Concordia (Canada), April 24th 2021

(I wasn’t satisfied by the answer I gave to a question after my speech, then I invite you to read maybe a better answer p. 7. Of course this answer is not perfect and maybe need other questions. Please, don’t hesitate to contact me in: Snooker52@hotmail.com )

**Can we envisage greater international cooperation, a global Green New Deal, in response to the warnings of the UN IPCC that the world has ten years to avoid the irreversible impact of climate change? Or will governments return to national agendas as countries struggle to rebuild their economies?**

 The question we are facing is whether we can envisage a global cooperation for a green new deal in response to the global change, or a return to national policy for an economic rebuild in a world characterized by a struggle of nations. This question is the defining issue of the coming world, and I propose to take a step back to understand the deep issues behind those two options from a social and political point of view, and the ideology they underpin. Then, we are going to dig a furrow and glimpse the reasons that have brought the modern world to where it currently sits.

 In his famous book, The Great Reset, the chairman of World Economic Forum, M. Klaus Schwab developed his view on both political and environmental issues for the post pandemic world. Schwab starts from the premise that national governments having been active actors in the health crisis, and being seen by their inhabitants as providential saviors[[1]](#footnote-1), will have a big role to play in the post pandemic world. Nevertheless, in his view, it is not a question of nationalist "folds", but of reconstructions of economic growth through policies supporting ecological conversion for the reconstruction of a more “egalitarian” global order. However, “egalitarian” is defined from a strictly economic and utilitarian point of view. Schwab does not deny the tensions between states and the struggle of states within the globalized system, but this is not contradictory with the maintenance of the globalization process, provided that global governance keeps being built.

 Thus, chairman Schwab acknowledges the tension between the return to the Nation-State and the global project in favor of a recovery policy and a global cooperation for a green new deal. But for him that tension is not inextricable. His ideas are as idealistic as they are superficial: idealistic because he thinks ideas create the material reality and in his enchanted world, the problems of the real world (counter movements, ecologic equilibrium and consequence, financial crisis etc.) do not exist! The world is imagined through an engineering way of thinking, as a mechanism.

 Then, to him, we are moving in the direction of a world shaped by a dialectic between national policy for economic recovery, made by governments and administrations, and global cooperation which will transform, ritualize and pacify the struggle of nations into bureaucratic form.

 To understand the deep issue of this question, I suggest you to start from an historical perspective.

 One of the main actors of our modern world is the State. But we have to know that this form of social and political organization has only existed in a very short time-frame in human history. The State is defined as a social, political, economic, and complex organization, which is also ecologically fragile [[2]](#footnote-2). Until the 16th century, when this form became widespread in the world, States have almost never been formed following an endogenous process. On the contrary, the decisive condition that led to their formation was almost invariably foreign invasions.

 In the Late Medieval Period, the main facts were the decline of the feudal system and of chivalry, and the concomitant rise of centralized kingdoms and guilds of merchants. The centralized power started to be structured. In France, as a mark of sovereignty, king Phillipe VI in 1347 imposed a royal monopoly on money printing. This decision represents a decisive turning point, which conferred power upon the royals thus giving a decisive advantage over the regional lords. The army, the law and the bureaucracy all came under the centralized control of a royal. The control over the currency can be seen as the backbone of the system, the essential tool in the hands of the monarch to control the territory. A control which was until then merely theoretical[[3]](#footnote-3).

 The other highlight of this period is the rise of the merchant’s paradigm. Together, these mutations go with a transformation of perception which is illustrated by the rise of the Universities, which became a competitor to the Church and monasteries. In these secular institutions, the students acquired a cultural background, but also technical "skills" in the art of keeping accounts, paperwork, and giving the authorities the means to emancipate themselves from the authority of the Church as a service-providing institution[[4]](#footnote-4). With this, rises a new paradigm[[5]](#footnote-5). This is how, from the 12th and 13th centuries, the figure of the merchant, until then suffering from a negative outlook, was valued! Unlike aristocratic values ​​advocating ostentatious spending as a sign of *virtus*, the merchant ideology praises the virtues of savings, rationality in action and time management [[6]](#footnote-6). And it was during the "Renaissance" that trade started to be seen as a means of strengthening the prince and the power of the kingdom, and a lever to impose his supremacy[[7]](#footnote-7). Then, in 1615-1616, Antoine de Monchrétien published his « *Traicté de l'économie politique* », in which he praised the sovereign’s efforts in transforming the kingdom into an organized productive system.

 At the same time, we can observe an evolution of techniques. The new accounting techniques brought a transformation in the way men perceived their place in the cosmos: time, space, materials, fauna, flora, human etc., everything become translated into measure, classification, columns of figures etc. In other words, the material world was becoming more and more abstract and intangible, in a self-sustaining movement. And then money became the tool that permitted us to measure everything. This new civilization demanded a permanent increase in trade and production. These abstractions from the merchant’s paradigm would in turn spawn another moral revolution: that of scientific abstraction.

 Of course, techniques also change with society and mentality, but it would be wrong to see this phenomenon as linear. Naturally, technical evolutions would be shaped by the mutation of the worldview and dominant ideas! Then, the goal was to achieve a "better social being", but this goal was viewed as an increase of exploitation, profits and enrichment of the upper strata of society. The evolution of techniques was put into a particular historical trajectory; it was shaped by the quest for profit and power[[8]](#footnote-8).

 So, the formation of what we call a "state" (in the modern meaning) is the result of a convergence of power (coercion), trade (accumulation) and technology (exploitation).

 This brings us to the question of the contradiction we all know between improvement and habitation:

 « *the poor man shall be satisfied in his end, habitation and the gentleman not hindered in his desire, improvement*»[[9]](#footnote-9)

“Improvement” means technical progress as we have just described, (improvement of productive structure and material) and “habitation people livelihood and environment, the material basis of their cultures. To Karl Polanyi this question is interpreted as the expression of a fundamental problem of modern and contemporary history and actuality, that is the radical opposition between the attachment of the poor to their habitat, which they want to protect from degradation, and the desire of the richest to increase their income. It is thus on the basis of this new paradigm that the nascent states favored improvement to the detriment of habitation. Since the post medieval era, we have observed a struggle among industrial nations for power to which corresponds a struggle of the poor for their livelihood.

 Later, in the 18th century, two movements appeared or rose that announced our modern world: the physiocrats, who advocated the authority of competent people to analyze and understand the “Law of nature”, and the “Philosophy of nature”, which advocates the authority of what we call now “scientists” or “engineers”. The first governed while the second shaped the outlook. After the Napoleonic wars, Henri de Saint Simon advocated industrialism and what we call now “technocracy”.

 This transformation, view from below as aggressions, provoked popular movement and revolts called “counter movement”. Of course, these popular revolts triggered retaliations from the dominant powers of the 19th century early modern civilization which led to its breakdown with the advent of fascism and Nazism. But from the ruins of WWII would emerge the 20th century’s civilization.

Karl Polanyi saw very early the danger of this new civilization: the iron law of Technique.

 The defining moment or starting point of this civilization may be Harry Truman’s inauguration’s speech, on January 20th 1949. For the first time in history, he used this strange concept of “*development*”, to describe an economic, social, cultural state, while at the same time, he coined its contrary, with the term “*underdevelopment*”. And since this time, “*development*” has become synonym of Progress. This concept became the backbone of this civilization and justified the rule of technocracy in capitalist countries, communist countries and the third world alike.

 And, facing the ecological problem, in 1987, a commission composed by technocrats presided over by Gro Harlem Brundtland published the report “our common future”, that popularized the concept of “Sustainable development”, and an international cooperation for it. Ecology became technocratic in its language, its worldview or its programs, but also its language (and it was very quickly adopted by technocrats and governments).

 Facing the myth of Progress as necessarily beneficial technical progress, Polanyi pointed to the technical phenomenon as a “total social phenomenon”, and he described how this is indeed a grave danger for freedom and democracy:

 “*we may have to recognize in this case a closer link than is apparent on the surface between the present enormous advances toward a technological civilization and the thread to freedom, that all over the world is latent in the deep*”

This became the great fact at each level: national, international or global, in Europe, America, India or east Asia.

 Then, the current question of global cooperation or struggle of nations for economic recovery as presented by Klaus Schwab becomes a mere dialectical question between two levels of technocracy: global or local, national or international (as the ritualized and pacified scene of struggles of nations). The cooperation for an international green new deal, or a national economic recovery neglect the struggle within nations between the technocratic outlook and democratic and social outlook.

 To conclude, I would like to open a new subject for future debates: what could be the consequences of this evolutions on environment, nature, societies, cultures, democracy and sovereignty?

**Nadjib identifies technocracy with the concept of development, If I understand him correctly, and draws on Polanyi to identify this as a threat to freedom and justice. What does he see as the way of moving beyond this threat?**

This is such difficult question, and I would like to answer by writing to give a satisfactory answer. The problem of technocratic rule is the fact that technocracy is not only a political, administrative or institution question, but also a human being. To answer to this question, I would like to first point some consequences of the technocratic being of humanity and then we will maybe see what people can do to move beyong that.

**The problem of knowledge:**

One of the pillars of this phenomenon is the consent of the people. This consent is based on a myth about technic, the alleged superiority of the knowledge of the expert. Every day media, at school or even in announcement etc., disseminate the mythology of “science & technic” or a particular idea about science & technic. For example, our epoch see Elon Musk or Bill Gates as a modern heroe.

This mythology of Science (Jacques Ellul, French philosopher who was, in the XXth century more famous in America than France, said “It is not technique that enslaves us but the sacred transferred to technique”) is based on two superstitions or fallacies:

* The belief in a superior knowledge, from scientists, engineers and expert, scientific, built on rigorous foundations, describe and decree the truth and the real. We can accumulate and ameliorate this knowledge as a capital of raw material.
* The belief in an inferior knowledge, from the common people, opinions, then subjective and finally against “Progress”.

Another myth is based on the belief of a better future, shape by the experts, and people have the blind confidence in their judgments and their decision making. Then, people become powerless.

Then, we can observe a kind of perversion of knowledge. This word, “*science*” is no longer reduced to designating an "institutional enterprise", which solves a series of standardized and predestined problems, corresponding to the paradigm of scarcity and subject to industrial hegemony. It is shaped for Convergent thinking (ability to give the correct answer to standardized questions that do not require creativity). But not the “the unpredictable deployment of human creativity". Science is now just an enterprise of service providing.

This myth harms the understanding of knowledge, and disempowers and infantilizes the peoples. Then people lack of capacity to teach, cure, debate and legislate etc.. It is a technostructure, or a “megamachine” that decide and define people’s needs. Those people who lose the capacity to define their needs and shape their social being and it renew, become passive. Then, raise the problem of “averagism” or “conformism”, then people lack their capacity and self-confidence and give their destiny to the experts.

**After that, there is the problem of language:**

Under the hegemony of industry, the non-industrial activities, those who not correspond to economic outlook or way of thinking (artisanal, domestic work) become degraded by the paradigm of “all measurable and accountable”: the the rule of economic outlook. We observe the radical monopoly of the industry, wich is not the monopoly of a firm, but the monopoly of a mode of production: industrial (not only capitalist, industry in USSR, Indonesia or India is also industry and alienate). Then, because the outlook become degraded, the the language also suffered those degradations. Then, we lack the capacity to express the domination of industry and the existence life, human being out or without this mode of production!

Then, the verbs more and more disappear and become names. Then, in our daily language, we more and more say “to have a work”, and less and less “to work”. In non-industrial language, this way of talking about “work” as a name does not exist! For example, as said Ivan Illich, from Cuernavaca (and traveled all over latin America on foot in the sixtees), “campesinos” never said “tengo un trabajo” but “yo trabajo”. Even today, in Chinese, we can grammatically say “我有工作” (to have a job) but in people’s heard, it sound weird, they say “我在工作” (I work). And finaly, in my native language, kabylian, we never say “khedmer” (to work) only.

We can say two things about this: the degradation of the concept of property:

* From a relation with a tool we use to do things, the verb “to have” just becomes a relation with a produce or a merchandize.
* The expression of the paradigm of scarcity, to have a scarce resource: from “I want to learn” or “I want to study”, to “I want to get an education. From “I want to move”, to “I want travel” become “I want a mean of transport”. This language express a struggle to fight to have a rare consumer good, but not a a potentially fruitful conflict over, for example, the means to use a tool who can broaden the prospects for freedom! The right to have, but not the right to make or to do (walk, read, write, participate in social changes or to use a simple and useful tool etc.)

Then, because the influence of industry reduce, it also reduce the language and them the freedom.

**Then the problem of the perversion of right:**

Shape by the paradigm of scarcity and the indefinite extension of the industry. The rights become the monopoly of experts, then become too complex and full of empty ethical concepts It create the legitimacy of the industrial regime.

Those three problems make one: each one produces the two other in a in a vicious circle. Then, after pointing that, we can imagine the different fields of action. For example, against the mythology of science and the perversion of knowledge, we can envisage the recovery and rehabilitation of the metis. In the Ancient Greece, this concept designated a knowledge or intelligence developed from a practical and concrete experience. Then, it is rooted in a people’s life. This body of knowledge is not based on an outlook based on exclusion, but an outlook based on integration. But it is excluded from society by institutionalized values and knowledge and their institutions (school, industry, academic sciences, government, medias, experts etc.).

This knowledge is from a capacity of acting and reasoning on situation in the action: in concrete life. The metis express a high capacity of improvisation ability and political imagination or others. However, it needs to be rooted in an adapted social context and non-industrial favorable environment.

One of the characteristic of the environment is the memory, but not nostalgia. To understand the difference, we should distinguish the “populism” and the “demagogy”. Populism is first the the aspiration to see the people reappropriate their life in their community and sovereignty (like Narodniki movement is Russia) and the values of the America's founding fathers, against the degradation caused by capitalism.

The misuse of this terme consist in qualify political and social phenomenon like Trump, Bolsonaro or Modi etc. “populist”, while it is about demagogy. Trump wasn’t elected on the basis of a discourse about founding’s values of America, against English oppression, but in a nostalgic feeling of an American empire stronger industrial power in the world: “*make America great again*”. it did not revive the memory of a country in distress which is fracturing, but disseminate un discourse based on a fantasized past (as Reagan). He also did not preach the limits to capitalism, but promised to revive the old merry capitalism, made obsolete by the new capitalism from San Francisco.

In fact, his demagogy seems to make him most a paradoxical tween of Justin Trudeau, than a successor to Martin Luther king or a man inspired by Christopher Lasch. They both ignore the line between impertinence and vulgarity, and are both indecent in their attitude and outlook (then also in their ideas). Just Trump is more rude and Trudeau more grotesque. The differences are the audiences: frustrated workers and the unemployed for the American one, executives and new upper strata of the new technocratic order, enthusiastic about the idea of imposing his new moral order, according to the new industry and the civilization of the XXI century (Cancel culture, “woke”, “Social Justice Warrior” etc.), a moral order of uprooting even deeper than the previous one, which was already destructive.

To resume, Trump is the progressist from the obsolete civilization of the XX’s century, witch refuse to disappear, and Trudeau a progressist from the civilization of the XXI’s century. And then, maintain a potential "demos" at the state of a “mass”.

So we see that the fields to emancipate and move beyong that are diversified! Politic (becoming citizen), cultural (intellectual, spiritual, the outlook, the values, deconstruct the paradigm of scarcity) and aesthetic (refuse the cult of gigantism and excess (cult of buildings, megalopolis, special adventure, adopt and promote a an aesthetic of fair proportion and human size. Kyoto, Taipei or Taichung, Lisbon better than Shanghai, Hong Kong or Manhattan etc.).

Another way is to take roots in our local environment, to form more than a laikos (people in the geographic meaning in ancient greek), a “demos” (people in a politic and civic meaning), and make community and then, why not confederate the all in united community.

But anyway, we should also not neglect the question of time, as the lifespan of an institution, before the before it exceeds its counter-productivity threshold (for example, the old representative nation-states, or United Nations, WHO etc.).

And then question of space, to found human-scale institutions, suitable for active citizens rather than passive right-wing and left-wing voters. And accept and de-dramatize errors or limitations.

Of course, there are no global and generic solutions to a global struggle, societies, countries, institutions and contexts are different! To fight in the ultra-violent context of Central America, the pacified society of industrial countries, in representative regimes or autocratic or already technocratic regimes are very different experiences and need adapted solutions. And the solutions or ways of go beyond this problem can only be adapted and found by the people who live in these contexts! I can only give a vague answer to this question, pointing out the problems, the possible front lines and possibly an enlightening bibliography.

1. COVID-19: THE GREAT RESET KLAUS SCHWAB THIERRY MALLERET FORUM PUBLISHING 2020 p. 38 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. James C. Scott, Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 117 to 127 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., p. 255-257 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ivan Illich, *River North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich As Told to David Cayley*, House of Anansi press Inc., Toronto p. 47-48 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Jacques Le Goff, *la civilisation de l’occident médiévale*, Flammarion, Paris, 2008p. 164 à 166 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., p. 109 et suiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., p. 114 et suiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., p. 26-27 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Considération of the cause in question Before the Lords Touching Depopulation*, cit. in, 1995

The Seventeenth-Century Revolution in the English Land Law, Charles J. Reid Jr., Cleveland State Law Review p. 36

A memorandum prepared for the Privy Concil of July 1607, Consideration of the cause in question Before the Lords Touching Depopulation, attempted to settle the basic problem posed by the Gateward Case: [↑](#footnote-ref-9)