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# Addressing The 21st Century

**Roland RECH, Nice, August, 2023**

At the dawn of modern times, Rabelais wrote, for the attention of the wise to come; "Science without conscience is nothing but the ruin of the soul. "Four centuries after, Einstein himself assessed modern technocratic civilisation, founded on science, warning the younger generations; "The 21<sup>st</sup> century will be a spiritual century or else it will not be the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

These two quotes fairly well encapsulate the terms of our current crisis, of which we will successively elucidate aspects, causes and remedies.

## 1. ASPECTS OF THE CRISIS OF OUR CIVILISATION

Its contradictions are numerous and can also be characterised as enormous potentials, unused and wasted, as growing opposition between our dominant ideas and reality: contradictions made more dangerous in being frequently unconscious.

- Humanity, particularly in industrial society, has never had so many means at its disposal, of material and cultural satisfaction: yet people are unsatisfied, unhappy.
- Science has never been so developed while at the same time ignorance and unconsciousness regarding the fundamental problems of life and death has never been so acute. The lack of wisdom evident in the majority of people is striking.
- Medicine is rich in knowledge and technique, yet serious illnesses are rampant. Mental illness, heart problems, cancers, accidents of all types.
- Agronomy is highly developed whilst, at the same time, our environment suffers; deserts spread over the planet encroaching forest, arable lands.
- Science, in its historical sense, deepens, whilst real traditions are lost; mankind exists without roots.
- New ideologies have appeared, claiming to be able to liberate humanity while creating new slaveries wherever they have been applied. Communist dictatorships, with their pretension to create a "new man." The shadow of concentration camps; the bureaucratic dictatorships.
- Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy have become very sophisticated in their study of human behaviour and mind: but no idea of basic mental health is taught in the preventative sense. The result is an epidemic of mental illness; people suffering without available psychiatrists nor hospitals in which to treat them. There are more and more suicides. They are sometimes saved by modern methods of reanimation; but the use of these methods is comparable, its lack of consciousness, to a mechanic repairing a car. The root of the evil of despair is neither addressed nor cured; and it often leads to the same people making renewed attempts to kill themselves.

World population is growing faster than the available resource to feed the new arrivals and hunger and starvation affects millions. Nuclear arms are powerful enough to blow the whole planet up, wipe out humanity; dislodge it from its place in the universe.

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In France we have a very fine national motto, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, product of the French Revolution: and, elsewhere, too, in this world there exist certain freedoms, in the formal sense of the world. And yet people are slaves of artificial desires created by the advertising industry, and now, particularly, the pressure of our social, virtual environment. Bureaucratic power and the private technocracy put greater and greater limits on individual freedom. Propaganda and prejudice, intellectual fashion all conspire to preventing a youth that is truly free and creative to appear. Conformity in teaching must also bear its responsibility. In everyday life people do not feel free, they barely tolerate what is given to them in the conditions of their life and work, and widespread suffering is the consequence.

Social life becomes a hard battle against frustration which in turn creates the need for constant attempts to find compensations that reduce the original suffering; and, naturally, these compensations don't work because in themselves they are nothing but illusions that create their own new suffering.

Consumer society is nothing but a vicious circle, we create less and less that satisfies our basic needs and more and more to maintain the activity of the economic machine with its incessant creation of profit, inequality and pollution. Workers no longer feel any meaning in their work, and this lack of felt meaning, of value in work, means work becomes itself, not a means of realisation or fulfilment, but a perpetuation of the same suffering.

The idea of equality appears as a myth, be it biological or social; as regard countries, an abyss separates industrialised countries from underdeveloped ones: very great inequality, social and international threaten future conflicts made more dangerous with their potential nuclear threat.

As regards Fraternity; individualism, selfishness, egotism are in the ascendance, made more acute by lack of happiness, wisdom. Fraternity has become a useless myth, even if it, in its roots, in empathy and compassion, offers itself the key, the potential solution, to so many of our difficulties in our contemporary social existence.

Science, which should be in the service of liberation, is largely used in the service of profit, power and the development of means of destruction. Science is called to service a Promethean desire for the conquest and subordination of the universe, ignoring any role it might play in developing the will to understand oneself and harmonise oneself with the cosmic order. Positively, we can, at the same time, see modern science revealing the fundamental structure of the universe in its conformity with Buddhist intuition dating back more than 2500 years. Ideas of impermanence, vacuity, interdependence are basic to Zen and common to modern physics: we can extend this idea of the certification of Zen practice in science and experience, what we know and can confirm as the psycho and physiological benefits of zazen.

Modern science refuses the philosophical implications that are engendered, in a certain way, by its discoveries; and it is this very lack that presents itself, yet again, as one more example of potential wasted; of the divergence between the dominant materialist ideology, and the extraordinary world discovered by modern physics, which far surpasses its strictures.

Another aspect of the crisis is the growing demoralisation of younger generations and the renouncement of their role as challengers, contesters of the values of the dominant order; their role as the carriers of new ideas; the descent of young people into a morose conformism and resignation that accepts the social order as it is. Nobody dares anymore speak of a sense to life, a meaning, of happiness and freedom: the grand ideas that were written on the Paris walls in May '68 have fallen, one by one, into the dustbin of history.

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In the East as in the West mass civilisation expands at the expense of the only true human reality, that of the free and realised individual. Education is geared to the creation of technicians, bureaucrats, administrators of the vast, oppressive, social machine; while true science and true education abdicates their role in helping towards a better comprehension of mankind and its place in the universe, of what is true happiness, rooted in harmony and integration, social behaviour in tune with the reality, the ultimate reality, of the cosmos. Future education must dedicate itself to restoring the equilibrium of body and mind for future generations.

## 2. SO, WHY THE FAILURE? WHY ALL THESE MISTAKES?

Why, with all these means, why can't men and women escape these curses that are currently weigh on our civilisation? In ancient times mankind believed suffering was, in some sense, a fatality, ordered by the gods, and Prometheus – as the myth recounted – tried to relieve that suffering with the theft of fire from the realm of gods. He failed, he was severely punished, in what remains a vivid metaphor for the failure of our technological civilisation. And then, with Christianity, a new myth arrived; that of original sin and with it the desire for knowledge and power.

The myth of original sin forms part of what has been called the “obscurity,” a dark age of thought, prevalent in medieval times, an age of spiritual development unhappily limited by hard dogmatism; an intellectual climate which seemed absurd to the Renaissance humanists who worked to restore the values of reason, science and technology; sacrificing, reject, in its pursuit of progress, the spirituality of the civilisation that preceded it. (The 18<sup>th</sup> Century: Age of Enlightenment.)

Prometheus made a forceful return but his passionate attitude, that caused him to be condemned in mythology, is the same passion that animates humanity right now.

The opposition between science and religion that carries with it the rejection of the spiritual in the name of the material seems to us an important cause of our current crisis. We must hope that as the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds we witness a reconciliation of these two conflicting conceptions.

Our current collectively demoralised state can be traced to a number of accumulated disappointments. The myths have collapsed, and nothing has come to take the place of the false ideas to which humanity was attached. We can tell ourselves we've freed humanity in killing God, but the epigram “God is dead,” ushered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the unleashing of tyrannies that ravaged the world. We have to say that over the corpse of God mankind has created idols far more dangerous and man appeared as the worst enemy of man himself: “Man is a wolf for man,” so said Hobbes. Nietzsche's “death of God” was situated at the origin of a great change, an overturing of morals and values, which ultimately lead to the horrors of 20<sup>th</sup> century nihilism.

Before, the figure of man was diminished for the glory of God; now God is denied to profit man. Man, however, had created a false image of God. He had imagined God as pure being-in-itself, a noumena, a pure essence of which man, little man, had been deprived and thus spent countless efforts trying to reconquer, and a great breach opened between the creator and his disappointed creatures as a result of the idea of original sin. The dualism, absolute, between man and divinity made of the spiritual search a venture doomed to failure. Man tired himself out in the face of obstacles he himself created a failure that led to a subsequent desire to destroy the obstacle of that very search, not realising that obstacle was itself due to his own failure to understand.

Finally, Man decided to kill God, but freedom never appeared, due to the image of God persisting, in erroneous form, as an archetype in the collective unconscious of mankind. Man himself wanted to become a kind of God, and find in himself a kind of noumena, a kind of absolute thing-in-itself, not

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taking into account the reality – which was also the reality of his freedom – of radical impermanence ( Mujo ) as he persisted in his rash, unconscious project to deny fundamental cosmic law.

Andre Malraux said, “death is that which transforms life into destiny. “This philosophy, existentialist, this philosophy of the absurd, is really absurd in itself; confusing karma with the essence of true dharma – that is to say Ku, vacuity – it wishes to make karma the ultimate reality. Thus, man becomes reduced to his own biography; thinking death makes the man an absolute, like God. Existentialist, absurdist philosophy increases the suffering, afflicts the moral of man by reason of its intrinsic absurdity. Not having encountered fundamental cosmic truth man cannot help but become complicated and plagued by illusions. Ignorant of his true nature, feeling a lack, feeling unsatisfied, man only seeks compensations, be these material, intellectual or spiritual which only increase the burden of illusion, of suffering. Man sees only the branches, never seizes the root. He takes whatever material means he can to make them work for himself. He can't see that the progress of materialist science carries with itself a profound spiritual message; which we can see, if we know how to fully realise our analysis.

Medicine and psychoanalysis, rather than creating the wisdom of mind and body, can only try and heal as best they can sickness that are at root symptoms of a profound spiritual malaise.

Economic organisation becomes precarious when it becomes an end in itself rather than a means to develop to flourish the innate capacities of mankind.

### 3. -WHAT CAN WE THINK OF THE FUTURE OF OUR CIVILISATION? WHAT ARE THE REMEDIES TO PRESENT WRONGS?

In effect God isn't dead because God, intrinsically, cannot die. The cosmic order never dies. What dies is only a human illusion as regards God. We have to find the true God beyond the narrow conceptions we have, fruit of the front brain, and create true conscience, true consciousness, body and body unified.

It's the same for morality because true morality cannot be destroyed; it can only be covered, like a fire, by ashes; we have to find it in ourselves by following the true Way, discovering the true nature of the ego.

From lived experience true moral value appears and creates new relations based on love, not egotism. It's for this we should be optimists; nothing is dead, nothing is destroyed, truth is only temporarily concealed by accumulated illusion. The purpose of true education is to sweep away such illusions so that truth may shine once more.

And this education, for us, must continue, night and day, practised fully, with body and mind.

We must create a middle path, without obstacles, beyond contradictions, building bridges as we go between past and future, material and spiritual, East and West. Take care not to try and assimilate the materialist West with the spiritual East at a time when the tendency is to the inverse and things are going the other way. This new great synthesis of East and West will not be the creation of intellectuals, of book learning; it will be the creation of those capable, able to find in themselves the fundamental truth of the human condition, which is, moreover, a cosmic condition. Those able to follow this path will do so grace of the wisdom of living in harmony with this truth, rediscovered, and profoundly experienced.

The true essence of religion is to allow mankind to find again inner unity, the unity of self and cosmos, it should never be conceived as some kind of hiding place from life's storms, for the weak, those who seek

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consolation in the hope of a better life after death. True religion is not to escape the world but to find true understanding, to find our true place in the universe.

It's a practice! Not blind faith.

What is the true Way? Dogen said, "Zen is zazen. Zazen is the study of self. To study the self is to abandon the self, to be certified by the cosmic order. "

Such a Way has no stable markers, you can't find it in books; only by daily practice, zazen, samu, fuse gifts, only by patience, (ninniku) morality, ( kai ) concentration, ( samadhi) Sagesse, (hannya) and compassion, (jishi) can it be realised, the practice of true meditation.

And what is the root of wisdom and compassion if not zazen, the realisation of true understanding which leads to the highest freedom, the freedom of the great bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, who, by great wisdom comes to the aid of beings who suffer.

We need to actualise this bodhisattva ideal in daily practice and zazen meditation because, by zazen we realise the metamorphosis of body and mind. Realising the true Way, true freedom, we free, also, others, unconsciously, by mutual influence. We have to start right here and right now. Humanity has already suffered too much with ideologies that promise future happiness for future generations, too many generations have suffered and sacrificed themselves to the delusion that future happiness is the only happiness to come. The future is always late in arriving!

What we propose to present generation and future generations is to actualise true interior revolution, change the way of thinking, cease to use only the front brain for thinking, use the central brain, too, use the whole body.

Mankind must cease to look for truth in ideology, in systems, modes and find the proper truth of himself in himself, in faith, in faith in the Way, faith in cosmic truth, the cosmic truth of oneself and that which surrounds oneself; this faith only waits to be realised, actualised. How can we do this? With true education, with true practice, true concentration, with the practice of zazen.

Man is neither angel nor demon, the world is neither bad nor good, it is what it is - it is also what we make of it. Letting go of the barriers we put up, letting go of our illusions, letting go of our blindness, what is what we must offer, because fundamental truth must reappear, otherwise man will endure nothing more than the cycle of frustration and compensation and this escalation can end in nothing other than catastrophe.

Already, there are plenty of signs of spiritual renewal are appearing at the same time as ideologies such as Marxism lose their force, but the progress of this future evolution depends ultimately on us: we must be true bodhisattvas.

Trying to describe future effects of true practice would only be to construct another utopia. But such a revolution is already coming, is already developing in the consciousness of the great number who suffer right now the impasse of modern civilisation. We notice more and more each day the growing interest across Europe aroused by zen teaching, the mission of Master Deshimaru, and his successors.

Having resolved their internal contradictions by education and true practice people are able to let go of the compensatory armour they wear in everyday life and live freely, naturally, without feeling the need to search for artificial compensations for their own sense of insufficiency and meagre satisfaction. Thus egotism, individualism, the search for power and riches can appease itself in a better understand of oneself, a better understanding of others, and more tolerance.

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With the acceptance of self comes the acceptance of others, come true respect, true freedom. With such a change in mentality, in behaviour, men and women can find real meaning in what they do, they can concentrate on real work, useful work, work in the service of others.

We could see a progressive evolution away from the economy of profit to an economy of service (samu). We could see an education of the totality of man, not as a tool of profit, but in the service of the development of his true potential.

Peace deepens mind and spirit, we could see, thus, a reduction in social tension, in international conflict, with a stronger fraternity and compassion to help reduce injustice, inequality, the inequality of unequal development.

The relation between man and nature will radically change, nature will no longer be seen as a enemy to dominate and exploit but as something that must be respected, loved. An understanding of the unity of man and the cosmos at the root of the true love of nature, our own nature, the nature that surrounds us.

Such a utopia can only be realised by the great upheaval occasioned by inner revolution, finding, once again, the unity of body and mind, ego and cosmos, in the practice of zazen right here and now.

It's the realisation of true consciousness: HISHIRYO, thinking with the body, thinking from the depths of non-thought.

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