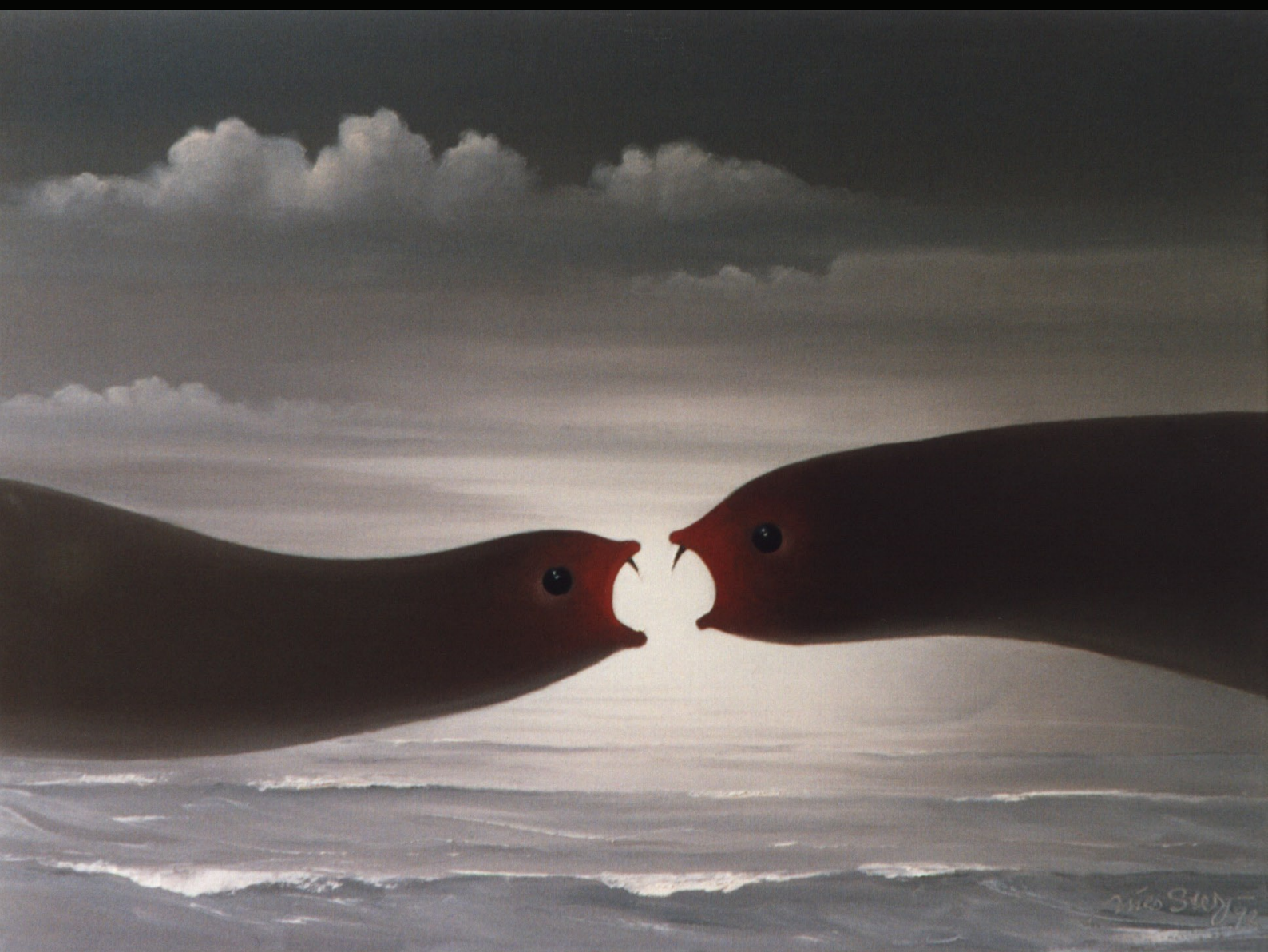


# TO HELL WITH CIVILISATION



Nico Steijn

**Coverdesign and layout by Sheila Mertens**

# To Hell with Civilisation

Internet edition



by Nico Steijn

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# Foreword

This booklet contains a summing-up of what the author has thought, said and done in response to what he has seen, read and heard, while he was journeying between the various stations and events of his life.

It is not an attempt to convince anyone about anything. Nor is it meant to point a moralising finger at humanity and its social-political systems. Neither is it a message of hope for a better world. His personal observations have drawn a few intermediate conclusions about the world in general and our civilisation in particular, endeavoring to look at the facts of life directly without any prejudice. He has striven to see, recognise and understand his own responses and reactions to the global chaos that has come about in the wake of our often unrealistic and irrational demands for more and better.

The author offers no solution to the personal, social or global problems in the wake of our civilisation. He only wishes to share an awareness of the truth as it reveals the facts of life at this point of our evolving civilisation.

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Groningen, the Netherlands

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# Chapter 1

One of the things that all people on Earth have in common is the fact that we're animals, one of the big ape species. We're creatures of flesh and blood like all other animals, and as such are completely dependent on the intake of fuel for survival, obtaining it by consuming other creatures as well as various plant species. Another absolute requirement for our survival is fresh water and clean air. Millions of people daily are dying for lack of access to that much needed fuel and fresh water, while millions of others are diseased and dying, because they consume more food and fresh water than they need.

Those of us, who have been born and raised in the welfare of a modern Western society, may not like to be told that we are a contributory cause to the suffering of millions of people who are dying for lack of food and fresh water. As individuals, we're not very willing to accept any moral guilt for whatever miseries exist in other parts of the world. We don't want others trying to convert us to the idea that we - the so-called rich countries - are responsible for the starvation of millions of fellow humans in far away countries.

Whatever we may feel, think or say about it, if we want to look at the previously mentioned facts objectively, it will be necessary to avoid emotion. To achieve that, we would need to put aside the word guilt and replace it with cause, so that we could be neutral. Consider the following question: Is the industrial Western world a contributory cause of mass starvation in other parts of the world?

Before trying to answer that question, we may consider that even the word cause could be a barrier in our attempt to be wholly objective. After all, everything that happens at any given moment in time and space is a contributing factor to everything in existence. The one and only first cause is a theoretical beginning of the Universe, with or without a Big Bang. At any rate, let's make sure not to use any moral qualifications concerning the inevitable facts of life. That doesn't just mean the world of human beings, but all other species of life. We're not the only inhabitants on the planet!

There are hardly any of us still living in the wild, but even the most primitive people in a forgotten piece of desert or rainforest have some kind of culture. Where there is a culture, there is a form of civilisation. But what is civilised behaviour for some is often seen by others as barbaric. Yet, even Barbarians had their own cultural mores and could be regarded as civilised. So what exactly do we mean when we use the word 'civilisation'? Having access to any form of technology doesn't necessarily mean that those who make use of it are civilised

human beings. When historians refer to ‘ancient civilisations,’ they mean that there were people in past millennia able to make tools with which they could build shelters, make weapons and other utensils to make life a whole lot easier. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that their behaviour was civilised. I think that being civilised is more of a mentality, than the material consequence of a developing intellect.

What I’m searching for in this exercise is the concept, the essence of civilisation. The majority of people take it for granted that it is a noble virtue and a blessing for humanity. But I don’t think that when we climbed down from the trees and started walking on our hind legs, that we consciously decided to civilise ourselves. We assume that we had become civilised when we had learned to make fire, enabling us to do things that we couldn’t do before; or verbally communicating our findings, thoughts and feelings to our offspring, so that with every new generation we were a little smarter than before. More so when we learned to read and write, producing images and showing us the consequences of our unfolding civilisation in every possible form.

Now we can question the merits of our urge to civilise everyone and everything around us. After having seen the overall effects of our civilisations, are they really that noble and virtuous, bringing blessings to the world at large? Perhaps we should have a long, hard look at the consequences of it, to see if there is a misconception in the real meaning of ‘being civilised.’ When we scrutinise the effect our Western style civilisation has, it becomes increasingly more difficult to consider it as a blessing for humanity and the natural environment. Have we become so sentimental that we can’t see clearly what real life is? Has our civilised mind become so weakened by our soft ways of living that we lack the discipline to change our dangerous ways?

Do we lack the strength to say a firm no to the seemingly endless arms race? Can we stop wasting our natural resources and say no to the destruction of vital eco-systems: the pollution of water, soil and air worldwide? All of this seems to be symptoms of something that lies deep in the human mind. Perhaps we could dig deeper into our psyche for something more fundamental that is causing all our human mischief.

What makes us the way we are? Is it our way of thinking? If so, we can try to learn how to change our unwanted behaviour, by changing the way we think: about the natural world, life and death, love and hate, etc. Are we capable of doing that? If so, then when, where, and how do we begin? It begins in our heads, where everything concerning our behaviour begins and ends. The issue is our search for the root-cause of our failure to live in harmony with the natural environment. Our thinking seems to be determined by our plentiful needs and

problems, with new ones being added daily. I suspect that past civilisations have gone under for the same reason, suffering the same disorders as we have today: our insatiable greed for more and better on one hand, and our destructive drive to expand and compete on the other. Besides our greed and compulsion to expand, we also suffer the unwanted consequences of our craving for sensation, in one form or another. We have to acknowledge these facts before we can come to any understanding of them. So let us admit that Homo Sapiens is greedy, competitive and has a lust for sensation.

Did we civilise ourselves to eradicate our 'bad' points? I don't think so. Civilisation just happened. Once we had learned to use fire profitably, and how to make tools and weapons that couldn't be made by any other animal, our success as a dominating, multiplying species was inevitable. With these material advantages, we could defend ourselves to some degree against the natural violence of weather conditions, hungry predators and hostile gangs of our own sort, which of course still goes on. People are being maimed and killed everywhere in the world by their own sort, for the sake of an ideology or a religion, for land, resources etc. We use 'civilised' justifications for developing better and more weapon systems, to kill those who have to kill us for similar reasons. Is it because of our civilisations or is it in spite of them?

Of course, in essence it makes no difference whether we're civilised or not; the laws of nature are the same as they have always been. To go against them with force, or what we allow ourselves to do in the name of our civilisation, remains detrimental to the natural environment, on which all species of life depend for their survival.

It is generally taken for granted that the original purpose of civilisation was to make life 'easier' for us all. And indeed, our species has been able to prevent some of the natural hardships of life. But have we gone too far in our constant craving for more comfort and pleasure? Or could we have prevented it? I don't think so. Once it started, the process couldn't be stopped and became irreversible. Even now, we're hardly aware of this pushy, unstoppable technology, which dominates every aspect of our life. We're far too busy with designing, producing and marketing a never-ending stream of novelties, all meant to make life 'easier' for us. Civilisation seems to be a blind process without any predetermined purpose. Or is it what we make of it?

Civilisation is just a byproduct of our ever-present desire for more and better. And we can't rightfully claim that civilised people are worthier human beings than those who haven't been civilised. When we want to make a serious study of our civilisation in its totality, we have to include the worldwide consequences of its effect on the environment.

These consequences have now been widely published and known by many people on the planet. Conferences have been held to inform us and discuss the urgent messages about the dire need to change our comfortable ways, and to call a halt to the runaway consequences of our behaviour. The fact that we've not been able to do that so far, is reason enough to get nervous. If we seriously wish to avoid the worst, we have to take drastic measures now, with or without any political treaties. Or shall we just watch our civilisation going under, on its own excesses? Are we making too much fuss about the fall of Western Civilisation? After all, as one species amongst many in the changing seasons of our history, civilisations have come and gone in regular succession. Life goes on, with or without it.

We could decide to be excited, if not fascinated, by witnessing the decline of the world as we have known it. Should we be worried about our children and the generations after them? What else can we do but to prepare them for the great changes, so that they can learn to deal with the facts of an altogether different way of life, in a future that is not all that far away? Perhaps the best thing we can give them is learning to think and act rationally under all circumstances. But are we competent enough to teach the following generations to think and behave as rational human beings, when we have shown them that we ourselves have been anything but rational in our conclusions about life on this planet? Shall we tell the next generation, in solidarity with other animals, that they should get rid of the car and every other machine polluting the planet and its atmosphere? Would they do it? Not likely! But perhaps in some surprising way, our collective instinct may take measures that we haven't dreamed of yet, to save us from extinction.

When we've realised that there is nothing we can do - except to adjust ourselves as quickly as possible to the inevitable decline, then there isn't any choice. We don't have to like it and no doubt we'll go on cursing and praying, until new insights have been rooted into our collective brain. Meanwhile, we might as well make life as pleasant as possible under the new circumstances, and allow the inevitable. Tomorrow or the day after, we might be able to do what we haven't been able to do today. Therefore, we mustn't conclude too soon that something is definitely inevitable. We would much rather keep telling each other that the human genius can solve our problems, even against our own better judgment. I suspect that we never really had a 'free' choice. To recognise and acknowledge that could change our ways of thinking and behaving!

Disturbing our conditioned way of thinking naturally causes much irritation, which usually makes us resort to the use of violence in one form or another. There will always be groups of people who see war and murder as the only effective

solution to the problems that come in the wake of politically or religiously enforced changes. To avoid such violence, it is important to be very careful with the people whose behaviour we seek to change or modify, in the name or on behalf of some abstract ideological or religious ideal. Perhaps we shouldn't busy ourselves with changing the world from what it is to what we imagine it ought to be. Changing or 'improving' society usually means undermining, condemning or forbidding what others say and do to maintain their personal life style.

Should we just sit down and do nothing that would upset anyone's applecart? In ages past, it was possible for an individual to escape a stifling community in which tradition was the holy cow; getting away from it and living elsewhere, or living the life of a hermit in the wilderness. That's not so easy today, unless one is rich enough to buy an island or some virgin land. Now we belong to one category or another to ensure our right of existence. We don't need to agree with the values and attitudes of present day society. But separating ourselves from it completely is no longer a viable option for the majority of people. To cater for our daily needs, we are now completely dependent on the facilities of a strict organisation. Everything is so structured that whoever needs anything at all, has to pay a price of one sort or another.

Is it too late to save the natural world from being so polluted that life becomes unbearable for most plant and animal species? Shouldn't we do everything possible to give top-priority to the prevention of every plant or animal that is disappearing into extinction? And for every species that has gone extinct as a consequence of our doings, shouldn't that be acknowledged as genocide? If everyone would become aware that our technologically directed civilisation is still causing genocide, perhaps we may be moved to turn the tide of our insatiable greed for more land, more oil, more cars, more machines, more roads and more overcrowded cities. Considering our human nature for what it is, I am not optimistic about it.

NASA and similar institutions have long been searching for an approachable moon or planet, which could be colonised by a future generation when it is no longer healthy enough to live on Earth. We've been fantasising and speculating for centuries about the eventual ending of the world: wishing about it and fearing it. Our collective dreams have been prophesied, interpreted and recorded in a great number of science-fiction stories, which have been read and viewed by millions of people and are as popular today as they ever were. There are also a considerable number of people who believe that a new messiah will appear to save all those who believe in it, while the rest of us will perish when all hell breaks out. The trouble with believers is that once they have convinced

themselves, they start acting as if it is true.

The so-called holy books of ancient times have given humanity no clarity; therefore they are partly responsible for the worldwide division between those who are emotionally bonded to their 'holy' books. The religious organisations, which have resulted from such interpretations, have never succeeded in bringing people closer together from their different beliefs. On the contrary, every group clings to its own belief-structure, imagining that only their interpretation of the 'holy' book contains the truth. They demand the civil right to bring their conclusions into the practice of daily life, therefore mocking or insulting those who believe differently.

It seems that more and more people are afraid for the future of their children or grandchildren. Somehow they have to cope with the mess we've caused in the wake of what our parents and grandparents left us. To know that a lot of people are afraid and angry, strengthens and confirms our own fears and anger. Many hope for a politically enforced change of mentality, but as we all know, politically enforced changes only cause more problems. There may be a relatively small group of people who are reasonable and rational in their thinking and behaviour. But the greatest numbers of human beings have never really learned how to be reasonable and rational. Most of us have only learned how to react emotionally at whatever we've heard, seen or experienced, making irrational conclusions with our emotional responses to the facts of life.

At the same time, it is commonly known that the suppression of our emotions usually lead us from bad to worse. As easy as it is for children to acquire these emotions, it is as difficult for adults to unlearn them, especially in a situation demanding a rational decision. Perhaps it would be better to teach our children that life would be easier to cope with if they learned to look at the facts of the moment, not letting their emotions get in the way of a reasonable assessment. For example, the fictitious character of 'Mr. Spock' in the Star Trek series and 'Data' in The Next Generation. Both were immensely popular and played a big part in making the series successful worldwide. It clearly shows that in our collective mind, there is a hidden desire to be able to keep our heads cool in any given situation. And to see the facts for what they are, without any moral or sentimental qualification, so that rational decisions can be made to control any circumstance. I don't rule out that there are people who actually live that way.

Our emotions are a psychological reaction to the facts of the moment through our thoughts. These thoughts are the result of what we believe, not what we know about the given situation. What we assume to be fact is determined by the culture in which we have been programmed and conditioned. Some believe in the Creation, others in Evolution; still others that God is nothing more than

a concept, an idea. All these parties look at the same questions and each one gives a different answer, contradicting the other. Our emotions are the bodily responses to our thoughts. These thoughts are the result of what we habitually believe. What we believe is whatever we've learned: from our parents, at school, in church, from books and personal experience. As adults, we take it for granted that what we've learned is the truth, never examining what we've learned. We never see if we're up-to date with the facts as they are at any given moment. But most people are too afraid not to believe.

The temples, synagogues, mosques and churches, as well as numerous schools and similar institutions, are the officially recognised places where religious rituals take place at predetermined times: daily, weekly, monthly or yearly. Different religions have different slogans and rituals for different occasions at different times, using different means. The scriptures must be obeyed and the ruling dogmas brought into the public arena.

Looking at the broad spectrum of all these various beliefs, with their doctrines and dogma, one may be tempted to conclude that it doesn't really matter what they believe, but that they believe. It never ceases to amaze me that so many people in the world find it necessary to believe in the so-called supernatural, in order to become a good, happy person. The believers' issues don't seem to include the well-being of other creatures and the natural environment, on which they depend for their existence. The main drive of a believer seems to be hope: for not being punished, for being spared in times of danger and to get a personal reward, like living in a paradise after one's death. Rather self centred! But let us not sit in moral judgment; we can leave that to the believers themselves. Instead, let's try to understand why so many millions need to cling onto a belief in the form of an almighty super-being, who seems to have an all-including need to be praised, adored and worshipped. And who apparently gets a kick out of punishing masses of people through the destructive power of nature or through some horrible disease.

So what moves people to believe rather than to question and seek the ever-present truth? I suspect it is the deeply rooted fear for punishment, and hope for being rewarded. When people learn to observe and think for themselves, religious leaders feel threatened in the wake of their own insecurity, and hold onto their 'holy' resolve to defend the Faith with deadly weapons if necessary.

Do we really need religion to live a reasonably intelligent, rational life? Everything we think, feel or say and do in our personal existence is nothing more than a conscious or unconscious reaction to the facts of the present. Every action that changes a given situation can draw out resistance, particularly from those whose wellbeing depends on the established order.

The obligation to spend the best part of our life working is the outcome of the inevitability of technology, replacing real life assets with a horrifying artificiality. The consequences of that are no longer foreseeable: we no longer can be in control to give conscious direction to our evolving technology. Yet on looking back, I wonder if we have ever known what we have been doing.

## Chapter 2

Up until now, we have failed to create a society in which everyone consciously strives to live an intelligent, peaceful life, by constantly thinking, saying and doing the 'right thing.' In spite of our wide-ranging capacities and talents, we apparently still don't know how to raise our offspring to everyone's satisfaction. When it comes to educating our children, it seems that the more knowledge we acquire through the sciences, the technologies and the arts, the more uncertain we are when it comes to programming and conditioning the new generation with the sort of values that create and maintain the right kind of human society.

Through the media, we've all been warned what is likely to happen if we fail to change, or at least modify our damaging ways of life: not tomorrow or after the war, but today. Whatever isn't changing today, will be the same tomorrow. Tomorrow can only be better, when we 'make amends' today. Which in real terms, means stopping to do whatever it is that adds to the decadence of a suffering, frightened, angry humanity. So if we really want tomorrow's society to be better than yesterday's, it's absolutely necessary that today we do or undo something of which we know has a damaging effect on our mental or physical health.

It has widely been recognised by the majority of people in the so-called civilised parts of the world, that the burning of fossil fuel is a major contributing factor to the worldwide pollution of soil, water and air. Yet every year, new combustion engines are being invented, manufactured, and marketed for evermore people, who have all been addicted to the luxury of speed and comfort. If we could confine our use of air-polluting machines to the basic necessities of daily life, we would greatly reduce our poisonous fumes and at least slow down the damaging effects on the natural environment. But we don't seem to be able to act on that. We're on the sideline, looking at it and passing it on to the next generation, so that they will know what they're in for: more chaos, more noise, more wars and more of everything that's bad, dirty and dangerous for living on planet Earth.

Just as there is a steady increase of deadly weapons, so is there a similar increase of combustion engines, giving us more noise, more speed and chaos, so that evermore people get angry, violent, diseased and insane. I suspect that we're too addicted to let go of our comfortable lifestyle, which leaves us with the conclusion that we lack the strength to change our ways, and can only watch how the natural landscape is being sacrificed to the demands of all kinds of transport systems. With fast growing cities worldwide, we have to travel greater

distances to get away from our noisy suburbs and shopping centres, where every bit of space is taken up to accommodate the ever-increasing numbers of motorised vehicles. All the advice and information that has been poured out since the consequences of our addiction to speed and comfort became apparent, has not even slowed down the sale of cars, motorbikes, boats, lawn-movers and a host of other machines that operate through combustion engines.

So, we've all been informed about the possible consequences of our indulgent and aggressive way of life, and its effect on future generations. The arts and sciences have left us with a score of possible scenarios, the one more horrible than the other. But then, empires and civilisations have risen and fallen during the many millennia that have passed by since we began civilising ourselves.

I was in my forties during the early seventies of the previous century, when I was struck by panic attacks on contemplating the future of the human race and the rest of the animal species. Less vulnerable now to those ancient fears, I am still left with a sense of loss for what life could have been if we hadn't been so damn arrogant in our blind ambition to dominate and subdue the entire planet, just to cater to our outrageous demands for more and better of everything. Like millions of disappointed parents who have asked themselves where they went wrong in bringing up their offspring, we can now ask ourselves the same question in the name of the Human Race: "Where did we go wrong"?

Predictably, we're doing our best to find a valid reason for not morally condemning ourselves for our collective behaviour as a civilised species, so that we can declare that we can't help being what we are. Or for others, it is the 'holy will' of some incomprehensible super-being, operating under a variety of names. Then we can save our faces, by pointing out that if it is the will of 'the Almighty,' then none of us can be held responsible for whatever we have done or undone. If we choose to believe that, then we just have to put up with the inevitable and forgive each other for not knowing what we're doing.

I've heard it said that the majority of people believe in the existence of a 'higher power,' personified into an all embracing entity that rules over the entire Universe. This 'one and only' entity comes in a variety of shapes and sizes, with different names and purposes, and in accord with the overriding dogma of worship and obedience.

I understand the temptation to conclude that such a great number of believers can't be wrong, but it isn't all that long ago that the vast majority of people believed that the Earth was flat. Or that we were at the centre of the Universe or that the uncivilised inhabitants of rainforests and other wild places were not really human. Instead of arguing about religion and the various interpretations

of its dogma, let's look at it in the light of our own neutral sense of honesty and see for ourselves that the vast majority of the world's worshippers are not really believers but followers.

The village where I was apprenticed to the local house-painter was small enough for everyone to know everyone; and everyone went to the medieval church on Sunday. The majority of villages were tightly church-bound in every aspect of their life, and anyone wanting to do business would do well to meet in church on Sundays. It was important to be seen there for all sorts of reasons. When I dutifully attended the service on my first Sunday there, the small church was so full that I could only stand behind one of the stone pillars, from where I observed a number of men playing cards and whispering gossip. It struck me as a violation of something which was supposed to be sacred. Then I saw it as a clear signal. It made me understand that these people were not at all seriously interested in the 'sacred' service and its assumed meaning. They didn't really believe in it! I obviously wasn't the only one who resented the boredom of attending mass in the gloomy church building, and sympathised with the bored looking faces around me. I wasn't a believer either!

The difference between us was that I found it stupid, contradictory and hypocritical to go on doing something I didn't believe in, so I quit and never went to church again. The others stayed, following the well-trodden path of simplistic obedience, rather than being excluded from the community. As long as one is a participating member of the club, all is well. Those who don't share in the familiar rituals are usually looked upon as disturbing, dangerous and unwanted individuals. 'Participate and conform or get out,' is the general message in every isolated community. It is not surprising therefore that most people would rather belong than be cast out. After all, doing the required rituals is not all that high a price to pay for having a certain status, and for one's personal safety being more or less guaranteed. Who would want to give that up? It would be easier to do the rituals and be counted as a fellow believer. Nonetheless, it is not believing but following. The difference is significant: it defeats the notion that all followers are believers. I suspect that the majority of believers are in fact followers, never seriously scrutinising or examining exactly what they profess to believe.

Anyone who cares to look in honesty will see that the religious organisations with their teeming millions of obedient believers/followers, have completely failed to bring the world's people together in a common need to live in harmony with each other; sharing and caring for everything that lives on the planet. Nothing has wrought so much division and bloodshed between races, cultures and ideologies as religion has. It no longer matters which religious party,

movement, organisation or church is the one-and-only true one. Now it is a matter of equal rights for all the different religious groups, regardless of each one professing to worship and obey the 'one and only' true god or prophet. Why would anyone want to believe in something that cannot be verified in the light of reason, common sense and logic?

Our inevitable ending forms a dark focus in the back of our conscious mind. All our thinking, philosophising and storytelling is about that: our personal and collective ending. Because we've made our ending such a morbid, frightening affair, we're desperate in our attempt to escape it in one way or another. One such way to escape our ending is to deny it. But since we've been confronted with our own death and the death of many other creatures for a million years or more, we can hardly deny the natural disintegration of matter. So we've invented a symbolic way to enable us to go on denying the inevitability of our ending through poetic devices, like re-incarnation or eternal life in an everlasting paradise.

Occasionally we read or hear opinions about the separation of Church and State, and about the assumed difference between religion and politics. In essence, there is no significant difference between them. Any form of socio-cultural organisation requires political negotiations for proper functioning in the community. Religious organisations are no exception. Both base their ground rules on what they believe to be the right way for the good of all people. And both lay down a set of rules to live by. Those who violate the rules must be punished or expelled, while those who apply and defend the rules must be rewarded. If not on Earth, then in heaven. Both promise their followers the chance of a good life, in one way or another. But if one is not a believer, a follower or a gambler, one is likely to anger the leaders who will consider you to be dangerous for 'The Faith,' because they depend on solidarity rather than on sound reason, common sense and just plain logic.

Why do we let other people decide what is good or bad, right or wrong without questioning it? Seeing and understanding ourselves requires a serious approach and a certain urgency to come face to face with the naked truth, as it can be found in our own hearts and brains. It requires us to observe ourselves as we are, instead of how we would like to see ourselves. It's a matter of seeing and being aware of what's actually going on: in our heads and in the immediate environment. Directing and holding the focus of our attention takes a certain effort and requires energy. The urgency with which we realise our need to change can generate that energy, and has a healing effect on mind and body. But many of us want to change the world to match our personal needs and wishes, which only causes more division. Our personal wants are rarely in accord with

what is needed to make us all live in harmony with each other.

Imagine that the human species is represented by one individual. And that this collective personage needs to pull itself together in order to maintain its sanity. It appears to be pretty sick and confused. So let's put this collective individual, named Homo Sapiens, on the psychiatrist's couch, free to say whatever comes to mind. Its preoccupations are evident when we look at the broad spectrum of human activity, coming through the world's media, arts and sciences. The chaos in the world reflects the chaos in the collective human psyche, due to the confusing contradictions with which humanity raises its offspring. A provisional diagnosis could help us to get to the source of the mental disturbance, so that we could discuss the necessary corrections for the behaviour of our species. But before we think of a suitable cure to heal this wretched, bruised humanity, what is the prognosis? What is likely to happen if we don't take appropriate measures?

That question has already been partially answered by a score of writers, filmmakers and actors, as well as a host of religious doomsday prophets of every denomination. It is obvious what is bound to happen. Things will stay as they are until they get out of hand, causing chaos in our affairs and a breakdown of our systems. As a reaction to that, there will be widespread anger, sorrow, frustration and all the resulting misery in the wake of it. Hackers in every part of the world will be breaking into all the vital systems. With most transport grinding to a halt, the resulting anarchy will spread rage, madness and mass hysteria, causing the death of millions.

Nobody would want any of this to happen. Yet I suspect it's happening right now, and probably has been going on before we've had any awareness of it. Can we bring this process to a halt? Could we have prevented two world wars and a whole lot of other human disasters that have taken place before and since?

After living more than eight decades on the planet, I'm more than ever convinced that everything that has taken place in our minds, on our planet, in the solar system and in the rest of the expanding universe, has been inevitable. That includes everything that has taken place in the evolution of our species. Inventing the wheel and the combustion engine was as inevitable and unavoidable as the process of life itself; including the far-reaching consequences of its existence. A dozen or a million explanations of how things have become what they are, mean absolutely nothing when it comes to perceiving the facts of life as they are. Going with the facts means not having a psychological resistance to the truth of the moment, no matter what it is.

Considering the global mess that we've brought about, I suggest it's time to give

priority to investigating ourselves honestly. Not to find moral guilt or cause, but to be aware of our own personal participation in this ongoing race for more and better: outwardly in the world of daily routine, inwardly in the way we think and feel. It is an unassailable fact of life that every one of us affects the world around us, through the way we operate in everything we do. Whatever we do is mainly determined by what we think, and what we think is mainly determined by what we believe or assume to be true. I suspect that there will never be an enduring peace, as long as opposing ideologies and different kinds of belief-systems are dominating our lives.

When change is necessary in the established order of any given society, we have to violate the original principles by which that establishment was formed. There will be conflict as long as the guardians of the establishment oppose change, inevitably resulting in various forms of violence. Occasionally I've read or heard that we 'should' be able to bring about change without using violence. But change is a violation of those who cannot or will not change. It's a mistake to assume that we can avoid physical violence by using emotional or psychological violence. Can we expect political or military leaders to make peace and preserve it, when individual citizens can't live in harmony with each other on a daily basis: at home, at work and on the street?

As long as we keep ourselves divided by opposing each other, culturally, religiously, traditionally, economically, politically or socially, we won't be able to establish any kind of peace. Perhaps there are not enough people in the world who really want peace - certainly not a majority. In any case, there's not enough to bring it about. I suspect that the majority of the peacemakers don't fully understand that peace, like love, can't be enforced. Enforced peace is suppression and keeps us all in cages. To keep any living creature in a cage is a form of violence. To curtail anyone's freedom is an act of violence. We can only suppress each other for so long, before we break out and go on a rampage. No one in a reasonable state of mind can deny the historical evidence of our seemingly endless demand for revenge, keeping us locked up in a vicious circle of legitimised violence of one sort or another.

Scientists have studied our behaviour for hundreds if not thousands of years. We've used chimpanzees, gorillas, orangutans and other ape-like creatures as models to acquaint us with the origins of our own behaviour, as social and a-social animals. In that way, we have hoped to gain understanding of some of our undesirable character traits. Has all this knowledge and understanding made us less violent than when we didn't know anything about 'behaviour'? I don't think so. Some of us have drawn the conclusion that we are a pretty bad bunch of intelligent animals, who have been busy mucking up the environment

in our frantic pursue for more and better. Certainly our weapons of war are better than ever. Our incredible store of knowledge has enabled us to explain just about everything, in and around us. Yet it seems that none of it is helping us to change our world from what it is, to what we imagine it should be.

Deeply rooted in the human psyche is the assumption that where there is guilt, there must be punishment. We all blame each other and find ourselves locking horns, without knowing how to break out of the vicious circle of punishment and revenge. Not many people like to be reminded of how much damage we've caused: to ourselves, to each other, to other creatures and the natural environment. I don't like it either, but I'm acting from a certain sense of urgency about coming to grips with the consequences of our indulgences. I've felt the collective fear of humanity in my bones more than once.

One way to free ourselves from the unnecessary burden of guilt and punishment is to convince ourselves that whatever is wrong in the world is not our fault. In essence, we cannot be held to moral guilt for being what we are. To come to that wonderful state of mind, we need to seriously consider that none of us have ever had any say in our existence. That may be a somewhat simplistic observation, but nevertheless it is as true as you are reading this. All of us, and every form of life, cannot be held responsible for being born. None of us could have avoided it. That unassailable fact of life may enable us to look at the obvious consequences of it in the following chapters.

## Chapter 3

Whatever we've done to ourselves and our natural environment, we were born innocent and remain so. However much blame and guilt we have put on ourselves, we are a dominating animal species. It is true that we are extremely greedy in wanting everything that can be had, because the majority of people on the planet have been programmed with the idea that it is noble to be ambitious, competitive, to have a higher income, more status and doing greater things than others have done; to have the first and be it, the fastest, the most knowledgeable and so on. I acknowledge that natural competition plays a major role in the evolution of the species, but there is no conscious intention. It is something that takes place in the wake of a chance event, in accordance with the natural laws of the Universe.

Whatever happens by chance can't be qualified as bad, evil or morally wrong. There is no conscious decision for a star to go into nova or hurl an asteroid at the earth, just to get rid of the dinosaurs. To see this in our daily existence, I'm bound by reason to conclude that whatever happens by chance, the consequences are nobody's intent, there isn't a 'higher plan.' Whatever the outcome of any given chance event, we cannot hold anyone morally responsible for it. Life itself is a chance event. Shouldn't we think again before we make ourselves morally responsible? Because of our deeply programmed prejudices, we can't curb our eagerness to punish each other in seen or unseen ways, even though we intellectually agree that we shouldn't.

Whatever we see when we willingly give ourselves over to unbiased self-research, the resulting change in our brain cells is effortless. Such a research can't lead to self-condemnation, because in the core of our being we know that we're not the product of our own doings. When we come upon our own innocence, we can't help seeing it in others. But it's not a matter of declaring ourselves and everyone else to be innocent; it isn't a political issue! Any politically applied ideology is bound to cause more contradictory mischief than is good for anyone whose desire it is to be free of political enforcement. A politically enforced ideology of innocence would do no better than any other law enforced ideology.

Insight has its own way of modifying mechanical behaviour without any conscious effort. It is not a reward for pleasing the whims of some authority or deity, but rather the natural outcome of a serious self-research. We think, talk and preach about truth a lot, yet after every discussion on the subject, we're still left with the same old question: what's true and what's false? Because we don't

have all the answers, the truth has become 'holy' to believers and followers, holding it in awe and worshipping it. The English poet, D.H. Lawrence, wrote: 'Only the loveless seek love.' In the same way, it could be said that only the 'truthless' seek truth. But the search for the truth is an abstraction, with little practical value in terms of our relationships with each other. Perhaps we should end our search for the one-and-only truth and turn our private and public attention to an altogether different concept, namely honesty. We may have difficulty in recognising the truth, but the majority of people can understand perfectly well that it means to be honest. Instead of probing the material Universe with our limited capacity, we might gain more by learning to be honest in our own minds.

From early childhood on, we've learned to act and to do 'as if.' Well nigh all of us have been exposed to a great number of lies during the first decade of our lives. From Father Christmas, the fairies, talking animals and unreliable history books. All of that still goes on and is accepted worldwide as normal: "It's the right way to bring up our offspring." At the same time we declare honesty to be a virtue, and that we shouldn't approve of dishonest behaviour or communication. That's how we've become to live such contradictory lives. We've been conditioned with the illusion that there is no harm in shaping the young, vulnerable minds of children with tales of hell and heaven, angels and saints, good and evil, reward and revenge, all in the name of justice and causing disappointment and false expectations. What's wrong with teaching our children what it means to live a rational life? Of course we can't. We don't know what it's like to be rational!

The global trend to vandalise private or public property is a clear indication of millions of young people, living in a suppressed state of anger and frustration, discovering that real life is not what their parents and teachers have made them believe. When we discover that almost everything is going wrong in the world, with corruption as the norm and cut-throat competition a virtue, we start telling each other how it ought to be. As a result of everything that has happened until this moment, the world cannot be what it 'ought' to be. The numbers of factors that play a role in establishing the exact condition of any given moment is incalculable. To see, recognise and acknowledge that inevitable fact produces a change in the brain, automatically leading to seen or unseen changes in behaviour. It is an example of changing without force, effort or any form of violence. That isn't an opinion, it's a verifiable fact. But it's no use just believing it. One has to find out for oneself.

Change in behaviour through the punishment-reward method has never been durable, only re-enforcing a society of winners and losers, breeding violence

of one sort or another. When change takes place in the wake of insight, it is effortless: without any psychological resistance and without any willpower. Willpower causes resistance. The law of opposing forces doesn't only confine to the physical Universe 'out there,' but also operates in our heads in the psychological world. Brain cells are also part of the physical Universe.

Insight through spontaneity forms a vital link between the brain and the mind. It is tempting to conclude that they are separate entities or items. But such a conclusion only leads to self-centred discussion and intellectual analysis, regarding our 'true' identity. We've been discussing it for millennia and call it philosophy, theology or anthropology. But all these studies have hardly helped the world to be more peaceful than just giving us more than mere knowledge. Real change is irreversible and durable. So when we find ourselves changing from aggressive to peaceful, we automatically affect the world around us. If that isn't reason enough to slow down and start looking at ourselves, we can't claim to be interested in a safe and peaceful world. But what exactly do we mean when we use the word peace? Perhaps it's a bit like art: undefined and somewhat unreal in terms of the natural world of everyday life.

We've been exposed to the many wildlife documentaries via the media, showing us the violent activities of every living creature depending for its survival on food, shelter and peace. In the natural world of daily life in the jungles, deserts and mountains, as well as in or around the rivers, lakes and oceans, there has never been any peace. As long as there's a sprinkling of life, there's violence in one form or another. Like others, I've had the tendency to look upon all that natural violence as a peaceful world. We 'peace-loving' people seem to find it quite normal to disturb the natural habitat of all sorts of animal species, for the sake of satisfying our insatiable curiosity and our lust for underbelly sensation. Not to mention the violence we commit when we use the forests to cater for the expensive whims of the rich and well-to-do, whose profits depend on the sale of manufactured goods that are made from rare, thousand year old trees that serve as habitat for numerous known or unknown plant and animal species.

Those involved would be inclined to say that they would never deliberately harm an animal, but they can't control the poachers or the 'market forces.' Their livelihood and their accustomed way of life would be in danger if they were to stop buying and selling precious plant and animal matter. It shows our impotence when it comes to changing what is needed to be changed to save what can be saved; not only for future generations, but for the sake of life itself. We've been rather casual about our incompetence in bringing about the necessary changes in our programmed, conditioned way of thinking. It seems that the best we can do is to keep telling each other that nobody can do anything

about it. The belief that we can't do anything to prevent the worst could be repeated so often that no one would be able to do anything.

Once I threw a ripe tomato forcefully against a whitewashed wall, and was fascinated with the way the individual seed pips were distributed around the centre of the impact, which I saw as a symbol of the Big Bang explosion. What I learned from it was that any single pip landed in its own place by chance. Since then I've considered myself and every other creature on the planet as having 'landed' by chance in the scheme of things. The way we look and walk, the sound of our voices, our tendencies, our reactions and responses, our race, culture and psychological conditioning are all the result of a chance event. In real terms, we can't be held morally responsible for the way we are. We can't help being born with all the genetic luggage of our ancestors. Has there ever been a creature that could determine its form, function and place before coming into being? I don't think so either.

One glance at the geological clock shows that compared with dinosaurs, sharks and beetles, our species is still quite young. Humanity's responses and reactions are those of a somewhat belligerent teenager, with enough brain capacity to develop all its potential and bursting at the seams with the inborn eagerness to explore and take control of its environment, including its own body. As we listen to Homo Sapiens (still on the psychiatrist's couch), we soon become aware of our preoccupation with all things sexual. Never before have we been so exposed to the forms and aspects of sexual behaviour. Sex is a worldwide industry. The market is flooded with all kinds of facilities to aid us in every possible way, to experience sexual pleasure. It is clear that our overriding interest in sex is as normal as any other teenage kid, just discovering the pleasure of it. Humanity is still rather young and has to grow through this gorgeous but awkward phase. To regard this global explosion as immoral is as dangerous and unsavory as church dogma, which orders that every new born baby is considered to be guilty until baptised. All moralists would want to warn us of the consequences of the ongoing sexual revolution, and are as much in need of help as those whose natural sexuality has been thwarted by the moralists.

I've often been fascinated by the manner in which sheep jump for joy after having been restricted in such an event like shearing or transportation. It has always given me a kick whenever I've seen it happen. The joy of being released is easy to identify with; we've all been constricted or suppressed at one time or another. When World War II ended, thousands of liberated prisoners and forced labourers took to the streets, not only to sing and dance, but to plunder whatever was left after the bombardments; a normal reaction after being the hostage of a repressive regime. The same thing happens when a repressive dogma has been

dropped, or when repressive taboos have been broken by public consent, in the wake of the sexual revolution.

Of course, there's always the fear of things getting out of hand. That too is a normal, understandable reaction. The public fear for anarchy runs deep in societies, where there is a predictable order in everyone's life. New ways of thinking in the wake of new insights are bound to bring about a revolution. But whether it leads to bloodshed, depends on the reactions of those who want to oppose the natural changes of a dynamic society. Look at the global situation. The evidence of resistance is everywhere. Where there is resistance, there is tension; inevitably leading to a sense of unease. An uneasy community makes people suspicious and secretive, which is a poor feeding-ground for peace and harmony. It's just not possible to have a peaceful community, when the majority wants something that is forbidden by the few. Or vice versa!

Peace, like freedom, is a state of mind. How peaceful or free we are depends mainly on how we choose to respond to the inevitable changes taking place in the world, in and around us. We can no longer isolate ourselves from these changes without cutting ourselves off from the community, causing further division. But since a great number of people actually want to do just that, it is unrealistic to expect the peace of a stable world society, where all contradictions have been eliminated by sound reason and common sense. There are also a great number of people who don't really care about war or peace, as long as they can go on doing business in one way or another. They know how to make profitable use of whatever situation the world is in, not resisting the inevitable facts of life. They're natural survivors, having no need to tell the world what is morally right or wrong.

Another big group of people who don't strive for peace are addicted to the adrenalin-kick of warfare. Millions of people thrive when they're engaged in the use of violence of one sort or another. With all the advantages of a relatively free life as a soldier, peace is boring and lacks what it takes to live an exciting life of action. I suspect that since we've invented the word peace, we're still trying to figure out what it actually means. Taking all that into account, we could conclude that millions of people are demonstrating that our general behaviour makes it impossible to avoid conflicts between opposing views and beliefs about the meaning of peace, freedom and equality.

Since the beginning of our recorded history, we've been trying to make everyone have the same belief. That's the overriding interest of every religion or ideological group, declaring that those who don't believe are either inferior or 'evil.' But now the United Nations have declared that all human beings are of equal worth, even though they're not of equal value in terms of being

useful. Believers tell us that we're all equal in the eyes of the Almighty, but what does it mean in the practical world of daily life: in the kitchen, at the office, on the work floor or in the classroom? Many believers and followers have declared suicide bombers to be worthier than women who have cheated on their husbands. One is rewarded, the other punished, but both must die. The bomber is posthumously rewarded with a place in an imaginary paradise, while the adulteress is condemned to some kind of hell. Who is the worthier human being in terms of real value to the community? Other groups of believers and followers have their own contradictory ideas, commands and dogmas about living the 'good' life in peace, freedom and justice. With all these opposing contradictions in our various belief-systems, violence can't be avoided, no matter how often we sit together and talk about the necessity for either war or peace.

Having been informed by the symbols, signs and signals of our manifested decadence, we've begun to realise that knowing about it doesn't help us to create a more balanced society. On the contrary, the more we tell each other how bad it is, the more we believe that there's nothing we can do about it. Any system that is imposed against the wishes of the many is bound to make matters worse

Humanity - still on the psychiatrist's couch, sits upright and asks if there is any hope of being normal again.

I ask: "What makes you think that being normal is the right thing? Being normal means living and acting in accordance with whatever has been accepted as the norm, which is the very thing that has helped us to destroy the natural habitat of numerous species, including our own. Being normal has also helped us to poison the soil, break up the ozone layer, pollute the oceans and replace the rainforests with speedways and skyscrapers.

Being normal is to be part of those who believe that they must consume as much as possible. Not just for the sake of their personal survival, but to keep us all at work for the sake of the economy: the harder we can work, the more we can consume. That is the socio-economical virtue. Where would we be if we didn't buy all those things that we really don't need? The factories must go on turning, so that there is enough consumption for as many people as possible. Ultimately, everybody will be able to have everything. That's normal!"

At this point I would advise Humanity to stop being normal and no longer participate in the rat-race. No political or religious organisation can bring about the necessary changes without violating one thing or another. A peaceful change might be possible if we refrain from wanting to control its direction.

But however much we've tried to learn from history, we keep making the same mistake of enforcing change. However hard we have studied and analysed the past, there is no evidence that any kind of enforced change has ever led to a durable peace, in a state of freedom. If I was a real 'shrink' and had a teenager on the couch, I would explain that being convinced of one's own ideals, does not give the right to violate other people's ways of life. Every form of human violence begins with unsettling enforcements of one sort or another.

## Chapter 4

We are constantly enforcing change on the world around us, but it doesn't seem to get any better; in many cases it seems worse. The civilised places of the world are becoming more complex and complicated: more expensive, more noisy, more efficient, but hardly better. We don't seem able to whip ourselves out of the groove of our habitual way of thinking. Apart from what psychologists and philosophers say about it, thinking is an ongoing activity in the brain, working day and night whether we're aware of it or not. Does that mean that this activity operates independently from our personal wishes? Looking at myself, I observe that this thinking process carries on, with or without my consent. My thoughts can be directed by an act of will, I can amuse myself or think about solving a problem; learning something or losing myself in a daydream. I can influence my never-ending stream of thoughts to a certain extent by willfully deciding to think only what I want to, without other thoughts distracting me. Science of course, can give us more information about the brain and its activities, but I don't think we need to know more, in order to realise that the only 'free' choice we have is what we choose to think. Even then, that may be doubtful.

We don't need to read a book to get to know our own mind. Self observation is enough to gain insight into the matter. In basic terms the brain is an organic 'instrument,' reacting and responding to impulses from its immediate environment. Of course, that goes for the brain of any animal. To a scientist this may sound like a simplistic view of a complex process, in which chance-events triggered by other chance-events, go all the way back to the Big Bang. Whatever triggered that one is far enough away in time and space to be irrelevant to the context of this enquiry, which is: Are we morally guilty for being what we are and what we do to ourselves and the environment? Can we rightfully hold Da Vinci and the Wright brothers morally responsible for the damage that has been done to the natural environment, because of the number of aeroplanes that now circle the globe? Are we morally guilty for the worldwide erosion as a consequence of our never-ending demand for more and better? Is it morally wrong to teach each other over many generations how to conquer and exploit the natural environment, efficiently, effectively and profitably?

Over a score of millennia we've taken it for granted that it's 'right and proper' to be ambitious, and to strive for being a winner. Our parents, grandparents and all the generations before them were convinced that cutthroat competition for profit and status was the appropriate way to earn the respect of the community, and a place in heaven after death. But the choices our predecessors made were

not free choices, because believers and followers cannot make a free choice. Their beliefs dictate the terms. Millions are kept in the narrow confines of tunnel vision, following the trodden path of tradition with its mechanical repetition of rituals. Can the people of a nation be held morally responsible for the actions and decisions of a dictatorial government, giving them the 'free choice' to obey or suffer the consequences?

We have the tendency to punish anyone making the 'wrong' decision. When the decision turns out to be favourable, we tend to put the one who made the 'right' choice on a pedestal. But when it turns out that we have made the 'wrong' choice, we automatically consider ourselves to be the victim of unforeseen circumstances. This tendency - to see ourselves as less guilty than the others - is the logical outcome of that ancient instinct for self-preservation, which is the first law of every living creature. Our natural obedience to that first law of life is not a moral sin against the natural order. Nor can it rightfully be regarded as a crime that must be punished in accord with the fashion of the times. Inherently every living thing has the natural 'right' to preserve itself within its capacity to do so.

What about preserving ourselves at the cost of other creatures? Self-preservation is not a moral issue and never will be in the real world, regardless of what believers and followers say it ought to be. This instinctive self-preservation naturally extends to our own families: villages, tribes, nations, cultures, religions and races. However, telling ourselves over and over again that humanity is one big family, and that we should be able to live in peace and harmony, doesn't help us to change into what we believe we ought to be. If we are told to do this or that 'for God and country,' we can hardly call it a free choice when one is punished for not doing it. When a right becomes a duty, it is no longer a right. Where is the free choice in that? We claim that education is a right and a privilege yet those who have chosen not to use it are punished. Where is the free choice in that?

Many of us go berserk in the wake of too much exposure to the noise of machines, or the relentless beat of pop music in the neighbourhood; or the constant nagging of an unhappy marriage partner. How many of us have been punished for the damage that we've created when we couldn't take it anymore, and did something we wouldn't have done if there had been peace and harmony in the neighbourhood? Some of us break-up or break-down sooner than others like those who have a higher or lower threshold of pain than average. That fact can easily be verified and is common knowledge. Yet we're inclined to regard those with less physical or mental capacities as less worthy of respect than those with more capacity.

No matter how advanced or backward we are in terms of knowledge and mental dexterity, we all think. Thinking is an ongoing activity in the brain. We can look at our thoughts, get to know our personal preoccupations, and perhaps learn something about ourselves and our relationship with the environment. In this context, the environment is the neighbourhood: the people we relate to and all the events that take place in and around us at any given moment. The world at large is the one we see and hear through the media. Both the environment and the world have a dominant influence on our thinking and behaviour. We're all aware of our ability to influence each other's ways of thinking, ever since we've been able to think at all. It's quite natural; we're doing it right now, all the time.

Never before have there been so many people with so much on their busy minds. Yet, never before have we been so divided in our ways of thinking and behaving. In spite of our up-to-date communication gadgets, we seem to have failed to get closer to each other as friendly neighbours and sharing the same amenities for the same human needs. Why aren't we friendly anymore? Or weren't we ever friendly? Perhaps we've grown tired of wearing a polite mask. Perhaps it's time to show our teeth for reasons other than to smile. Perhaps we've been tolerant for too long and need to live in peace in our own private world, without being harassed by those who want us to think and behave as they do. Or to be regarded and condemned for being an 'infidel' or a 'pagan.'

The word tolerance could be defined as a politically correct expression of goodwill towards strangers, whose life style and cultural expressions have an unsettling effect on the established order of the host community. Politically imposed and judicially enforced tolerance makes it the moral duty of every citizen to act and behave as if they are tolerant. This makes no one happy. Understandably, we're not eager to compromise our own comfortable lifestyle to make room for the invading strangers, whose definition of tolerance may be quite different from ours.

Europeans once invaded every continent in the world and called it exploration and colonisation. Now, millions of people whose lands were once occupied by the colonists have invaded Europe and call it 'seeking asylum.' Who is right, who is wrong: nobody and everybody? Changes are inevitable and unavoidable, whether we want them or resist them. If we think it isn't possible to live in peace and harmony with each others' differences, then we'd better learn how to live in a permanent state of fear and hatred, expecting every form of violence to take place. Peace and competition are uneasy bedfellows. Competing to have more and to do better is itself a form of violence. It forces us into the rat-race that now dominates the life of most people on the planet. There are winners and

losers, and where there is competition, it inevitably leads to various forms of inequality.

Freedom, justice, peace and equality are often mentioned as the corner stones of our civilisation. Perhaps we might gain some new insights by focusing our attention on these concepts. The first thing that strikes me is that none of these four words can be defined in terms of any exact meaning, in spite of our dictionaries! We all have to agree on the right meaning of these words for the sake of clarity, so that we all know exactly what we're saying and hearing, when we're using these words. Fundamentalists in every culture and religion are bound to become extreme and fanatic when they want to build their case on one or more of the cornerstones of our civilisation. With enough charisma to attract large numbers of followers, they feel strengthened in their idealism and assume that they live in accordance with the 'right' interpretation of any of these four words: justice, freedom, equality and peace. Therefore they seriously believe that they are living a life that expresses the 'one-and-only' truth.

When the word is regarded as the appointed truth, it becomes 'holy'. The books in which they have been written have become 'Holy Books.' The concept holy has been so deeply programmed and conditioned into the brains of believers and followers, that it is very difficult - if not impossible - to convince them that what they believe has nothing to do with the truth of the here-and-now. Most of us would think of ourselves as having an inborn sense of justice, so we would 'feel' rather than know what's fair and what isn't. We're all influenced by our own personal fears, wishes and prejudices. For a moment we may identify with a victim and be led by a sense of compassion, but which victim? A winner who gets clobbered by a loser, or a loser who has never had any choice? Which 'sense' of justice is valid?

There is no such thing as justice in nature. Our sense of justice is not inborn, just as it is not among other animals. Justice is a concept and has no absolute value. We all have our own conditioned sense of justice, with our beliefs or whatever 'spiritual' or psychological routes we have chosen to follow. The result for the whole of humanity is naturally chaotic, contradictory and corrupt. All because we've invented the word justice and don't quite know what it means or how to apply it to everybody's satisfaction. The 'holy' books inform the believers what is just, but all we learn from that is what the authors believed when they wrote down their words at that time.

Why did we invent a word that didn't represent anything real in the natural world? Most of us have been brought up with the idea that justice is something real, like gravity or electricity: something that can be applied in the practical world of everyday business. But is that so? It seems to me that justice has

meaning only in the context of a society dependent on the reward and punishment method. In that context, justice is an artificial instrument which can be used in diverse cultures, races or religions with different values. That makes justice a curse for some and a blessing for others. Ultimately, we can see that justice is nothing more than an opinion.

Once I saw a documentary on TV in the 'Built to Kill' series. It showed how a cheetah had spent all her energy catching prey to feed her three young kittens, only to be chased off by a lioness that carried it away to her kittens. When someone takes away something from us that we consider to be ours, we call it an outrage and seek revenge. Or we congratulate ourselves for stealing something without being caught. It all depends on where we were born and how we have been programmed: not a matter of good or evil in moral terms. As for the idea of equality, nothing in the Universe is equal to anything else. What exactly do we mean when we talk or preach about equality? Does it mean that all human beings should be regarded as having equal value in the community? That there is a naturally evolved hierarchy amongst socialising animals is obvious. The practical reality of daily life shows that the value of any member of a community is determined by the usefulness of that person. Like justice and freedom, equality is just another word we've invented, with no relevance to the real world. We can't define it and don't know how to apply it for the good of everyone. Equality is a messy idea, causing a great deal of anger, fear and confusion. It frustrates a great number of people who don't understand why some people receive a very large salary, while others get very low wages for a lot of hard physical labour. Yet, can we learn to look at the facts as they are, without declaring them to be good or bad in moral terms?

The hard working cheetah lost her prey to an opportunistic lioness. Is it possible for us not to be sentimental about such things? If we say: "No, it isn't possible," we've had it! Things will only get worse. If we say: "Yes, it's possible for us to stop being sentimental," then we can look at ourselves and the world without seeking justice and equality. Then there is some hope that we may stop believing and following, in order to see the facts as they are and deal with them intelligently, without punishment or reward. Could that be the meaning of 'turning the other cheek?'

Another cornerstone of our wonky civilisation is the concept of freedom. We've invented that word in a futile attempt to make it as real as gravity and electricity. But do we really know what it means to be free? As it is now, we've let politicians decide how free we are allowed to be. How can we call ourselves free individuals, when we damn well know that any allotted freedom is strictly within the confines of the cultural cage, in which we've been born, programmed

and conditioned to obey the laws of the land and the commandments of the churches, temples, mosques, synagogues and every other dogmatic authority? We are as tightly restricted by our self-imposed systems, laws and bylaws as the moon is in her orbit. The repetitive, predictable lives we have are the causes of our mechanical ways of thinking and behaving. We may sleep the hard times away in a soft bed and dream of freedom, but the bed is only a comfortable perch in our cage. Like animals in the zoo, many of us are well fed and free to play in our allotted space. We live artificial lives and are totally dependent on the mood and style of our 'chosen' leaders, who keep on making and breaking promises about peace, justice, equality and freedom.

## Chapter 5

We commemorate our wars in every nation, all over the world. When we are asked why, we say: “Lest we forget.”

Forget what exactly: the historical dates and anecdotes, the number of dead heroes and martyrs, defeats and victories? It seems that we can't or won't remember the underlying causes and consequences of all those wars, fought since the dawn of civilisation. Perhaps we should only have one worldwide Remembrance Day each year. All the people in the world, putting down their weapons and violence ceasing for that one day, a worldwide ritual to be attended by everyone on the planet. Then, at the end of that day, we can all ask each other whatever valuable lessons we've learned from last year's causes and consequences, and the politicians will present us with their answers at next year's Remembrance Day. Having satisfied ourselves that we've been seen to participate in this year's remembrance ritual, we can carry on as usual: religious and ideological divisions breeding fanaticism, nationalism, patriotism, racism, sexism and other prejudicial isms.

We can't afford to allow tradition to dictate the terms of modern life any more. Millions of people are still submitting themselves to the culture of the 'holy' tradition. Neighbours from different cultures, forced upon each other by political treaties with different perspectives, clashing with each other in time, space, form and meaning.

There are a group of people who feel at ease with each other, because they have all participated in the same cultural activities over a long period in their history, having highs and lows together over many generations. Then these apparently peaceful people are infiltrated by another group of people with a totally different culture, demanding a totally different lifestyle, dealing with problems in different rules and rituals. They claim the right to express their traditional ways as freely as their reluctant hosts express theirs. The hosts resent the intrusion, seeing everything they hold dear being undermined. To keep the peace, they are asked, advised, ordered, urged or forced to be tolerant and for a while they are. But the resentment remains and goes underground, becoming a public secret, breeding hatred and fear; in due time, all hell breaks out.

Many individuals, families, tribes and nations are locked in a vicious circle of revenge, passed on to the next generation and beyond that in the following centuries. The wars that were lost must never be forgotten. The shame and suffering of the past can only be wiped out by fulfilling a proper act of 'honorable'

revenge. The ways of tradition must be upheld.

When we have been hurt by someone, we consider it normal and natural to take revenge. Being the victim, we automatically assume that we have a moral right or a duty to hit back in some way. It must be immediate or in due time: 'an eye for an eye,' so the 'holy' book says. Millions of people are programmed and conditioned to regard revenge as the proper way. I suspect that it has more to do with family pride or national honour, than with the willingness to accept a more logical, profitable way of getting compensation for being hurt. But compensation alone doesn't satisfy the avenger; there must be punishment as well. With conscious intent, the avenger seeks the 'sinner' or the 'enemy,' demanding two eyes for one. If we accept this as a natural part of our genetic makeup, an inevitable fact of 'human nature,' then we're doomed. But if we don't accept such a conclusion, we can ask ourselves if a fundamental change in our thinking is possible.

It is generally assumed that when we have reached a certain age, like sixteen, eighteen or twenty one, we can no longer be treated as children or behave like them. When we're 'grownup,' we're expected to behave as if we are responsible for the choices we make. If they lead us to undesirable situations, we may be punished for making the 'wrong' choices. However, if our choices turn out to be 'lucky' ones, we'll be rewarded. In either case, the choices are gambles: an affair of chance. From the very first choice we ever made as an individual, as a family, a business or any other sort of group, we have gambled. And throughout our lifetime, we have hoped that the choices we have made would be 'lucky' ones. Guesses may be educated ones or just random, we hope we won't be punished for them. Whenever we make a decision at governmental level or on the level of our private life, we all keep our fingers crossed. When we decide to build an outrageously expensive prestige object to impress or intimidate, attracting more business to keep a lot of people working, we're gambling with each others' money and recourses. I'm not making a moral judgment about it, just steering towards the reward and punishment issue.

Losing a gamble can happen to anyone. Chance can never be ruled out or brought under control. It remains unpredictable. To lose a gamble is always painful and a punishing experience, so why add more punishment for making the wrong choice? Our tendency to punish is an expression of anger, grief or disappointment. When a football game is lost against the expectations of the crowd, it is 'thumbs down' and the players get booed or worse. Yet, none of the players can rightly be held morally responsible for losing the game. There isn't a game in the world in which chance doesn't play a vital role in winning or losing, so why punish the participating players? It is neither logical nor

intelligent and reveals our immaturity and callousness. Being aware of that as we see it happening in the privacy of our own minds, it does its own thing. That is when real change takes place, in our brain cells.

## Chapter 6

Enforced tolerance is devastating for peaceful co-existence. Ordering us to be tolerant for the sake of a peaceful relationship might work for a short time. But when it takes longer than we consider reasonable, there is a build-up of tension due to unexpressed thoughts and feelings, especially if we have been ordered not to use our right to 'free speech' for the sake of preserving the peace. Enforced tolerance is in itself an act of violence! To be punished for reacting to the unreasonable demands of authority, makes a mockery of the so-called cornerstones of civilisation. It also breeds indifference and makes us drift further away from each other: a way of switching off. A logical consequence is the realisation that we are in fact incompetent when it comes to fundamental change in our ways and means of thinking and behaving.

It seems that every concept we have invented which cannot be defined in terms of recognisable, verifiable fact, refers to a state of mind rather than to the facts of life. Believers and followers are constantly encouraged to strive for a society that operates as a well-oiled machine, in accord with the so-called cornerstones of civilisation. Many see it as their 'holy' duty to establish a society in which peace, justice, freedom and equality is practiced in every department of their daily lives. Some get dangerously addicted to the ever-present hope of a seat in 'paradise,' to such an extent that they are willing to die for the cause of trying to change the world from what it is, into something it can never be.

There is ample historical evidence that any idealism that has been used to justify undesirable extremities does not work; the 'higher' our ideals, the worse the consequences when they are imposed on the real world. Is that the underlying cause of human action and reaction, our seemingly compulsive need to impose ourselves on each other and the natural world of plants and animals?

Believers can't be blamed for being what they are, considering that they were programmed and conditioned to blindly believe and follow the trodden path of their predecessors, without seriously examining exactly what it is that they believe. This phenomenon doesn't only confine itself to religious organisations. Political parties are invariably based on an ideal: looking good on paper, sounding good with the right voice and saying the right words at the right occasion. Many people would be upset and disturbed by the loss of idealism. There is still a widespread belief that idealism is a noble virtue and that it is virtuous to be an idealist. Politically motivated idealists are as eager as religionists to change society into what they believe it should or ought to be. Particularly those who believe themselves to be chosen by the one they worship.

Believers and followers are inevitable: the religious, the communists, the anarchists, the humanists, the atheists. They come and go with nothing to say that can possibly bring about a fundamental change in our mental behaviour and in our way of thinking. Many are hoping and waiting for some new messianic talent to 'deliver us from evil.' The only thing I consider to be 'evil' is the word itself. It refers to an idea that has nothing to do with the real world. Those using that word imply that the 'devil' (d'evil) actually exists, thereby revealing their own superstition, which is exactly what the ex-president, George W. Bush revealed when he introduced the phrase 'axis of evil' to the world at large.

All the various cultures, ideologies and religious organisations are now widely spread across Europe, flooded by those whose ancestors had once been enslaved and colonised by Western adventurers, merchants and missionaries of all sorts. It seems that the tables have been turned. For many people it is a striking example of 'poetic justice,' confirming that in the end we all lose. I suspect that not many people appreciate this kind of writing and would rather reject it as 'negative' doomsday stuff. Some may even feel threatened and rightfully so! I've felt threatened for the greater part of my life. Perhaps we would all be better off if we just admitted that we're afraid for the future of our children and grandchildren and for the rest of life on this planet. In short, humanity lives in fear and it shows! But knowing us, we'll most probably lay the cards for poker, as if we couldn't lose. There isn't much left to gamble with anyway, we have already lost so much! Our natural resources are dwindling and we will soon be killing each other for whatever is left.

Is there any hope? Of course there is. There has always been hope and perhaps that is part of our troubled existence. Perhaps there has been too much hope. Our hope for the best often comes out of our fear for the worst. A woman hoping to find the right man often gets the wrong one, because her hope is her fear in disguise. The hope for a long, healthy life is born from the fear of dying young. Hope and fear are our daily companions. There's not much difference between living on hope and living in fear. One is starry-eyed and has lost touch with the real world; the other is neurotic, paranoid and awfully lonely.

We are alarmingly unbalanced in a dangerous way. Behind us is the timeless road of our violent history. Many of us may still hope that some rare individual will present us with a saving formula, to save us and the rest of the planet. But our fears, greed and hatred are the dominating forces behind our activities. Our civilisations have enabled us to develop the astounding genius of our intellect, at the same time disabling ourselves of making intelligent use of it. Whatever we think we have gained during our existence on the planet, we have yet to learn how to establish and maintain a weapon-free world peace.

We seem to be the unfortunate child of a marriage between the best and the worst of life on the planet. The same storyline runs throughout our troubled history, revealing that the glory of our genius is overshadowed by the embarrassment of our stupidity. With an arsenal of billions of deadly weapons that can be fired at the touch of a button or the pull of a trigger, we can only stand gaping, staggering, stupefied by the consequences of our impotence when it comes to living in harmony with each other and the rest of the world. Being the offspring of the 'Beauty and the Beast,' we sit with the fruits of the one and the shit of the other: rich and poor, noble and debased, overeaten and undernourished, intelligent and stupid. What can we do to save ourselves? We've been programmed, conditioned, drilled and trained to be prejudiced from childhood on, to blackmail and shanghai each other into fighting; slaughtering each other in the name of the highest, with the means of the lowest.

Are we potentially able to turn the tide and free ourselves of the consequences of our behaviour? Or shall we go on trying to kill the Beast to save the Beauty? Perhaps the legend of St. George and the dragon has led us up the garden path. Perhaps it is time to make peace with the dragon, and acknowledge the beast in us as valid, learning to live with it instead of crippling ourselves in our futile attempt to get rid of it.

The millennia of religious dogma have warped the minds of billions, by putting the fear of God into them and burdening their growing brains with a cunningly induced sense of guilt and shame, in one form or another. Perhaps it is time to put the chainsaw to the 'tree of knowledge of good and evil' and nudge ourselves into an age of honest reason. No longer deceiving our offspring with double-bind moralities, but teaching them to use their own inborn faculties and talents. To make their own personal enquiries into the miracle of life, so they can make their own observations and see the world as it actually is. By its very nature, every form of organised religion is expansionistic and greedy for the power of dominion. Many people suffer from chronic guilt complexes and crippling hang-ups about their sexuality, because of their commitment of a religious dogma with which they've been programmed and conditioned. Perhaps it is time to examine our taken for granted root-assumptions about life in general, and about ourselves in particular. Will there ever be a government that is prepared to ban every form of religious dogma from the schools? The religious feeling is a private experience. To organise that into an institution with frozen dogma and mechanical rituals is a violation of the free human spirit, retarding the natural development of an open mind. We don't have to strain our faculties to see that a large majority of our species is not a happy lot. There is much public and private fear, anger, hatred, suspicion, grief and sorrow. It is obvious that most of us have not yet found the key to a satisfying, fulfilling

existence.

What makes us assume that what we pass onto our children will make them happier, more peaceful, less aggressive, more considerate and sensitive than we find ourselves to be? By the time they're in their teens and twenties, many are so confused by the contradictory moral issues, that they shrug their shoulders and make their own rules. It seems that our youth has justifiably grown skeptical and suspicious of a world full of opposing doctrines and ideologies. The early childhood doctrine is the hidden fountain of our emotions. It is therefore not surprising that in spite of our intellect we're emotionally immature, witness the state of the world we're living in. Heart and brain have been knocked out of balance by the often ill-fitting moral root values. All our prejudices spring from our root-assumptions. Our traditional and mechanically defended root values make up the symbolic tree of 'knowledge of good and evil.'

## Chapter 7

When technologically inclined people look at the complexities of organic life, they may assume that nature is inefficient or even wasteful and that in terms of efficiency it could be better. The technological mind seeks to 'improve' organically evolved systems by making laboratory-tested shortcuts. But it seems that efficiency only aims at speed. There is ample evidence around us that technology and competition have whipped us up into a frenzy from which it is well-nigh impossible to escape. Most of us have been conditioned to be in a hurry, in most departments of our daily life. Peace and harmony are not the products of speed and frenzy. The more we speed up our efficiency, the more pressure we put on everything that lives and evolves, including ourselves. Whenever there is pressure, there is tension. Mechanically induced tension as a result of our greed for profit, status, pleasure or power, inevitably finds its release in the eruption of emotional, psychological or physical violence.

We've invented time and measured it, from light-years to nano seconds. Every minute we spend on the planet is a minute less. The older we are the more precious these time-units are, the sum of which we call a lifespan. Our ideologies have been built on the assumption that time is more important than clean air, fresh water, wholesome food and adequate shelter.

There were times when it was easy to get each other's attention. All we had to do was call out and ask for it, but not today. Now our attention takes time and time costs money. Money buys much more than mere food and shelter. It can buy anything that makes us go faster, from A to B and back. And we can have more 'free' time-units to spend on ourselves in any way we would like to. Since we are addicted to spending our precious time-units in fast cars, speedboats, airplanes, busses, mountain bikes, buggies, roller-skates etc, we end up losing most of them in traffic jams, clogged-up airports, overcrowded beaches and holiday camps.

Through the media we have heard some voices in the wilderness, informing us of all this and we agree with what they have been saying. It is just that we don't know how to jump off the merry-go-round without falling on our faces. For those who are desperate to get off, just jump and roll clear. Some have done it and found an alternative way to obtain food, shelter and whatever extra can be had. Is there a way to slow down the carousel before it breaks up and flies apart?

A much used phrase is that 'deep down everyone is essentially good.' Believing

that to be true has fooled millions and millions more will be fooled if we go on believing it and passing it onto the next generation of believers. I suspect that those who believe that all human beings are 'essentially good' don't really believe it, but hope it is true. What do they base their hope on? Where is the evidence? If we wish to live a life that is completely compatible with the laws and tendencies of nature, it is absolutely necessary to think rationally. We cannot go back to the old ways; the ways before we had civilised ourselves. Yet I suspect that there is a memory in the deeper recesses of our ancient brains, which we could refer to as 'the beast.' That beast is not imaginary, nor is it a fantasy or a speculation. It exists as an ancient intelligence that remembers how to live intelligently. It is not evil, callous, brutal or pretentious. Of course, there is no beast in us, like believers claim a soul as a separate entity, or a demon that can be exorcised by the local priest or shaman. The beast I am referring to is not in us. We are that beast! Like any other caged animal, we are deprived of our natural habitat.

No matter how loud or how often we proclaim ourselves to be human, we are what we have always been: animals. What is so terrible about that? We are an animal species! We eat, drink and make noises like any other mammalian animal. We sleep, run and copulate like other animals. It is just that we camouflage our animal nature with make-up and manners. In short, we are animals behaving like humans, even though many would claim the opposite. To deny that we're animals is like a gorilla saying: "I'm not an animal, I'm a gorilla." Any other creature could claim the same thing: "I'm not an insect, I'm a wasp."

I once read on the first page of Genesis in the christian bible that who so ever named a thing, that would be its name, and I saw the meaning of it at once. It was an unexpected insight that led me to the source of Mary Shelley's inspiration, her book, 'The Monster of Frankenstein.' She may or may not have consciously intended to warn humanity against the rapidly growing technologies of her time, or to predict that in the end we will be destroyed by what we have created.

I suspect that the person who invented the original story of the creation in Genesis was most likely a gifted storyteller, with a talent for speaking from a trance-like state of mind. Such people have always existed and probably always will, in any form that suits the period in which they live. Often they are people whose minds have not been kept rigid by dogma. Every age and culture has had its own names for such people: seers, channels, speakers and in some cases, prophets. What most of them seem to have in common is their ability to see and recognise hidden connections between separate events. In the right mood and with a suitable ambience, they seem able to foresee the likely consequences of events in the world at large or in their own environment. Some of them have

had little or no education. Yet, they can speak with a certain conviction and authority and enough personal charisma to attract admiring believers, who in their turn attract a host of followers.

In those far-off days when the story of the creation was first told or written down, the majority of the world population was illiterate. The few who could read and write were the 'learned ones,' and because they were educated, it was naturally assumed that they knew the truth about gods, angels, saints, devils and life-after-death. Now that we can lament our woeful deeds and probable destiny, it only makes us more depressed, confused, angry and insecure. So why bring it all up to the surface of our consciousness? Or perhaps we can't help thinking about it...

Writers have turned out every kind of disaster story we are capable of imagining. One after another is shown in cinemas the world over. It seems that most of us are fascinated in various degrees by all these terrifying situations; every one a box-office success. In addition, there is a multitude of movies that depict hideous crimes that draw millions of people to enjoy the sights and sounds of 'blood 'n guts.' At the same time we moralise about it as 'an evil influence' that should be rooted out, one example of our double-bind contradictions. As long as we go on believing that peace, democracy and globalisation should be enforced, all our efforts to change things for the better will be no more than futile gestures. Every force causes a counterforce. This important aspect of the law of physics has been largely ignored by our politicians.

We have a tendency to give names to all sorts of things that we hold dear or are afraid of. Once we have given something a name and qualified it as good or bad, safe or dangerous, lucky or unlucky that will be its name. We give names to ships and other sorts of transport, and even to tornadoes. All kinds of objects are nicknamed in accordance with the secret beliefs of the owners or the users. We give them pseudo personalities. That kind of animation goes on everywhere in the world. Many a person has kissed a 'talisman' before going into battle in the sports arena, or on the battlefields of warfare. We just hope that whatever we animate will be in our favour!

I suspect that billions of people are basically superstitious, because we have all been programmed to think in terms of punishment and reward. We punish when we're angry and reward when we're happy. We're all familiar with our tendency to kick the car when it doesn't 'behave.' All of which clearly shows that normal behaviour isn't necessarily rational behaviour. The idea of punishment and reward has been so deeply crystallised in our black-and-white perception of the world, that we would be astounded at the idea of a society in which there were no punishment and no reward for whatever we may have done. The source of

punishment is vengeance, a human trait. Not a natural but an artificial trait that has been culturally imposed on most of us when we were too young to foresee the consequences of it. By the time we were grown up, we had taken it for granted that revenge is a natural way of dealing with those who have insulted or hurt us in some way.

One aspect of vengeance is that it isn't an eye for an eye, but two eyes for one. It means hitting back harder than we were hit, which inevitably accelerates and grows exponentially. If we do it often enough, we can get hooked on the adrenaline and the pleasure of seeing our victim suffer. That is why we not only take away the offenders' freedom of movement by putting them in prison, but punishing them with irrational forms of treatment. Can we break out of this vicious circle that keeps violence going on at every level of our confusing existence?

If we say: "No, we can't," we will paralyse ourselves with the idea that it is all in the hands of 'god or the devil,' both of which have been put in charge by their believers and followers. On the other hand, we can say: "Yes, we can break out," hoping that someone will take care of our problems, such as the government, the police or the army; or the scientists, who could produce non-violent embryos with all the right genes in place. Then when they were grown up, we could clone each other and form a worldwide army of ideal citizens. After that, we might try immortalising ourselves. In some future millennium it might be as easy as baking bread. Or is there another way? Perhaps we'll never get that far and just fall back into barbarism and to hell with civilisation...

It seems that the old solutions to our old problems have only brought about more problems. With the increasing world population, the dwindling natural resources and the climatic changes, we have a doomsday scenario that is no longer a theory or a computer model. Now that we admit that we don't know the long-term effects of whatever we are doing, we have to keep our superstitious fingers crossed and go on gambling, like we have been doing ever since time began. All this may seem rather grim, making us angry for feeling guilty, ashamed or scared, which has an unavoidable effect on our behaviour. We can all identify with these feelings, but we don't have to accept any moral responsibility for the choices we have made. Given the circumstances in which we have evolved into as an intelligent animal species, it couldn't have been any different.

Throughout the ages there have been people wanting to create global unity by making everyone believe in the same thing: about life and death and the best way of living in peace and harmony. But no one has ever succeeded in bringing about such a global Utopia, for the simple reason that anything based on a belief-structure has never worked and is doomed to fail. Witness the mess we

are in.

Concerned citizens are involved in discussing possible ways to eliminate or at least reduce the amount of human violence. Others busy themselves with the question as to whether we are inherently an aggressive animal species. And some of us are convinced that there can be no law and order without the use of violence. Any form of enforced restriction is a form of violence. Catching wild animals and giving them a life sentence behind bars is also a hideous form of violence. But only a few of all these peace-loving citizens would recognise the subtle forms of violence in their own prejudices. Which is a pity, because for anyone who is seriously interested in understanding the root causes of human violence, it pays to investigate one's own personal reactions and responses in the privacy of one's own mind.

If we are really serious in our research into human violence, we need to see, recognise and acknowledge that material poverty - due to uneven distribution of the world's wealth - is also the result of unrestricted breeding in barren countries, where agricultural farming is well-nigh impossible. We can go on explaining all these causes, but it doesn't seem to help us to know what to do about it or how to live with it. It is easy to say that everything is cause and effect, because the logic is so obvious. But apparently we find it difficult to see and acknowledge the far-reaching consequences of that unbreakable law of cause and effect: action-reaction. To separate guilt from cause would be an absolute necessity.

Whenever a human disaster takes place, there is always the unavoidable question: who is to be blamed? The word blame is prejudicial and implies moral guilt. When we ask who is responsible, it is because we want to know whom we can punish. The gods of tradition, backed up by the culture, demand a sacrifice, just like past civilisations when virgins or children were thrown into volcanoes to be sacrificed. We still believe that when there is a disaster, someone has to be sacrificed. But because we now think of ourselves as being more civilised than ever, we don't do that sort of thing anymore. Instead, we find someone to be responsible for all sorts of mischief, if only to satisfy the rest of us that 'justice has been done.'

I propose the elimination of the word 'blame' to understand cause, rather than condemning those whose actions triggered a disastrous event by the unforeseeable factors of chance. But what if a person or a group of people intended to bring about a disaster, such as a war or terrorism? Even then there can be no moral guilt. Such a group may be stupid, callous, negligible or dangerous, but not guilty in the moral sense of the word; therefore they should be treated rather than punished.

An example: a very hot day on a busy sheep-farm, where a lot of sheep are being ushered into a double-decker truck, with a double-decker trailer. The farmhands are yelling and kicking, while the sheep are being packed so tightly that they can hardly move as they stand waiting in the burning sun to be slaughtered, several hundred kilometers away. When the driver finally gets in and the truck is in motion, we feel uncomfortably miserable, because we're sorry for these suffering animals and angry at the farmhands for treating them that way. We speak to the farmer about it who says that under the pressure of the meat export business he has to deliver a deadline. Otherwise he'll lose his contract, which could mean losing his farm to the bank and affecting a lot of other people. Who has a free choice in all this? In events like this, everyone has a valid excuse and no one feels responsible for the misery of those who have been affected. The torture of the sheep is a by-product of our fears for not making enough profit to keep us going, or having to pay more than we can afford. Those involved can rightfully claim that they have had no choice, which is the voice of self-preservation.

## Chapter 8

Every war that has ever been waged has been the result of the sum total of a great number of known and unknown factors. Who said the wrong things at the umpteenth peace conference? Was someone suffering from hemorrhoids or was it an ulcer? Did somebody drink one glass too many? Was it the pressure of the market that made some politicians corrupt? Was the population too frightened, too indifferent or too incompetent to avoid having an idiot for the country's top dog? Was it the false pride of the weak government, which didn't want to be seen with egg on its face? Or was there a promise broken, because of unforeseen circumstances? The list of such questions could fill a lot of books, inviting us to guess who or what was really responsible for bringing the war into being. Apparently none of those who were accused at the Nuremberg Trials believed themselves to be guilty of war crimes. They had acted in accordance with the military culture of their time, swearing loyalty to their führer and having no choice but to follow the orders that were given to them.

In some countries the population can't prevent idiots or maniacs coming into power by promising welfare and justice. The believers and followers swallow these promises without much questioning, hoping and trusting instead of scrutinising what really motivates their macho leaders. The top dogs in the multi-national business claim to have no choice but to raise their prices or sack their employees, because of the so-called market forces which fluctuate by the laws of chance. Every choice is a gamble! We can hardly avoid the conclusion that our present situation - financial status, reputation, prospects, image etc - is what it is, because of the choices we've made in the past. Our ability to foresee the most likely consequences of our choices depends on a whole lot of known and unknown factors, such as the status of our parents, the rest of the family, the 'right' choices for their children's education, and the opportunities in our environment. It includes genetically fixed character traits and the ideas with which we've been programmed and conditioned.

So what exactly is our 'moral' responsibility in all this? Contemplating it may be a useful exercise for those of us who seriously wish to see and understand that whatever choices we've made, they were never free and always a gamble. When we gamble and win, we're likely to be supported by friends, family and the community at large. When we gamble and lose, we're likely to be blamed and punished for our choices. An understandable reaction: we are like that! It is neither good nor bad, just a fact of daily life.

Compared to other animal species, we regard ourselves to be 'advanced' in our

mental dexterity. Our ability to think implies that we have a choice: thinking or not thinking. But it would be more accurate to say that we think, whether we want to or not. We may be high or low in status and intellect, rich or poor, sick or healthy, but we're all at the mercy of our never-ending stream of thoughts. When we have a practical problem to solve, we have to think logically with no emotional reaction; pure practicality, a necessity for getting things done in a state of order. We need to be able to think in that way so that we can play a vital role in our amazing technology. To be engaged in that kind of thinking requires our concentration. But when our problems are solved, our thinking changes to free association: one thought leading to another via our memory. This usually happens when we're engaged in routine behaviour, driving a car, cooking a meal or anything else we do as a matter of routine.

Free association often leads us to daydreaming. When that happens, our emotional reactions can be subtly drawn out, or they can be frightening. It all depends on the contents of the daydream. Generally it is assumed that daydreams are sweet and pleasant, like success, romance or a fast car. But we're all familiar with the endless arguments and fights that can go around in circles in our heads. It is all in our imagination, feeding the emotions with unexamined facts, strengthening our prejudices and conclusions.

Imagine for a moment that a man with a chainsaw kills your favourite cherry tree, which has been your silent companion for a lot of years. Wouldn't you want to punish that man for what he has done? In the privacy of your own mind, wouldn't you love to see him having a fatal accident? Occasionally we get caught in an unwanted daydream, in which we unwittingly visualise the worse scenario we can imagine. That kind of daydreaming will affect our nervous system and our mood. We might be shocked to think that there are 'evil' things lurking in the deeper recesses of our minds, and it can be so frightening that we are tempted to believe that there is something wrong with us. That makes it worse. It could possibly develop into a full-blown obsession or neurosis. Almost every minute that we are not involved in directive, purposeful thinking, free association takes place in our heads; almost, because at rare moments in everyone's life there is no thought at all. But such moments don't come about by 'willing' it, so there is no point in doing all sorts of mental or physical exercises to induce such a state of mind. In fact, the harder we try not to think, the less likely it is to come about. Thinking is not something we choose to do, but a process in the brain over which we have little or no control.

We've taken it for granted that we are free to think whatever we want to. It may be true for some of us, but I suspect that it doesn't apply to the majority of the world's believers and followers. They let themselves be directed to think in

this or that way. In some countries, those of us who don't wish to participate in anything that violates our integrity as sensible, sane, peaceful creatures, could be put in prison or shot for disobeying. Is that a free choice? Sticking to one's integrity and being killed, or choosing to lie and live? According to our natural instincts, it is better to live than to die. It is therefore an act of natural intelligence to do anything possible to stay alive. If that includes violating our social integrity, so be it. The 'freedom' to choose between undesirable situations, is like giving a condemned person the choice to be shot, hung, gassed, poisoned or decapitated!

Holding elections is an unavoidable gamble. The authorities grant the people elections with a 'free choice' between opposing ideologies, thereby gambling with the possibility of war or peace. No one knows what the outcome is going to be and every voter lives on hope. In the face of failure or disaster, it has often been said by those involved that they had no choice. 'You leave me no choice,' is one of the most frequently used clichés to defend our decision to punish someone. Every choice is a gamble, and we would hardly be able to function without them.

Losing a gamble is a punishing experience in itself, so why do we increase the punishment? Are we punishing the losers because they lose, or because they gamble? If we punish them because they gamble, then the winner should also be punished, for 'equal rights.' It would be corrupt not to do so. But then, because of our many contradictory systems of law and order, we have no choice but to be corrupt. Self-preservation is the factor in every situation calling for a defense of our choices. Gambling is a daily event throughout life, whether we're aware of it or not. The difference between us and the other animal species is that we turn gambling into games, and have lotteries and casinos to keep us addicted to the ever-present hope of winning and the ever-present fear for losing.

We've been campaigning ever since we started civilising each other. It has never worked. From communism, fascism, idealism, democracy, we have never succeeded in bringing about peace and harmony in all the members of a community. Anyone reading history can confirm that there has never been justice, peace, freedom and equality. These attributes are little more than something we thought up as an ideal, but which has no healthy relationship with the real world. I suspect that as long as we keep ourselves separated from the real world by pursuing an ideal way of life, we shall never be able to understand what civilisation is all about: animals behaving like humans.

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