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THE GREAT TRANSITION AND ITS PRIOR CHOICES.

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The key factors that are shaping the contemporary human condition are rapid advances in science and technology, rapid social and cultural change, rapid population increase, the impact of energy technology and energy consumption on the environment, rapid scientific and technological advances with great and unpredictable social impact, unemployment, global, regional and national disparities, financial and economic disorder, complexity and instability and the variety and inadequacy of human and institutional responses to these changes.

The human species is clearly in some kind of a transition. There is no longer a status quo ante that could or should be maintained, but no one can be sure of where the transition is leading us.

Two outcomes are possible.

One, the human species finds itself incapable of gaining control of the processes and speed of change, and will destroy itself either with a bang, as the result of nuclear war with its nuclear winter, or slowly, with a whimper, as the result of environmental destruction, the destruction of the global life support systems.

Two, the present human predicament is a transitional phenomenon towards the next stage in human evolution.

Humankind's first priority therefore is of course, to survive.

Secondly to determine collectively, and to the extent it is master of its own fate, the direction it would like its further evolution to take.

If the human species is to survive it will have to develop a clearer understanding of what is happening to the world and to itself, and why. Some have called this **the crisis of intelligibility**. The human race collectively will have subsequently to be able to

develop a global consensus about the what's and why's of the contemporary human predicament, if it is to develop the capacity for effective collective action. This will require of each of us a much greater capacity for digesting very large amounts of information and a much greater capacity for analysis, and integrative conceptual thinking.

At the same time we have become aware of the limits to the human capacity to adjust to rapidly changing circumstances, and of the irrationality of response, the anomy and even of the psychotic character of his or her behavior beyond those limits. We have also become aware of the fact that individuals have different thresholds of tolerance for change. We will all have to learn to raise those thresholds through better understanding of our situation and selfreflection..

Likewise we will all have to try to push back the outer limits of our capacity for institutional and societal adjustment, through processes of social learning.

The human person, individually as well as collectively, will have to learn to live with the complexity of natural and social systems, with scientific uncertainty, unpredictability and social instability. He will also have to learn to make decisions under such conditions; - sequentially, if necessary to avoid committing oneself irrevocably, to one single course of action that would permanently foreclose all other options.

He has to learn that man does not stand outside the very complex interactions between the globe's social and natural systems, but that he is very much part of it. He has to learn to accept that he can not control these systems, but can learn to influence somewhat the probabilities of outcomes from within the system. He has to learn to do so also, by managing his fears and without losing his capacity to reason. He has to make fundamental adjustments to the values he lives by. He has to learn how to adapt his

personal and collective lifestyle so as to make global development sustainable.

As population increases and personal space continues to contract, he will have to learn to expand his inner space, through the arts, religion or simply through a sense of humor and his capacity to laugh. He has to redefine as well his perception of the place of the human individual and the human race collectively in the order of things. It is in the end his worldview that shapes his values and directs his aspirations.

The most important lesson we all have to learn however, may well be our willingness in confronting these problems, to begin our analysis of our problems with the moral definition of these issues. For too long have we accepted that the experts defined our problems for us, leaving the moral dimension as a residual problem, to be tackled only when the experts had provided their solutions to the problem. We can no longer afford to do so. We will have to take off from our own understanding of the moral nature of our problems and then challenge the experts to come up with their responses to them. The human capability to make the right choices - and choices made are the ultimate manifestation of one's values - obviously, does not only depend on his cognitive abilities, his attitudes and values, but also on his courage and integrity as a human being.

Incapacity to respond rationally to the contemporary human condition may be the result of disorientation in the face of such rapid, all encompassing changes, and his frustration to deal with complexity and instability. To learn to live with reason in conditions of complexity, crowding and instability requires in the first place a clear and unambiguous idea of what it is, and what it takes to be a human being. The, possibly inevitable degree of

specialisation and compartmentalisation of science has contributed significantly to the fragmentation of a person's conception of him or herself and his or her humanity. He can only restore the wholeness and integrity of his identity as a human being by his awareness that he is inescapably part of nature, that beyond certain limits human intervention, - deliberate, through greed, development or by externalising environmental costs, or simply as the unintended, cumulative result of individual actions of millions and millions of poverty driven people-, may irretrievably damage and destroy the global life support systems, on which human life and other forms of life on this globe depends. Hence man has to learn to transcend the **hubris** that so much characterised his actions in the first half of this century, and to learn to live with greater humility and with a sense of the limits to which he too, like all forms of life, is subjected. It is in this light that he will have to redefine or re-establish the relationship between economic growth and equity, efficiency and justice, policy and ethics, between competition and cooperation, between sufficiency and affluence, between scientific freedom and social responsibility, between science and spirituality, and between individual and community.

There is most likely **no separate future** for the rich and the powerful in this world on the one hand, and for the poor and the powerless on the other. Humankind will only have a single, common future, if at all-, depending on humankind's collective ability to observe and respect his ultimate dependency on nature and the global environment. It will also depend on the actions and inadequacies of his fellow human beings. He should therefore realize the need for an enlarged and inclusive concept of being human, one that is imbued with a powerful sense of human solidarity encompassing the human race all over the globe as well as encompassing the needs and rights of future generations.

Such an inclusive concept of human solidarity can only emerge from the wellsprings of human faith and action at the deepest

existential level of human consciousness. It is the level in which our profoundest spiritual and philosophical convictions, including those about one's individual self and its relationship to the human community and the Divine, are imbedded. These constitute the source of his inner strength. Indeed, any effort to reintegrate the human person's inner perception of his own humanity, will be forced to address the question of the ultimate meaning of human existence and the situation in which he finds himself. Such an overarching concept of human solidarity, constituting a basic challenge to each and all religions, will then have to include the recognition that there are multiple ways of perceiving and expressing truth, and to recognize the inevitability of religious pluralism and of a variety of different value-orientations and cultural identities in this world. Such an acceptance may be the beginning of tolerance between and within religions, and of cooperation between religions as well as between religions and non-religious ethical systems, on issues that are linked to human survival.

There is therefore a need in each country for people to work towards the development of effective national constituencies linked together in a global network committed to a multivariied search for **an inclusive and shared ethical framework for human survival and solidarity**. It also calls for a new Copernican revolution in our perception of the nation-state and its place in any international and transnational system:

We will have to move from a view centered around the **nation-state to one in which the state system revolves around the commonality of a set of core values pertaining to human survival and solidarity**.

This will require among many other things, the voluntary blunting of the sharper edges of national sovereignty

Humankind collectively, - and each of us individually -, has become responsible for its own survival, and for the direction its further evolution should take, if it survives. The choices that have to be

made , whether they are scientific, technological, economic or social, are ultimately cultural choices, value choices. When everything is said and done, in the end, as the Dutch philosopher Van Peursen has pointed out: "The future is an ethical category"

In order then to ensure human survival and continued human and social evolution the greatest of human efforts will be required. Many of the changes involved , in human and institutional behavior patterns , in habits and customs, in intellectual and cultural orientation , are quite fundamental in nature, and given the inevitable slowness of any collective learning process, especially under conditions of considerable disparities and injustice, there will almost inevitably and continuously be, the inclination to try to speed up that learning and adjustment process through coercion , and the threat or use of force., rather than through improved education , conscientisation, and heightened awareness.

It should also be realized that many of the factors that have brought about the global changes that are part of the contemporary human predicament, are the cumulative result of choices and decisions made by millions and millions of individual people , rich and poor, each acting in his own perceived selfinterest. These factors therefore are not easily manipulated by decisions from any one center.

Events in the last few decades have in addition taught us the limits to coercive power and to the use of violence in solving problems

that involve changing human attitudes, behaviour and value orientation.. But above all we will have to resist any such inclination towards coercion for the simple reason that the use of violence may well destroy the very purposes that human evolution is supposed to serve. It is only in freedom that we can hope to survive and continue the ascent of man. But it is a choice we all have to make together.

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Note: The Club of Rome celebrated its 20th anniversary with a conference on the theme : "The Great Transition: reasons to live and to hope in a new global society.". The author, member of the Club of Rome, former Rector of the UN University and former Ambassador to the USA was asked to present a paper on ethical and spiritual values in that context.

The Government of France hosted the meeting, which was opened with a statement of Prime Minister Michel Rocard.