

# FROM 'COMMON GOODS' TO THE 'COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY'.

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**Abstract:** The present systemic crisis of capitalism and its various dimensions in the fields of economy, energy, food, ecosystems, values, requires a new approach. All the crises that have become acute in recent times are the result of the same fundamental logic. For example: 1) it conceives of development in a way that ignores 'externalities'; 2) it is based on the idea of a planet with infinite resources; 3) it prioritizes exchange value over use value. It is very important to make the links between the defence of 'common goods' like water, and re-establishing priority for the 'Common Good' and the vision of a new construction of the 'Common Good of Humanity'; partly because the holistic vision embodied in the latter concept requires practical implementation - as in common goods for example - if it is to emerge from the abstract and be translated into action. Partly, too, because specific struggles must also take their place in the overall plan in order to identify the role they are playing, not simply as mitigating the deficiencies of a system, but rather as contributing to a profound transformation - one that requires the coming together of the forces for change in order to establish the bases for the survival of humanity and the planet.

Keywords: Common goods, humanity

## INTRODUCTION

The present systemic crisis of capitalism and its various dimensions in the fields of economy, energy, food, ecosystems, values, requires a new approach. All the crises that have become acute in recent times are the result of the same fundamental logic: 1) it conceives of development in a way that ignores

'externalities' (that is, environmental and social damage); 2) it is based on the idea of a planet with infinite resources; 3) it prioritizes exchange value over use value; and 4) it equates the economy with the rate of profitability and the accumulation of capital, creating enormous inequalities. This model, which is at the origin of a spectacular development of global wealth, has reached the end of its historical function, through the destruction it has wrought on nature and the social inequity that it has brought about. It cannot replicate itself or, in contemporary parlance, it is not sustainable. "The economic rationality of capitalism" comments Wim Dierckxsens, "not only tends to deprive large majorities of the world population of their lives, but it destroys the natural life that surrounds us" (2011).

The Argentinean economist Jorge Beinstein states that in the last four decades capitalism has become decadent on a world scale (a drop in the productive sector) which has only been disguised for a while by the artificial development of the financial sector and huge military expenditure (J.Beinstein, 2009, 13). For this reason therefore, let it be clear that we cannot only talk about regulation: it is necessary to think of alternatives. These are not the result of purely theoretical reflections, but it necessarily lead to practical policies with long-term objectives, as well as for the short and medium-term.

To talk about alternatives to the capitalist economic model that today prevails in all fields through its globalization and its social, political and cultural dimensions means reviewing the fundamental paradigm on which the collective life of humanity on the planet is based, such as it was defined by the logic of capitalism. This

paradigm is composed of four elements that we can call the fundamental ones, because they form part of the vital needs of all societies, from the oldest to the contemporary ones. Let us recapitulate them: 1) the relationship with nature; 2) the production of the material basis of life – physical, cultural and spiritual; 3) social and political collective organization; and 4) the interpretation of reality and the self-involvement of the actors in constructing it, that is, culture. Each society has to achieve this.

The current paradigm, that guides the construction of the contemporary world, can be summed up in one word: modernity. This was the result of a profound transformation of European society and culture that for centuries has defined its own paradigm. Undeniably, it represented an advance (Bolivar Echevarria, 2001). However, modernity was not a social abstraction that happened by chance or came out of nowhere. It concerned a collective way of life on the planet, with its material and social bases and its production of ideas. It became well established in history while, at the same time, through a dialectical process, manifesting its contradictions. The emancipation of the individual, human rights, the idea of democracy, the progress of science and its technological applications are some of its products. However, the hegemony of the capitalist market and the imposition of its laws reduced most of these advances to class privileges and colonial relationships that were brutally maintained for five centuries. A number of social struggles enabled some subordinate groups to share in the advantages of modernity, but without changing the paradigm. Now the latter, through its contradictions, has endangered the four fundamental elements for the collective life of humanity on the earth. Because of the distance that had developed between humans and nature, the modernity paradigm led to the over-exploitation of nature: in other words, to the devastation of the source of life (Mother Earth). It gave birth to the capitalist market economy that, by its logic, invaded all aspects of life. In the political field the highly centralized Jacobin State resulted from this vision. In the cultural field, unbridled individualism was developed as an ethical necessity, together with the concept of the unlimited progress of humanity, living on an inexhaustible planet and capable of resolving its contradictions through science and technology. This model oriented the development model, including that of the socialist societies, of the XXth century.

The global dominance of this project became apparent early on, through the destruction, absorption or submission of all pre-capitalist modes of production, through the various colonial adventures, through the establishment of unequal exchange between the centres and the peripheries, and through what has recently been called 'globalization', which finally brings together the concepts of growth and Westernization, that is to say, the spread throughout the universe of the latest forms and dominance of capital.

There was a reaction against this model, expressed in 'post-modernism'. However, this mode of thinking, which developed in the second half of the twentieth century, also incorporated a particularly ambiguous critique of modernity, which was generally limited to the cultural and political fields (M. Maffesoli, 1990). The idea of history as something constructed here and now by individual actors, the refusal to acknowledge the existence of structures and the denial of the reality of systems - defined exclusively in vertical terms - as well as the explicit desire not to accept theories in human sciences, has turned this current of thinking into the bastard child of modernism itself, so that people have become depoliticized. Post-modernism has transmuted itself into an ideology that is pretty convenient for neoliberalism. At a time when capitalism was building the new material basis of its existence as a 'world-system', as Immanuel Wallerstein has termed it, the denial of the very existence of systems is most useful for the advocates of the 'Washington Consensus'. It is important to criticize modernity, but with a historical and dialectical approach (actors interacting who have different degrees of power) and with the desire to recover the emancipatory nature that characterized one moment of European history. It is not possible to identify modernity with capitalism, but neither can one talk of modernity without alluding to capitalism.

This is the reason why it is imperative that we reconstruct a consistent, theoretical framework, benefiting from the contributions of various currents in human thought, including those of a philosophical nature, as well as the physical, biological and social sciences. It is important to situate each new initiative within the whole, thus giving coherence to what could seem a series of separate actions, without much connection with

each other (empiricism). This is also valid for international politics.

Let us recall that the foundations of the collective life of humanity on the planet are fourfold: the relationship with nature; the production of the basics for living (the economy); collective organization, social and political; and interpretation as a symbolic expression of reality. It is the fulfilment of this new paradigm with its four elements that we would call the achievement of the Common Good of Humanity, that is, as we have already said, the reproduction of life. It is an objective that has to be continually pursued, but which cannot be defined once and for all because historical circumstances change the context. However, the current crisis requires a radical rethinking, one that goes to the roots of the situation (István Mészáros, 2008, 86) and this means a complete reorientation, faced as we are with the paradigm of capitalism. The concept of the Common Good of Humanity has been expressed in many different ways, according to the traditions of thinking and the collective experiences of peoples - for example in the philosophies and religions of the East and of the indigenous peoples of the Americas (the *Sumak Kwasai*, or *buen vivir*), as also in the Marxist tradition of the system of universal needs and capacities (A. Salamanca Serrano, 2011, p. 46 and S. Mercier-Jesa, 1982).

## 1. THE NEW PARADIGM.

Summing it up, we can say that the paradigm of human development expressed by modernity is indefinite material and scientific progress, on an inexhaustible planet at the exclusive disposal of human beings, so that they can benefit, with increasing liberty, from goods and services. This way of life is based on the efficacy of a competitive economy (a particularly masculine characteristic) and it is now being exhausted because of all its social and ecological contradictions. Hence the need for a radical change to ensure the continuity of the life of the earth and of humanity in the long term.

The new paradigm proposes, as a fundamental option, a balanced social dynamic between individuals, genders and social groups in harmony with nature to as to promote life and ensure its reproduction. It is a question of 'vivir bien', achieving the 'Common Good of Humanity', which means, as a first step, respect

for the wholeness of nature as the source of life (Mother Earth).

Its construction and applications in the fundamental elements of the collective life of humanity on the planet are processes: not just academic exercises, but something to be worked out in society, where thinking has an essential place but so also has practical experience, particularly social struggles. In each case these have had the fault of being unable to achieve the 'Common Good of Humanity' in their search for solutions. As the destructive globalization of capitalism has exercised its supremacy in the economies, societies and cultures of the world – without however totally eliminating their specific characteristics – the reconstruction task belongs to us all, men and women, according to our social characteristics and historical experiences. No one should be excluded in this common effort to re-elaborate our living conditions.

In fact, this paradigm is not so new as it seems. In precapitalist societies all round the world there are references to it, that is, to a holistic vision of the human destiny on earth. In many cases this is expressed in religious terms and in traditions with a philosophical base (Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam) as well as in the traditional religions of indigenous peoples. It is a question of rediscovering the appropriate visions and concrete practices in contemporary terms for the diverse societies of today.

### 1.1. Redefining the relationship with nature: from exploitation to respect for it as the source of life.

Modern civilization with its strong control over nature, its high degree of urbanization, has made human beings forget that, at the last resort, they depend totally on nature for their lives. Climate change reminds us of this reality, sometimes in a very brutal way. It therefore means seeing nature, not as a planet to be exploited, nor as natural resources that can be reduced to the status of saleable commodities, but as the source of all life. As such, its capacity to regenerate itself physically and biologically has to be respected. This obviously entails a radical philosophical change. Any relationship with nature that is exclusively utilitarian must be questioned. Capitalism considers ecological damage as 'collateral' and inevitable – though perhaps to be reduced as far as possible; or, even

worse, ecological damages are considered as 'externalities', since it is ignored in market calculations and consequently in the accumulation of capital.

Some authors go much further, and question the anthropocentric bias of these perspectives, proposing new concepts like 'the right of nature', which the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff has defended in some of his writings. It was on this basis that the president of the UN General Assembly, Miguel D'Escoto, proposed, in his farewell speech in 2009, a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth and of Mankind. The same Assembly had previously approved unanimously through the votes of 192 countries the adoption of a Mother Earth Day. It was rightly pointed out that the human being is a part of nature and that a dichotomy should not be set up between the two but rather a symbiosis. Different speakers, supporting this position, maintained that only a shallow anthropocentric attitude could consider the human being as the centre of the world, without taking into account other living beings, including the planet itself. This attitude is indeed having negative ecological effects that are becoming dramatically visible.

On the other hand, what we are calling the 'Common Good' of the Earth can only be tackled through the mediation of the human species. It is only human intervention that can allow the Earth to regenerate – or prevent it from doing so through our own predatory and destructive activities. This is why the Common Good of Humanity involves the survival of nature - that is, of biodiversity. If we use the expression 'the rights of nature' (Eduardo Gudynas, 2009), this can be understood only in a secondary sense, since it is only the human species that can infringe or respect those rights. Neither the Earth nor the animals can claim respect for their rights.

It is human beings who are responsible for the destruction of the ecosystems. In this sense, according to the jurist Antonio Salamanca, using the legal categories of *droit titulaire* or *droit vicairie* (subsidiary or secondary law) the human community must act on behalf of the 'incapable' (animals, newly born babies, handicapped people) who, for the reproduction of their lives require human mediation. Such a position is not anthropocentric, but *anthropo-responsabilisante*. In this way, by broadening the process of the juridical subject, one can talk

of climate justice, without necessarily resorting to the personalization of the earth and its elements. At the same time, it cannot be ignored that there is a link between the relations that human beings have with nature and class relations. All social classes do not behave in the same way vis-à-vis the Earth. It is a case of power relations, put into practice by the logic of capitalism.

In any case, what is at issue is the principle that the planet should be sustainable - able, in other words, to conserve its biodiversity - so that it can renew itself in spite of human activity. We can also embellish nature, using its plant wealth to create new landscapes or gardens for more beauty. The Earth is also generous and can contribute, but with non-renewable elements, to the production and reproduction of life. But this is totally different from exploiting it to produce a higher rate of profit.

In the great philosophical traditions of the East, the deep bond between the human being and nature is a central characteristic of their thought. Respect for all life, such as we find in Hinduism and Buddhism, exemplifies this conviction, as does the belief in reincarnation as an expression of the unity of life and its continuance. The belief that man was created from clay (the earth), which we find in the Judeo-Christian tradition and subsequently taken up by Islam, expresses the same idea. The Bible represents man as the guardian of nature (Genesis 1, 26-28). Even if it affirms that nature is there to serve him, this obviously excludes its destruction. Creation myths in many cultures in Africa and the Americas contain similar beliefs.

For the indigenous peoples of the American continent, the concept of Mother Earth (*Pacha Mama*) is central. As a source of life she is seen as a real person, with anthropomorphic properties. The natural elements are also alive with their own personalities and serve as the objects of Shamanistic rites. At the Climate Summit in Cochabamba in 2010, various texts (the preparatory document and also interventions by different groups and individuals) went beyond the metaphorical nature of the expression 'Mother Earth', attributing to her the characteristics of a living person, capable of listening, reacting and being loved – and for these reasons, with rights of her own. The final document called for a re-evaluation of popular wisdom and ancestral knowledge, inviting us to “recognize Mother Earth as a living being, with which we have an

indivisible, interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship.” This is a strong reminder of the link between nature and humanity, expressed in the framework of the cosmivision of the indigenous peoples who moreover, also stress the maternal (feminine) character of the relationship.

Nevertheless it has to be admitted that, when confronted by the logic of capitalism, by development and the advances of urbanization, as well as by the attractions of mindless consumption, the great oriental philosophies and the traditions of the first nations are unable to resist. They are transforming themselves rapidly or even disappearing from the cultural scene, as has been the case with the ‘Asian Tigers’, in China and Vietnam, and also among the indigenous peoples of the American continent and the peoples of Africa. Neoliberalism is accentuating this phenomenon all over the world: it has been an individual and collective aspiration for many to participate in the values of the dominant culture. What happened among the subordinate classes of Europe and with Christianity – this being the first religion to be confronted with capitalism – is being repeated elsewhere. Ideological pollution is very real.

However, traditional concepts are now once again being invoked, as tools for historical memory, cultural reconstruction and affirmation of identity, all of which can be very useful when questioning capitalist logic. There is a certain pride in being able to refer to historical cultures and in using its concepts to contribute to a process of social reconstruction, although there is always some danger of falling into a paralyzing fundamentalism, more oriented to the past than to the present.

The references to *Pacha Mama* (Mother Earth) and the *Sumak Kawsai* (buen vivir) of the Quechua peoples and to the *Suma Gamaña* (living well together) of the Aymara peoples (Xavier Albó, 2010, 45-55) belong to these categories. These are two of the founding concepts of indigenous peoples which, in concrete historical conditions, signified a specific cosmivision and practices regarding respect for nature and for shared collective life. As such they can inspire contemporary thinking and social organization and can revitalize the symbol. However, success will depend on making the adjustments that will be necessary “in such a way”, as Diana Quiroga Suarez writes, “that the transformation provides an

opportunity to combine the best of ancestral and modern wisdom, with knowledge and technology working in step with nature’s processes” (D. Quiroga Suarez, 2009, 107).

This, obviously, does not mean questioning the necessary harmony between nature and the human species, or swallowing the capitalist concept of the exploitation of nature as a necessary by-product of the kind of development conceived as just endless material growth. Nor is it to deny the need to revise the philosophy of the relationship with nature which ignores other living species and the capacity of nature to restore its balance. Nor should we undervalue or marginalize the cultures that can offer a healthy critique of humanity, both in its exploitation, brought about by the logic of capitalism, and in the rampant individualism of the consumption model and all the other kinds of behaviour that go with it. Nevertheless it has to be acknowledged that different cultures do exist. If we try to describe the necessary change only in terms of symbolic thinking, representing the symbol as reality, this will come into collision with the cultures that have an analytical approach, and which place the causality of all phenomena into their specific categories, whether physical or social.

At the present time the two cultures co-exist. The first comes with a wealth of expression that reflects the strength of the symbol and the importance of ideal, particularly as regards relations with nature. It brings with it truly practical elements, which can easily be translated into knowledge, behaviour and policies. But its cosmivision is difficult for an urban culture in any part of the world to assimilate. The second has clearly reduced itself to a mere practical rationality or even a pure ‘superstructure’ (the “cherry on the cake”, as the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier puts it), thus reinforcing capitalist logic and contributing to extending it further, while also admittedly making possible a great advance in knowledge that is useful for resolving practical and political problems. It would be unwise, in fighting against the globalized capitalism that is leading humanity and the planet into disaster, to state one’s case in only one cultural language. On the contrary, this is the moment to apply the principle of interculturalism in all its dimensions.

We have already referred to the contribution of Karl Marx. He considered that capitalism had

provoked an artificial and mechanical separation between nature and the human being. The rupture in the metabolism, that is the material exchange between the earth and the satisfaction of the needs of human beings, such as defined by the capital accumulation process, has ended up in irrational practices, wastage and destruction (*Capital*, Vol. 1, 637-638, cited by Gian Delgado, 2011). For this reason, according to Marx, it is necessary to reduce the material energy flows in a way that is socially fair, so as to ameliorate the quality of life. According to him, only socialism can re-establish the metabolic balance and put an end to the destruction of nature.

Calling for a new concept of our relationship with nature brings with it many practical consequences. We shall cite some examples, grouping them into: necessary prohibitions and constraints; positive initiatives; and then discussing their implications for international policy.

First, we must outlaw the private ownership of what are called 'natural resources': i.e. minerals, fossil energies and forests. These are the common heritage of humanity, and cannot be appropriated by individuals and corporations, as happens now in the capitalist market economy – in other words, by private interests that ignore externalities and aim at maximizing profits. A first step in a transition, then, is for countries to recover sovereignty over their resources. Of course this does not necessarily ensure the desired result of a healthy relationship with nature: national enterprises often operate with the same capitalist logic, so that State sovereignty would not necessarily imply a philosophy of respect for nature rather than its exploitation. The internationalization of this sector would be the next step, but only on condition that the relevant institutions (like the United Nations and its agencies) are made really democratic: in many cases they are still under the influence of the dominant political and economic powers. The introduction of ecological costs of all human activities into economic calculations is also a necessity, making it possible to reduce these and to counter the utilitarian rationale that excludes "externalities": one of the reasons for the destructive nature of capitalism.

Another aspect of the necessary prohibitions and constraints is the need to forbid the commercialization of those elements necessary

for reproducing life, such as water and seeds. These are common goods that must not be governed by commercial logic but should be handled in different ways - which does not necessarily mean by the State, but under collective control. In more concrete terms, this principle involves putting an end to the monocultures that are preparing 'the deserts of tomorrow', particularly those producing livestock feed and agrofuels. A tax on the kilometres covered during the exportation of industrial or agricultural products would make it possible to reduce both energy use and the contamination of the seas. Other such measures could be proposed.

On the positive side, reserves that protect biodiversity should be extended over more territory. The promotion of organic agriculture would be part of this initiative, as would the improvement of peasant agriculture, which is in fact more efficient in the long run than capitalist productivist agriculture (O. de Schutter, 2011). Legislation requiring the extension of 'life expectancy' for all industrial products would make it possible to save primary materials and energy and reduce the production of greenhouse gases (Wim Dierckxsens, 2011).

Finally, in the field of international politics, the struggle against the basic orientations of the financial institutions, which contradict the principle of respect for nature, has to be fought on a number of fronts. There is the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the regional banks; and there is also the regulation of the private banks, that are so powerful at this time, when the world economy is being financialized. The policies of the WTO promoting the liberalization of the world economy also have ecological implications, since most of them are implemented without taking externalities into account. Member states of this international organization have a huge responsibility in this field; alliances between ecologically conscious nations could influence decision-making in this body.

The promotion of international conventions is another very important aspect. For example, there are the conventions on the climate (Cancún), biodiversity (Bonn and Nagoya), those on the protection of water (rivers and seas) and of fish, on waste (especially nuclear) among others. The extent of awareness of this dimension of the new paradigm will be the basis of the international effectiveness of progressive

states, and should form part of their foreign policy.

The redefinition of the 'Common Good of Humanity' in terms of our relationship with nature is an essential task, considering the ecological damage already inflicted, with its harmful effects on the regenerating capacity of the planet and on climate stability. This is a new factor in the collective conscience, but it is far from being shared among all human groups. The socialist societies did not really incorporate this dimension in their planning, as is illustrated in the spectacular economic development of a country like China, which is being achieved without giving much attention, at least for the time being, to externalities. A socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would tend to incorporate this as a central plank of its policies.

### **1.2. Redirecting production for life's necessities, prioritizing use value over exchange value.**

The transformation of the paradigm as far as the economy is concerned lies in giving priority to *use* value, instead of *exchange* value as is the rule under capitalism. We talk of use value when a commodity or a service is useful for the life of someone, rather than being simply the object of a transaction. The characteristic of a market economy is to give priority to exchange value: for capitalism, the most developed form of market production is its *only* 'value'. A good or a service that cannot be converted into merchandise has no value because it does not contribute to the accumulation of capital, which is the aim and engine of the economy (M. Godelier, 1982). According to this view, use value is secondary and, as István Mészáros says, "it can acquire the right to exist if it adjusts to the requirements of exchange value" (2008, 49). Any goods, which are not at all useful (the explosion in military expenditure, for example, or the white elephant projects of international development assistance), can be produced as long as they are paid for or, if artificial needs are created through publicity (Wim Dierckxens, 2011), or if financial services are expanded through speculative bubbles. In contrast, putting the emphasis on use value makes the market serve human needs.

In fact, the concept of necessity is relative. It changes according to historical circumstances and the development of productive forces. The principle is that all human beings have the right

to satisfy their basic necessities. This is emphatically affirmed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, this cannot be achieved in the abstract, but in well defined economic, social and political circumstances. But relativity cannot mean unfair inequalities, some having more needs than others, according to their class, gender and ethnic origins. The satisfaction of basic needs must be defined by the human community at different levels through a democratic process and by competent bodies (national and international parliaments, representative assemblies). This is what could be called the establishment of a 'moral economy', which is subjected to ethical requirements that contradict the predominance of the exchange value, as a source of the accumulation of capital – the ultimate objective of the economy and therefore the only value.

It is not possible to achieve this without challenging the private ownership of the principal means of production, which is what places decision-making power in the hands of the holders of capital goods and subordinates labour to capital, both directly, through wages and indirectly, through other mechanisms like monetary policies, national debts and budget deficits, speculation on the price of food and energy, the privatization of public services etc<sup>1</sup>.

It is the exclusive control of capital over the production process that also lies behind the degradation of working conditions (Jorge Beinstein, 2009, 21) and of the devaluation of women's work, which is so essential for the reproduction of life in all its dimensions. However, total State control as a counterweight to the total market is not a satisfactory solution, as past socialist experiences prove. There are many different forms of collective control, from cooperatives to citizens' associations.

Thus what we need is a totally different definition of the economy. It would no longer be a matter of producing aggregate value for the benefit of the owners of the means of production or of finance capital, but rather a collective activity aimed at ensuring basic needs for the physical, cultural and spiritual lives of all human beings on the planet. A national and world economy that is based on the exploitation of work to maximize profits is unacceptable, as is the production of goods and services destined for 20 per cent of the world population who have relatively high purchasing power,

excluding the remaining 80 per cent because they do not produce any added value and have insufficient income. Redefining the economy thus means a fundamental change. Privileging use value - which still involves the development of productive forces – and presupposes the adoption of the first fundamental element, that of respect for nature, like those to which we shall be coming shortly: generalized democracy, and interculturalism. This does not exclude exchanges necessary also to satisfying the new use values, but on condition that they do not create imbalances in local access to use value and that they include externalities in the process.

'Growth' and 'development' are not the same thing: this is what neo-classical and neo-Keynesian economists seem to forget. As Jean-Philippe Peemans, professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, has said, “the logic of accumulation as the only development logic” is well entrenched. But a new approach is evolving, which takes various forms. One of them is to take up the concept of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, *'el buen vivir'* or 'living well' (*Sumak Kawsai*). This is a much broader notion, which not only implies the complete opposite of growth as an end in itself, but also harmonizes with nature (Diana Quiroga, 2009, 105). Already in the 1960s the Club of Rome had proposed zero growth as a solution for what, even then, was felt to be a non-sustainable way of life. In the Soviet Union of the 1950s, Wolfgang Harsch wrote a highly original book entitled *Communism without Growth*.

The idea was taken up again, although this time much more radically, by Serge Latouche in France, who in the 1990s launched the concept of 'de-growth', inspiring a series of movements, mainly among the middle classes of Europe, to reduce consumption and to respect the natural environment. While the content is positive and it is important to denounce the myth that claims growth will solve all the problems, the underlying notion is rather Eurocentric and limited to the consuming classes. It would seem somewhat indecent to preach 'de-growth' to African peoples or even to the impoverished classes of industrialized societies. A concept like 'living well' or *'buen vivir'* has a broader and more positive connotation. In Bhutan, under the influence of Buddhism, they have the notion of happiness, which has been officially adopted as a political and social objective. These are perhaps small islands in the ocean of

the world market, but they herald the development of a critical vision of the contemporary model, with a clearly holistic perspective.

Prioritizing use value over exchange value also means rediscovering the territorial aspect. Globalization has made people forget the virtues of local proximity in favour of global interchanges, ignoring externalities and giving primacy to finance capital - the most globalized element of the economy because of its virtual character. Territorial space, as the site of economic activities but also of political responsibility and cultural exchanges, is the place to introduce another kind of rationale. It is not a matter of reducing the question to a microcosm, but rather to think in terms of multidimensionality, in which each dimension, from the local unit to the global sphere, has its function, without destroying the others. Hence the concepts of food sovereignty and energy sovereignty, by which trade is subordinated to a higher principle: the satisfaction of the requirements of the territory's dimensions (Jean-Philippe Peemans, 2010). In the capitalist perspective, the law of value imposes priority for commercialization, and hence it gives precedence to the export of crops over the production of food for local consumption. The concept of 'food security' is not adequate, because it can be ensured by trade that is based on the destruction of local economies, on the over-specialization of certain areas of the world, and on globalized transportation that is a voracious consumer of energy and polluter of the environment.

In the same line of thinking, the move towards regionalization of economies on a world scale is a positive step towards delinking from the capitalist centre that transforms the rest of the world into peripheries (even if emerging economies). It is also valid for exchanges, as in the monetary system, which would thus redistribute a globalizing model.

This brings us to practical measures. They are numerous, and we can give only a few examples here. On the negative side, the predominance of finance capital cannot be accepted, and for this reason tax havens of all kinds must be abolished, as well as bank secrecy, two powerful instruments in the class struggle. It is also necessary to establish a tax on international financial flows (the 'Tobin tax') to reduce the power of finance capital. 'Odious debts' must

be denounced, after due audits, as has been done in Ecuador. Speculation on food and energy cannot be permitted. A tax on the kilometres consumed by industrial or agricultural goods would make it possible to reduce the ecological costs of transport and the abuse of 'comparative advantage'. Prolonging the 'life expectancy' of industrial products would effect great economies in raw materials and energy, and would diminish the artificial profits of capital resulting purely from the circulation of trade (Wim Dierckxsens, 2011).

From a positive viewpoint there are also many examples to be cited. The social economy is built on a logic that is quite different from that of capitalism. It is true that it is a marginal activity at present, compared with the immense concentration of oligopolistic capital, but it is possible to encourage it in various ways. The same goes for cooperatives and popular credit. They must be protected from being destroyed or absorbed by the dominant system. As for regional economic initiatives, they can be the means of a transformation out of economic logic, on the condition that they do not represent simply an adaptation of the system to new production techniques, thus serving as means to integrate national economies into a capitalist framework at a higher level. Restoring the common goods that have been privatized by neoliberalism is a fundamental step to be taken in public services like water, energy, transport, communications, health, education and culture. This does not necessarily mean the State taking them over but rather the setting up of many different forms of public and citizen control over their production and distribution.

Redefining the 'Common Good of Humanity' in terms of a new definition of the economy is thus a necessary task to be undertaken, confronted as we are by the destruction of our common heritage as a result of forgetting the collective dimension of production for life-needs, and by the promotion of exclusive individualism.

### **1.3. Reorganizing collective life through the generalization of democracy in social relations and institutions.**

Our third central theme, in revising the paradigm of collective life and the Common Good of Humanity, is the generalizing of democracy, not only in the political field but also in the economic system, in relationships between men and women and in all institutions.

In other words, the mere forms of democracy, which are often used to establish a fake equality and to perpetuate unacknowledged social inequalities, must be left behind. This involves a revision of the concept of the State and the reclamation of human rights in all their dimensions, individual and collective. It is a matter of treating every human being, with no distinction of race, sex, or class, as partners in the building of society, thus confirming their self-worth and participation (Franz Hinkelammert, 2005).

The concept of the State is absolutely central in this field. The model of the Jacobin centralized state of the French Revolution, erasing all differences in order to construct citizens who were in principle equal, is not enough to build a real democracy. Such a state was without doubt a step forward when compared to the political structures of the European *ancien régime*. But it is now necessary not only to take into account the existence of opposing classes, and to realize that any one class, or a coalition of them, can take possession of the State to ensure that their own interests dominate; but also to acknowledge the existence of all the various nationalities that live in a territory and who have the right to affirm their cultures, their territorial reference points and their social institutions. This is not a matter of falling into the kind of communitarianism that weakens the State, as has happened in certain European countries in the neoliberal era or of accepting the neo-anarchism of certain legitimate and massive protests. Neither is it a matter of retreating into nostalgia for a romantic past, like certain politico-religious movements, nor of falling into the clutches of powerful economic interests (transnational enterprises or international financial institutions) that prefer to negotiate with small-scale local bodies. The aim is to reach equilibrium between these different dimensions of collective life, international, regional and local, recognizing their existence and setting up mechanisms for participation.

The role of the State cannot be formulated without taking into account the situation of the most marginalized social groups: landless peasants, lower castes and the *dalits* (the former untouchables), who have been ignored for thousands of years, as well as the indigenous peoples of America and those of African descent who have been excluded for over 500 years and, within these groups, the women who are doubly marginalized. Juridical processes, even

constitutional ones, are not enough to change the situation, necessary though these are. Racism and prejudice will not rapidly disappear in any society. In this field the cultural factor is decisive and can be the subject of specific policies to protect people against aggression by the 'all market' and which provide the basic necessities constitute an important step in the transition process, as long as they are not just 'band-aids', detached from structural reform.

It is also important to look out for the use of vocabulary twisted from its original meaning. The Right is outstanding for making pronouncements in this vein. They talk now about 'green capitalism'. But even in countries that want change, traditional concepts such as *Sumak Kawsai* (*buen vivir*) must be analyzed in function of their real meaning, which could serve as elements of the transition to another way of collective life, or simply be an adaptation of the existing system. The general political context makes it possible to understand the difference and evaluate it.

The generalization of democracy also applies to the dialogue between political entities and social movements. The organization of bodies for consultation and dialogue must be part of the same approach, respecting mutual autonomy. The project for a Council of Social Movements in the general structures of ALBA is an original attempt in this direction. The concept of civil society, often used in this proposal, must not be ambiguous, because this is also where class struggle takes place: there really is a lower and an upper civil society. The unqualified use of the term makes it possible to create confusion and present social solutions that overlook class differences<sup>2</sup>. Forms of participatory democracy, as can be seen in various Latin American countries, also follow the same logic, that of generalized democracy. Real independence of the various executive, legislative and juridical powers is a guarantee that democracy is functioning normally. A democratic State must also be secular: that is to say, free from the intervention of religious institutions into the institutions of power, whether they are majority religions or not. This is in fact the basis of religious freedom. This does not mean a State is so secular as not to acknowledge the public aspect of the religious factor (the social-ethical dimension of Liberation Theology, for example) or worse still, as was the case in the countries of 'actually existing socialism', a State that establishes atheism as a quasi-religion.

Other institutions should be guided by the same principles. Nothing is less democratic than the capitalist economic system, with the concentration of decision-making power in just a few hands. The same thing goes for the social communications media and is also applicable to all social, trade union, cultural, sport and religious institutions.

The notion of non-violence is obviously associated with generalized democracy. The conflicts in human societies, whether in the family or at the international level must be resolved by appropriate non-violent mechanisms, formal or informal. The German sociologist Max Weber's concept of 'legitimate violence' as a State monopoly is dangerous because it leads to an easy justification, for example, of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. However while non-violence is the principle, that which is desirable and desired, the reality is that we live in a violent world.

Violence has nearly always been caused by the pursuit of economic and political hegemony. In modern history, the reproduction of capitalism as a system was a dominating factor in the exercise of violence, both for the accumulation of internal capital (the military-industrial complex in the United States, for example) or to ensure the predominance of one nation over another and finally to guarantee the control over natural resources (oil and strategic metals). The cultural and religious arguments have often been, consciously or unconsciously, the ideological legitimacy capable of motivating peoples and the masses to support conflicts that are economic and political. But such arguments have also served as the immaterial ammunition of oppressed groups fighting for justice.

In this way wars, like dictatorships, represent a failure of democracy and a rupture in the pursuit of the 'Common Good of Humanity'. Now, with the availability of technologies for killing there are no more just wars except for popular resistance when all democratic solutions have been excluded. But only a socio-political and historical analysis of all the (holistic) elements at play can pronounce on their ethical and political justification.

The organization of the struggle against racism or gender discrimination comes into this category. So does action to democratize the

mass communication media, for example, through prohibiting its ownership by finance capital. Rules ensuring democratic functioning (equality between men and women, alternating responsibilities, etc.) can be the conditions for public recognition (and, possibly, for subsidies) of non-State institutions, such as political parties, social organizations, NGOs and cultural and religious institutions.

As for international politics, there are many possibilities of applying the principle. An obvious one is the United Nations, whose various organs, starting with the Security Council, are hardly democratic. The same goes for the Bretton Woods institutions, particularly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Supporting efforts in this direction can be a priority for governments of the periphery. The meetings of the G8 or G20, although informal, carry real weight and should be challenged. Courts of justice to respect human rights, institutions that are desirable in themselves, should still be subjected to the same norms of democracy, as well as given new fields to deal with, such as economic crimes, 'odious debt' and ecological damage. All the new Latin American regional institutions, like the Banco del Sur, regional currency (the *sucre*) and ALBA, should be given special attention in this sense, as well as regional institutions on other continents.

The destruction of democracy by capitalism, especially in its neoliberal phase, has been so great that societies, at all levels, are now organized to serve the advantages of a minority, provoking a degree of inequality in the world that is without precedent in history. To re-establish democratic functioning as a universal paradigm thus constitutes a central pillar in the concept of the 'Common Good of Humanity'.

#### **1.4. Instituting interculturalism while building the universal Common Good.**

The objective of the cultural dimension is to give to all knowledge, cultures, philosophies and religions an equal chance of contributing to the Common Good of Humanity. This cannot be the exclusive role of Western culture, which in reality is totally identified with the concept of 'development', eliminating or marginalizing all other perspectives. Undertaking this involves, not only an understanding of reality or its anticipation, but also the necessary ethic for elaborating the Common Good, the affective

ethic necessary for the self-motivation of the actors and aesthetic and practical expressions. Multiculturalism also obviously entails the adoption of the organizational principles of the three other themes: the relationship with nature, the production of life's basic needs and the organization of democracy on a broad scale. It is also important for the transmission of ideas and values within different peoples. To speak in everyone's language and to express oneself in culturally comprehensible terms is an essential requirement of democracy.

However, multiculturalism is not enough. Open inter-cultural activity should also be promoted, with dialoguing between cultures, and the opportunity for exchanges. Cultures are not objects in a museum, but the living elements of a society. Internal and external migrations, linked to the development of the means of communication, have created many cultural changes, clearly not all of them desirable but which can be enriching. In order to exist, cultures must have material bases and means, like territorial reference points (in various forms) and educational and communications media, as well as various opportunities to express culture like fetes, pilgrimages, rituals, religious agents, buildings, etc.

This brings us to the practical aspects of designing the organization of a multicultural State. In countries like Bolivia and Ecuador, the concept has been specifically translated into constitutions by multinational States, although not without difficulties when it comes to putting them into practice. The central idea is the obligation for the State to guarantee the basics of cultural activity for different peoples and, in particular, to defend them from the assaults of economic modernity and the dominant culture. For this purpose, bilingual education should be promoted. However the notion of interculturalism must also have an influence on general education, like the teaching of history and the reshaping of an education philosophy at present guided by the logic of the market. The publication of inexpensive books, the organization of book fairs, artisanal centres, inter-active museums, etc. are useful tools. Communications media are important as they transmit not only information but also values. Without denying pluralism or democracy, this problem must be tackled as a whole: promoting local cultures, counterbalancing monopolies and destroying the dominance of a handful of international agencies. Ethical bodies must also

have the opportunity to express themselves, such as associations for the defence of human rights, watchdog groups of various kinds, religious institutions.

Culture includes a spiritual dimension, which is a characteristic of human beings, raising them above the concerns of everyday life. This is a central theme in a period when civilization is in crisis. All over the world there is a search after meaning, for the need to redefine the very aims of life. Spirituality is the force that transcends the material world and gives it a meaning. The sources of spirituality are many and are always to be found within a social context: they cannot exist without a physical and biological base. The human being is indivisible: spirituality presupposes matter that, on the other hand, has no sense without the spirit. A cultural view of spirituality, ignoring the material aspects of a human being - which for an individual is their body and for society is the economic and political reality - is a conceptual aberration, leading to reductionism (culture as the single factor in change) or alienation (ignorance of social structures). Spirituality, with or without reference to a supernatural, gives sense to human life on the planet. How it may be expressed is conditioned by the social relations in each society, but it can give a direction to these relations. A change of paradigm cannot be carried out without spirituality, which has many paths and multiple expressions.

The vision of the world, the understanding and analysis of reality, the ethics of social and political construction and the aesthetic expression and self-motivation of the actors are essential elements when designing alternatives to the model of capitalist development and the civilization that it transmits. They form part of all the dimensions of the new paradigm: our relationship with nature; the production of life's basic needs; the redefinition of the economy; and finally the way in which we conceive the collective and political organization of societies. In all their diversity, these paradigms can contribute to the change that is necessary for the survival of humanity and the planet.

## **2. THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY AS A GLOBAL OBJECTIVE.**

It therefore follows that the 'Common Good of Humanity' will result from successfully achieving all these four goals, each of which is fundamental to the collective life of human

beings on the planet. The goals defined by capitalism, guaranteed by political forces and transmitted by the dominant culture, are not sustainable, and so cannot ensure 'the Common Good of Humanity'. On the contrary, they work against the continuance of life (François Houtart, 2009). There has to be a change of paradigms, to permit a symbiosis between human beings and nature, access of all to goods and services, and the participation of every individual and every collective group in the social and political organizing processes, each having their own cultural and ethical expression: in other words to realize the Common Good of Humanity. This will be a generally long-term process, dialectic and not linear, and the result of many social struggles. The concept of Common Good as used in this work goes well beyond the classical Greek conception, taken up by the Renaissance (J. Sanchez Parga, 2005, 378-386), and beyond the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, based on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.

It is for this reason that a complete theoretical rethinking is necessary, on the one hand dealing with all the elements that have led the world into a systemic crisis situation and with the wearing out of a historical model; and on the other hand, redefining the objectives of a new social construct that is respectful of nature and capable of ensuring human life as a shared endeavour. As Enrique Dussel (2006) has said, what must be ensured are the production, reproduction and development of the human life of each ethical subject (each human being). This is what the Common Good of Humanity means. The ultimate reference of all paradigms of human development is life in its concrete reality, including relations with nature, which is, in fact, negated by the logic of capitalism.

There may be objections that this is a fanciful utopia. The fact is that human beings need utopias, and capitalism has destroyed utopian thinking, announcing the end of history ('there are no alternatives'), so that the search for the Common Good of Humanity is indeed a utopia, in the sense of a goal that does not exist today, but that could exist tomorrow. At the same time utopia also has a dynamic dimension: there will always be a tomorrow. All political and religious regimes that claim to embody utopia end up in catastrophe. Utopia is a call to advance.<sup>3</sup> It is for this reason that it is not simply a 'harmless utopia' (Evelyn Pieiller, 2011, 27). The need for it is felt by hundreds of

thousands of social movements, citizen organizations, political groups, all in their own way struggling for better relations with nature and for its protection, for peasant and organic agriculture, for a social economy, for the abolition of illicit debts, for the collective taking over of the means of production and for the primacy of work over capital, for the defence of human rights, for a participatory democracy and for the recognition of the value of different cultures. The World Social Forums have made it possible to visualize this reality, which is gradually creating a new global social consciousness.

However, it is a dynamic process that requires a coherent total vision as the basis for coming together in action, with the aim of building a force powerful enough to reverse the dominant contemporary system in all its dimensions, economic, social, cultural and political. It is precisely this that the 'Common Good of Humanity' seeks to express: a coherent theoretical basis, enabling each movement and each social and political initiative to find its place in the edifice as a whole. The achieving of it cannot be the work of just a few intellectuals who think on behalf of others, but a collective work, using the thinking of the past, especially the socialist tradition, directly confronting capitalism, and integrating new elements. Nor can its dissemination be the exclusive responsibility of one social organization or one avant garde party monopolizing the truth, but rather of many anti-systemic forces, fighting for the Common Good of Humanity. Of course, many theoretical and strategic issues remain to be studied, discussed and tried out.

### 2.1. The transition.

We cannot go into detail in this text, but it is worthwhile introducing, in this moment of reflection, another notion, which is the concept of 'transition'. Karl Marx developed it apropos the shift from the feudal mode of production to capitalism in Europe. It is "the particular stage of a society that is having increasing difficulty in reproducing the economic and social system on which it was founded, and seeks to reorganize itself on the basis of another system, which becomes the general form of the new conditions of existence" (Maurice Godelier, 1982,1,165). Evidently it is a question of long, but not linear processes, more or less violent according to the resistance of the social groups

involved. Many analysts believe that capitalism has reached the end of its historical role because, as Karl Marx already observed, it has become a system that destroys its own bases of existence: nature and work. And this is why Samir Amin talks of 'senile capitalism', why Immanuel Wallerstein published an article in the midst of the financial crisis, saying that we were seeing 'the end of capitalism' and why István Mészáros refers to its incapacity to ensure the maintenance of the 'social metabolism of humanity' (I. Mészáros, 2008, 84).

While one can accept the idea that we are living in a transition from the capitalist mode of production to another, and that the process can be precipitated by the climate crisis, we must not forget that such a change will be the result of a social process, and this cannot be achieved without struggles and a transformation in power relationships. In other words, capitalism will not fall by itself and the convergence of all social and political struggles will have to achieve it. History teaches us that capitalism is capable of transforming its own contradictions into support for the accumulation process. Already people are talking about 'green capitalism'. Developing the theory of the concept, within the historical context of the current system's crisis, will enable us to work out the tools for evaluating the social and political experiences now under way. This is particularly the case for Latin America where regimes have embarked on a process of change, heralding the socialism of the twenty-first century.

The concept can also be applied to particular processes within a general evolution. Without losing the radicalism of the objectives, it is a matter of identifying actions that can lead to the desired result (i.e. another mode of human development), bearing in mind both the concrete circumstances of material development and the existing power relations in the socio-economic and political fields. A typical example is that of the extraction-based economies which, in spite of the ecological and social destruction that they cause and although very much dominated by the interests of capital, cannot be brought to a sudden halt in the progressive countries. This is because, among other things, they provide the financial backing for new policies, as is the case of Venezuela and Bolivia. The transition phase would consist of 1) introducing a long- and medium-term economic policy based on the needs of the internal market; 2) promulgating

stricter ecological and social laws to counteract damage in the economic sector; 3) making users pay the costs; and 4) promoting international legislation to avoid the phenomenon of 'comparative advantage' that favours those whose legislation is less restrictive. In other countries that are less involved in these activities, like Ecuador, a moratorium of some months or years could be proposed, in order to negotiate a transition process with the various social movements.

Using this conceptual instrument cannot serve as a pretext for making political and ideological concessions of the social-democrat variety - in other words accepting that the development of the forces of production cannot happen without the adoption of the principles, tools and formulas of capitalism. That would mean reinforcing the power of those social classes most opposed to a change in the model, as has been the case in Brazil – in spite of advances in other fields; or, as in the socialist countries, establishing new social differences that will inevitably lengthen the transition process, as in China and in Vietnam. All this does indeed pose a more fundamental problem: how do we develop our productive forces with a socialist perspective, that is to say, in terms of the Common Good of Humanity? And what forces should be developed first? It is a problem that the countries and progressive regimes that came into power after the Second World War, were unable to resolve; and it was the origin of their failures, as well as of the present neoliberal orientation of most of them. As Maurice Godelier said, in his courses at the Catholic University of Louvain: "The drama of socialism is that it had to learn to walk with the feet of capitalism". The idea of developing organic peasant agriculture, as was proposed in an Asian seminar at the University of Renmin in Beijing in 2010, instead of promoting the monocultures of an agro-exporting agriculture; the idea of reorganizing the local railway network in Latin America, instead of adopting the projects of IIRSA (Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America). These are some of the examples that could be proposed. Many others could also be worked out in order to promote a genuine transition and not just an adaptation to the prevailing system.

### 3. TOWARDS A UNIVERSAL DECLARATION ON THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY.

Another function of the concept of the Common Good of Humanity would be to prepare a Universal Declaration, within the framework of the United Nations. Obviously a simple declaration is not going to change the world, but it could serve to organize the forces for change around a project that would continue to be fleshed out. It could also serve as a useful pedagogical tool for promoting the theoretical work necessary to mobilize social movements. It would be at the same level as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This was the result of a long cultural and political process that started in the Enlightenment and at the beginning of 'modernity', and signified the emancipation of individuals and the recognition of their rights. It was developed by the French and US Declarations at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. We know that it is not perfect. It was drawn up in a context that was heavily influenced by the social vision of the Western bourgeoisie, and it has provoked responses like the African Charter of Human Rights of the OAU and a similar initiative in the Arab world. It is used by the Western powers to establish their hegemony over the world. However, it exists: it has saved the freedom, even the lives, of lots of people, and has guided many useful decisions for the well-being of humankind. It has been improved over time, adding second and third generation rights. Nonetheless, to deal with the dangers that the planet and the human species are facing, a new equilibrium is necessary, demanding not only a broadening of human rights, but also a redefinition of the Common Good of Humanity on the basis of new paradigms.

The preparation of a new Universal Declaration can thus be an instrument for social and political mobilization, creating a new consciousness and serving as a basis for the convergence of social and political movements at the international level. Clearly it is a long-term task, but it needs to be started. Not only can the coming together of social movements like the World Social Forum and political parties like the Forum of São Paulo contribute by promoting such a Declaration, individual countries can also do so through their representatives in international organizations like Unesco and the United Nations itself.

There will be a political struggle, but it is worth doing and can be seen as one of the symbolical elements of the revolution necessary for redefining the paradigm of the collective life of humanity on the planet.

It is very important to make the links between the defence of 'common goods' like water, and re-establishing priority for the 'Common Good' and the vision of a new construction of the 'Common Good of Humanity'; partly because the holistic vision embodied in the latter concept requires practical implementation - as in common goods for example - if it is to emerge from the abstract and be translated into action. Partly, too, because specific struggles must also take their place in the overall plan in order to identify the role they are playing, not simply as mitigating the deficiencies of a system (thus prolonging its existence), but rather as contributing to a profound transformation - one that requires the coming together of the forces for change in order to establish the bases for the survival of humanity and the planet.

- Extract of the text prepared for the Conference on Commons Goods and the Common Good of mankind by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Rome (April 2011).

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#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>It is estimated that 70 per cent of the work in the world is informal, which makes it difficult for workers to organize. Nevertheless there are now various initiatives, like the Confederation of Self-Employed Workers (CTCP-FNT), which is affiliated with the National Federation of Nicaraguan Workers (FNT), and Streetnet International (Orlando Nuñez, 2011)

<sup>2</sup>A few years ago, on a wall in a popular neighbourhood of Bogotá appeared the slogan: "We, too, have human rights!"

<sup>3</sup>Apropos of utopia, Eduardo Galeano wrote: "I go forward two steps and it moves away two steps. I go forward ten steps and the horizon withdraws by ten steps. I can always go forward and I shall never reach it. What is the use of utopia? Precisely that: it is to advance." (cited by Maurice Lemoine, 2010)