memory, but also to a positive imaginary at the heart of the global structuring of the world of tomorrow. This holds true for Europe, for it is the form best suited to its history. It cannot be effectively constructed by denying the singularity of its peoples. Yet, it is even more true for a planetary vision: we cannot build a shared sense of a common destiny, namely planetary challenges such as climate change, if we deny what Glissant calls "the root identities" of peoples and cultures that are constituent elements of this "people of the earth." Because this world to come will have its Tien Amens, its Solzhenitsyns, and its Chernobyls, and its logic of fear will not be enough to permanently contain aspirations for freedom and individualisation in the same way that the logic of a dominating power is not adapted to the emergence of a geopolitics of humanity which, for its part, needs creative power and not a domineering one.

Hence, the memory of the best of the root identities of peoples and cultures (without their inward-looking identity) fused with the imagination of their contribution to an all-world archipelago organized around the preservation of a common good belonging to no one (the oceans and space for the most part, even the Poles) will be decisive in humanity's capacity to launch itself into a desirable future. It could be the march toward an emerging dawn of a humanity en route to a new stage in its humanization where the intelligence of the spirit (the first sapiens)— provided it is cooperative and creative— can be at the service of wisdom and thus the intelligence of the heart: the second sapiens.

About the author:

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Philosopher, author, honorary magistrate at the Court of Audit, Patrick Viveret led a mission on the evaluation of public policies and wrote a report on wealth indicators. He is co-founder of the international meetings "Dialogues en Humanité" and he is also co-founder of the "Mouvement SOL" for the promotion of local citizen currencies to serve a society of good living. He actively participates in the citizen archipelago "Osons les Jours heureux".

<https://dialoguesenhumanite.org/>