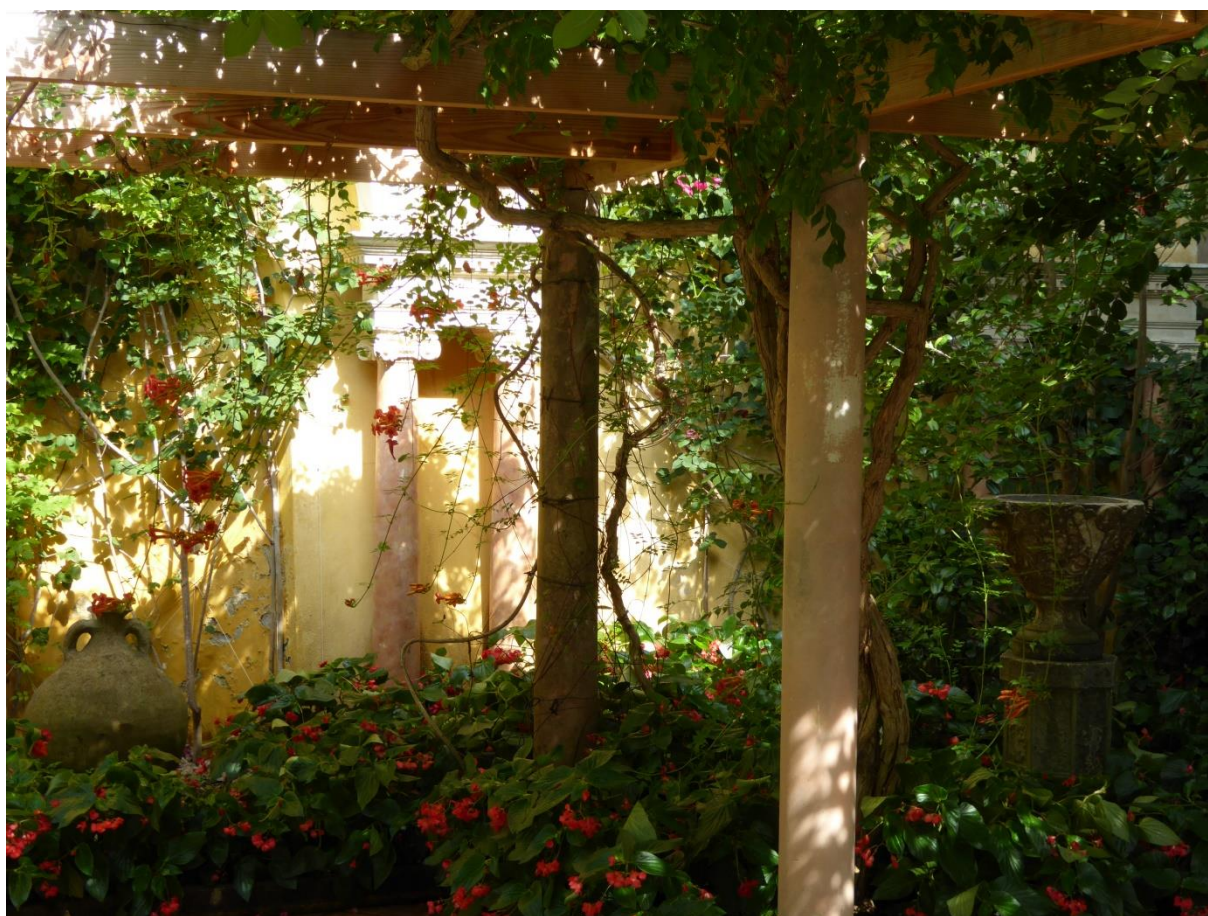


Existential Elements



By

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Foreword

After a long life in Government service, both internationally and at home in Norway, I have acquired a number of experiences. These experiences are both of a public nature and of a private nature, and as life has moved along I have noted down elements of thought that have shown themselves to be important in the process of sorting out what is essential and what is non-essential when facing challenges and opportunities.

These thoughts are mine, even though they are also inspired by many great authors from the past, and I do not pretend that they have general importance. My reason for writing them down is that it has made it easier to sort out my thoughts and make them clear to myself. And then, having written them down, it is easy to put them out on the net. If these thoughts are important to me, they may also be important to others. This is, in all its simplicity, the thought that made me put this text out on the net. If it is useful for you, it will make me happy. If it is not of interest to you, no harm is done to anybody, and writing these thoughts down will have been beneficial for me.

All the pictures used in this text are, with one exception, pictures taken by me.

Kind regards

Fred – Olav Sorensen

Oslo, Norway, October 2020.



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Part 1 Time

Gaston Bachelard is a French philosopher who is well known for his books on **the psychoanalysis of the elements** (air, water, fire, and earth). He has also written interesting reflections on time (past - present - future), in his book "L'Intuition de L'Instant" (The Intuition of the Instant).

He divides the notion of time in three: past, future and present. The past and the future are not real in a tangible sense. They are ideas and images lodged in our consciousness and in our unconscious. Only the present is real, tangible. I will look a little further into this below.



Chapter 1 The past

The past is made up of all the ghosts that inhabit our imagination. Some ghosts are good-natured and some are ill-natured.

The good-natured ghosts represent our selective memories of moments in our life which have left positive imprints in our unconscious and in our consciousness. Some ghosts are ill-natured, representing various sorts of negative imprints left by earlier events of our life in our unconscious and in our consciousness.

The ghosts of the past can appear in the present as regrets, satisfactions, sources of pride, sources of shame, nightmares, lessons to remember, insults requiring vengeance, psychological debts unpaid, feelings of gratitude, experiences of love, traces of hate, and many more. Our psychological constitution determines how we consciously or unconsciously select and store memories. Our personality determines the space each memory will occupy and the role each memory will play in forming our idea of the past. As time goes by, the facts underpinning a given memory will retreat and the elements we unconsciously wish to retain will grow in relative importance.

These ghosts live their own life after having entered our unconscious. They may indeed also have effects on our behavior in the present, even though they are ghosts of the past. They may be transformed over time: embellished, rendered more ugly, increasingly laden with feelings of guilt, blown up in size or diminished. This will depend on our internal psychological mechanisms of selection and repression and on the images we develop of our self. Sometimes, these ghosts may grow so big - either in our consciousness or in our unconscious - that they take completely control of our behavior or well-being in the present. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung have, as we know, said much about this. So have all the psychiatrists and psychoanalysts who have followed them since. The catalogue reviewing all the types of mental illnesses compiled by the profession in the United States of America is increasing annually at a rate which even the imagination cannot keep up with. This catalogue is in itself making people feel unwell, given that the catalogue attaches medical diagnoses and drug treatment to an ever increasing number of human behavioral patterns that formerly were considered as part of normal behavior.



Chapter 2 The Future

The future is made up of all the illusions, in the form of fears, desires and hopes, that our imagination is producing.

These illusions are greatly influenced by our personality and by the ghosts of the past that inhabit our psyche. Our attitudes towards risk, our evaluation of what is possible and what is not possible, our sense of initiative and capacity to take action to influence our own situation, our will-power, fighting spirit or lack of such are among the important factors that will color our illusions in dark or bright colors. They will nevertheless be illusions, until confronted by the evidence and forces (including our own actions) that produce the present.

We all know that people have different attitudes towards risk. Some are what we call risk averse, and they will take action in the present to eliminate or contain as many as possible of the factors that may produce a danger to their health, income or material situation. They place their priority and value on stability, predictability and the status quo. They will not enjoy taking initiatives, and prefer a defensive existence where their actions mainly take the form of reactions to unwanted events that take place in their lives.

Others are what we call risk seekers, and they enjoy taking risks because uncertainty and danger give them a psychological boost. Many enjoy taking risks if these risks carry the potential of great benefits in the future, even if taking these risks also may lead to heavy costs. They weigh up the probability of obtaining the benefits against the probability of incurring the costs, and enjoy taking calculated risks. For these people, taking initiative and promoting change is the essence of their attitude to life.

Our attitude to what we think is possible and what we think is impossible also depends strongly on our personality. Some people see obstacles in life as something they cannot change, and either try to circumvent them or allow them to stop their endeavors altogether. Others see obstacles as challenges that they can either fight directly and eliminate or analyze and turn to their advantage. The amount of fighting spirit and will-power to be found in each individual varies greatly, either because of genes or because of training and education. Our responses to difficulties that arise vary accordingly. Some people never give up, even when the vast majority of people would say that the game is over. Others give up in the face of even the slightest difficulty or obstacle, preferring total passivity.



Photo taken by Martine Félix Sorensen.

Chapter 3 The present

The present is the moment when the ghosts of the past and the illusions of the future are confronted with actual events and with our interactions with other beings.

The present is an instant that, depending on the nature of our actions, senses and perceptions, produces a multitude of events and feelings that in turn will be processed by our memory in the selective way described in Chapter 1 above. The present is the only part of our life which is real in a tangible sense, and it lasts only for a moment before it is transformed into the past and replaced by a new present.

An interesting view on the present is illustrated by the discussion of the notion of mindfulness. In essence, according to Jon Kabat-Zim of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, this is about attention, awareness, relations and caring in the present time. Mindfulness, in this professional version of the notion, deals with our experience of the present moment as conditioned by a) our own bodies; b) our own thoughts and emotions; c) our tacit and constraining assumptions; and d) our highly conditioned habits of mind and behavior.

Our appreciation of the present moment depends on our capacity to concentrate on that specific moment. As the famous British author D.H. Lawrence put it: "An act of pure attention brings its own reward." At a more symbolic level, we have the Japanese Tea Ceremony. The essence of this ceremony is to concentrate totally on each moment and gesture contained in the ceremony. In this way, each act takes on a symbolic content. All thoughts and considerations pertaining to other subjects than the ceremony are shut out of the consciousness. It becomes like an act of meditation where the act of serving the tea is the mantra. As such, it is a ceremony that expresses the central part of the Zen philosophy. All distracting thoughts and prejudices are chased away, and you place yourself as the sculptor in front of the uncarved block.

The great literary critic Harold Bloom, has - in his book "The Western Canon" - reproduced a passage in Shakespeare's play "Measure for Measure" (the Duke's speech in act 3, scene 1), accompanied by a comment on this passage by Dr. Samuel Johnson:

Thou hast nor youth, nor age
But as it were an after-dinner's sleep
Dreaming on both

Dr. Johnson's comment, as reproduced by Bloom, goes as follows:

"This is exquisitely imagined. When we are young we busy ourselves in forming schemes for succeeding time, and miss the gratifications that are before us; when we are old we amuse the languor of age with the recollection of youthful pleasures or performances; so that our life, of which no part is filled with the business of present time, resembles our dreams after dinner, when the events of the morning are mingled with the designs of the evening."

The capacity to concentrate on what is happening in the present, while at the same time mastering the ghosts of the past and harnessing the illusions of the future, together make up the quality of our life. As the Swedish poet Stig Johansson said: "These days that came and went. Not did I know that this was life itself." (My translation.)



Part 2 Our Context

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has done remarkable thinking as regards the analysis of the context in which we find ourselves in our lives.

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological work is dominated by an analysis of how the ruling social classes maintain their strength relative to the social classes lower down in the social hierarchy. His focus on the mechanisms of reproduction of the social hierarchies is a point of departure for the development of a series of very interesting and useful notions for those who wish to understand more about how social forces interact with the individual. His analysis is crucial if we wish to understand the factors that we as individuals are facing when we wish to develop a livable space for ourselves in society.

Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of cultural and symbolic factors in social interaction and in the functioning of society as a whole. Those who are in a position to define the prevailing social rules of human behavior and achievement, are also in a position to make sure that their own preferences and their own qualifications will prevail as measures of social success. This power to define is, once it is used actively for the attainment of social and political power, called symbolic violence by Bourdieu. He defines symbolic violence as the capacity to ascribe relative social value to different types of symbolic behavior and to legitimize certain types of behavior as opposed to other types of behavior.

The social world is in his analysis divided into fields (French: champs), like the fields of art, fashion, media, sports, academia or politics. You may, if you so wish, go as far as you want in making up sub-categories in each of the fields you wish to concentrate on. All these fields have their own respective social rules of behavior and their own criteria for success or failure. They have their own hierarchies and their own dynamics, and the persons who are within these fields or who try to enter them are in a constant state of social competition – with the aim of improving their relative position in the field's ranking system.

The participants in each field possess a certain capital which they can make use of to further their aims in the field. In this context, we can (following Bourdieu's reasoning) distinguish between economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Our economic capital consists of all forms of economic capital, whether in the form of financial assets, real estate or other forms of economic assets. Our cultural capital consists of all cultural resources we possess, either in the form of internalized resources (know-how, competence, manner of speech, manner of clothing and behavior, and so on), objects (cultural objects, for instance like those contained in museums) or institutionalized resources (diplomas, titles, and so on). Social capital designates all types of resources that are linked to our possession of networks, the quality of those networks, and the degree to which we are accepted and respected in these networks. Our capacity to understand and master the social rules of behavior in each social segment of society is crucial for the role we can hope to play in each of these segments. An additional notion of capital is symbolic capital, which designates those parts of the other three forms of capital that are particularly recognized as having a high status in society (like, for instance, the distinction between “old” money and “new” money as regards the social status of economic capital, or the status of the school you have graduated from as regards cultural capital).

Each person, or agent (as he or she is most often referred to by Bourdieu in this context), is characterized by what he calls a habitus. The habitus is the collection of dispositions, perceptions, personal characteristics and modes of action that the individual has received at birth or acquired through his social experience, and it forms the basic platform from which the individual's actions flow. Important elements in making up an individual's habitus are also gender, race, social class, parents, tastes, preferences and attitudes towards challenges posed by the individual's surroundings.

Through more than thirty books and hundreds of articles Bourdieu's work contain vast empirical work. This work is thus centered around these major concepts and directions, in the following way:

- The habitus is seen as a driving force (or lack of such) behind the individual's behavior.
- The social world is divided in fields with their own internal power structures, rules and criteria for success.
- The participants in each of the fields possess economic capital, cultural capital and social capital, which they may use to further their aims in the fields they choose to operate in.
- The social world contains latent symbolic violence, i.e. the capacity of dominating groups or persons to impose their criteria for success without being challenged by the victims of these criteria. The degree of symbolic violence applied in each field will vary according to the dispositions of those who have power in the respective fields, and according to how easily rules can be challenged and changed there.
- The direction of Bourdieu's work tends to show: 1) how hierarchies are formed between the social groups; 2) how cultural practice plays an important role in the conflicts between these groups; 3) how the school system plays a decisive role in reproducing and legitimizing these social hierarchies.

Like every scientist, Bourdieu has been inspired in his work by others. From Max Weber he has retained the importance of the symbolic dimension as a legitimizing force in social domination. Weber's idea of social orders has in Bourdieu's work become fields. From Karl Marx he has retained the notion of capital, generalized by Bourdieu for all social activities, not only the economic activities. From Émile Durkheim he has taken up the notion of determinism, and – in a way – Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralism.

Structuralism, which states the submission of the individual to rules of conduct imposed by the social structures, is conceptually opposed to constructivism, which considers the social world as the result of freely chosen actions on the part of individuals. Claude Lévi-Strauss was the major proponent of structuralism, whereas Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism is an important example of constructivism – in the sense that the individual's freedom of choice was at the center of his preoccupations.

Bourdieu's theories were developed with the idea that the individual has freedom of action, but that this freedom is limited by the structures within which his actions take place. He was thus operating on the basis of a synthesis of the two concepts. This is why he preferred to talk about agents, rather than individuals, because this notion in a better

way covers the idea that the individual acts on the basis of several conscious and unconscious premises that he represents when he acts.



Chapter 4 The Habitus

As already mentioned, the habitus is the collection of dispositions, perceptions, personal characteristics (such as will-power, optimism and sense of initiative) and other modes of action that the individual has received genetically at birth or acquired through his social experience, and it forms the basic platform from which his or her actions flow. Important elements in making up an individual's habitus are also gender, race, social class, parents, tastes, preferences and attitudes towards challenges posed by the individual's surroundings. We are here thinking about characteristics that are not part of what is called the economic, social and cultural capital of the person (which we will look at in Chapters 6, 7 and 8), but rather of characteristics that form the basic intelligence and personality of the individual in question.

Differences in types of personality can be easily observed, even at a superficial level. Introverts and extroverts, optimists and pessimists, active and passive, defensive and offensive, senses of humor, joyful and sad, quick-witted and slow-witted, problem-oriented and solution-oriented, independent-minded and submissive, conflict-oriented and conflict-avoiding, constructive and destructive. These are a few opposites that can easily be observed in different types of social and cultural contexts. They can be encountered in all walks of life, and are not specific for any given class of people.

We can observe people who have a mission or a clear goal in life, regardless of where in society they operate and what their starting point in life is. They are most often driven by a strong motivation, and they often have a strong will to go with it. A sense of mission and a strong will-power goes a very long way. Persons who have these most often succeed in what they try to do. On the opposite end of this scale, we observe people who have no idea about what they want to do in their life, and who need others to tell them what to do. In addition, they may lack the energy or motivation to do their assigned tasks properly. These people are not likely to achieve much in their lives, regardless of where in society you see them. Some of them may be heirs to great financial fortunes and have been given the means to do what they might want in life, but their problem is that they have no motivation, nothing that drives them anywhere. Many of these seek to escape from the aimlessness of their lives through the use of drugs. They will only succeed in destroying their own lives. From these two extreme opposites, between which we find the great majority of people in multiple varieties, we can see the importance of the habitus in determining the destiny of each individual. The next element which is shaping a person's destiny, is the field of action where the person either chooses freely to go or is encouraged or pushed into by other people.



Chapter 5 The Fields

In all walks of life we will find ourselves in a social context. We would not survive for long if each of us lived in total isolation. In any context there will be rules of conduct, either explicit (like laws, rules and regulations) or implicit (unspoken, but yet important to know). If we live in a truly democratic country, we like to think of ourselves as free, especially if we have enough money at our disposal. This sense of freedom will meet many obstacles as we move on in our lives. The obvious obstacles are our financial limitations, physical obstacles such as walls and other barriers, laws and their enforcements, meteorological conditions, and so on. Less obvious obstacles are informal rules of conduct in different social settings. Each field of human interaction has its formal and informal rules of conduct, as well as criteria for success or failure.

Fields of human interaction are numerous and diverse in their set up. They have their own hidden or open hierarchies. The fields of arts, sports, fashion, politics, academics, journalism, business, public service, literature are examples of such fields, and each of these has many subcategories. At a different level, we find social stratifications like aristocracy, upper middle class, middle class, and different subcategories of lower classes. In Hindu society social stratifications are codified in more explicit ways, as seen in the caste system. Stratifications of social classes of humans or of human activities such as those already mentioned, can be elaborated indefinitely if you so wish. This is not useful here.

The field of sports is a field where criteria for success or failure are openly available for everybody to see. Rules of behavior are also clearly set out, even if cheating is rampant here as everywhere, especially where the rewards for success are very big. Honesty and ethical behavior requires a character not shared equally by all. For some people, the risk of being caught in the act is the only deterrent to cheating.

Business is another field where criteria for success are clear for everybody to see, as illustrated by the words bottom line. Dishonest behavior can give great rewards in this field as well, but at great risk for those who engage in it. For those who are in official business ventures, dishonest accounting is an example where rewards may be great in the short run but entail complete ruin if (or, rather, when) the dishonest practices are discovered. As in sports, rules of behavior are here quite explicit, in written laws and regulations, as well as in accounting standards. Here, as in sports, there are also many unwritten codes of behavior, with infinite local variations.

Many fields of human interaction are less transparent than sports or business when it comes to criteria for success or failure. Aristocracy is one sphere where it is hard to understand what is going on, unless you have lived in it from birth. Many customs and codes of behavior go back a long time in history, to the time when chivalry was alive and real back in the 13th century. The upkeep of ancestral traditions is held in high esteem, and more so the longer the family lines go back in time. Dress codes are strict and subtle for

every social occasion, and movements, gestures and ways of speaking will immediately tell insiders whether you are one of them or not. The only persons who manage to behave and move naturally in those circles, are those who are born and raised in them.

Most fields of human interaction are governed by rules and habits that can be learned by anyone interested in doing so. At this stage it is enough to know that such rules and habits must be mastered if you wish to have success in any field of your interest. At the top of this game you will find those who make the rules.



Chapter 6 Economic capital.

The notion of capital, applied widely like professor Bourdieu does, opens up for an explicit discussion of any person's economic, social and cultural endowments. We all have such endowments. Some have vast amounts, others have few, but we all have something.

Economic capital is the most visible form of capital, and therefore most often used to rank people socially in circles where money is important. Economic capital comes in many types. Financial capital is the one directly used in transactions between humans. In earlier times it existed in the form of metal coins where the type of metal, like gold, silver or

copper indicted its purchasing power in markets. If you were rich, it would involve carrying around a lot of weight whenever you needed to travel. To solve this problem, paper money was invented, carrying a guarantee placed on it by the person or institution, usually a bank or a head of state, who had issued it. This guarantee, if you had confidence in the person or institution who had issued it, made sure that you at any time could exchange the paper bill for its equivalent in gold or silver, if you preferred to exchange it into those metals. As international trade picked up momentum, paper money was less used for those transactions. Letters of exchange replaced it. Those were letters issued by a bank or the buyer of goods that guaranteed the payment for the goods delivered. Today, now that electronic communication has entered all human activities, money in the form of coins, paper bills or letters of exchange are fast losing their place in financial and trading transactions. Even the smallest trading transactions in a grocery shop are now handled electronically by use of cards which are up to date on the state of your financial capital.

Other forms of economic capital are different types of material possessions, like real estate, art objects, agricultural land, forests, means of production, and others. Their respective value is more difficult to assess, and they are more directly linked to the use to which they are put. When you cultivate agricultural land, its value will depend on the type of production this land is fit for. If it is located in a place where you can produce top class wine, the land will be worth far more than if it is located in an arid place where few plants grow. Similarly, the value of real estate depends on where it is located and what type of real estate it is. Art objects are generally more mobile, and their values are set in a global market. Art objects have become objects of investment for people who wish to make their fortune less visible, or for speculative purposes – as the prices of art objects from one period to another can be very unpredictable. Sometimes prices may increase to astronomic levels, defying imagination, and other times they may fall flat, for no clear reason. If an artist gets a fashionable name, his or her art objects will attract financial speculators, and prices obtained will be highly unpredictable. These examples show how difficult it is to evaluate economic capital when it is in the form of material possessions.

Material possessions have numerous functions, of which some are purely utilitarian and others are symbolic. A house is a place where you live, but it also tells something about you. If it is an old house that you have inherited, the number of generations of your family having lived in it will convey a message to interested people. The content of this message will depend on the nature of the house. If it is a castle it will send one type of message, if it is a house with a notable architecture it will send another type of message. The size of the house will also convey an important message. Almost all material possessions have symbolic contents, in addition to the use for which they have been produced. Each object, even the most prosaic one, sends a message about its owner and his or her place in society. Aside from houses, cars are other objects that send a variety of messages about its owners. An object's design is supposed to send a message. This message is formed by its designer, and the way the message is received by the public will in turn depend on who acquires the object, and to what use the object is being put. The French sociologist Roland Barthes has in his book "Mythologies" explored what kinds of stories objects can tell in different

settings in society. Many people place a high priority on the symbolic content of objects, and they are careful to acquire only objects which tell stories about them that they wish to convey to other people. These are stories that have a close relation to the sense of social and cultural identity of the people concerned. A trade union leader is for example not likely to wear a tuxedo or drive a Jaguar.



Chapter 7 Social capital

Social capital is something we inherit, and also something we can build up by our own activity. Social capital enables us to achieve results which we could not achieve without it. It is the sum of relations we have with other people, in terms of contacts, access, good will, friendship, and all other elements that shape people's disposition towards us.

By birth we automatically acquire contacts, access and good will in those social classes where our family is accepted and appreciated. We can build on those elements by playing along with the rules of conduct we meet in those classes, and thereby increase our social capital further from that point of departure. The social class we are born into will have numerous rules of behavior, codes of communication, codes of appearance and sets of values that we need to internalize and adhere to if we wish to capitalize on the good will

our parents have built up. Some rules and codes are flexible, and others are rigid. By stretching the flexible codes to their utter limit, we will acquire a reputation for independence – which is to our advantage if we know how the flexibility of the codes operates. If we interpret the flexibility in the wrong way, we may transgress sensitive borders and thereby lose good will.

The major part of our upbringing will involve learning and internalizing all these codes and rules. If we are brought up well, we will gradually think and act according to these codes and rules without even thinking about them. They will be an integral part of us, and we will react with surprise or shock, depending on the situation, if we meet someone who does not master these codes and rules. It could happen if we meet someone who is supposed to be our equal, but who acts with language, gestures or clothing that do not conform to what we would expect from our upbringing. It could also happen if we meet someone from another social class who acts or speaks out of tune from what we would expect from someone in that social class, because we will also have learned what to expect from people of different social classes. If we have had little contact with people from other social classes than our own when we have been brought up, we will have been taught stereotypes and simplifications, and our own reactions to such people may be clumsy when we actually meet them later in life. This leads to an uncomfortable feeling which in turn makes us hesitate to seek contact with people outside of those of our own class. This type of behavior, which is normal, also has the disadvantage of reinforcing social segregation between classes. Some countries, where the social class system is solidly ingrained, have quite rigid social structures, and this often makes them less innovative in meeting the challenges that modern societies are facing.

The social capital that we are given at birth will be kept intact throughout our childhood and early youth because we are not held responsible for our acts in this period of our life. Our social capital at this stage consists of our possession of all the codes and rules of conduct (as well as the good will) that are transferred from our parents to us. Later on we may lose this capital gradually by being either passive and withdrawn from other people in our social class, consciously in opposition, or by developing a life style in breach with the codes of conduct – either through lack of attention to the evolution of the codes or through a failure to live up to the standards of success of those classes. Our degree of integration with the social class we were born into, is entirely up to us, through the activities we choose to engage in, and through the energy we put into it. If we were born into aristocracy, there will a number of clubs we are supposed to join, there will be hunting, fishing or special types of sports that we are supposed to practice. If we were born into working class, there will be sports like football where we would be expected to join the local supporter club, and there will be pubs where we meet our kinsfolk. Our social capital is in constant flux, and it will decrease or increase in accordance with the efforts we put into maintaining it or developing it.

If we have been good at developing our social capital, it will be seen through the number of social networks we are connected to. A network is defined by a group of people who see each other frequently, keep regularly in contact and exchange views or practice sports or other activities together. In the modern world, the term networking describes the activity of entering, maintaining and developing our participation in networks. Ambitious people practice networking actively and strategically, by carefully choosing the groups they wish to join and by being active participants in these groups.



Chapter 8 Cultural capital

Culture is the sum of attitudes, values, and ways of doing things that you find in a society or a community, and it is communicated and maintained over time by way of codes and rituals.

As you see with social fields, you also find cultural fields – with their own codes and rituals. The notions of social and cultural fields are overlapping in many respects. Within a given social class of people you will find many cultural varieties, as you will find representatives of many social classes within a given cultural field.

A social field is a place where people from a given social class gather. The purpose of the gathering may be of any kind, like sports, literature, or social contact, but the interesting feature in this context is the character of the social classes gathered there. The more exclusive the field is, the more socially homogeneous the assembly of people will be. The Jockey Club in Paris is an example of a social field where strict criteria for admission are practiced, mostly based on your links with classical nobility.

A cultural field is a place which is characterized by the type of activity that goes on there. It may be a concert, a football match, an art exhibition, or any other type of activity. The cultural field may contain people from many different social classes. Some cultural activities draw people from many classes, while other activities may be very narrow with respect to the spread of social classes present. It is possible to study the degree of correlation between types of social classes and types of cultural activities. Some activities are socially exclusive, either because of the awkwardness of the activity, their social or historic roots or because of their financial cost. The British game of polo is an example of an activity which almost exclusively attracts nobility or people with great fortunes and social aspirations.

Education is a central key to access to cultural fields. Formal education gives us access to most fields where this particular education is valued. Our access is easier the stronger our academic credentials are. If we in addition possess the codes of conduct and have personal relationships with the dominant persons of these fields, we will have access to the so-called inner circles of these fields. Access to these inner circles gives us high visibility, and high visibility opens up opportunities.

Aside from formal education, birth is a powerful provider of access to socially valued cultural circles. Being born into one of the “right” families provides automatic informal education that in turn leads to the possession of those codes and the knowledge of those rituals that are in use in these circles. In addition to the access provided by the family ties and networks, this informal cultural competence opens opportunities in other fields where this competence is valued. A combination of good formal education and “right” birth, ensures access to the social and cultural circles with the highest status – with the possible exception of circles that consciously aim at being “counter-cultural”. In these latter circles, personal indicators of high traditional social and cultural status are handicaps that will have to be surmounted if access is desired.

There are, of course, many social and cultural fields where neither education nor birth is important at the outset. Popular political movements are examples of such. The history of labor movements in many countries shows that the founding leaders usually came from social groups with low levels of education and small financial means. However, as the movements became important, people with social or cultural status were motivated to join, and little by little took over the leadership – based on their superior educational competence (often in spite of their sometimes deficient possession of the prevailing cultural codes of their constituencies).



Chapter 9 Symbolic capital and symbolic violence.

Within each category of capital we will find types of capital which have a particularly high status, and carry with them prestige which give their owners special authority in the fields where they operate. Such special authority is of great value, because people instinctively listen to what these people say and often obey what they recommend. Such particular authority is in Pierre Bourdieu's language called symbolic capital. When somebody with high symbolic capital imposes his or her codes or rules of behavior on a group or a circle in any given field, Bourdieu defined that as an act of symbolic violence.

In the field of sports, codes and rules of behavior are most often written down explicitly and decided upon by designated governing bodies, according to agreed rules of decision making. In this context, the term of symbolic violence does not apply. However, many sports also have unwritten rules of behavior, codes of dressing, and habits and rituals established through tradition. In the practice or evolution of such codes and rules, symbolic violence may take place if local leaders are autocratic and members are afraid to oppose them.

In the world of business, we find laws decided by governments, codes and rules established by the governing bodies in the respective businesses, as well as more informal cultural codes pertaining to ethical, moral and other behavioral aspects of life in the company concerned. Symbolic violence may easily occur if the company's leaders send strong signals regarding dress codes, attitudes concerning sex, race, religion or other cultural elements not relevant for the exercise of the business at hand.

In the worlds of fashion or show business, the power of decision often rests with a few people who have great discretion to decide what is right and what is wrong – often way beyond questions pertaining to the professional necessities at hand. For some reason, many of the leaders in these fields have strong personal views on what people should look like. These views are not often justifiable by reason. Women are often put under strong pressure to lose weight, often to such an extent that their normal feminine shapes are being eliminated. There are no accepted codes or rules that prescribe such pressure, and these pressures are undoubtedly examples of symbolic violence.

In different social classes, codes of behavior are generally not written down. They are formed by tradition and habits, often going far back in history – especially in aristocratic circles. Social rank is informally established, but for those who take part in a social circle there is seldom any doubt about the social rank of each member – even if it is never spelt out explicitly. There may be one or a few people who have acquired the habit of making decisions, because of the informal authority they command over the group. The ranking among nobility has its traces back to medieval times when titles and rank were given by the king, but the traces of these rankings still linger in those societies where nobility still has a strong social position.



Part 3 Four desires that do not allow us to find peace of mind

The old Taoists in China identified four types of desires we are carrying in our minds that will not give us peace of mind:

The desire for long life – which gives us fear of ghosts.

The desire for reputation – which gives us fear of men.

The desire for rank – which gives us fear of power.

The desire for riches – which gives us fear of punishment.

These will each be discussed briefly in the four chapters that follow. There are some other Taoist pearls that I wish to mention for the pleasure of sharing them with you. They will, however, not be dwelt upon further below. They are the following:

- What the ear likes to hear is music, and prohibition of the hearing of music is called obstruction to the ear.

- What the eye likes to see is beauty, and prohibition of the seeing of beauty is called obstruction to sight.

- What the nose likes to smell is perfume, and prohibition of the smelling of perfume is called obstruction to smell.

- What the mouth likes to talk about is right or wrong, and prohibition of the talking about right or wrong is called obstruction to understanding.

- What the body likes to enjoy is rich food and fine clothing, and prohibition of the enjoying of these is called obstruction of the sensations of the body.

- What the mind likes to be is free, and prohibition of this freedom is called obstruction to the nature.

All these obstructions are main causes of the vexations of life. Cultivating life is to get rid of these vexations.



Chapter 10 Long life.

The fear of death – or its mirror image – the desire for a long life, is the source of all types of fear and anguish. If we do not fear death, then there is no reason to fear any other things, since death is the end of consciousness as we know it.

To rid ourselves of the fear of death, we need to face the thought of what death is likely to be. Death is a transition from consciousness as we know it, to another type of consciousness – or lack of consciousness - which we do not know the nature of. This transition may be very short and abrupt – with little suffering – or it may be drawn out, with more suffering. For those who feel that this suffering is intolerable, there is always the option of making it end voluntarily. Most people do not choose this option, which may be taken to mean that the suffering is more tolerable than the idea of disappearing from the face of the earth. If the idea of disappearing from the face of the earth makes us uneasy, it is either because we are interested in life and what it has to offer, or it may be because we attach importance to ourselves and what we have to offer to the well-being of the community. Wanting to live is not in contradiction to getting rid of the fear of death. In fact, when we get rid of the fear of death, our enjoyment of life will increase, because our anguish will no longer linger above our heads like a dark cloud.

The suffering which leads people to the brink of a death wish, may take the form of boredom, a feeling of emptiness, physical or mental suffering, the feeling of being a burden in old age or incurable illnesses. Mental illnesses are one of today's epidemics. American psychiatrists have, as already mentioned, compiled large books full of diagnoses of different types of mental illnesses. They "discover" new mental illnesses every year, and enter them into their books, categorized as illnesses to be treated. This then turns more and more people into mental patients who think they need professional help. Alternatively, they could start asking themselves questions about what it is that causes their problem, face the difficulties and fight them as best they can, before automatically seeking help from others. Opening up to friends and family about our mental problems generally helps a lot, and many of the solutions lie in getting to understand the causes of our problems and facing them directly ourselves.

We may choose to fight our suffering or we may accept it passively. It is not going to hurt us much if we are not afraid of death itself.

Once we are rid of the fear of death, we can start living in full. We can relax and enjoy the present – with the past being past. The past is, as already discussed in the early chapters, populated by ghosts of all sorts, good or bad. The past is something we can forget about if we wish, or we may have learned some lessons we wish to retain for future reference. In addition, the past may remind us of thoughts that haunt us or give us pleasure, thoughts which may pop up from time to time. We are free to discard these ghosts if we wish. The future is something we can plan for (with the planning process being itself an enjoyable undertaking, since this is something we control). The future contains all the illusions and intentions we may be having about what our life is going to be, or could be. These illusions may be of a nice sort or a bad sort. If we want our illusions to become reality, we need to ask ourselves what it takes to turn the illusions, or dreams, into reality. Then we need to actually do what it takes, which may involve quite a bit of hard work and stamina. If we are ready to do the hard work and fight all the adversity we might have to face while doing it, then we have a good chance of making our dreams come through. Until then they will be illusions of the future.

Only the present is reality, in a tangible sense. Our present sensations and thoughts may be filled with good or bad ghosts of the past, or with good or bad illusions about the future, but the tangible reality of the present is what we are holding in our hands, seeing with our eyes, hearing with our ears, feeling on our skin. It is the activity we are engaged in, the people we are interacting with, and the place we are in when this is happening.



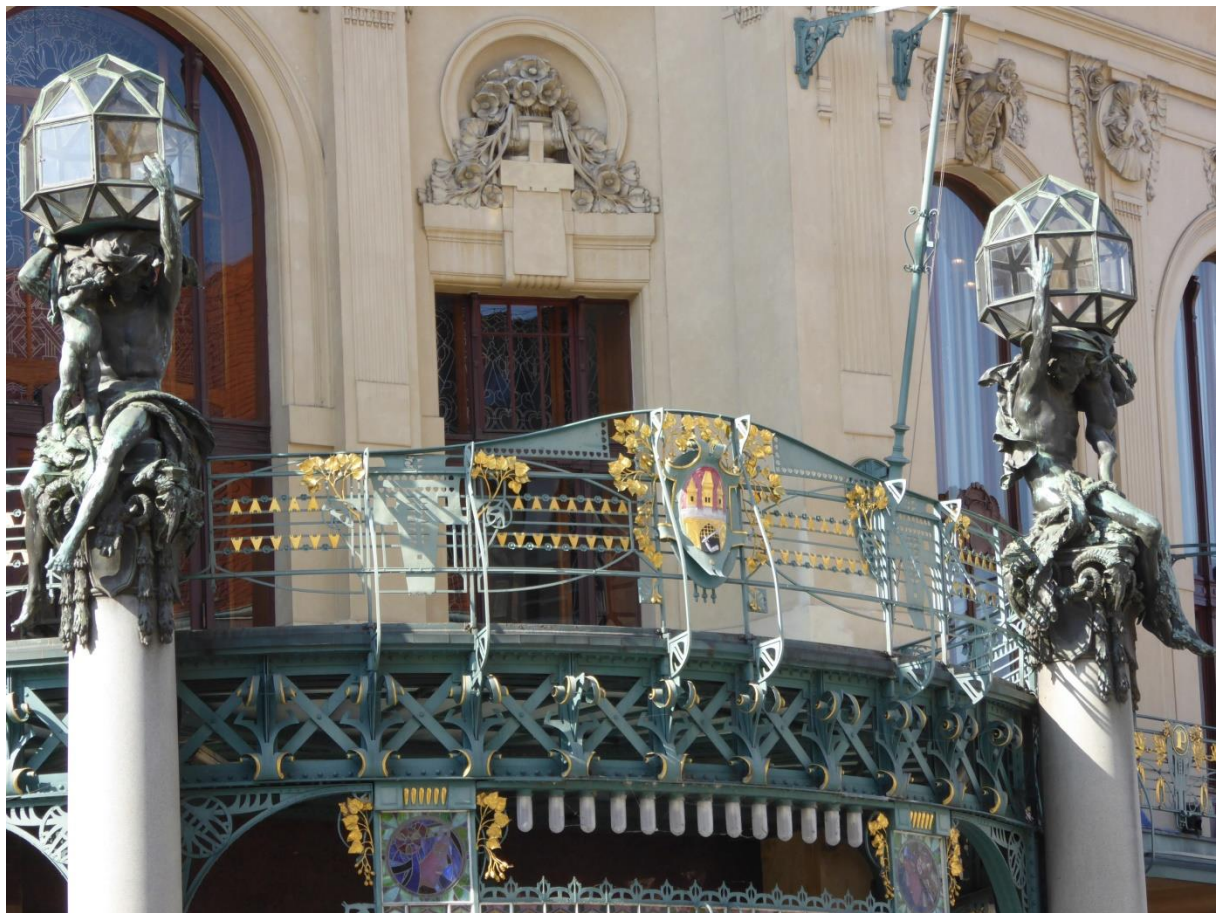
Chapter 11 Reputation.

Worrying about what other people think of us, makes us think and do a lot of things we would not otherwise think or do. It makes us into actors, playing the role of what we wish others to see when they look at us. Our acts and our appearance are directed towards an image that we wish to project. The further that image is away from the person we really are, the harder it becomes to play the role that projects that image. The harder that role is to play, and the longer we act it out, the greater our fear of being unmasked becomes. The probability of actually being unmasked naturally increases with the strain we feel when playing the role. The easiest thing is to play no role at all, and not worry about the image we project.

We seldom reflect on how our present acts and thoughts are influenced by the idea of what others may think about us or want us to do. We may be living our lives the way our parents wanted or expected us to, or we may be imitating the life of someone we admire. We may be doing what the boss tells us to do, without thinking about whether this is the best thing to do in the circumstances. It is hard to know whether the choices we make about our own life are choices we make freely, according to our own inner wishes, or

whether they emanate unconsciously from choices and desires other people have formulated in our place.

The crucial thing to know is whether we can identify actively with the choices we make and the acts we engage in. If we do not care about the image we reflect or project on others, we are more likely to do and say what we feel like doing and saying, and we will dress in the way our purse and our taste leads us. We will not act out any role, and there will thus not be any tension between what we are and what we project. When we act and speak according to our nature and convictions, there is no psychological tension building up.



Chapter 12 Rank.

Healthy ambition has to do with setting targets on how to improve conditions in our life or other peoples' lives, or achieve other goals that we think are legitimate. Unhealthy ambition has to do with climbing on other peoples' backs, tearing other people down in organizational pyramids, or other ways in which we harm other people when trying to further our own ambitions. If climbing the pyramid becomes an aim in itself, relations with superiors who can influence our climb and competitors who can threaten our climb become the focus of our behavior. That takes the focus away from our professional or humanitarian achievements. Our professional life and our social life become entangled in

tactical considerations – where doing and saying "the right things" take precedence. In the process we lose our integrity, and we lose touch with the basic values in life.

Libraries are full of books about how miserable we become when we engage in hierarchical competitions in larger corporations, or when we engage in social competition with friends and neighbors. We then fill our days with schemes and plans aiming at impressing others, blocking other people's efforts, acts of vengeance if someone has hurt us, setting up traps for other people to fall in, nurturing fears about what other people might do to us, and other activities which further stimulate our hypocrisy or mischievous imagination. This approach to life never ends well. We may succeed in getting on top of a pyramid or giving people the impression that we are great persons, but we know the truth, and that truth eats us up from the inside and ultimately gets to the surface in the form of great losses of self-respect and other psychological problems.

Reaching our goals and living in harmony with our self-respect are not incompatible things. It mainly involves identifying what we need to do and making all the efforts we think are necessary to achieve our goals, without compromising with our ethical standards. Some people do not have any ethical standards and they act as if cheating and lying are all part of normal behavior for achieving their aims. Organized crime is full of such people, and we unfortunately find them in all walks of life as well. There is no good reason to let ourselves be inspired by them, if we wish to live in harmony with ourselves and respect ourselves as persons.



Chapter 13 Riches.

A desire for material wealth, beyond what we may call basic needs, will – if unchecked – lead us into reasoning and actions which will never give us peace of mind. This type of desire is often based on comparisons with what other people possess. Some people also tend to measure our value as a person in direct relation to our wealth. Rankings of this kind abound in the media. If we, consciously or unconsciously, allow ourselves to be caught in that game, it is safe to say that we will never be happy. There will always be people who possess more than us. Chasing after them is sure to make us permanently frustrated. Being rich is in itself not a problem, as long as our goals in life are not linked to these riches. It becomes a problem when we start defining an increase in wealth as a goal in itself.

Attaching a big importance to our wealth, even if we do not compare ourselves to others, will in itself be a source of anguish. The fear of losing it will spread into a fear of everything that can lead to a loss of our wealth, or a fear of everyone who has direct control over factors that influence our wealth.



Part 4 Preconceptions, attention and circumspection

Chapter 14 Preconceptions

From the moment we are born, ideas, feelings and images get implanted into our minds. Other people, particularly our parents and other close relatives, talk to us and give us all forms of contact. Later on, as our consciousness increases and we develop our language, we see things and hear about things, and these things are given names. Attached to these names, we are given explanations and interpretations. Our young minds are receptive like sponges. We take in everything. Observations, explanations and interpretations enter our minds and stay there. We have been given no reason to doubt what we are told. Ideas and impressions, as they are formulated by other people, become integrated parts of ourselves.

Later in life, as we grow up, we are expected to take charge of our own lives and make a living for ourselves. We become, or are expected to become, independent people.

Some people never become independent. They may have developed a strong psychological attachment or submission to their fathers or mothers, and throughout their

whole lives they take orders from them or try to guess what they want, and spend all their time trying to please them or fulfill what they think are their expectations. They constantly need recognition from their fathers or mothers, or both.

Other people develop competences that enable them to take care of themselves materially. They become materially independent. However, they carry with them all the ideas, norms and ways of seeing and interpreting the world around them that they have been fed by their family and relations as they grew up. They become close copies of their family and relations.

Yet other people have developed in their minds an opposition to their parents and relations, and everything they stand for. They have become just as dependent of their parents as the others mentioned above, but this dependence is logically linked to taking the counterpoint of their parents. Whatever the parents think or do, they choose the opposite – in a form of protest. This type of protest is not a sign of independence, it is direct dependence in the form of negation.

Truly independent people develop their own material and mental life by their own thinking, without submitting to pressures from anybody. And yet, independence is also a question of being able to reflect on all the ideas, notions and opinions received or acquired during childhood, and having an explicit idea about whether these are still part of your thinking and whether you confirm or reject those ideas, norms and opinions after your own independent reflections. The crucial part of this reflection consists of making ourselves aware of all the preconceptions that have over time been uploaded into our minds. Getting rid of these preconceptions, and reloading only those that we consciously wish to take on board, is a necessary process in acquiring real independence of mind.

Blowing the preconceptions out of our minds would be what the Zen Buddhists in China and Japan would term “getting back to the uncarved block”, an image taken from the world of sculpture. That would also mean taking on a new task with a minimum of preconceived ideas.



Chapter 15 Attention

The capacity to pay attention, or to concentrate on the task at hand, is an underestimated challenge of our modern society. And yet, to quote the famous British author D.H. Lawrence: “An act of pure attention gives its own reward”.

In our digitalized society, the means of communication are so numerous and so prevalent that many people are incapable of disconnecting themselves from the constant flow of information directed at them through their mobile phones, desk computers, alarm systems, automatic reminders of tasks ahead, and other electronic units they have linked themselves to.

In ancient times, people dropped everything in their hands when the telephone was ringing. This was such an extraordinary thing that it almost created panic in the house. This dominant and slightly terrifying thing had to be answered immediately, or we might lose contact with those who tried to reach us. It might be something very important! This dominant position occupied by the telephone has persisted, and it still has this position with many people today. Except today, the mobile phone, which has taken over that role, never stops ringing. The mobile phone has so many functions and applications that only the professionals who have produced them understand the whole variety of things you can do with them. Somebody may want to reach you, somebody may have posted a message

on Facebook, on Twitter, on Instagram, or on one of the many other social media outlets or Apps you are linked to. Depending on what you have asked your mobile phone to communicate to you, it works 24/7 for you and it sends signals all the time. Some people are incapable of ignoring the signals sent out by their mobile phone, and they are busy responding to it throughout the whole day. Others have decided to abstain from responding immediately, but they leave the device connected in order to stay aware of what is going on.

The result of today's digitalized communication and its multiple devices is that very few people are able to concentrate on one subject at a time. In order to defend their life style, they say that they are champions of multi-tasking, and take pride in their capacity to do many things at the same time. What they do not realize is that their power of concentration on one task at a time has gone down the drain. They get restless and nervous if they are disconnected, and they are unable to do anything properly. They develop a fear of losing out of something exciting going on, so they will not pay attention to any task or priority without at the same time having an eye on the electronic devices at hand.

Over time, Chaos sneaks into their minds. Since they need to keep up with what is going on, they do not pay attention to the silent and devastating work Chaos is doing in their minds. Chaos produces depression, burn-out and other forms of psychological imbalance. They have not paid attention to what was going on, so Chaos could do its work without them doing anything to fight back. The only time they pay attention is when they break down, when they have become incapable of attending to their devices. By then, they are unable to help themselves. They need professional help.

The act of pure attention gives its own reward. That thought by D. H. Lawrence is going straight to the point. Attention is something we mobilize ahead of a task, not after everything has broken down. To obtain the level of attention a task needs, we need to concentrate. The capacity to concentrate starts by shutting all distracting elements out of our mind, including shutting off the mobile. We direct our thoughts exclusively to the task at hand. The ancient Indian art of meditation, which Buddha also applied when reaching Nirvana, required extensive training in the art of concentrating exclusively on one thing for a long time. It takes will power, which is not readily available in a culture of instant gratification. This is also something that requires training. Once we have acquired this type of power of paying attention, we may hope to fulfill the more basic ambitions we might be having.



Chapter 16 Circumspection.

Slow, reflected and attentive progress. This is the key to success in the Japanese game of Mikado, where we have to pick apart a stack of entangled sticks one by one without moving any of the other sticks as we remove each one. The same key words apply to the Chinese game of Go, which is a game of strategic advancement on a board, where we move our pawns in such a way as to take control of territory, facing an opponent who will try the same thing against us.

Magically, these games go at the heart of how human progress is achieved in a society as a whole, or individually. In human relations we need to convince people to cooperate with us if we wish to obtain durable results. We may be able to force people to do as we wish if we possess means such as money or physical force that can be applied in a given situation. Such use of force will give short lived progress, because those who have been forced will not cooperate actively with us in the long run. Most probably, they will try to obstruct our efforts whenever they have the chance to do so without our noticing it.

The only way to achieve durable progress is to establish active cooperation towards our aims. This can only be done when other people understand what we wish to achieve, and agree with us that these are desirable aims that they also would like to see happen. Before we can hope to get to this stage in a process, we need to establish genuine communication

with the other person or persons we wish to cooperate with. We need to be convinced that we can trust the other person, and this other person needs to see if he or she can trust us. Anybody who wishes to do business with Asians will have been struck by the importance they attach to establishing mutual trust before getting down to what their western partners call business. In western culture, the relationship is defined in a written contract partners need to sign, and there is less emphasis on making sure the human relations are well in place before embarking on a common project. The risk of misunderstandings is in the latter case greater, with legal litigations and court procedures as the price to pay.

Short term business dealings and long term mutual trust are two different things. In human relations, large projects involving many participants or in politics there is no way around the slow process of building trust. Whenever we are facing a difficult situation, we need to take the time and make the effort to understand properly what the challenge is about. This also applies to a situation where we have to solve a problem on our own. We need to take one thing at a time, make sure that everything we need is in place and all involved are on board, before we can move on to the next stage. Trying to jump the gun only forces us back to the starting point, often with the handicap of having lost trust in the process. Those societies where politicians take the time to consult properly with their people will take more time to make decisions, but once the decisions are made they can proceed more quickly to the desired results, because everybody cooperates, or at least, nobody obstructs. In societies where politicians make quick decisions, the population either stays passive because most of them do not understand what is going on, or they resist actively either because of opposition or because they do not want to cooperate on something they do not understand.

Both individually and collectively, patience and persistence, combined with full understanding of and close attention to the task at hand yields the best results.



Part 5 Resistance and Harmony

The Stoics of Ancient Greece and Rome, and the Buddhists have some elements in common that we can learn many important things from. These major elements are: a) Ethical conduct, b) Mental discipline, c) Reflection and understanding, d) Empathy and compassion, and e) Resistance to suffering. In the chapters that follow, we will explore these elements a little more.

Chapter 17 Ethical conduct.

As we all know, we all encounter difficulties in life and unforeseen problems come up, often at inconvenient moments. We also face the consequences of problems that are much larger than those created in our own sphere of influence. Wildfires due to heatwaves or storms generated by the climate are examples of problems that may hit us personally and directly, even though we have not caused them. Sometimes we have to face problems that are a direct consequence of our own actions, like in the case where we encounter payment

problems because we have been spending too much money on things we do not really need.

We can learn a lot from the Stoics in Ancient Greece and Rome, who were active more than 2000 years ago in Greece and carried on in Classic Rome, even reaching up to the sphere of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. The Stoics taught us something fundamental about how to face problems. They made it clear that it is impossible to live a life which is free of problems. Problems will always come up, in one way or the other. The question is not how to avoid problems, but how to deal with problems when they arise. The first thing we need to do is to sort out which problems we have the power to deal with and which of them are outside our reach, those we cannot do anything about. Then we should not spend our energies or worries on those problems we can do nothing about. We need to concentrate on those problems we can do something about.

The problems we meet and we can do something about are of many sorts, of course. They may have to do with relations with other people, consequences of mistakes we have made, or unforeseen accidents. Firstly, we need to face the problems directly. If we try to avoid them or run away from them, they will follow us and grow bigger by the day as they are left unsolved. Secondly, we have to reflect on the best way to solve them before we act. Thirdly, we have to carry through what we think is the best way to act. Whatever we do, we have to act honestly and in an ethically correct way. No lies, no cheating. In short, we need to do our best and do the right thing.

If we do the right thing, as best we can, we will not be bothered by bad conscience or reproach from other people afterwards. The famous Russian author Dostoyevsky wrote a novel called *Crime and Punishment*, which goes to the heart of this question. In this novel, a young man robs an old woman in her apartment and accidentally kills her in the process. He manages to sneak away without getting caught. So, one could think that, from his point of view, everything is fine for him. However, this is when his problems really start. Both consciously and unconsciously, his self-respect as a person is gone and he is tormented by his conscience. So, even if nobody else knows what he has done, and he therefore does not have to face the condemnation and punishment of other people, his own mind torments him all the time, leaving him no psychological rest. As time goes by, he gets completely destroyed by his own torments. This is, to varying degrees, what will happen to us all whenever we act unethically in one way or the other.

To face all our problems directly, do our best, and in a way which is ethically proper, is the main lesson the Stoics left us. A lesson that serves us well.



Chapter 18 Mental discipline

When we face a problem, or any challenge for that matter, we need to start by thinking about the alternatives we have and what the best course of action is. From that moment on, our mental discipline is crucial. Once we have decided what to do, we need to stick to the decision and carry out the actions that follow from the decision. This often means working hard, talking to people who have a say in the problem, waiting for the necessary answers before moving on to the next step, following up what you agree with other people to do, and so on until the problem has been dealt with in the way you want. It may take time, and cooperating with other people can be complicated, since you need to listen to what they say, and take account of it. We will need patience and persistence. A lot of efforts on our part may be required, and we need stamina and self-discipline.

The greatest amount of self-discipline is required when the challenge we are dealing with is something we have decided on our own initiative, when nobody expects anything from us. This is the case if we for instance have decided to stop smoking or drinking, or to start losing weight. Then we will have to go through a long, drawn out program which implies taking small, steady steps every day involving only ourselves. These daily efforts, which have not been part of our daily lives up to now, require moving out of our comfort zone and do unpleasant things every day in order to achieve a result which is not only far away

in time, but also uncertain of success. To carry through such daily efforts requires great mental self-discipline. Mental self-discipline is a major asset. Those who possess that have great advantages over those who give up when things become unpleasant or difficult. It often makes the difference between those who achieve success and those who do not. Far too many people give up when they meet resistance from other people or when things become unpleasant. When the daily comfort becomes the first priority, nothing important can be achieved.

In the world of sports this becomes very visible. In order to achieve certain goals, you need to train up your body's strength, technical ability and stamina to meet specific standards set up either by yourself or somebody competent who knows what is required for success. Achieving these goals take a long time and involve very uncomfortable efforts. Next, when you meet a competitor whom you wish to beat in competition, you not only have to meet the standards set up by yourself, but also face the standards of your competitor. If your competitor's standards surpass your own, your will-power will be tested. You may, without really knowing it, be able to surpass your own normal standards if you have the will-power to try hard and if you are determined to never give up. Time and again, we see this happen in sports. The reason is that in sports, as in all competitions, there is a physical component and a mental component. Mental strength is composed of will-power and the capacity to never give up, even when things look hopeless. Of two competitors with equal physical ability and strength, it will always be the one with the greatest mental strength who wins.



Chapter 19 Reflection and understanding.

When we face a task, a challenge or a dialogue with a person or group of persons, we need to understand what we face. A common mistake I make is to start acting too quickly, before the nature of the challenge ahead has been entirely clarified and the alternative actions open to me are mapped out. The more complicated the challenge is, the more necessary this prelude is if we wish to avoid unforeseen problems afterwards. And yet, we tend to underestimate the necessity of going through this preliminary process. If the challenge is clear and simple, it will generally only take a few seconds to take that extra round of thinking. When we are impatient, we tend to overestimate our capacity to understand the nature of the challenges ahead.

When a task or challenge is complicated, reflection takes time. The larger the number of people involved in the task, the more time we will need. In politics, decision makers want to give the appearance of being decisive and efficient. Generally, they wish to take quick action when a problem arises and that is what the public wants too. However, they both tend to underestimate the complexity of many of the challenges facing a large community. There is a strong interdependence between different parts of society, and an action taken in one part will have consequences in many other parts of that society. By being decisive and quick in dealing with one problem, we may cause problems in several other areas and

end up with other problems that seen on the whole are worse than the one we set out to solve.

Well organized societies are characterized by good dialogue between different groups of people and different organizations. Whenever political action is contemplated, a process of consultation between people concerned by this action is set up and organized in such a way that all concerned are confident that their views will be heard. The necessary time for this process of consultation is set aside before decisions will be taken. Such a process costs time and often much money for research and examination of alternatives. Once a course of action is decided, it will generally be understood and accepted by all involved, even if all people involved do not always agree on everything in the decided action. After this, the action can be implemented with a minimum of protests, obstructions and unforeseen complications.

In societies or groups where only few people are involved in the decisions, there is an illusion of efficient decision making because things move more quickly. However, the level of discontent with the decisions being made is often considerable and the unsolved problems following in the wake of quick decisions can be numerous. In the end, this is far less efficient than what we see in the more slow moving processes of the societies that are better organized.

At the individual level, we see the same thing. People who make quick and impulsive decisions are often more chaotic than more slow moving people, The chaos following in the wake of impulsive people is often far more entertaining, but the results achieved are less entertaining for those who have to live with the consequences.



Chapter 20 Empathy and compassion.

A basic value in Buddhism is compassion. After reaching Nirvana in his intense period of meditation, one of his major thoughts was the idea that compassion was the essential way to face the great miseries he would meet on his way. All the major religions place this at the center of their preoccupations. If human society is to function, compassion has to be an essential part of it. Empathy is a precondition for authentic compassion.

Without empathy we are not in a position to understand other people's sufferings. If we do not understand what other people are going through when they have difficulties or are suffering, then our compassion is not going to be authentic and it will be felt more as an insult than a help by those we show compassion with. We can never hope to understand fully what is going on in another person's mind, but an honest attempt to understand will be a precondition for real compassion.

In practice, compassion can take the form of mental support shown to the one who suffers. This often has a significant value for that person. He or she will then know that they are not alone, and have someone to turn to for support. Materially, compassion can be shown in the form of practical help to relieve the suffering. It can be food if the person is hungry, or financial support if the person does not have the financial means to meet basic obligations for a decent life.

Different societies have different views on how compassion should be shown in practice. The basic difference between societies is shown in the question of whether the community as a whole should be involved or whether it is entirely a private matter.

Some societies have the attitude that all persons are responsible for their own welfare, and that the practice of compassion is left to the individual's own choice. This means that people who are in need of help, depend on the good will of other people, and become indebted to them if they receive help. This will in many cases introduce a feeling of humiliation in the person receiving help and a feeling of superiority in the person who helps.

Other societies have the attitude that nobody should be placed in a situation where they become humiliated by their material situation, and depend on individual charity for subsistence. Through contributions made by all citizens, the community is given the means to offer help to all those who are in need, and this help is considered as a right they have which is not considered as charity. The individual is a member of the community and the community stands up for all its citizens when the need arises. In this way, the citizens are expected to help others through the contributions they make to the common finances, and receive help when they are in a situation where help is considered appropriate.

The attitudes shown in this major question by different societies vary quite a lot, and most societies are operating a mix of both attitudes. There are variations regarding the kind of help people are given by the community and the extent of help given. This subject often leads to heated discussions and strong disagreements. Some people think that if the community gives too much help, its citizens will become lazy and rely too much on the community for their well-being. Other people think that the community has to make sure that nobody will depend on individual charity for their survival. The disagreements on this question do not show signs of abating.



Chapter 21 Resistance to suffering.

Resistance to suffering was the triggering thought for Buddha after he had travelled around in the world in his youth and seen all the misery confronting him. He wanted to find a way to exist in this world without being totally consumed by all the suffering that was to be seen everywhere. His intense and long spells of meditation aimed at shutting all suffering out of his mind, in order to disengage with the misery of the world. What remained as essentials in his mind was the feeling of compassion and a total resistance to suffering. The Stoics in Ancient Greece and Rome who emerged more than two centuries after the life of Buddha, developed thoughts about life that were quite similar, except that the Stoics did not look for disengagement with society in the same way. The similarities, however, were linked to accepting suffering as an integral part of life and doing your best to improve things while acting ethically and compassionately.

In the Western world today, the material well-being has developed to such an extent that many people have become used to having their needs fulfilled very quickly after the need is identified. The notion of Instant Gratification has become an integral part of the language and of the expectations we find in many people's minds. Many people, in fact far too many people, act in their daily lives as if they have the right to fulfill their immediate needs without regard to what the consequences of their acts may be for other

people. It can easily be observed in traffic on roads, and all other places where the interests of people may collide in a visible way. In spheres where things are less visible, things are even worse. The need for instant gratification has arisen for two generations of people who, among the upper and middle classes, have been raised with the experience that whenever they expressed a wish or a need it was quickly fulfilled by anxious parents who had the means to fulfill these wishes and needs. These two generations did not get the time nor the occasion to experience frustration or suffering linked to not getting what you need. Suffering linked to lack of food or other material goods was not part of their experience.

Without this basic experience of suffering in early childhood and youth, they were subsequently not mentally equipped to deal with other kinds of suffering linked to less material frustrations. Human relations, in particular the experience of love and friendship, give rise to many types of suffering that are not linked to material well-being. Problems related to health, which can strike anybody, regardless of wealth, are other examples. Those who have been raised with the experience of instant gratification are not mentally prepared to face suffering in the way a Buddhist or a Stoic would think you could. They will frequently have mental breakdowns or be in constant need of psychological assistance. Presently, western societies are seeing a surge in the need for psychological assistance from people who are unable to confront the difficulties they face arising from consequences of a material nature or as consequences of complicated human relations.

The idea of suffering will also be significantly different for people in different cultures or different classes of society. The sufferings of beggars in slums of big cities in Asia or Latin America do not come from the same causes and are not of the same nature as the sufferings of rich people in the upper classes around the world. The endemic use of drugs among many people around the world who are well off materially have different causes than the escape that drugs may offer people on the verge of starvation. The ancient practice of meditation in the forests of India thousands of years ago, or the surge of hermits who sought isolation in caves in the deserts of the Middle East around early Christian times were movements of the same kind as that practiced by the Buddha, a mental effort to detach themselves from the misery and suffering of life in human society.

Suffering has always been a companion of human life in communities, whether the causes have been wars and other conflicts, hunger, plagues or other health problems, natural catastrophes, or sufferings of a psychological nature deriving from complicated human relations. The capacity to resist such sufferings is an essential part of life. We need to be able to endure the sufferings arising from things we cannot do anything about, as well as we need to be able to fight against those problems we have the power to do something about. Endurance and fighting spirit are keys.



Part 6 Fundamental basis for our own activities

Regardless of where we stand in the sociological analysis drawn up by Professor Pierre Bourdieu (see part 2 of this book), there are some elements that stand out as basic for our existence regardless of how the forces analyzed by Bourdieu affect us personally. Those elements are: a) Our health; b) Our education and acquired competencies; c) Our access to material goods such as housing, food, clothing and other necessities.

Chapter 22 Health

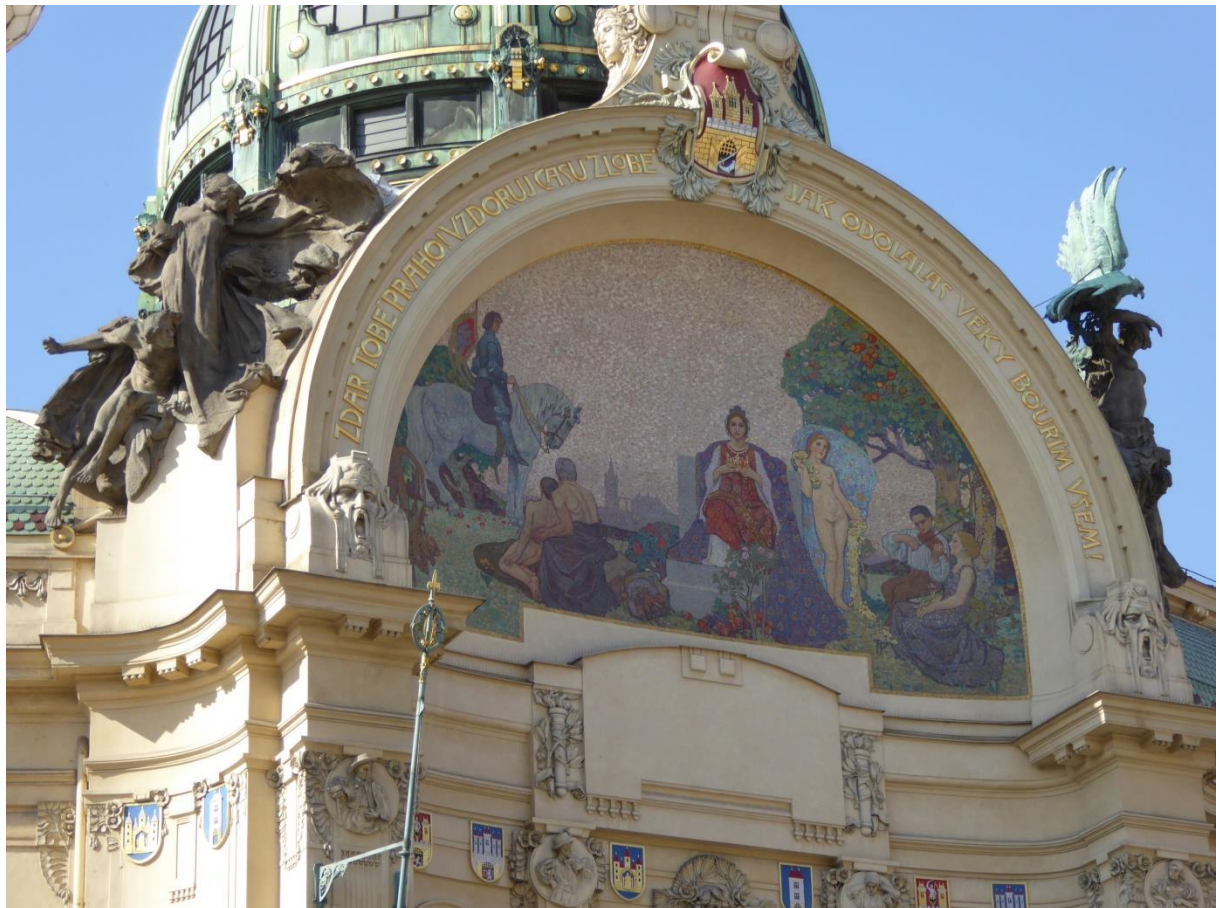
Our physical and mental health is a starting point from which all our activities are formed. If we are lucky, our health is good and it does not in any way limit the choices available to us when we wish to find out what to do any given day or what course to choose for the longer term. We can then embark on any physical or intellectual activity open to us, and expect to succeed in any endeavors where we choose to make the necessary efforts.

If we have physical or mental limitations or disabilities that impair certain types of functions, the choices open to us may be more limited. However, within those more limited choices available, we may still have many options that are open to us. The number and nature of available options are very much dependent on our personal attitudes when faced with obstacles. Some people seize upon any excuse to avoid doing anything requiring an effort. Other people have tremendous fighting spirits and defy conventional wisdom as regards what it is possible to do when faced with different types of obstacles. The British scientist Stephen Hawking is a brilliant example of a person who has managed to do research on the highest intellectual levels in spite of physical handicaps that would have stopped the vast majority of normal people. He surmounted those handicaps by acquiring technological tools that enabled him to work his way around the difficulties and achieve what he wanted. Numerous other examples of people with strong will-power and endurance have shown us what can be achieved if we do not give up.

Even if we have the good fortune of being in good health, we need to be aware of the importance of making active efforts to maintain and develop our health. The food we eat, the physical activities we engage in, and the environment we live in all influence the future course of our health. Western societies are experiencing a steady increase in average weight among their citizens, due to the type of food people eat and a lack of physical activity. Obesity, which now is widespread in Western societies and also elsewhere, leads to many types of illnesses. Many health problems are also emerging due to pollution of air, water and soil which lead to respiratory diseases, poisoning of internal organs, cancers and many other illnesses. In many less developed countries, hunger and malnutrition also cause multiple health problems. Those countries are in addition plagued by formidable problems of pollution due to the lack of control of harmful types of production. Production and income is given such a high priority there that little attention is given to the harmful side-effects of production such as emissions of many types of poison into air, rivers and soil. Such pollution does great harm to the health of people who work in or live close to these production activities. The pollution of air, water and soil then spreads further through the movements of the air, and water and through the poison that has entered the products from the poisoned soil. The evolution of science has shown us how pollution affects human, animal and plant life on earth through numerous mechanisms.

The importance of good health for the possibility of living a good life, is understood by every individual, either through direct, painful experience or by quick and easy reasoning. When people organize their societies, this self-evident truth does not seem to be recognized. Many societies have health systems which do not ensure that their populations have equal access to medical services. Access to health service is too often made dependent on people's capacities to pay for it. This in turn means that rich people get better health service than poorer people. This is even unavoidable in societies where public health service, made available to everybody on an equal basis, is supplemented by private health service which is made available on the basis of your ability to pay for it. Almost all societies have a combination of public health service accessible to all, and

private health services available if you are willing and capable to pay for it. The differences between countries show up in the relative importance given to one and the other. In countries with a weak public sector, basic public health service is poor. In countries with a strong public sector, basic public health service is strong. A paradox is showing up when countries which are considered rich offer poor health services to people with limited financial means. This is hard to understand, given the importance everybody attaches to the importance of having a good health for the possibility to have a good life.



Chapter 23 Education and competence.

The second basic element which will influence our possibilities to live a good life, is our competence, the things we know how to do. If we are capable of doing many things, we can be useful to other people. The more things we know, and the better we know them, the more other people will be ready to pay for our services, and the better off we will be. This is common knowledge, but it is surprising to see how different societies treat this basic truth.

Here again, we see that some societies go far in making education available to all its citizens at no cost or low, accessible cost. Some societies do this even up to the highest

levels of education for those who are motivated to make the effort of acquiring this education. Other societies, even rich ones, only provide lower levels of education for all, while leaving the access to higher education only to those who have the capacity to pay for what it costs to provide it. They do not want to impose on their citizens the obligation to contribute in a common effort, through the payment of taxes. Instead they choose to give unequal access to education, depending of people's capacity to pay for it. This in turn produces unequal possibilities to obtain the good life education can provide. And it also leaves the societies concerned much poorer, since a society's general level of competence affects everybody.

In addition to acquiring education and competence through the institutional education system, there is the possibility for individuals to build up their competence on their own. This is quite feasible, especially in areas of competence where no institutional diplomas or authorizations are issued. In those areas you do not need to show proof of your qualifications through displaying a document, but you need to show it through your actions by actually demonstrating what you can do. If you start your own business, you decide for yourself whether you are qualified or not, and in the end it will be your customers who decide if you are qualified or not.



Chapter 24 Material situation.

The third basic element which is decisive for our possibilities to have a good life is our access to material goods, essentially the financial means at our disposal. This can be achieved either through income from our own efforts or from transfers from parents or other people who wish to help us. If we have the means to get housing, food, clothing and other essential goods, we will be free to spend our time giving attention to other priorities.

This material freedom is essential for all people, but only a minority of the world's population has it. There are, naturally, many degrees of material freedom we can distinguish between. The highest degree of freedom is found among people who get this level of income without having any obligation attached to it. The vast majority of people who have this level of income - where housing, food, clothing and other essential goods are covered – are people who have to work in order to get this income. Their freedom is limited by the obligation and the time necessary to carry out the work in question. A third category is found among those who have income, but not sufficient to satisfy all the needs in question without limitations on other desired expenditures. Further on, we get down to levels of income where freedom is more and more limited, until income is so low that we talk about different categories of poverty – and ultimately - starvation.

Full material freedom can be associated with an income or a fortune that is such that we are not limited financially in the choices we wish to make in our daily lives regarding things to do or things to possess. If we also are blessed with good health and good education, we have a freedom which is only given to very few.



Part 7 Broad, global challenges

A political ideology develops from conditions in the society where it exists. Three pillars form the foundation of most ideologies. These three pillars are, respectively, the economic, the social and the environmental balance of the society in question.

By a good **economic balance** is meant a balance where the availability of goods and services (through domestic production and imports) and the use of goods and services (for investments and consumption) is balanced in such a way that unemployment is low, prices are stable, and the international balance of payments is under good control.

By a good **social balance** is meant a balance where a society's social groups resolve their differences through peaceful dialogue, without use of force or violence. The underlying assumption behind such a balance is that the society practices freedom of expression, and that social groups have the legal right to organize themselves and express their views through peaceful actions.

By a good **environmental balance** is meant a balance where human use and extraction of resources from nature is such that it does not affect nature's biological reproductive capacity. By the use of nature is meant both cultivation, transformations produced by

urbanization, and other uses (including use for purposes of disposing of different types of refuse and emissions from human activity). By extraction is meant mining, petroleum extraction, fisheries and all other activities that extract resources from their natural environment.

Any country which wishes to have a successful and peaceful development, must strive towards the simultaneous achievement of these three balances. These balances need to co-exist, and a finely tuned political management is necessary to achieve this coexistence. If the economic balance gets out of hand, it will soon affect the social balance through the mechanisms of income distribution and distribution of welfare between social groups. Both unemployment and inflation have strong adverse effects on the social balance through these distributive mechanisms. If the social balance gets out of hand, it will quickly spill over into a disturbance of the economic balance, through the disruptive actions or reactions of those groups who have been hit by an imbalance. These actions and reactions will normally affect economic production quite quickly. An environmental imbalance is probably the most serious of all, because it takes a long time to develop, a long time to discover scientifically and an even longer time to “repair” – in the unlikely event that politicians agree on how to repair it. In the meantime, it will have strong effects on both of the other balances, because of the type of measures it may require for “healing”.

Historically, the polarized ideologies have shown themselves incapable of achieving good balances for the three balances simultaneously. A free market system without the proper checks and balances has not been capable of securing a good social balance. A communist system has, through its need to control both the production and the distribution of resources, not been capable of generating a good economic balance. None of these systems have so far produced good solutions for the environment, and time is quickly running out before the environmental balance becomes irreversible, and the door to a good balance is closed. We will look a little closer at these questions below.



Chapter 25 Economic balance

The **availability of resources** comes from a country's own production and from imports of goods and services from other countries. The **demand for a country's available resources** comes from domestic consumption, domestic investment, and foreign demand for the country's products (exports). If the demand is lower than the supply, we will see a pressure to reduce prices and imports, so as to achieve a new balance at a lower level of activity – with higher unemployment. If demand is higher than supply, we will see a pressure for increased prices and imports, so as to achieve a new balance at a higher level of activity – with lower unemployment.

Imbalances which lead to high long term unemployment are a waste of resources and they create social hardship on those who become unemployed. They are therefore politically undesired in most countries. So are imbalances that lead to long term inflation and deficits in the balance of international trade. The major danger of inflation is that it creates increased differences in remuneration among the country's citizens and undermines the country's long term capacity to import goods that are necessary for its development. If wages do not follow the rise in prices, workers lose purchasing power, and those producers who cannot increase the prices of their products at the same rate as the inflation

rate, will see their businesses lose money.

Such imbalances are undesired, and it is necessary to strike a balance between demand and supply of resources that is such that unemployment is mostly of a short term nature, linked to the natural movement of employees from firms that reduce their activity to firms that increase their activity. This must be achieved in combination with a price development which is not out of line with that of the country's major trade partners, so as not to upset the trade balance.

This is a complicated balancing act, because it means the political management has to achieve a total demand for goods and services in the country which is at roughly the same level as the production capacity of the country, taking account of the level of imports that goes along with this. The country's government must therefore have a policy that is capable of influencing domestic consumption, domestic investment, and exports. No economic system has shown itself capable of steering total demand in a precise way, but by governing in a steady, predictable fashion this balancing act is feasible in a rough manner. Policy instruments in a market based economy can only act indirectly, by way of incentives and links between factors that influence the final result. Those political systems that have tried to govern demand and supply directly by central planning of the whole production sector have not proved to be feasible in practice, because they do not manage to handle the enormous amount of information and logistics required to match detailed, individual demand and supply. In addition, these systems are particularly open to corruption, because the major decisions are taken by a reduced number of people with few mechanisms to control what they are doing.

So far in the history of mankind, these balancing acts have not been taking account of how the Earth's natural environment has reacted to the increased production and consumption of an increasing population. In the early 1970s it became clear to everybody with the slightest interest in these questions, that the Earth was suffering in a number of ways from both the methods of production and the disposal of waste from production and consumption, as well as from the expansion of this production and waste resulting from the growth of global population.

The global economy was, then as now, made up of independent countries taking their own independent decisions, even though they were linked by many interdependencies which they did not take account of. Many large countries were not interested in discussing environmental issues in the 1970s, when the challenges to global ecosystems became visible to all, and some of these countries are still not interested in this discussion. They were then, as now, acting as if the problems did not exist. In this way they avoided taking unpleasant decisions that might irritate producers and consumers. This was easy enough then, because no supra-national authority had the powers to put pressure on those countries which did not care about the environment. This is still the problem today. It was furthermore difficult for other countries to implement costly environmental measures, when their large competitors in the international markets did not. This is still the case, and

only international agreements can change that. They are on the way, but the process is too slow and it is being resisted by dominating countries who have the power to stop the process.

This is where we stand today. Some global funds are directed towards preserving forests, and a system for trading emission permits is being implemented. It remains to be seen whether these measures will have an impact in the real world. It is not yet clear whether the funds involved will end in the wrong pockets, with no real impact on the ground. Only measures that contain significant incentives for the operative choices made by producers and consumers will have any effect. There is yet not, after 40 years of beating around the bush, any systematic thinking on a global basis about the use of incentives for the improvement of the environment. Some countries are applying incentives in selected areas, but these are limited to those countries and to those areas – with no global significance.

China has realized that its future development will be choked by a dying environment and a population dying from diseases contracted from bad environmental conditions if it does not take measures with significant effects on the ground. It is now relying heavily on technological innovations to achieve the necessary improvements. When a major country like this leans on technological innovation, it is likely to have effects on the research efforts being carried out. It is in technological innovations that the hope for the environment lies. Examples are hybrid automobiles and electric automobiles. If environmentally neutral products are presented to consumers and investors alike, they will choose them if they are affordable – but not otherwise.



Chapter 26 Social Balance

A good **social balance** is obtained when a society's social groups resolve their differences through peaceful dialogue, without use of force or violence. The necessary context for this is that the society practices freedom of expression, and that social groups have the legal right to organize themselves and express their views through peaceful actions (including strikes). If this were not the case, it would not be possible to assess whether the lack of conflict was due to oppression or to harmony.

When academics wish to compare between countries the levels of conflict between the social partners, they generally use the number of days that countries experience strikes or lock outs (corrected for the size of the conflicts involved). There will never be total harmony in the sense of total absence of conflicts. However, a nation's capacity to solve its problems through dialogue, without use of threats of violence or other forms of oppression, is crucial for the possibility to obtain a genuinely good social balance.

The quality of the social dialogue will depend on how representative the partners in the dialogue are. They need not only to represent a majority of the people they are supposed

to represent, but they also need to be in touch with their base in such a way that the views they put forward in the dialogue are actually representative of the views of their base. The availability of properly represented social partners in the dialogue is thus crucial for the success of the social dialogue.

If the representation of the relevant social partners is fragmented, the complexity of the dialogue will increase correspondingly. The more consolidated a social group manages to make its representation, the more strongly will it be able to make its views understood. In some countries, authorities or businesses are under the illusion that if they can make the labor organizations more fragmented – or make them disappear altogether – they will achieve better results. This is at best a view that will be valid only in the short term. In the long run it is a recipe for social polarization and unrest, and major disruptions in production will ultimately follow.

Experience shows that countries where the social dialogue functions well, are better able to take difficult decisions that involve all social partners. They are also better assured that such decisions will be respected and followed up. These decisions will take longer to prepare and to make, but they will stick better once they are made. Furthermore, the time lost in preparing for the decision, will be recuperated by time gained in handling reduced levels of conflict after the decision is made. Confrontation and polarization does not work well as a long term political strategy for running a democratic country.



Chapter 27 Environmental balance

As mentioned above, a good environmental balance is a balance where human use and extraction of resources from nature is such that it does not affect nature's reproductive capacity. By the use of nature is meant both cultivation, transformations produced by urbanisation, and other uses (including use for purposes of disposing of different types of waste and emissions from human activity). By extraction is meant mining, petroleum extraction, forestry, fisheries and all other activities that extract resources from their natural environment.

Some kinds of extraction may come from renewable resources such as forestry and fisheries, and for these the amounts of extraction have to be balanced against the reproductive capacity of the whole ecosystem involved. To achieve this, the reproductive capacity of the ecosystems involved has to be closely monitored, so that extraction can be regulated to stay in harmony with the reproductive capacity. The ecosystems involved in different types of extractions contain extensive interdependencies between plants, animals and human activities.

One type of intervention will most often destabilize a temporary equilibrium that has been reached between the life and activities of the species involved in that ecosystem. Time will pass before a new equilibrium may be reached (if any), and this new equilibrium will

have new characteristics. If the stock of one particular species has been depleted, the animals depending on this species will have to adapt to the new situation. Awareness of the mechanisms and repercussions involved in dealing with extractions is necessary in connection with policy making and monitoring.

Similarly, the effects of transformations generated by urbanization, road building and other forms of infrastructure developments need to be monitored with respect to how they affect environmental balance. The balance is always affected, but the degree to which the effects are acceptable will depend on the results of monitoring and research – and of the political tolerance for changes in the balance.

The most difficult environmental problems and challenges stem from disposal and emissions of toxic substances into air, water and land. These disposals and emissions are hard to monitor, their effects are hard to assess (even when monitoring is successful), and the agents who actually cause the disposals or the emissions are not always easy to identify. Toxic disposals and emissions are the main threat to long term environmental balance and human survival, because they influence the quality of air and water as well as the capacity of land to produce non-toxic food. This comes in addition to the on-going discussion on climate change, caused by those same factors.

Economic growth, caused by expanding activity per capita as well as increased global population, is at the heart of this discussion. Only technological innovations and radical changes in incentive structures (that may induce change in patterns of behavior) can realistically change the relation between economic growth and environmental development. The present relation between economic growth and environmental development is not sustainable in the light of those growth patterns and demographic developments we see now. In the absence of appropriate global decision making capacities, the prospects for long term survival of the human species on the planet are dim.

The national political systems in most countries are such that action on a problem is only initiated when the problem has reached proportions where most people (including media) consider it to be a crisis. We must here of course distinguish between crises that are generated by media with little foundation in reality, and real crises that actually take place and are perceived as such by people in the areas involved. However, a crisis taking place in one country does not affect the perceptions in other countries, except very indirectly and slowly (if the crisis persists and becomes very visible). Therefore, for the global political community to act on a problem, the problem would have to be operating simultaneously in a majority of the major countries – like when we had the global financial crisis. In environmental matters, the evolution does not take the same form in every country, and the problem is therefore not perceived in the same way by all major countries. This also applies to problems that are of transnational character, where the effects that may have the same cause take different shapes in each country because of different local ecosystems and their respective types of resistance to impacts of the same order. Hence, no agreement is reached on the measures to be taken. As long as the

problem is perceived differently in different countries, the stalemate on significant global action will persist.

