

New Approaches to Religion and Power



Interreligious Solidarity for Just Relations
**TRANSCENDING
GREEDY MONEY**

Ulrich Duchrow and
Franz J. Hinkelammert

Transcending Greedy Money

NEW APPROACHES TO RELIGION AND POWER

Series editor: Joerg Rieger

While the relationship of religion and power is a perennial topic, it only continues to grow in importance and scope in our increasingly globalized and diverse world. Religion, on a global scale, has openly joined power struggles, often in support of the powers that be. But at the same time, religion has made major contributions to resistance movements. In this context, current methods in the study of religion and theology have created a deeper awareness of the issue of power: Critical theory, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, feminist theory, critical race theory, and working class studies are contributing to a new quality of study in the field. This series is a place for both studies of particular problems in the relation of religion and power as well as for more general interpretations of this relation. It undergirds the growing recognition that religion can no longer be studied without the study of power.

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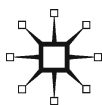
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Foreword

Today we are faced with life-killing civilization, manifested in economic injustice, ecological destruction, the threat of Empire, and the escalation of religious conflicts. This compels us to urgently explore the possibility of life-giving civilization which affirms relationships, co-existence, harmony with creation, and solidarity with those who struggle for justice.

World Council of Churches/Council for World Mission, Jangseong,
Jeollanam-do, Korea, 2007¹

This quotation shows the depth of the change needed today. The reason is evident: humanity and the earth are in danger. Normally, people identify the dominant economic system as the root of this danger. At first glance this is true. Yet we do not need only a change of economic structures. These are embedded in all other dimensions of western civilization, including science, technology, philosophy, sociology, psychology, neurology, anthropology, spirituality—and theology as the self-reflection of religion(s). Western civilization in the form of “modernity” has deep historic roots. Therefore, when analyzing the present and taking action in order to make the needed change in the culture, we must address at least these dimensions, including their historical fabric.

Most initiatives struggling for change concentrate on one of the aspects. This book wants to contribute to understanding the interconnections among them, particularly among religions/spiritualities, psychology, and the political economy. We regard the original religions of the “Axial Age,” Ancient Israel prophecy and Torah, Buddhism, the Jesus movement, and the early messianic church, as well as Islam, as important sources for change. They already address structural, psychological, and spiritual problems linked to a new economy that is becoming the base for modernity. A central issue today is the way money, linked to private property, dominates all spheres of life. How can we overcome this, and particularly the spirituality of money? In an earlier book we concentrated on the history and systematic role of property.² In another one, written by a team that

included psychologists, we added the psychological dimension.³ Here we add the religious dimension in historical and systematic perspective in order to show the holistic character of the crisis of the dominant civilization today and to search for ways to move toward a new culture of life in just relationships. This issue is of great importance for

- Initiating critical thinking and acting by redefining the meaning of “subject”
- Understanding and transforming the power structures in the political economy
- Healing the destructive psychological effects of the prevailing system
- Unmasking the perversion of religion and spirituality for power purposes and building solidarity for just relationships through interreligious alliances.

Worldwide there are many initiatives within civil society struggling for a new culture of life. The purpose of this book is to strengthen these efforts through sharpening the analysis, understanding the interconnectedness of all these efforts for a new culture of life in solidarity, providing sources of spiritual empowerment in the struggle, and suggesting ways of taking action to move toward a comprehensive cultural revolution. This, we hope, can contribute to people becoming human, personally and collectively, as well as to overcoming the dominant, deeply inhuman civilization of our day.

We thank Patricia Davie for translating part 2 from the German, and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation for financing this. A special thanks goes to Elaine Griffith for her selfless work and professional capacity to correct our limited English and give it a mother tongue style, which she also did for our previous book, *Property for People, Not for Profit*. This book came about through interdisciplinary and interreligious seminars at Heidelberg University. We very much thank our participating colleagues, Karl-Heinz Brodbeck, Lutz Drescher, Franz-Johannes Litsch, and Ton Veerkamp from Germany; Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Stylianos Tsompanidis, and Petros Vassiliadis from Greece; Farid Esack from South Africa; and Seong-Won Park from South Korea for their valuable contributions. We also have learned from Christian-Buddhist and Christian-Muslim dialogues that engage structural greed, which were competently organized by Martin Sinaga of the Lutheran World Federation and Shanta Premawardhana of the World Council of Churches (WCC). We also thank Rogate Mshana of the World Council of Churches for giving us the opportunity to participate in the program of *Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE)*. Peace for Life, coordinated by Carmencita Karagdag from the Philippines, provided the particular framework for interreligious

solidarity against imperial oppression. We hope that the readers will recognize the shared reflection in our various engagements to make another world possible.

Heidelberg and San José, Costa Rica, March 24, 2012, day of the martyrdom of Archbishop Óscar Romero

ULRICH DUCHROW AND FRANZ J. HINKELAMMERT

Introduction

Modernity, the destructive climax of which we are experiencing today, has deep roots in history. This can be observed particularly in the fields of political economy, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy. Starting in the eighth century BCE, the growing division of labor led to the spread of new forms of exchange, built on money and private property, particularly in the Ancient Near East and Greece, but also throughout Asia. Politically this new economy merged with imperial structures and behaviors. Linked to this we can see a loss of solidarity in the affected societies as well as a shift in human self-understanding and praxis toward greed and egocentrism. This type of civilization is taken up again in intensified forms in western modernity. The capitalist market has become more and more globalized, served by more and more violent global empires. Individualism becomes the mark of this period.

It is hermeneutically crucial to see the continuity between ancient and modern civilizations. In our interpretation, the religions of the Axial Age (beginning in the eighth century BCE) emerged in direct confrontation with the new political economy and anthropology. This means that, in spite of all the differences in details, their message and spirituality have a direct relation to our own context. This is why, in the first part, we present a sociohistorical analysis of antiquity, laying the ground for modernity as the context to which religions and philosophies are responding. In [chapter 1](#) we first analyze the implications of an emerging new economy built on money and private property. This comes about in the context of an increasing division of labor that leads to more and more exchange of goods and services. To facilitate this exchange, money takes on a central role as the “one in the many,” that is, people agree to use or acknowledge the use of money as the accounting unit for the exchange of different goods. As it also defines property rights, the calculating individual comes to the fore, stimulating greed, which becomes institutionalized in the form of interest. This in turn leads to the social split between creditors and debtors who, if not able to service their debt, lose their land and fall into debt slavery. This leads to a growing gap between rich and poor that causes harsh suffering for the latter. Politically this development links up with the structures

of empire, which request tribute from the subjected peoples and thereby increase the suffering of the people. The linkage of the money-property-economy with slavery and imperial structures finds its first climax in the Hellenistic and Roman empires. Culturally the solidarity relationships of the tribal societies are dismantled, and systemic egotism wins the day. All these developments are reinforced in modernity because individualist competition and greed are made positive motors of the economy and culture.

In [chapter 2](#) we turn to the psychological effects of the money-property economy. Normally this aspect is forgotten when researchers or movements look for alternatives to the dominant system. However, when it comes to the implementation of the alternatives, this neglect turns out to create major difficulties. How do we explain that, although the present system works against the interests of the vast majority of the world's population, only a minority resists and works actively for alternatives? And what does it mean that, after nearly all the revolutions that have taken place, the result is only an exchange of elites, and is neither a new equality and nor more humane relationships among people. So it is most important not merely to work for more just structures in society but also for transformed persons. The psychological and spiritual dimensions must be given the same weight as the structural ones. We look at these from the perspective of relational psychology. It has been demonstrated that from infancy we become subjects only through intersubjective relations. These create basic benign and malign psychological patterns within us that are reinforced by subsequent social, economic, and political positive and negative experiences. Consequently it is important to understand that these patterns find different expressions in the different social classes. Therefore, healing and mobilizing people from the lower-, middle- and upper classes will call for different therapies and strategies. This is why we deal specifically with the psychological problems of every class. Here the losers in the system turn out to be the most important protagonists of change. In this context the middle classes pose a particular problem because the majority of their members lose out in neoliberalism but, in an illusionary consciousness, they side with the elites. It is a big question for the future of humanity how this can change.

In [chapter 3](#) we first try to clarify our understanding of the Axial Age. It is very interesting to see that this concept, once coined by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers in idealistic terms, is experiencing a renaissance. Several recent books have dealt with it. Our particular thesis is that the religions and philosophies of that age, since the eighth century BCE, are precisely a response to the development of the new money-property economy, causing change not just in economic, social, and political structures but at the same time within the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of persons, thus creating a new comprehensive culture. We see proof of this in the fact that the new perspectives in religion or philosophy can be observed not only

in one country or region, but everywhere the new economy spreads—in such different regions as Israel, Greece, India, China, Persia, and later in Arabia. So we have to analyze the developments in each of these regions in order to understand not only the common but also the particular features of the religious and philosophical responses. This again becomes the basis for our question concerning their relevance for today, because the global crisis, created by the climax of the money culture, calls for a global answer. It is therefore of utmost importance to find out what, and how, the world religions emerging during the Axial Age might contribute to a new life-enhancing culture that can overcome the death-bound western civilization.

Historically the first protest against the new economy and its social consequences comes from the Ancient Israel prophets calling for justice. The next stage saw the development of the Torah as a legal instrument as well as a new relational understanding of the human being as being made in the image of God. The Jesus movement and the early Christian church also built on this foundation. We also show how the Apostle Paul discovered how law, originally designed for enhancing life, can be turned into an instrument of death when hijacked by greed—an extremely important insight for the understanding of capital accumulation as a death-bringing law in modernity.

[Chapter 4](#) describes how the Buddha in India concentrated on prevailing over greed, aggression, and the illusionary consciousness in order to overcome the suffering of the people. It is not by accident that today outstanding Buddhist economists belong to the most lucid critiques of capitalism and designers of a new personal and collective alternative.

In Islam we see a second wave of renewing the spirituality of the Axial Age, now in the context of merchant Arabia ([chapter 5](#)). Here the particular emphasis is on overcoming the taking of interest as the institutionalizing of greed and on promoting justice by sharing wealth. The oneness of God prohibits making money an idol, and God's graciousness requires sharing with the poor. Islamic banks have developed on this basis, and constitute an interesting approach when it comes to devising financial alternatives today.

Finally we take a look at the ambivalence of classical Greek philosophy ([chapter 6](#)). On the one hand, it brought fundamental insights into the nature and consequences of the money economy from Socrates to Aristotle. Particularly the latter presented pivotal reflections on the dangerous illusions created by money and on ethical and political ways to protect society from their destructive effects. On the other hand, this philosophy, especially in its Platonic version, also laid the foundation for reducing reality to what fits into mathematical models and also for authoritarian political structures (with a male bias)—prefiguring western modernity.

A critical analysis of modernity is presented in part 2. After an introduction, analyzing the legitimization narratives of modernity by John Locke,

David Hume, and Adam Smith, we describe the basic characteristics of modernity (chapter 7): subjecting the whole of life to functional mechanisms geared toward the accumulation of capital. The foundational invention for this “efficient” thinking is double bookkeeping, calculating everything according to the profit obtained after balancing input and output. This leads to the reductionist rationality of means-end calculation, which turns out to become irrational and totalitarian (chapter 8). It leaves out the reproductive rationality that puts life and the sustenance of life at the center of critical thinking. This explains why modernity with its science, technology, economy, and politics has ended up in crisis, putting at risk the survival of humanity on earth. Here we come to the core of our thesis that western civilization is death-bound and why this so.

In chapter 9 we ask how—in the face of globalization as the climax of the “irrationality of the rationalized”—the repressed subject is returning and the common good can again become the yardstick for economy. The common good is not understood in the Thomistic way against the background of a natural law. In our understanding the requirements of the common good are discovered through the experience of the system’s self-destructive tendencies, that is, in the midst of the respective struggles of the people. These struggles are decisive for becoming human and move toward liberation (chapter 10). Modernity as a whole can be understood from the perspective of the quest for humanization and emancipation. However, bourgeois society has betrayed this longing by reducing the human being to an owner of property using science, technology, economy, and politics as means to a single end: capital accumulation. The symbol of this is the fact that the French Revolution executed the leaders of the emancipation of workers, women, and slaves. Therefore we need to criticize the myth of modernity through critical thinking and the development of an ethic of emancipation. We use the slogan of young people, protesting in front of Zurich banks in the 1980s: “Do as God does, become a human being.” This we link with Karl Marx’s “categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which the human is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being.” When, on the basis of God’s becoming human, “the human is the highest being for humankind,” as Marx went on to say, then all religions find a reference point that can even be shared with unbelieving humanists. This leads to the question of justice. Justice is about safeguarding the natural cycle of human life. This is why we speak of “life in just relations” as the key concept for a new culture of life overcoming the ambivalence of modernity.

Part 3 deals with a realistic vision and practice of this new culture as well as the question of how religions can contribute to both. We see a good chance for the vision of a new life-enhancing culture convincing majorities

(chapter 11). Even western sciences, starting with physics a century ago, are starting to abandon the Cartesian dualistic paradigm and adopt relational approaches. This is particularly true of brain research, biology, and psychology. There are even the beginnings of a relational political economy. We report on networks of solidarity economy, common good enterprises, and cooperatives. Life in dignity is the guiding metaphor. A crucial factor is the rediscovery of commons. This implies the vision of a new money and property order, guided by public interest. A concept that embraces all of this is the democratization of economy as the basis for real political democracy; the latter has to complement its traditional representative character by direct and participatory democratic elements to become an integral democracy. As Enrique Dussel says, “It has as its foundational content the imperative to produce, reproduce and develop human life within a community.”¹ The hope for a new vision is grounded on social movements as the historical subject of the necessary changes. Engaging in them is also the key for individual persons from all classes becoming human in solidarity and shaking off the fetters of fetishism. Finally, it is here where the faiths of the Axial Age as well as nonwestern cultures can experience a genuine revival in contributing to the vision of a new culture of life in just relationships. This indeed is already happening. We offer a host of examples, including the special contribution of ecofeminism.

Chapter 12 deals with the transformation strategy and practice for the implementation of the new vision. We suggest a multiple approach that combines the withdrawal of energy from the dominant system with ways to nurture social and ecological life. The former implies the demystification of the system, defiance, and resistance. The latter deals with postcapitalist alternatives at the local-regional level as well as struggles toward the reappropriation of stolen resources at all levels, aiming at the transformation of economic macrosystems. State institutions have to be subjected to the criteria of social, economic, ecological, and cultural human rights from the start and not only as a sideline. In order to build up the countervailing power necessary to implement this multiple strategy, divisions in the labor, women’s, social, ecological, and peace movements must be overcome and broad alliances formed. We see the arousal of the broad population in Arab countries and Israel as well as in some European countries as hopeful signs of the times. To some extent, thanks to the persistent work of the social and labor movements, there have been already basic changes in the economy and politics after the disaster of neoliberal policies in some Latin American countries. But consumers also have to contribute to change. After all, they are the ones who are keeping the accumulation machine running by satisfying their desires for transcendence through the surrogates of capitalism. This brings us back to the necessity of simultaneous personal and collective

transformation. Here, too, we see signs of hope in an emerging new grand narrative of a culture of life.

Finally, we raise the question again of the role of religion in the process of implementing the new vision ([chapter 13](#)). We see the critique of religion as a necessary presupposition if we want to make a credible contribution to bringing about the life-enhancing culture. Why? Religion in history has been shown to be deeply ambivalent itself. It has such tremendous power over people's hearts and minds that the powers-that-be have always successfully co-opted religion in order to use it for their own legitimacy and support. Unless religion sees through this mechanism and overcomes it, it has no power and operates as opium, as observed by Marx. There is an antidote against the abuse of religion in the original religious traditions themselves. It is the criterion that God elected the poor, the marginalized, and the excluded. With that yardstick, all religions, particularly those of the Axial Age, can be tested to see whether they live their authentic faith or represent a perversion in the service of the powerful. We show how—in all faith communities addressed in this book—there are growing minorities who are recovering the original liberating character of their religions. They practice it in cooperation with the old and new social movements. This is a sign of hope in times of growing dangers for humanity and the earth. A new Axial Age is not only necessary, but it might become possible—not bringing paradise, but stopping hell on earth.

PART 1

*Foundations for a Relational Culture of Life
in the Axial Age*

Resisting Death-Bringing Ancient and Modern Civilizations

CHAPTER 1

The Emergence and Development of Division of Labor, Money, Private Property, Empire, and Male Domination in Ancient and Modern Civilizations

1. Money-Property Economy

Today we experience the financial markets as the dominant force of our destructive civilization. However, they are but the climax of a development starting nearly three thousand years ago. The key issue is the development of larger societies with growing division of labor and exchange of goods that use money connected with the concept of private property. Division of labor as such existed much earlier. But the question is how it is socially coordinated. Social coordination is necessary in order to organize the reproduction of life within a given community through the production and distribution of goods to satisfy people's basic needs. In their book on the subject, Franz Hinkelammert and Henry M. Mora distinguish five types of social coordination of labor, characteristic of particular periods of history but overlapping.¹ Building on this proposal we suggest distinguishing among the following phases of development:

1. *Tribal society* (before 3000 BCE), including agricultural communities. Here all different types of labor are interconnected in small communities.
2. *Archaic societies before the introduction of money and private property* (around 3000 to eighth century BCE). A new phenomenon emerges: the cities, superimposing themselves on agrarian communities and subjugating tribes in order to extract the surplus of their labor. Even

- the first empires appear, mostly connected to the creation of hydraulic systems with giant work forces for the irrigation of agriculture.²
3. *Societies with early money-property economies* (eighth century BCE to fourth century CE). In this period money, charging interest, and private property spread widely in the Mediterranean, the Ancient Near East, and the Far East, increasingly coordinating the division of labor through markets and undermining solidarity structures. The result was landless and over-indebted people, thus reinforcing the split between elites and the impoverished groups.
 4. *Slave labor and feudal serf labor societies* (around 500 BCE to thirteenth century CE). The towns and landlords dominate the agricultural production of latifundia, using debt mechanisms for the enlargement of the estates and a labor force of debt slaves.
 5. *Early capitalism* completes the social coordination of the division of labor through markets in a systematic form, subordinating the countryside to the dominance of the cities.
 6. *Industrial capitalism*, with its factory production, is characterized by a growing specialization within the work process. Workers are not expected to create a complete product in order to realize a higher profit for the capital owner.
 7. The climax of this period is today's financial capitalism, which subjects the whole production process, scientific and technological development, policy making, and the satisfaction of basic needs by life-sustaining goods to one goal: the maximization of financial profits.

Let us briefly look at some major features of this development.

1. In *tribal societies* there were no special institutions for the social coordination of labor. As these societies were small, their members organized the coordination by agreement and traditional rules. The only goal was to satisfy the basic needs of the community and its members. The exchange of goods was not commercial but organized by mutual gifts or ceremonial practices. A spirit of solidarity prevailed as in a family or clan. The exchange between those small tribal societies was not very extensive but limited to luxury goods and ceramics, mostly in the form of mutual gifts.

2. *Archaic societies* in the form of city kingdoms and empires institutionalized the social coordination of labor by way of conquest and administration. So the military and administrators formed a new class exploiting the surplus of productive labor in cattle raising and agriculture. The center was the treasury of the empire, appropriating, storing, and distributing the products. We are familiar with this system from the story of Joseph in Egypt, but also from the Inca and Aztec empires. However, it did not destroy the tribal economies, on which the cities and empires imposed

themselves, demanding tribute for the centers. The cities did not yet produce goods for the rural areas, but, on the basis of tribute, developed within themselves new functions: military, administrative, and artistic. The commercial relations within those archaic societies were at first only marginal, based on barter. They mainly traded over long distances (e.g., between Egypt and China) with luxury goods like crafts, jewelry, and salt.

3. A basic change happened through the *introduction of money and private property*.³ The expansion of the new economy, based on money and private property, dates back to the eighth century BCE. One theory is that in Greece peasants were able to liberate themselves from feudal bondage by owning land.⁴ It was those free landowners who formed the *polis*, a city in the midst of an agricultural region (for example, Athens in Attica). The importance of this property for freedom and independence led to the introduction of ‘interest’ on loans and money. The most plausible theory, however, interprets the emergence of money in relation to the processes of growing exchange between people. Buddhist economist Karl-Heinz Brodbeck has elaborated this view in a ground-breaking book on the history and system behind the dominance of money.⁵ He sees the cause for developing money (and property rights) in the growing division of labor linked to the growth of societies with large populations involved in bartering. The exchange of products in these societies would not have been possible without a unifying measurement. This unity in the diversity of commodities is money—but not as a ‘thing’ separate from the social process of acknowledging its value. The calculation involved in the bartering process is at the same time the origin of mathematics. It also changes the soul of people. Besides communicating by speech, that is, using words (*logos*), they communicate by calculating (*ratio*) in money. In so doing, the individual ego gains precedence over relations in community. This is furthered by the fact that, in the process of exchange in the market, the money owner has more power than the producer of a commodity. Money as such offers access to the market, while the product has first to be in demand. Coping with this risk is only possible by having as much money as possible. This is the “objective” basis for greed to accumulate money without limits. The key mechanism for this is charging interest (and all other forms of profit). The other implication of this is that money gives the right to private property beyond personal property. Money gives access to the market, cushions the risks, measures the exchange value, and gives access to property rights. Combined with the development of hierarchies and classes in larger societies, money and property start to determine the economic, social, and political power of people within societies.

In any case, the new economy led to greed and the desire to accumulate limitless money. The institutionalization of this greed was interest. A debtor had to pay back more than he had borrowed, for example,

to purchase seed. He also had to put up his own land as security. If he could not pay back his debt, he lost his land and had to work as a debt slave for the creditor. Thus private property and money came into existence at the same time and led to debt slavery and loss of land. On the other hand, the creditors could collect more and more land, money, and debt slaves. This is what scholars have called the emergence of a class society in antiquity.⁶ So the result of introducing money and private property in the archaic period was increased division in societies.

4. The merchants and bankers did not yet form the dominant class but rather those entitled to profit from the monarchic and imperial tribute and those who were able to enlarge their estates and make personal slaves through the new debt mechanism. This led to the period of slave labor and serfdom-based societies. Therefore, besides the traditional collective forced labor, for example in Egypt for the construction of imperial monuments, an individual slavery emerged through the new economy based on money and private property. This involved two very important changes:

(a) Traditionally, powers came from outside in the form of conquistadors to subjugate a group, as the Egyptians did to the Hebrews or aristocratic classes in the city kingdoms to the peasants in surrounding territories. Now, the money-interest-property mechanism broke the bond of solidarity among the peasants themselves through accumulation for some, and the loss of land and freedom for others. Money and private property brought individualism.

(b) The slaves became personal property. Their social and cultural identity was destroyed. They were dehumanized.

The overlapping of periods 3 and 4, that is, the property-money-interest economy linked with personal slavery, spread even more during the time of the Hellenistic empires. Roman Law finally legalized the absoluteness of property (*Dominium est jus utendi et abutendi re sua, quatenus juris ratio patitur*/ownership is the right to use and abuse/consume/destroy your thing as far as compatible with *ratio*, the logic of the law). In fact, the Hellenistic-Roman empires were characterized by the totalitarian linkage of the traditional dominance of military and political power with the property-money economy.

In order to fully understand the effects of introducing money and private property into the economy, we need to systematically analyze exchange and money. Here we can build on Brodbeck's ideas about domination by money (ibid., 296ff.). "Exchange is a modification of a social basic structure, not an *original* social phenomenon. Each exchange is *embedded* in other social contexts. In its basic structure every exchange consists of (at least two) exchange partners and the objects of exchange. The 'market' as a place of the exchange is a *social* phenomenon."⁷ The most frequent form of exchange is buying (money for commodities). This is because, in the pure

form of exchange, the subjects of the exchange acknowledge each other as owners; their relationship is initially non-violent (310ff.). They bargain as if in a bazaar, finally saying “Yes” or “No,” I want to buy/sell or not.

How violence enters the process becomes clear when we distinguish between possession and property (314ff.). Possession is actually having a thing. It can thus designate all possible utility rights to a thing, even when they are partial or temporary. Whether the possession is lawful or not can also remain an open question. Property, by contrast, is the mutually acknowledged possession. This acknowledgment can be personal by direct communication. Two children exchange marbles. They acknowledge each other as possessors of the marbles. Consequently they feel the moral obligation not to take the marble by force. This differs basically from the public-legal guarantee of property rights. In this case, force is applied when these rights are violated. Consequently there is no acknowledgement of the other as a real person; he or she is seen rather as an owner of property protected by force or even violence. According to John Locke (1689), the state has no other purpose than protecting property. He implies that property is unequally distributed by processes involving money.⁸

The explosiveness of this reflection becomes evident in the connection between private property and money. Money, according to Brodbeck, constitutes “a new, unique and non-derivable social structure” (338). A large society, mutually exchanging goods and services, is inconceivable without money. Money as meaning is created through a social process and we can only understand this by realizing how we ourselves participate in this process by using money. “Money does not *fulfill* a function for a purpose, given from outside the social place in which money reproduces itself. Money *is* a social function. However, you have to understand what is meant by ‘function’—namely the process of creating social meaning. Only in this way does it become clear how money could become an end in itself and, as an end in itself, *dominate* the world, the human mind and the societies—as a functioning illusion” (342, emphasis in original). The social place of money is a population of exchange structures, not atomistic individuals. In the process of exchange, a good becomes a commodity (goods, exchangeable via money). “The structure of exchange via money becomes a buying act from the perspective of the buyer, the owner of money, a selling act from the perspective of the owner of the commodity.” Thus a market has to be understood as “a population of buying acts via money” (346). The exchange always takes place according to a measure (figure and unit of measure, e.g., one kilogram of potatoes for two liters of milk). Within a money economy, only quantity counts, that is, the amount of money. The owners of commodities and those of the money must agree on the meaning of the currency, that is, money is only based on the mutual acknowledgement that the exchange or the buying is measured in a given currency,

e.g. the US dollar. Both calculate in terms of the same unit. “And this *calculation* is the whole content of the buying act. Participating in the market changes *thinking*, just as thinking is transformed, through language, into an internal speech act. In fact, the act of buying transforms the exchange partners, during the time of negotiating, into mere calculating machines, who completely *abandon* the rest of their subjectivity” (349, emphasis in original). The buyer in a mall, for example is normally not interested in the social situation of the seller, but only in the price. So money has to be understood not as a thing, but as a way of thinking and relating to others, analogous to language.

Unlike the exchange of a commodity for a commodity, money owners in a money economy are in a privileged position compared to the owners of a commodity (350ff). The latter have to struggle for recognition in the market. If they do not succeed, they are excluded from the market. This shows that the general function of money has to be seen as the principle of exclusion from the market. Nobody can participate in the market without money. Consequently there is a structural asymmetry in the money economy. “The only security in the objective risk within the buying act is a sum of money that is as high as possible.” This is “an objective reason for deriving lust for money and charging interest” (353). These economic dynamics of money accumulation are reinforced politically by the state through creating and enforcing property rights. So there are two factors causing the dominating role of money. Money is only money if one can enforce a property right with it (390). Money has a double structure. It is “a unit of calculation and a means of defining property rights” (394). This is why the buying power of monetary property can superimpose itself on other power structures in a society (politics, media) (387). Here is a contemporary example. In order to influence the European Commission, corporations, banks, and insurance companies employ more than ten thousand lobbyists in Brussels, while hardly anyone advocates for the unemployed people there. This is only possible because so many in a society surrender to the power of money.

There is a further dimension inherent in the developments described: male domination. The most probable origin of patriarchy is outlined in the Kurgan hypothesis.⁹ It seems that nomadic Kurgan people invaded Eastern and Southern Europe starting around 4400 BCE, coming from the Eurasian steppes. They built their power on cattle husbandry and superior military power in the form of horses. They overpowered the earlier matrilineal agrarian culture. Around the same time, in the Middle East, hydraulic cultures developed large irrigation systems by hierarchical forms of organization. Private property and money reinforced male domination since only men could own property, which was a way of also giving them political power.

In Ancient Greece, the farmer ruled as head of the household (*despotes*) over slaves, women and children. On this basis the farmer gained the freedom and leisure to meet as *polites*, citizens, at the *agora*, the centre of the city, and to discuss and deal with community affairs. There was some trading, but the main activity was political, including religious, judicial, and sporting activities. The people's assembly met there.

In Rome, property is called *dominium*. The dominion is meant literally, not just metaphorically, and goes to the heart of the matter. The origin is probably the rule of the *pater familias*, *dominus* (Gr. *despotes*), over the members of the household and domestic objects. The *patria potestas* (power of the head of the house) over the family (Lat. collective term *familia pecuniaque*, i.e., women, children, slaves, livestock) entails—as they were like things—rights concerning life and death (*jus vitae necisve*). Gradually the *patria potestas* was differentiated into the power of family law (*manus*) over wife and children and *dominium* over slaves and animals. Precisely in the classical period, the *dominium* was related to landed property. The *dominium* contains no relational elements at all, for example, relating to the fact that there are owners and nonowners in a society, and that possibly “having” could have something to do with the nonhaving of others. It is absolute rule over things (*jus in rem*), and as such works against everyone, above all *excluding them*.¹⁰ It differs from *jus in personam*, which is about obligations and contracts of all kinds between owners.

Summarizing developments up to the Roman Empire, we can say: the necessary social coordination of the division of labor led to different methods developing over the centuries. After mutuality and solidarity in tribal societies, we find various forms of coordination in exploiting labor, particularly agrarian labor. In the beginning, those who appropriated the surplus of the production process by tribute and collective forced labor were the military and administrative classes. Solidarity among peasants broke down with the introduction of both private property and money (with interest) leading to the accumulation of land, on the one hand, and loss of land plus debt slavery, on the other. Besides direct oppression, this introduced indirect, anonymous forms of extracting surplus production, which promoted the splitting of societies into rich and poor. This was not just a structural problem, because money also changed people's souls. Besides communicating through speech and cooperation, they start calculating, including calculating each other's performance in competition. So the problem was not just structural, but took on a psychological and spiritual dimension.

As we shall see later, in ancient times this development was contested by religions and philosophies supporting resistance movements from different social groups. Charging interest was unanimously rejected. This changed

in modernity. Because of the special focus of this book, we will leave out the feudal centuries of the Middle Ages, turning directly to the modern phase of the money civilization.

5. The time of *early capitalism* is the beginning of a great transformation, as noted by Karl Polanyi in his pivotal work.¹¹ His main argument is that from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century CE the market set out to conquer one sphere of life after the other. The basic step was the privatization of land through enclosures subjecting agriculture to the mercantile coordination of labor. Another new development is that the cities started producing for the rural areas. So there was an integration of the production of cities and countryside into one market, coordinated by merchants. But both produced finished products for the market exchange.¹² This led to a substantial increase in agrarian production but also to a monetarizing of relations. What this means is aptly described by Jeremy Rifkin:

Enclosure introduced a new concept of human relationships into European civilization that changed the basis of economic security and the perception of human life. Land was no longer something people belonged to, but rather a commodity people possessed. Land was reduced to a quantitative status and measured by its exchange value. So, too, with people. Relationships were reorganized. Neighbours became employees or contractors. Reciprocity was replaced with hourly wages. People sold their time and labour where they used to share their toil. Human beings began to view each other and everything around them in financial terms. Virtually everyone and everything became negotiable and could be purchased at an appropriate price.¹³

These are not questions of taste but of life and death. In the market, as we saw earlier, the money owners have priority over the product owners because the latter have to struggle to sell their products. So they are at the mercy of the money owners in the market and can be manipulated, even blackmailed, by speculation. The same applies to wage laborers. They can become unemployed. So money has the power to exclude. This introduces a structural uncertainty into the lives of agricultural producers as well as wage laborers.¹⁴ Fear becomes inherent in labor relations through the mercantile coordination of labor. And it is the laborers' fear for their livelihoods. This whole development is based on the rationality of the new double-entry bookkeeping, with which we shall deal in [chapter 7](#).

6. *Industrial capitalism* deepened the division of labor and increased the split between the classes. The division of labor reached the level of production itself. In the factory production of the industrial revolution, workers only produced a tiny section of the product. The famous example is the production of pins in Adam Smith's pivotal work on the wealth of nations.¹⁵ They are produced by 18 distinct operations. The key is a new calculation

of costs in order to increase the profit of the capital owners. It is the age of Manchester capitalism. Social and ecological degradation accompanies this kind of mercantile coordination of the division of labor.

7. Today's *financial capitalism* even endangers the life of humanity and the earth. The capital owners and their agents, the banks and investment funds subject all aspects of life to the logic of capital accumulation. They claim high profits—25 percent and more—thus putting the real economy under pressure to save at any cost. The consequence is unemployment, wage dumping, and no concern for the environment. They hold governments hostage through public debt in order to lower social benefits and threaten to leave the country if there is talk of imposing appropriate taxes. They use tax havens to avoid paying taxes at all. The deregulation and liberalization of the financial markets has made them into weapons of mass destruction. The euro crisis, starting in 2010, shows the madness of the system. When the financial system was melting down in the crisis of 2007–08, the governments transferred much of the debt of speculators into the public budgets, at the expense of the working taxpayers. Strengthened again, the capital owners and their agents, the banks, and investment funds, used the rise in public debt to speculate against the government bonds of the most indebted countries. An example is Greece, which has been forced to introduce harsh austerity programs against its citizens. By increasing the interest rates for refinancing the public debt and by speculating against the euro, “the markets” are driving the other European Union (EU) countries to pour in huge amounts of tax revenue to guarantee the stability of the euro. Governments say it is “to win back the confidence of the markets.” So “the markets,” being nothing but the big capital owners and their agents asking for 25 percent and more profit on their capital, are allowed to drive all European citizens into poverty and the governments into debt—without the latter daring to oppose this madness and change the whole system. The financial markets were evidently successful in nurturing the ideology that competition for more money is the ultimate value for human beings. All this, of course, is only possible because the majority of people go along with it, asking: “What’s in it for me?” We must come back to this when we look at the political and cultural implications of this economic system.

Looking back at all periods with division of labor, it becomes clear that they have one thing in common: the extraction of the surplus produced within the division of labor.¹⁶ The original basis of the surplus was agriculture, extracted by cities and empires. After the introduction of money and private property, it was the owners of money/capital who profited from the growing role of market relations in coordinating the division of labor. Eventually, in financial capitalism, banks and investors started to call for

a 25 percent profit margin on their capital stock, while economic growth in highly industrialized countries has fallen to almost zero. This means that the capital owners are systematically robbing the rest of society and the earth.

2. Politics and Culture in the Money Civilization

As outlined in the previous chapter, a close connection between the money- and property-based economy and political power was already visible in antiquity. The classical cases were the Hellenistic-Roman empires. Together with the deepening of the division of labor and its mercantile coordination, capitalism also reinforced the linkage between economics and politics.

Giovanni Arrighi has convincingly analyzed the historical phases of the capitalist world system.¹⁷ He shows how each capital accumulation regime has been coupled with a political and military territorial power.

In the first phase, the capital power of Genoa linked up with the hegemonic territorial power of Spain. It was characterized by direct robbery and genocide, especially in Latin America. They stole minerals, mainly gold and silver, and nearly extinguished the indigenous peoples. Before the *conquista*, starting in 1492, at least 70 million people were living in South America and the Caribbean. One and a half centuries later, 3.5 million were left. That means that 95 percent had been wiped out.¹⁸

The main feature of the second phase, mercantilism under Dutch hegemony, was triangular trade. In Africa, slaves were captured and shipped to the Americas for labor on the plantations in order to produce raw materials (e.g., cotton). These goods were shipped to Europe to be manufactured and sold all over the world. In this case, more than 70 million slaves were captured. Two-thirds of them died in the process.

Industrial capitalism, under the hegemony of Great Britain, developed on the basis of the resources and capital collected by “primitive accumulation” (Karl Marx) through robbery, slavery, and mercantilism, exploiting the working people in Europe and the colonies abroad. The classical phase of industrial capitalism built on the ideology of liberalism, originally conceptualized by the English philosopher John Locke and further developed by Adam Smith a hundred years later. Locke wrote at the time of the Glorious Revolution (1688), when the big bourgeois property owners managed to take over political power.¹⁹ He defined human beings as property owners who have the natural right of privately appropriating unlimited property worldwide through labor and money. The only function of the state is protecting the (unequally distributed) property. This was the beginning of the ideology that the bourgeois global empire can use the state as a protecting agency. At the end of the nineteenth century, this took the form of the imperialism of competing nation states in Europe, caused by

the interest of capital desiring to protect foreign investments in search of higher profits.²⁰ This phase ended in the Great Depression (1929) and the two world wars.

The experience of these catastrophes made it possible for the countervailing power of the workers' movements to implement some "taming" of the capitalist system. In Germany, for example, the social obligation of property for the common good was legalized in the Weimar Constitution after World War I (after 1945, included in the German Basic Law Art. 14.2). In the United States, the New Deal policy, coupled with Fordism in the economy, allowed for higher wages. In Europe, the welfare state implemented progressive tax systems, increasing social security, and took different measures to enhance social cohesion. In Germany, the constitution also prohibited the military from starting imperial wars, limiting the army to self-defense. Former colonies could now achieve liberation and independence and try to start some development on their own. In addition to the workers' and liberation movements, the presence of the competing communist countries contributed to social legislation in the capitalist world.

At the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, British economist John Maynard Keynes proposed institutions and policies that took the European social market economy as the model for the postwar global political economy.²¹ The United States, having become the hegemonic power after the self-destruction of the Europeans, refused. It wanted both the dollar as world currency and trade liberalization for its big companies. This opened up space for neoliberalism to arise in various ways.

At the same time, the United States put dictators into power, mainly by intelligence instruments (Central Intelligence Agency), wherever possible with the support—or at least without much interference—from other Western powers and local collaborators. (It should be remembered that the first case was Persia, where the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeque was toppled in 1953 because he wanted to nationalize oil. The Shah was installed by the grace and favor of the United States, starting the tragedies of Iran that continue to this day.) The first task of the dictators was to open up their national markets to transnational capital in order to give it access to markets and resources for its own interest; the second was to crush all political and social resistance against this interference (besides Iran in 1953, e.g., Congo in 1960, Brazil in 1964, Indonesia in 1965–66, and Chile in 1973).²² Johan Galtung interprets this as a form of fascism: "Fascism is Western civilization in extremis. Nazism in particular and fascism in general is a phenomenon that comes into being when capitalism is in crisis and is no longer capable of operating smoothly or softly (meaning, giving an adequate return on investment)."²³ These dictators were also to contract national debts by buying western products, thereby instigating the overindebtedness of their countries. These foreign

debts were used by western-dominated, undemocratic institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), with the help of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), to liberalize, privatize, and deregulate the economies and societies of these countries. In this way, the structural force of finance replaced direct military force. The result was massive impoverishment, expropriation of national resources, and increased violence among the people of these countries, now struggling bitterly for survival.

This development intensified after the collapse of the competing system, that of state socialism, which in the same modern context as capitalism had concentrated political and economic power at the top and violated human rights. The neoliberal-capitalist model has globalized. Globally, mobile capital can play workers and governments of all countries off against each other, leading to the dismantling of the welfare functions of the state and strengthening security functions (for owners). The international result of this has been that the military and political servants of capital empire—the United States, the EU, and their allies—are going back to methods of direct violence to seize and control resources in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, there is increasing social downshifting of more and more people, direct violent aggression, and destruction of nature around the earth. Human rights, once introduced by the bourgeoisie, are increasingly being destroyed by global capitalism in the form of empire.²⁴

The European Economic Community (EEC) began to form as a ‘superpower in the making’, as Galtung claimed in his eponymous book, published in 1973.²⁵ He observed that the original EEC consisted of the six former colonial European powers, now led by the power of transnational corporations (TNCs). This European project developed over the years until the EU wanted to forge it into a European constitution designed to legalize neoliberalism and militarization for imperial purposes. This would have undermined the national constitutions of the period after World War II, which in the case of Germany, for example, was designed to guarantee the social obligation of private property, the social welfare state, and the orientation toward peace by limiting the military to self-defense and prohibiting wars of aggression.²⁶ Fortunately, the majority of French and Dutch voters rejected the draft European constitution. But politicians supporting the neoliberal economy and finance, as well as the military buildup of the EU for worldwide intervention, continued with the plan to retain the main content of the constitution, while only changing the name to “Reform Treaty” or “Lisbon Treaty.” This was to be pushed through by the EU governments, no longer involving the people through plebiscites. Only Ireland was constitutionally obliged to ask for a vote by the people. In June 2008, the majority of the Irish said “No.” But the governments pressed

on to implement this treaty anyway—a sign of the state of democracy in neoliberal capitalism.

The EU's Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) came about in similar fashion. Not only was it not linked to a common social policy, but it also missed the chance of pressing for a new international regulation of the monetary system. Now the euro is competing with the dollar in a deregulated market system with speculative risks, as shown by the euro crisis. The move of oil countries away from the dollar to the euro as trading and reserve currency, as promoted by Iraq under Saddam Hussein, is a further stimulus for imperial wars. In summary, it can be said that the EU is part of the US imperialist setup, partly competing with the United States within this framework—and both serving the empire of capital.²⁷

The *financial crisis* has shown the nonsustainability of the system since 2007, but governments have been under pressure from big financial capital to repair it, in order to get back to business as usual. They use tax revenue to bail out banks and companies that have lost some of their speculative gains. While public budgets accumulate giant debts, governments cut social benefits, public investments, and ecological programs for the purpose of debt servicing to the capital owners. Although this madness is obvious, the majority of people are not yet ready to resist effectively and chase the servants of capital accumulation out of political office.

Before we ask why this is possible let us briefly look at the human, cultural and ecological dimension of it all. As we observed in the previous chapter, the introduction of money and private property with the growing division of labor and exchange changed not only structures but also the souls of human beings. Calculating in monetary terms transformed human relations. Through the increasing rule of money and private property in a “disembedded economy” (Karl Polanyi²⁸), human relations have become ever more commercialized and individualized. In the early seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes formulated this capitalist market anthropology by defining human beings as individuals competing for ever more wealth, power, and reputation.²⁹ This “possessive individualism” corresponded with the new subject-object dualism formulated by René Descartes. He defined the human being as “master and owner of nature.”³⁰ Along the same lines, Francis Bacon understood science as power: “the power and the dominion of the human species over the entire world of nature”—including women and indigenous people as part of nature.³¹ The violence of this approach is demonstrated by the fact that he says: “You have to torture nature in order to press out her mysteries”—a very real comparison, as he was one of the people responsible for torturing witches.

The climax of this development happened with the introduction of neoliberalism in the 1980s. After the breakdown of liberal capitalism under

British hegemony in the Great Depression (1929) and World War I and II, the liberal ideologists and economists felt defeated and scattered (in the United States and Britain they call themselves “conservatives,” mostly gathered politically in the Republican and the Conservative Party). They felt isolated in the period of the New Deal in the United States, the Social Market Economy in Europe, and likewise when the United Nations moved to allow independence for the “third world” after World War II and start the “development” of the former colonies. Recent studies have shown how these liberal intellectuals organized in order to win back ideological hegemony.³²

The main instrument of regaining power was the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS), named after the place in Switzerland where the founding group met first in 1947. It formed a transnational network of neoliberal intellectuals who had already tried to develop ways of regaining momentum for liberal ideas. This opened with the Walter Lippmann Colloquium in 1938. In Geneva, the Institut Universitaire des Hautes Études Internationales (IUHEI) had started to work against any “collectivist” theories (from socialism to Keynesianism). The year 1942 saw the founding in the United Kingdom of Aims of Industry, a pressure group working on behalf of free-enterprise industrialists, as well as the Society for Individualists, the Progress Trust, and the National League for Freedom. In 1943, the American Enterprise Association followed, later renamed American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI), in addition to the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) and others in the United States. The neoliberals also founded journals like *The Freeman* or *Faith and Freedom*. Through think tanks, university institutes, or journals they started a long-range campaign for privatization, liberalization, and deregulation.

The driving force of the MPS was Friedrich August von Hayek, whose book *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) was a kind of rallying point for the arguments of the neoliberals. One other key actor in the MPS was Milton Friedman of the Chicago School of Economics, who in 1975 was called by Augusto Pinochet to implement the first one-to-one neoliberal economy in Chile, before Margeret Thatcher introduced it in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States. In an interview with the newspaper *El Mercurio* (Santiago, April 19, 1981) Hayek showed what neoliberal capitalism means for the poor, for those who have no private property or cannot contract their labor. It means they will be sacrificed:

A free [market] society needs morality that is ultimately reduced to the maintenance of life—not the maintenance of all life, as it could be necessary to sacrifice individual life in order to save a greater number of other lives. That is why the only rules of morality are those leading to a “calculation of life”: property and contract.

This extraordinary text builds on the lie that there is not enough for everybody on earth. United Nations (UN) studies prove there is more than enough. Two specific terms make the text revealing for the nature of neo-liberal ideology. One is “calculation of life.” It shows that the money subject has encompassed even life. Everything in the world is subjected to the logic of capital accumulation, creating the situation that there is not enough for all. The other word is “sacrifice.” It indicates that capitalism is a religion asking for live sacrifices, as did the idol Moloch in the Ancient Near East, to whom children had to be sacrificed.

This is why, finally, we have to deal with capitalism as religion.³³ It was Martin Luther who, in the situation of early capitalism, first realized the religious character of this socioeconomic order. In his Large Catechism he comments on the First Commandment:

What is it to have a god? What is God? Answer: A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart . . . For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God . . . Many a person thinks he has God and everything he needs when he has money and property; in them he trusts and of them he boasts so stubbornly and securely that he cares for no one. Surely such a man also has a god—mammon by name, that is, money and possessions—on which he fixes his whole heart. It is the most common idol on earth. He who has money and property feels secure, happy, fearless, as if he were sitting in the midst of paradise. On the other hand, he who has nothing doubts and despairs as if he never heard of God.

The next great thinker to analyze this phenomenon was Karl Marx. He unmasked the mechanism of money accumulation in economic development up until the advent of industrial capitalism. He called it the “secret of making a plus”³⁴ and recognized three fundamental aspects. Firstly, he explained the distortion of the money accumulation mechanism by analyzing the fetishisms of commodities and capital. All rules and institutions of this system that remain invisible, but that have the power of life and death over human beings and the earth, ultimately serve the accumulation of capital and are therefore regarded as sacrosanct (taboo). Secondly, at the same time, he refined the Aristotelian distinction between money as money (exchanged for useful goods needed to meet human needs, i.e., to be consumed), and money as capital (in the sense of unlimited and excessive accumulation of money for its own sake). Thirdly, he also came up with a basic analysis for something Luther had realized earlier, that accumulating money as trading capital or as industrial or interest-bearing capital, that is, surplus value, is achieved by the exploitation of labor. (Today one would have to add the exploitation of the environment, to which Marx also referred.) Like Adam

Smith, he saw that the share of profits reaching the labor force was only that which was necessary to maintain it at a minimum level. Neither the earth nor human beings and their needs extending beyond reproducing the labor force are of any interest to self-expanding capital. This is the root of human misery and environmental destruction.

A detailed account of Marx's fetishism analysis in *Capital* is beyond the scope of this book. However, Franz Hinkelammert has taken up the issue from a present-day perspective.³⁵ What does Marx analyze in his fetishism theory? He analyzes the rules, institutions, and power relationships governing the division of labor and distribution of goods within society. These rules are kept secret in capitalist society, because they are hidden in the terms applied to commodities.

Fetishism reaches its pinnacle of development and acquires its all-inclusive character under capitalism. Everything becomes a commodity to be used for money accumulation. Of course this means money itself, but also includes land (and increasingly the means of industrial production) and, most importantly, labor in the form of waged labor. In other words, everything is transformed into capital. So what is capital?

Marx contrasts two formulae to explain capital. Under a barter system, money facilitates the exchange of two commodities required by human beings to satisfy their basic needs. Therefore, the first formula reads: Commodity 1—Money—Commodity 2 (C-M-C'). However, money becomes capital when it becomes the starting point and goal of the economic process, while the commodity is reduced to a means of increasing the amount of money. This gives the formula Money—Commodity—(more) Money (M-C-M'). As shown above, one or more identical cycles of this type are hidden in the production process of the commodity.

“Buying in order to sell, or, more accurately, buying in order to sell dearer, M-C-M', appears certainly to be a form peculiar to one kind of capital alone, namely, merchants' capital. But industrial capital too is money, which is changed into commodities, and by the sale of these commodities, is reconverted into more money. The events that take place outside the sphere of circulation, in the interval between the buying and selling, do not affect the form of this movement. Lastly, in the case of interest-bearing capital, the circulation M-C-M' appears abridged. We have its result without the intermediate stage, in the form M-M', “en style lapidaire,” so to speak, or money that is worth more money, value that is greater than itself.

M-C-M' is therefore in reality the general formula of capital as it appears *prima facie* within the sphere of circulation.”³⁶

Marx uses this statement to point out that in the modern bourgeois money-accumulation economy the value added in the transaction from money via commodities to more money is exploited labor. The waged workers can no longer take their labor to market in the form of a real product

they have made, but must sell their labor, that is, themselves. The owner of capital has control of the production factors, the machinery, and so forth. But he is also the owner of the products, that is, the means of survival for all non-capital owners, including the farmers who do not own land, the unemployed, and marginalized groups.

However, capital—by its very nature money-accumulation for its own sake—“ensures the livelihoods only of those workers necessary for its (capital’s) survival.”³⁷ The misery of unemployment, for example, has no place in the calculations of capital, like child labor at one time, as long as the opposing forces are not strong enough. This is how capital appears to a noncapital owner. Capital itself gives the impression of being the source of everything productive. Its destructive mechanism of self-generation is presented as the source of life.

Walter Benjamin built on this analysis, revealing the destructive character of capitalism as religion in four features: (1) capitalism is a pure cult religion, has no theology; (2) the cult is permanent, no Sunday, no workday; (3) it is the only indebting religion without mercy and atonement; (4) the indebting god must be kept secret.³⁸

There is a cynical book on marketing³⁹ that says that Marx and Benjamin are right. Capitalism is religion. This is why we have to build marketing on exactly this religious character in a time of overproduction. The consumers have to be convinced that the commodities are not for *having* but for *being*. The authors call it “cult marketing.”

Konrad Raiser has raised the question of religion, power, and politics in the context of globalization.⁴⁰ He tries to develop criteria for regaining the primacy of politics over the economy. How do we have to organize politics? How must the public sphere be structured in order to overcome the totalitarian claim of the market by legitimate power? What can churches contribute to develop a sustainable world order? To complement this approach, we find it necessary to critically analyze the existing co-opting of the liberal state and religion by the capitalist market. In order to design a new political order, we also need to restructure economics. And moreover, since the introduction of money and private property have not only changed the structures of the political economy but also the souls of the economic and political actors, we also have to deal with the psychological and spiritual factors of the political economy.

CHAPTER 2

The Sociopsychological Effects of the Money Civilization on the Different Classes

We shall touch upon the psychological effects with respect to the Ancient Near East and Antiquity when we deal with the different religious responses during the Axial Age. This chapter aims to give a systematic analysis of the problem in the context of modernity. It is here that the psychological effects of the new economy come out most clearly. The key problem of the money-property economy is the splitting of societies into losers and winners. In neoliberalism even the middle classes are divided into a larger group, which is in decline, and a smaller one, which joins the winners. What are the psychological effects on the different classes? In what way do we speak about classes? There are various approaches to this question.¹ We use the concept of Pierre Bourdieu in the tradition of Karl Marx. Bourdieu adds the cultural to the economic dimension, because status in society is more and more also defined by education. Thus he differentiates various milieus within the different classes.² But with Marx we stress the emancipatory dimension of the class analysis, beyond the sociologically descriptive dimension. This is even more important, as the economic and political elites have been very successful in making the class concept taboo, especially in the middle classes. Objectively, in neoliberalism, the ruling classes wage a ruthless class struggle from above. In the last analysis, the class question raises the power issue in society. How does power distribute life chances? Jörg Rieger has convincingly shown that, particularly in view of the downturn logic of neoliberalism, class matters not only in economics but also in religion.³ In the following chapter we want to analyze how neoliberalism not only creates socioeconomic but also psychological problems among the different classes. We will confine our

analysis to our contemporary situation, where possessive individualism, driven by limitless competition, is extreme. To prepare the ground, let us first look at the approach of relational psychology.

1. Relational Psychology Implies a Perspective from Below⁴

Relational psychology takes a bottom-up perspective. It contradicts individualistic, drive-theoretical methods. As the starting point we use the object-relation theory as developed by Ronald W. D. Fairbairn, Donald W. Winnicott, and others and as presented by John R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell in a historical overview.⁵ In this approach, trauma psychology plays an important role.⁶ We also draw on Erich Fromm. However, with regard to the object-relation theory we have chosen a different language. Above all, this theory suggests that from infancy on, a person is not to be understood as an isolated individual, but rather as a relational being—starting with the mother-baby relationship. To refer to the mother as an object would mean to use the language of René Descartes, which starts from the dualistic splitting of the (rational) subject and the material object and, in doing so, reflects the capitalistic idea of the isolated, competing individual. For that reason, to describe relationships we prefer to use the language of Emmanuel Levinas and say that the “self” emerges in relation to “others,” first of all to the main reference person during infancy, normally the mother. However, in the course of the child’s further development, the adult partner does not consist of only one person. On the contrary, society, societal groups, and political and economic institutions are all partners. They mobilize the infant’s early childhood experiences and psychological patterns that are formed through experiences with specific persons.

(1) Primary Intersubjectivity

This first point of view is called primary intersubjectivity. Primary intersubjectivity means the ultimate relatedness of the emerging psychological subject. From Winnicott we have the intriguing statement: “There is no such thing as a baby.” We cannot examine a baby without starting from the relational unity of baby-mother. We can speak of the birth of subjectivity emerging from intersubjectivity; the structural building of the developing personality points to the basic, real experiences in the intersubjective space and the process of internalizing them.

The investigation of the microstructural interconnected experiences of the small child from an intersubjective psychological perspective has removed the basis for psychologistic atomism; the basic underlying character of intersubjective relatedness is still decisive in the life of the adult as a participant in

social structures and as one affected by them. As individual adults we also remain dependent on the constructive inner and real basic relationships to the significant contexts of our existence, dependent on the school and on our own family, friends and colleagues, as well as on religious and political loyalties. Satisfactory social integration makes possible an affirmation of the entire personality, which, paradoxically, only then also allows feelings of autonomy. The basic social dependency of the individual can best be clarified terminologically as the basic structure or matrix of social relatedness. This makes it easier to analytically understand the mutation of this relationship structure caused by socioeconomic changes. A benign, basic matrix of social relatedness allows for a feeling of continuity and security, providing the precondition for individual influence and control over important areas of one's existence and planning. It contributes substantially to supporting the prevalence of good inner relations to various sorts of partners over bad relations to other partners. On the other hand, a malignant matrix of social relatedness tends to reactivate bad inner relationships to others and thereby contains a pathogenic psychological potential.

In this manner, biographical individual-psychological dimensions, on the one hand, and the sociopsychological on the other, are connected and allow us to clearly recognize and describe their mutual interaction. Starting from this basis, we now turn to the particular analysis.

(2) Trauma-Theoretical Implications

The relational approach includes a constitutive trauma-theoretical implication. Fairbairn understands the building of psychological structures as a process initiated by traumatization during infancy. For him the decisive phase is the "schizoid position." This phase concerns the early childhood experience of loving acceptance and respect on which the child depends; it concerns reciprocal emotions—children feel not only that their mother loves them, but also that she accepts and treasures their love for her. The unavoidable and widely differing experiences of the absence of love and rejection of their own love are highly threatening for children; they feel ultimately threatened by the loss of self and psychological destruction. The defense mechanisms used to ward off this threat are: (1) splitting the threatening partner, "the other," into his/her good and evil parts and (2) the internalizing of his/her evil part. For Fairbairn these two mechanisms constitute the foundations of the construction of the self. This internalization serves primarily to gain control over the threatening reference person—the evil from the other is taken up into the child's own interior, so the relationship to the real other is positively maintained but at the cost of now being burdened by the threatening "other" within the self. The splitting and the

internalization of the evil side of the early reference persons result in the splitting of the self into the respective partial “others.” The essential task of structure building for Fairbairn is defense against the hostile-aggressive interior “other”; psychoneurotic disorders indicate as primary cause the near destruction of the defensive balance and the traumatic entry of the destructively threatening “other.”⁷

For Fairbairn an important aspect of the investigation of traumatic causal relationships is a productive systematic consideration: it concerns the relationship of trauma victims to the perpetrators, the bad or guilty feelings on the part of the victims. With the concept of moral defense Fairbairn opens up a perspective for understanding the real and internalized relationship of the individual to those destructive others and relationships. In contrast to the super-ego concept, which is centered on the internalization of the social authority relationships, Fairbairn clearly sees the concept of moral defense basically as moral reversal: with the development of the ability to make moral generalizations, the evil persecuting powers of earlier times are transfigured into powerful idealized authorities. The unconscious reason for this reversal is that it means more for the child to be bad in a world ruled by good others (i.e., it is possible for him/her to achieve good), rather than to be good in a world dominated by strong, evil authorities with the resulting strong fears of threats and isolation and feelings of despair. The concept of moral defense, or reversal, offers a basic psychodynamic addition to the concept of orientation trauma, which through confusion strengthens the relations of the victims to the perpetrators—as G. Fischer and P. Riedesser have described.⁸ This leads to an affective-cognitive relationship to the thinking patterns of the perpetrators and adds to the severe sense of depression and self-blame from which the victims suffer, among other factors. These early relational and internalization cases informed by trauma theory develop into psychological constellations and dispositions that are reactivated in the context of later socially burdening experiences and can be strengthened in a malignant way.

In strategic terms, the above view helps to explain why victims do not spontaneously join the resistance against the elites in the dominating system. Nor do they tend to support the struggle for alternatives to powerful systems and actors that have destructive socioeconomic and political effects on their own lives and those of others.

(3) The Necessity of Social Analysis

In contrast to individualistic psychology,⁹ relational psychology studies the specific conditions of “the other” and particularly the power dimensions.

This approach allows us to understand how the relation between the self and the other has shaped the self and how it has internalized the experience of the interrelationship. In this way the researcher transcends the well-known microlevel by broadening the perspective and including the microsocioal environment of the adult person.¹⁰

We have seen that the conditions surrounding a child during infancy may produce pathologies—for example, if there is a lack of empathy or break in continuity. This may, for example, fragment the structures of the self or damage the structures of relationality. In the same way, traumatizing social downgrading may cause instability and damage the identity of the adult. Social trust might be shattered. The traumatizing factors might vary, but it is crucial to understand this basic problem. The threatening decay of a benign subject-environment relation is in itself traumatizing and shatters the understanding of self and world, disturbing basic social confidence. The traumatic reactions may differ individually, depending on the stability of the personality and the weight of the traumatic factors, but it is crucial to understand the significance of the interaction between the ego and the environment. This problem was recognized and theoretically formulated in the context of the experience of “war neuroses.”¹¹ Sigmund Freud developed a model of understanding this by describing the process of the split between “old peace-ego” and “new war-ego.” But this model has much more potential than just interpreting war neuroses; it enables us to relate the effects of broad social processes on the psychological basic structure or matrix of social relatedness of individuals in the perspective of trauma theory. Splits within psyches caused by social events can be made transparent and helpful for social criticism. The trauma-theoretical concepts of “split” or “cleavage” can bridge the understanding of the psychological structure and the specific character of social processes and structures. For example, Robert Jay Lifton described this problem that is related to the side of the perpetrator by analyzing the split in medical doctors of Nazi concentration camps into an “Auschwitz self” and a “normal self.”¹² He also recognized the split into a “nuclear self” and a “normal self” in US scientists working in military nuclear research.¹³

On the basis of these theoretical models it is also possible to understand the psychological effects of traumatizing socioeconomic developments as “economic neuroses.”¹⁴ Under the present conditions of neoliberal capitalism the formation of the self can be differentiated in terms of a neoliberal aggressive “perpetrator self” and a neoliberal “victim self.” We shall come back to this in more detail.

The switch from the social welfare state to neoliberalism can be understood as the shock of moving from a relatively benign structure of social relatedness to a malignant structure of social relationship. In the former,

people felt socially secure and thus had a basis for self-development and the shaping of their lives. It was the struggle of the workers movement that achieved structures and institutions for creating solidarity. To use Winnicott's terminology, this is a broadening of an attitude of "concern,"¹⁵ This outlook is not just about charity for the poor but the rights of individuals that allow for a life with dignity. So it is very important to make a clear analysis of reality in order to understand the psychological dynamics in a particular situation. For relational psychology it is central to look at the psychological effects of neoliberalism from the perspective of the victims.

One particular empirical phenomenon can serve as the starting point for our psychological analyses: the dramatic increase in psychological diseases. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression will be the second largest mass disease by 2020: "By the year 2020, depression is projected to reach 2nd place of the ranking of DALYs calculated for all ages, both sexes."¹⁶ The insurance companies are alarmed. In Germany the rate of these diseases doubled in the younger generation between 1997 and 2004, a time of notable cuts in social spending.¹⁷ A study of the university clinics in Hamburg shows that in Germany 25 percent of young people below the age of 18 suffer from psychological or psychosomatic diseases.¹⁸ Between 2002 and 2008, the total costs of these diseases increased by 32 percent.¹⁹ Experts agree that this development is caused by the insecurity, cutbacks, and pressure that neoliberalism has brought to the socioeconomic and political sphere, including education.²⁰

2. What Do the Losers Suffer?

(1) Trauma Experiences in the Context of Neoliberalism

In [chapter 1](#) we saw the socioeconomic exploitation, expropriation, exclusion, and impoverishment of a growing number of people, as well as their political disempowerment. Against this background, the traumatic effects for losers become visible. The undermining of the relatively benign pattern (matrix) of former social relatedness in the European welfare state, the US New Deal, the developmental model in most of the countries of the Global South, and the sharp increase in the destruction of indigenous communities affects all members of such societies and produces the accompanying symptoms. However, particularly for the victims (losers) who perceive the changes in their basic social matrix, the hostility of the system toward their needs for individual security, stability, and support has a troubling and frightening effect.

Let us look into some of the implications. The most evident case to illustrate the observed mechanisms of traumatization is (structural) mass unemployment. Unemployment increased with the introduction of

neoliberal policies. At the same time, neoliberal governments have tried to make unemployment invisible by creating precarious jobs. The financial and economic crisis has intensified this development. Particularly youth unemployment is growing. In 2010, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published a survey showing that worldwide youth unemployment is running at 81 million, and in Spain even 40 percent of young people have no jobs. This speaks of a lost generation. In a capitalist society with its emphasis on achievement in the production process, becoming jobless is not only a socioeconomic problem but it threatens a person's very identity. The self loses its feeling of worth, and becomes fragmented. There is a kind of schizophrenia: the self experiences aggression against the internalized bad part of "the other," leading to depression, or the self diverts the aggression by projecting it onto scapegoats like immigrants, who allegedly take away jobs. This explains why people do not organize to fight the real causes of their misery.

Unemployment has also been described as an "individual stressor" and a "man-made disaster."²¹ People hit by unemployment have attested that for them this was an experience of death.²² The traumatization follows a certain pattern. It may sound paradoxical, but when—after a time of uncertainty and fear—people lose their job, they first experience a feeling of relief. A phase of rebellion and anger soon follows, and then one of mixed feelings: depression, powerlessness, despair, victimization, loss of dignity, worthlessness. The fourth and final phase is characterized by apathy.²³

Practical examples can be found in Richard Sennett's book *The Corrosion of Character* (1998). However, we do not share his idealization that a person becomes flexible through resignation. Instead, we agree with Oscar Negt (2001) and Christian de Montlibert (2001), who call the creation of unemployment for profit's sake an act of violence to be opposed. They call the irresponsibility of the elites in this regard the main scandal of our times.

These elites add insult to injury by turning the victims into perpetrators. The latter are reputedly guilty of their unemployment and even made to suffer sanctions. This is blaming the victims, but even worse: it is victimizing the victims a second time. It aggravates the psychological mechanism described above when people take the bad part of "the other" into themselves. The economic and political elites use the media to spread this perversion of truth, which shapes public opinion such that this group of unemployed people even hide their suffering and thus isolate themselves even more from social interaction. This whole complex is what psychologists call "disorientation trauma." Neoliberal policy does not fight unemployment—it disregards the unemployed and impoverished.²⁴

This blatant injustice toward millions of people—even in the rich countries—is not only violence against these people, but it is making them use violence against themselves and become scapegoats. It is one of the key

reasons for the growing violence against women, children, and, above all, immigrants in our societies. It is no secret that the same mechanisms led to Adolf Hitler's fascism in the Germany of the 1930s. The only reason why the extreme right wing is still a small, albeit growing, minority in the West today is the fact that progressively the dominant parties are all moving further to the right. Dismantling more and more civil and political rights in the name of "internal security" was not only characteristic of the Bush administration in the United States, it typified the European Union (EU) countries as well. In conclusion, it can be said that violence is growing at all levels: within persons,²⁵ among persons,²⁶ within societies (criminality), and, last but not least, exercised by US-led imperialism against countries like Afghanistan and Iraq.

Given the combination of economic, political, military, ideological, and above all propaganda (media) power of the elites, the victims need one thing most: witnesses to truth in the form of advocates. The trauma of the victim first of all needs a "third" party to publicly say what is true.²⁷ For example, someone needs to expose what neoliberal governments call "reform" as class struggle from above and, in reality, an onslaught against the citizens. Think of the importance of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee. Although most of the perpetrators of apartheid did not repent and the government did not provide for the promised reparation, the fact that the truth was publicly recognized brought healing to many of the victims.

Three elements stand out when we look for healing and liberation of the losers, which will form the basis for our reflection in part 3:

- *Community-building*: overcoming isolation through the rebuilding of relations;
- *Solidarity*: standing at the side of the struggling victims even if this involves conflicts with the rich and powerful;
- *Truth and dignity*: speaking the truth about reality and returning dignity to the victims who are accused by the elites of being guilty of their own misery.

3. What Drives the Winners?

In our analysis of the emerging money-property economy we saw that money gives access to the market, cushions the risks in the market, measures the exchange value, and gives access to property rights. This is the objective basis for developing greed to accumulate money without limits and institutionalize this greed by way of charging interest or engage in other forms of capital accumulations. Greed is the classical expression for the force that

drives the winners. Desire is called *epithymia* in Greek, while the concept for greed is *pleonexia*. In the early Church these were considered deadly sins. Aristotle shed a lot of light on the observation that the purpose of the natural economy is to satisfy the demand for limited life needs in household communities.²⁸ It is a matter of use-property. However, money can be accumulated and hoarded on the basis of the exchange value of property, since it (money) does not lose its value. As soon as it enters the scene, greed is the result. This also creates the illusion in people, especially the rich, that one can gather limitless amounts of money and riches and thereby purchase eternal life. Lust for money is thus a sign of a person's inability to relate to his/her own finite nature and mortality. However, the egoistic private accumulation of social wealth by the greedy destroys the community of the polis, on which they are dependent. This means that they destroy not only the community but themselves as well. "Murder is suicide," Franz Hinkelammert has often said, and this rings true, and not only for today's global world. Jesus Christ took this analysis further. He stated that placing one's trust in the "hoarding of treasures" has a religious quality. It amounts to idolatry, the worship of wealth, which he called "Mammon."

(1) Capitalism Turns the Vice of Greed into a Virtue

Under capitalism, that which ancient societies considered anathema and therefore politically and ethically rejected and prevented by law became the foundation of economic and social systems. In the capitalist view, egoistic economic activity is good for the community (private vices are public virtues, to quote Jeremy Bentham), creating general prosperity, the "wealth of nations" (Adam Smith). That is to say, greed became the *positive* propelling element of the entire system. For this reason, it would be shortsighted to view the question of winners and losers in neoliberal capitalist societies solely as a personal ethical dilemma for the capitalists. The system *itself* is driven by unlimited private greed for growth and, conversely, it produces greed.

Empirical "gambling research" has shown that the system drives its actors, who always need more—otherwise they will sink in the competitive struggle raging around them. In fact, the whole thing merely amounts to a rat race, not unlike guinea pigs or rats running endlessly in a stationary turning wheel. The psychosociological researcher Peter Jüngst²⁹ has proposed the thesis that the United States, viewed psychologically, is the driving force behind increasingly rapid hypercapitalism because: (a) it gave people, especially those with weak communal bonds, the opportunity to immigrate to the New World and, once there, to continue to conquer ever new spaces ("going West"), and (b) after the most remote physical boundaries had been reached, this drive was transferred, especially to inflate

the financial bubble, because capital-based retirement systems—in contrast to those structured on the basis of solidarity—produce such gigantic pension funds that these exert pressure to then further expand through speculation.

The economic mechanism of accumulation is built on private property and contract—not property for use but rather property in its exchange value, invested in the competitive market by the owners of the means of production. Through production, trade, and financial dealings they can increase their property, measured in monetary terms. In neoliberalism this mechanism tends to break through all limits. At present the financial markets aim for at least 25 percent rate of return on their capital—at a growth rate of 1–4 percent in the real economy—which means they must steal more than 20 percent from the workers’ share and the public at large. As no kind of real economy can yield this rate of return, the consequences are: (1) cost cutting at any price on the shop floor, including wage dumping and layoffs, (2) concentration on luxury business and consumption, and (3) high interest rates for loans and financial speculation, leading to the volatility of the financial markets and to risks for the real economy.³⁰

Thomas Hobbes, in his *Leviathan*, defines human beings as individuals competing for ever more wealth, power, and reputation.³¹ This capitalist anthropology includes the impact of the rich on the state. Transnationally organized capital blackmails not only workers but also governments, in order to provide the best conditions for the highest returns. This particularly concerns the tax system, but there are other ways of harming the common good. Most of the mass media are also in the hands of international media barons, who can thus influence political institutions and public opinion.

(2) Pathological Narcissism: The Autocratic Power-Self

Psychologically greed can be classified as an addiction, a pathological dependency linked to a kind of boundless narcissism. Narcissism is characterized by self-importance that constantly seeks applause. In the perspective of relational psychology it reflects the splitting of the structure of social relationships, leading to the disembeddedness of ruling elites. Autocratic rule has been called a “predatory interrelation.”³² It takes the form of pure repression or may go hand in hand with a “manufactured” minimal consent of the ruled. The history of western “civilization” is full of examples. It is characterized by conquest, exploitation, violence, and oppression.³³ Concretely it implies three elements: megalomania, the notorious tendency to dehumanize others, and a paranoid split of the power-self.

Megalomania leads to a loss of ability to limit oneself in a human and social way. The power-self has fantasies of omnipotence, idealizes itself, and lacks any empathy. Others are just instruments and kept powerless.

This leads to the dehumanizing and instrumentalizing of the ruled group in a form of social apartheid. This type of dominium seeks dominance by creating fear, insecurity, and the feeling of being inferior in others. The autocratic power-self is characterized by concentrating on “having” instead of “being” (Fromm). Psychoanalyst Horst-Eberhard Richter also contends that, after breaking away from the transcendental regulation of society in medieval Europe, people aspired to assume the role of God.³⁴ The self thinks that it must constitute itself, and does this through a megalomaniac acquisition of power by harnessing the forces of science, technology, and capital. The ego-society that results from this drive is exclusively oriented toward the masculine, conquering, violent, mathematically rational powers in human beings, and it represses compassion and sympathy for others or feeling relationships. It also discriminates against women and indigenous peoples, referring to the latter in racist terminology. Above all, this kind of society rapes Mother Earth. The idealized self-image of the dominant elite is, however, an illusion and a misapprehension of the surrounding reality. So the autocratic power-self suffers from a disturbed relationship with its social environment.

This is why paranoia is the disease of dominium (Elias Canetti). In order to stabilize their claim for limitless power, the autocratic elites have to constantly expand it. They have to create enemy images.³⁵ They regard themselves as the “good guys,” while others are the “evil empire.” They also need to stabilize the surrender of those they dominate. So they paint themselves as “good rulers” (as nations the benevolent empire), those who create progress and welfare. In doing so, they reactivate sociopsychological relations to parents (portraying themselves as benevolent fathers). They also try to create myths in order to give the impression that their dominance is legitimate. In summary, the autocratic rule of the narcissistic power-self destroys any relationship of responsibility and seriously damages the wholeness of the perpetrator itself.

As a matter of fact, narcissistic capitalists as exponents of their class do not act as subjects in the human sense of the word, but as a “character-mask” of capital.³⁶ Max Weber, while propagating capitalism, calls it “lordless slavery,” because of the anonymous character of the markets. In the capital-self we find exactly the elements of the pathological narcissist described above. It is, however, a difficult problem for society that the destructive features of capitalism are packaged as democracy, human rights, and philanthropy. The original master of this “nice-speak” was John Locke, who produced the ideology of “democratic capitalism.” Summarizing his ideology we can say: “The West has conquered, colonized, enslaved, and humiliated the world, annihilating whole cultures and civilizations. It has carried out unprecedented genocide, but has always done it in the name of human rights.”³⁷ The perspective of the real-life human being is lost. What counts is his/her function for capital accumulation.

What does this mean for the personhood of the super-rich in neoliberal capitalism? This does not only concern the approximately two hundred fifty billionaires who own as much as half of humankind. Psychologists like Lifton and Eric Markusen speak of the mechanism of dissociation.³⁸ Before them, Freud had perceived this phenomenon in the aftermath of World War I, that is, the dissociation between war-self and peace-self. In their study *The Genocidal Mentality: Nazi Holocaust and Nuclear Threat*, Lipton and Markusen distinguish the concentration camp-self and nuclear-self from the normal self. By dissociating their self the perpetrators can feel “normal” even when they serve an insane social system or structure. The same is true for the neoliberal protagonists. They can feel good even while participating in systemic murder. One famous example of an aggressive manager is Jack Welch, nicknamed “Neutron Jack.”³⁹ People called him that by analogy with the neutron bomb, which leaves matter untouched, “only” killing people. An example that exceptions are possible is Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winner and former president of the World Bank (WB). In an interview he stated that the moment he saw certain policies killing people he had to act, and change. Consequently, he was forced out of his job by the US government. So the prize for the winners in the neoliberal system is to fragment their “self”; the prize for those who convert to humanness is to sacrifice their position.

4. Fear, Illusion, and Authoritarianism of the Middle Classes

To become rich and part of the elite, to climb the social ladder, is the main aim of the middle classes. They hope to accomplish this social advancement through hard work, saving, and intelligent planning. This mentality was rewarded by the period of social welfare policies: in the United States the New Deal, in Britain the Beveridge plan, in Central and Northern Europe through the welfare state and social market economy, built on Keynesianism and the ordoliberalism of the Freiburg School, and in at least some southern countries like Argentina through developmental policies. What happens when neoliberalism takes over?

(1) Fear of a Sudden Fall: The Sword of Damocles in Neoliberalism

“Middle-class squeeze” is a common expression in the United States for what happens to the middle classes. Only very few profited from the tax cuts for the rich typical of the Bush administration. One-third of the tax subsidies went to the top 1 percent of the population. The majority of the population lost in terms of rising costs, for example, health care, unemployment, child care, school, and college and university fees. Overindebtedness,

bankruptcy, and particularly in recent times the crisis in mortgages (sub-prime crisis!) hit the middle classes disproportionately. In fact, they accounted for 92 percent of bankruptcies.

The same is happening in Europe. Here the Agenda 2010 is particularly responsible for the decline. Its goal has to be seen in the context of the EU's Lisbon strategy to make Europe the most competitive region in the world by 2010. In order to achieve this goal the neoliberal policies of deregulation, liberalization, and privatization have been applied. This approach has been aggravated by the euro crisis, which was caused by the increased public debt originating from the bail out of the banks after their speculative losses. The consequences are: dismantling of the welfare state, wage dumping and rising casual employment, and unemployment. Onslaughts on the social security of people can be observed in all European countries and the United States, as Anne Daguerre has shown.⁴⁰ Besides these impoverishment programs there is a stagnation or even decrease in wages and a trend away from safe to precarious jobs. In Germany there has been a dramatic increase in low-wage labor. Since 2005 the government has been upgrading the low wages by transfers of tax revenue.⁴¹ In the five years leading up to 2010 it spent fifty billion euro on this program, thus subsidizing businesses—a feature typical of neoliberalism.

When Argentina went bankrupt in 2001 after following neoliberal policies, it was chiefly the loss of their savings that drove the middle classes into poverty. The famous statistic illustrating this is that in Argentina the population was 60 percent middle class before neoliberalism, and 60 percent under the poverty line after the economy collapsed. Some people object to the above arguments by pointing to China and India. It is true that the middle classes have been growing there in the last few decades. But firstly, both countries have not completely liberalized, particularly in terms of capital flows, and were thus not drawn into the Asian financial crisis of 1997. And secondly, the advancement of a sector of the urban population was accompanied by serious impoverishment of the rural population. The WB corrected the record of poverty in China in 2008: The growth is coupled with a low-wage policy and extreme poverty; the buying power of the population is 40 percent less than calculated before.⁴²

So with the exception of a few countries, there is a growing anxiety among middle-class people all over the world, particularly in North America, Europe, and Japan, the classical trio of rich regions.

(2) The Mentality of “Servility” among Those Who Are Upward-Oriented

In order to understand the social, political, and psychological situation of the middle classes, it may be helpful to take a brief look at history.

Let us first turn to Germany.⁴³ After the failed revolution in 1848, Otto von Bismarck achieved national unity from the top down in the 1870s. Imperial Germany was determined by the domination of the Prussian monarchy, with the aristocracy, military, and bureaucracy as the leading elites. The parliament did not have real legislative and monitoring functions. There was still a three-class voting system. The economic bourgeoisie did not show a democratic desire for power. The elites attempted to form the mentality of the population in an authoritarian-aggressive way. When the workers' movement became stronger because of the socioeconomic crisis in the 1870s, the aristocratic landowners and big capital formed an alliance under Bismarck's policy of unification and the slogan "War against Social Democracy." At the same time, aggression was being directed against Germany's eastern neighbors, the Slavic peoples. The middle classes in their socioeconomic insecurity were targeted and challenged by the elites to prove themselves as "pillars of the nation" by focusing their aggressions against the "enemies" inside and outside the country—a classical example of disorientation propaganda.

Psychologically this revitalized the negative patterns of social relations described above (under 1.2): idealizing the strong "other" above and diverting aggressions against those below. Think of the psychological consequences of incidents like a public official being fired for having rented a room to a Social Democrat. The disorientation created what Heinrich Mann in one of his novels (*Der Untertan*) portrayed as the servile subject. Even the Social Democrat (SPD) officials started to behave well in the given framework, eventually resulting in a "truce" when the party voted for a budget that started World War I.

But besides sticks, the elites also used carrot tactics, offering small privileges to the middle classes in order to keep them out of labor movement struggles. "To separate those whose alliance could damage them was always a basic goal of those in power."⁴⁴ After new middle classes grew up in the 1880s, business offered nicer offices, slightly higher salaries, more holidays, in short, "white-collar" conditions to those they wanted to wean away from the working classes. Special associations were formed to reinforce the status symbols, some that were linked to their jobs, but also some that were nationalistic in character. When the economic crisis grew harsher toward the end of the 1870s, Bismarck added elements of a social welfare state. The combination of those benefits at home, linked to aggressive hate against the workers' movement, on the one hand, and growing nationalistic and imperialistic behavior against other nations, on the other, prepared the ground for the later Nazi illusions of the German middle classes.

This dangerous development started with World War I and the Weimar Republic. Not only did the broad majority support the "preventive war," but after the war the nationalist policies of the elites. For a short period,

part of the middle classes formed a coalition with the SPD, but both cooperated with the old elites in the military and the bureaucracies. They even fought the revolutionary part of the workers' movement up to the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. This enabled the fascists to grow stronger and stronger. When the middle classes lost more and more of their socioeconomic security in the course of inflation and subsequently during the dismantling of the social welfare state in the course of the Great Depression, the vast majority of them moved to the right.

After Hitler came to power with the help of the big landowners and big capital, the first to be persecuted were the workers' organizations, the Social Democrats, and the Communists. Many members of the petty bourgeoisie were happy to receive positions in the new power system. That way, they could identify with Hitler, who himself represented that class, so full of resentments.

Whereas the 30 years after World War II were a golden age for the middle classes, they have been more and more split into a majority of losers and a minority of winners since the introduction of neoliberalism.⁴⁵ They represent about 60 percent of the German population: 50 percent are in the process of losing, and 10 percent have made it to join the winners. Of course, this applies differently to the different milieus, but the overall consequences are alarming. Thirty-six percent of Germans with a middle-class background transform their fears and disappointments into resentments against immigrants and socially vulnerable and excluded people. If one adds the 11 percent with a working-class background, 47 percent of Germans, nearly half the population, do not see the real causes of their misery in the policies of the economic and political elites but in scapegoats.

Whereas in the historical period just described, some societies, for example, in the United States, developed politically in different ways, there are, however, interesting sociopsychological analogies. Barbara Ehrenreich has dealt extensively with the relationship between the working- and middle classes.⁴⁶ She shows how, in neoliberalism, large parts of the middle classes are in decline, reacting with anxiety and even despair. Jörg Rieger has picked up on this analysis in *No Rising Tide*. Both explain the evangelical revival in the United States as one of the consequences of this development.⁴⁷ The religious right, in turn, strengthens the political forces driving the neoliberal agenda, as we know from the time of the George W. Bush administrations. The climax of this development is the Tea Party, pushing the Republican Party more to the right. Noam Chomsky even interprets this as a move toward fascism, analogous to the emergence of National Socialism after the Great Depression in 1929.⁴⁸ So the question whether the middle classes follow their "illusionary consciousness" or join the struggle of the lower classes is of great importance for the future of the world.

***(3) The Psychodynamic Makeup of the Middle Classes
against the Historical Background***

The position of the middle classes is by definition “in between.” During feudal times the guilds were between the aristocracy and the lower classes; during the period of classical liberal capitalism the employees in industry, trade, and public service were between the bourgeois upper class and waged labor; after World War II the middle ground expanded widely, even including parts of the working class, before neoliberalism started to shrink the middle classes again, to push many workers into the state of exclusion and widen the gap with regard to the super-rich.

Abstractly speaking, the key question is whether the middle classes orient themselves toward the elites or toward the losers, whose problems they more and more share. Historically they have tended to see themselves as allies of the elites, who reinforce this orientation through targeted propaganda. As long as they could improve and secure their social position in the context of the social welfare state, this made some sense. But what happens when the shift toward neoliberalism shatters all securities? Now the objective situation would suggest they are joining the lower classes. But psychologically there are obstacles.

Erich Fromm⁴⁹ analyzed the question in relation to the middle classes threatened by monopoly capitalism in the period after World War I. He speaks about the authoritarian personality forged by a system of command. In neoliberalism the same happens through ideologies and policies suggesting, “There is no alternative” (TINA), as Margaret Thatcher put it. Friedrich Hayek, too, wrote of the “humility” required by the laws of the market. It is exactly this message that the economic and political elites, together with most of the media, keep spreading. Some call it “the alliance for disorientation.” The consequence is that the middle classes develop an illusionary consciousness of reality. So again we see the double victimization as in the case of the losers, but here with even more serious consequences. Fromm speaks about three responses of adaptation to the threatening power:

- the flight into authoritarianism
- the flight into the destructive
- the flight into conformism.

The feeling of powerlessness creates a masochistic drive in the threatened person to secure security by subjecting him-/herself to authority, by becoming one with it. This masochism can turn against the self, creating depression, or transform itself into sadism and turn against weaker persons and groups. Some call it the bicycle position: bowing to those above and

trampling on the lower level. The destructive version places the person against his/her enemies in blind hatred. Conformism solves the problem by allowing the person to split into one part that obeys the outside world and another that opts for “inner emigration,” leaving the status quo as it is—exactly what the elites want.

Having analyzed the deteriorating economic, political, and psychological situation of the majority of people, the question arises: where to look for remedies?

CHAPTER 3

The Judeo-Christian Tradition in the Axial Age¹

1. The Axial Age

In our book *Becoming Human in Solidarity* (2006),² we suggested revisiting what Karl Jaspers called the “Axial Age” in order to tap into the inspirations of ancient cultures and faiths for coping with the present deep crisis of global capitalism and its destructive effects. Our goal was to find elements of a new humanness and culture of life. Jaspers, after World War II, raised the questions of why and how there was a basic turning point in human history during the period of 800–200 BCE and what this meant for developing a planetary new order.³ He had observed that at the same time there was a parallel transformation going on in distant cultures like Israel, India, Persia, China, and Greece. He saw the change as an intellectual and spiritual breakthrough, providing the categories and potentials for subsequent human history and moving humanity toward universal communication. He regarded the period prior to that as prehistory. This is why he named this period the Axial Age. He could not find one single cause for the parallelism in the different cultures. He excluded the assumption of a biological or genetic cause, but saw some significance in the thesis of Alfred Weber that all the concerned cultures had been affected by invasions of horse-riding groups with their wheeled chariots, originating from Central Asia, since the end of the third millennium BCE. A new wave arrived around 1200 BCE, spreading upheaval, violence, and male domination in the Eurasian region. It is assumed that before this time there had been a maternal culture among relatively peaceful agricultural and nomadic tribes. So the experience of violent crises, according to Jaspers, might have prompted the new parallel effort to find new foundations for living together. He characterized the new approach as intellectual and spiritual (*geistig*), looking only marginally at the economic and political context. On the whole his—very valuable—book takes an idealistic approach.

Also in 2006, Karen Armstrong published a whole book on the Axial Age.⁴ Admirable in its depth and breadth, it is a detailed study of the cultures and religions in China, India, Israel/Judah, and Greece during that period. She starts from the present dangerous situation of our planet, calling for a “spiritual revolution” transcending modernity:

The explosion of the first atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki laid bare the nihilistic self-destruction at the heart of the brilliant achievements of our modern culture. We risk environmental catastrophe because we no longer see the earth as holy but regard it simply as a “resource.” Unless there is some kind of spiritual revolution that can keep abreast of our technological genius, it is unlikely that we will save our planet. (xv)

So she looks to the “Axial sages” for inspiration:

Their objective was to create an entirely different kind of human being. All the sages preached a spirituality of empathy and compassion; they insisted that people must abandon their egotism and greed, their violence and unkindness. . . . Each tradition developed its own formulation of the Golden Rule: do not do to others what you would not have done unto you. As far as the Axial sages were concerned, respect for the sacred rights of all beings—not orthodox belief—was religion. If people behaved with kindness and generosity to their fellows, they could save the world. (xviii f.)

With this kind of approach she had to study the contexts of the respective axial cultures. But her main interest relates to war and violence. She touches upon economic matters (see above, [chapter 1](#)) in passing. However, she does not really harvest the consequences of her penetrating insights into the axial spiritualities in terms of the transformation of our present-day political economy, anthropology, and spirituality.

This is what Jeremy Rifkin tries to do in *The Empathic Civilization*,⁵ building inter alia on Armstrong’s research on the Axial Age. This too is an admirable study; however, his hope for a decisive victory of empathy through modern communication techniques and what he calls “distributed capitalism” seems to neglect the analysis of the institutional and personal power of property and money as well as their influence on the other sectors of western civilization. We shall discuss this further in part 3.

So how to interpret the Axial Age? We have seen in [chapter 1](#) how the introduction of money, private property, and interest in societies with a growing division of labor split the societies into rich and poor. The need to use money as a means of exchange stimulated greed for the limitless accumulation of money and property. The struggle against the new economy, spreading increasingly beginning in the eighth century BCE, can first be observed in Ancient Israel. Is it just by accident that this century is regarded

as the start of the Axial Age? Our thesis is that the new economy based on money and property was the main cause of the Axial Age religious and spiritual innovations. Not only did it split societies into rich and poor and increase violence beyond the traditional direct oppression of the peasants by the king and the aristocrats, but it also changed the hearts and minds of people, as we have seen. This, of course, required not only a response at the political and economic level, but also in relation to anthropology, psychology, and spirituality. This is exactly what characterized the cultural and religious transformations of the Axial Age in Israel, India, China, and Greece.⁶

Let us look at some of the Axial breakthroughs, particularly the Judeo-Christian tradition, Buddhism, and Islam, and also briefly at classical Greek philosophy. This will not give a full picture of the religions and philosophies in the Axial Age. We have omitted China (Confucianism and Taoism) and Persia (Zoroaster), as we do not feel competent enough to deal with these civilizations.⁷

The first response to the new situation comes from the Hebrew prophets starting with Amos (late eighth century) and the legal texts of the Book of Covenant (Ex 21–23; ca. early seventh century), continues after the breakdown of monarchy during the Babylonian exile and Persian times, and reaches its climax in the apocalyptic writings of the Hellenistic period. The messianic writings of the Second Testament pick up these critical views in the context of the Roman Empire, even sharpening them in a kind of second wave of the Axial Age.

2. Socioeconomic Resistance and Alternatives in the Bible

The system of charging interest on loans, on top of the tributes to the empires, drove the impoverished families of Ancient Israel into ruin. The classical case in the then-agrarian society was the following. A farmer has a poor harvest and asks his neighbor to lend him seed up to the next harvest. This neighbor, however, demands more back than the quantity lent and also takes the land of the debtor as a pawn (security). When the debtor cannot pay back the debt, he loses his land and has to work for the creditor as a debt slave, together with his whole family. The basic contradiction appearing in Ancient Israel after the spread of the money-interest-property economy was between debtors and creditors.⁸ In real terms, this led to the concentration of land in the hands of the big landowners on the one hand and the over-indebtedness of the small farmers on the other. The former could live in luxury, mostly in the growing towns. The latter lost their land as well as their own and their family's liberty and autonomy, and had to work as day laborers or slaves for the big landowners. At the end of the monarchic period there were even beggars in abject poverty. It is important

to realize that the nouveau riche accumulated the land completely legally, namely through creditor-debtor contracts. They came to form a common upper class with the court bureaucracy and military leaders. This class had not only economic but also political power, and was even able to manipulate the legal system, which in Ancient Israel was originally meant to protect the poor and vulnerable.

This destructive development in society and public life, caused by the new economy, provoked the protest of the great prophets in the last part of the eighth and the whole of the seventh century BCE. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others called for justice and righteousness, which had been lost through the new property rights and money mechanisms. They claimed that, with the cancellation of justice and the rights of the poor, Yahweh, the God of Israel, had also been abandoned. After all, knowing God was identical with doing justice to the poor (Jer 22:16). Let us look at some of the relevant texts.

Amos arose in the mid-eighth century in the Northern Kingdom. His central theme is the endangered small farmers. They lose their land through seizure, they are sold into slavery and the female slaves are sexually abused (Am 2:6–8), they are defrauded in credit deals (8:4–7), and they get taxed (5:11f.). The law, meant to protect them, is violated (5:10; 6:12). On the other hand, the prophet criticizes the rich for enriching themselves at the cost of the poor, living on the labor of others and living in luxury (5:11; 6:4001E6 and passim). Amos predicts disaster and their downfall (9:9f.). The elaboration of the words of Amos through his school enlarges this prophecy by predicting that the victims will enjoy the fruits of their labor in the future (9:14). This makes it “clear that the property of lazy big landowners, built on exploitation and luxury, will be destroyed while the property of the farmers, built on labor, will enjoy a secure future. It is not abstract property offering freedom. Rather the property built on leisure will be destroyed while property built on labor will be blessed by God.”⁹

The prophet Micah arose toward the end of the same century in the Southern Kingdom of Judah after the prophecy of Amos had been fulfilled and the Assyrians had destroyed the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE. Like Amos, Micah denounces the same mechanism of property, interest, seizure of the land as a pawn, and debt slavery:

Alas for those who devise wickedness
and evil deeds on their beds . . .
They covet fields and seize them;
houses, and take them away;
they oppress householders and house,
people and their inheritance. (Micah 2:1f.)

Here for the first time the seemingly purely economic act of retribution for defaulting on a loan is qualified as robbery. Instead of lending seed in solidarity to a neighbor who had a bad harvest, the creditors aim for the debt to become unrepayable in order to seize the debtor's land and house, given as security for the loan. The rich people responsible will experience disaster (2:3; Is 1:23; 3:14; 5:8ff.).

The prophet Isaiah in the seventh century also sharply criticized the expropriation of farming families and the accumulation of land:

Ah! You who join house to house
 who add field to field,
 until there is room for no one but you
 and you are left to live alone
 in the midst of the land! (Is 5:8)

The prophetic interventions of the eighth and the seventh centuries did have consequences. This can be seen by the legal reforms from this time and later. The first occurred in the Southern Kingdom, probably after the experience of the catastrophic fall of the Northern Kingdom (722 BCE). The codified result of this can be found in the Book of the Covenant (Ex 21–23). These beginnings were confirmed and unfolded in the second reform, the core of which can be found in Deuteronomy. There are two possible contexts without which the Book of Isaiah cannot be understood properly. One is the reform of King Josiah (622 BCE; cf. 2 Kings 22f.). The decline of the Assyrian Empire had begun in the mid-seventh century, which had seen the beginnings of a power struggle within the ruling class of the kingship in Judah. Crown Prince Amon was murdered (641). The “people of the land” (*‘am ha’arez*) took power and enthroned the young Prince Josiah (641–609). The actors were the free peasants, owning land as patrimony, probably in alliance with socially minded members of the ruling class. In any case the upper class, criticized by the prophets as robbers, was deprived of its power and the society reorganized in a socially just way.¹⁰ There is a second possible interpretation. After the upper class of Judah, having regained power after the death of King Josiah, was deported by the victorious Babylonians (586), the remaining population (mainly those who had lost their land by the debt mechanisms) got the fields of the exiled landowners for cultivation.¹¹ They too may have written at least part of Deuteronomy. In both cases, however, we can assume that the subjects of the reform were the productive farmers and those in solidarity with them against the upper class.

Deuteronomy presupposes an economy using money for exchange (Deut 14:24–26). At the same time, all its concrete laws aim at correcting, if not

avoiding, its destructive forms and consequences. A preventive measure is the prohibition of charging interest and pawning as well as the abolition of tribute to be paid for the court and the temple. While the former can already be found in the Book of the Covenant (Ex 22:24–26), the latter is revolutionary. Tithing now only serves the purpose of staging an annual people’s festival and social benefits for those members of the community who have no land for their subsistence (widows, orphans, and Levites, 14:22–29). Moreover, the harvesters have to leave grain on the fields for the poor to collect (24:19). When somebody falls into debt anyway, the debts have to be forgiven after seven years, in the Sabbath Year. Also the debt slaves have to be released after such period—receiving a certain sum of money, equivalent to the seven years wage of a day laborer, for a new start in freedom. If the people follow God’s life-sustaining instructions, there will be no poor among them (Deut 15:4). Taken together, these amount to the first known social laws in world history.¹²

Theologically the texts legitimate these revolutionary laws by referring to God’s freeing the Hebrew slaves from Egypt: “I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall have no other God before me” (Deut 5:6f., Ex 20:2f.). Among the people of the liberating God there must be no exploitation of human labor, nor gods who legitimate this. The Tenth Commandment adds the prohibition of accumulation: “Neither shall you greedily desire your neighbor’s house or field . . . or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Deut 5:21). In Deut 8 this is illustrated by the story of God giving the people bread, called manna, while passing through the wilderness (Ex 16). The central verse of that text reads: “When they measured it (the bread) with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed” (Ex 16:18). Jesus later refers to this in his prayer: “Give us this day our *daily* bread.” And he asks for a decision between God and mammon, i.e., the god of greedy accumulation (Matthew 6:24). This is why we call the biblical economy an “economy of the enough for all” on the basis of God’s abundant gifts.

The Holiness Code of the book Leviticus, designed by priests in the sixth century (probably in the context of the return from the Babylonian exile to Judah), ultimately formulates the theological and legal foundation of this economy: The earth belongs to God, and therefore is a gift of God for all. This is why there must be no absolute property for some, but rather property for use for all the earth’s inhabitants: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine: with me you are but aliens and tenants” (Lev 25:23). Therefore, after seven times seven years, in the jubilee year, all families must get back to their patrimony, the land originally owned by the families.¹³ Accordingly the price of a piece of land has to be calculated

by counting the harvests remaining until the next jubilee year (Lev 25: 6–28)—there is no absolute market where sellers are free to determine the prices. With all these rules and regulations money is not a means of endless accumulation; it is limited to its function of facilitating exchange. The land as basic means of production for the subsistence of the families must not be turned into a commodity. The socioeconomic order rests on the autonomy and equality of the farming families—lived in solidarity with those who, for various reasons, are not able to produce their own food.

During the time of the Persian Empire, Judah enjoyed semi-independence. Here we have one classical narrative showing how the people used this opportunity to live according to the Torah. It is the story of Nehemiah becoming governor in Judah. This was the situation:

Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish kin. 2 For there were those who said, “With our sons and our daughters we are many; we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive.” 3 There were also those who said, “We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards and our houses in order to get grain during the famine. And there were those who said, “We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king’s tax. 5 Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others.”

Nehemiah responded to this debt crisis by convincing the rich to offer complete debt relief, thus renewing the covenant between God Yahweh and the people. Ton Veerkamp has recently published a new and fascinating book on the political history of the grand narrative of Israel.¹⁴ Nehemiah and the priest Ezra play a central role in this account. Up to their time the alternative to the normal orders of exploitation was but a minority position, represented by the great prophets and King Josiah (641–609 BCE). Only when Nehemiah had political power to introduce the Torah with full participation of the people could Judean society implement the fundamental new order of autonomy and equality. This is why Veerkamp calls this order the “Torah Republic.” God is identified with this basic order that lacked the exploitation of the many and accumulation for the few. In order to implement it, Judean society had to separate itself from the other peoples and their gods. This was not done for ethnic reasons but to implement justice without antagonistic classes. Of course, the elites resisted this order. However, it implanted a revolutionary vision into the history of humanity, inspiring not only Jesus and his movement but countless people and groups up to this day. At that time the oral and written traditions of the people of Israel were put together in the form of the five books of the Torah,

together with the books of the prophets relating this vision to all future generations.

This semi-independence of the Persian period ended with the Hellenistic Empires. The year 168 BCE revealed the totalitarian character of these empires. The Hellenistic ruler, Antiochus IV, prohibited the Yahweh cult and put a statue of Zeus into the Jerusalem temple. The population of Judah was divided. The priestly aristocracy and the upper class assimilated to the Hellenistic way of life, while others started an armed liberation struggle and still others moved into nonviolent resistance. These Chassidim expressed themselves in apocalyptic underground writings. The most important example is the Book of Daniel. [Chapter 3](#) tells the story of the resistance of three Jewish men. Characteristically for apocalyptic literature, the narrative is coded in order for the author to avoid persecution. It speaks about a historical king who erects a golden statue, the symbol of absolute political, economic, and ideological power, and tells all people to worship it. All subjected peoples follow this order except three Jewish men. As punishment they are thrown into the furnace, but rescued by God. In that way the apocalyptic writing strengthened people in their resistance and gave them hope.

This is the heritage that Jesus and his movement draw upon. He builds on the prophetic and Torah tradition. He even radicalizes the corrective measures, like those of the Sabbath and the Jubilee Year. He puts them in force for every day. So he prays: “Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven those who are indebted to us.” In Luke 4:1ff., he claims that the rules of the Jubilee Year have become reality with his coming—“good news to the poor” (Is 61). The story we have romanticized by calling it the story of the rich young man is in the tradition of the prophets and the Torah. The protagonist, a big landowner with “many possessions,” comes to him to ask how to obtain eternal life (Mark 10:17–22). Jesus tells him to follow the Ten Commandments and the prophetic “You shall not steal,” and tells him to give the stolen wealth back to the poor. The man, struck by sadness, rejects the idea of following Jesus. The contrasting story is about the rich tax collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). He responds to the encounter with Jesus, a poor man, by giving away half of his possessions to the poor and repaying those whom he robbed by four times as much as the tax system had allowed him to take from them. The theme of stealing also plays a key role in Jesus’s confrontation with the temple (Mark 11:15–19). Here the central question is: Which god rules? Is it the gods who legitimate exploitation and impoverishment? Or is it the biblical God who protects and liberates the poor, asking for justice, not for sacrifices? Jesus confronts, first of all, those who harm the poor by the monetary system, the money changers; secondly, those who profit from the market system, trading with pigeons, which are sacrificial animals for the poor; and finally he stops the whole liturgy of sacrifice.

To summarize, Jesus formulates the key issue in a sentence: “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and the sake of the good news to the poor will save it” (Mark 8:35f.). The evangelist Matthew (6:19–34) formulates the same notion by linking it to the collecting of treasures in the name of the money god Mammon: “Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth. . . . You cannot serve God and wealth.” On the other hand, those who first care about the kingdom of God and its justice, that is, who live in just relations, will have everything they need for their lives.

The early Christian communities followed Jesus on this path. The classical text is Acts 4:32–35. The community voluntarily shares property, especially those who have landed property and houses. This balancing of the relations within the community is portrayed as the fulfillment of the Deuteronomy Torah: “There was not a needy person among them” (cf. Deut 15:4).

Looking back at this short review of the Bible, we can identify four biblical options in dealing with the economy, particularly with money and property. They are:

1. Prophetic critique of economic and political power
2. Legal regulation of the system as long as there was a chance to reform it
3. Resistance in the case of totalitarian empires
4. Living alternatively in small groups to become a kind of leaven in society—even forming networks of solidarity among those groups throughout the empire (cf. the collection of the Apostle Paul for the poor in Jerusalem, 2 Cor 8–9)

3. Discovering Humanness in Empathy and Solidarity

The shift from direct oppression of the rural producers by the aristocratic upper classes to the competitive breaking of solidarity between the farmers beginning in the eighth century not only aggravated social misery but also caused a deep psychological crisis. This was already observable in the archaic period. For example, many texts and particularly psalms in the Hebrew Bible are a moving expression of the link between the social and the psychological effects of the new economy. Listen to Psalm 55 (1–5; 10–14):

- 1 Give ear to my prayer, O God;
do not hide yourself from my supplication.
- 2 Attend to me, and answer me;
I am troubled in my complaint.

3 I am distraught by the noise of the enemy,
 because of the clamour of the wicked.
 For they bring trouble upon me,
 and in anger they cherish enmity against me.
 4 My heart is in anguish within me,
 the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
 5 Fear and trembling come upon me,
 And horror overwhelms me. . . .
 9 Confuse, O Lord, confound their speech;
 for I see violence and strife in the city.
 10 Day and night they go around it on its walls,
 and iniquity and trouble are within it;
 ruin is in its midst;
 oppression and fraud do not depart from its market-place.
 12 It is not enemies who taunt me—
 I could bear that;
 it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me—
 I could hide from them.
 13 But it is you, my equal,
 my companion, my familiar friend,
 14 with whom I kept pleasant company;
 we walked in the house of God with the throng. . . .

It is particularly interesting to see that the breaking of solidarity between the originally equal peasants causes the utmost psychological pain to the praying person. It is the friend, the neighbor with whom he did the pilgrimage to the holy place who has now turned into a commercial ego, competing for accumulation without empathy.

The climax of this challenge comes with the Hellenistic Empires. They represent the merger between the traditional practices of conquest, direct oppression, and exploitation beginning in the time of the Mesopotamian empires and the new market economy (including individual slavery) with its splits between rich and poor, city and countryside. We can read about the dramatic psychological effects of this pauperization in the Book of Job. What we usually read as a personal destiny is the narrative of what happened to many farmers in subjugated Judah who tried to live according to the Torah.¹⁵ They lose all they have, which has devastating material and psychological effects.

The first to deal with this mixed bag of problems is the prophet Jeremiah. He is personally persecuted for addressing God's warnings to the powerful and the people. He expresses his existential dilemma in moving "confessions." One of them closes with the outcry:

Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame? (20:18)

But he also realizes that there have to be changes within people. It is not enough to have good laws in the spirit of Yahweh. The spirit has to transform the heart and the thinking after money has stimulated the human greed for more:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. “It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD.” But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jer 31:31–34)

“Knowing the Lord”—according to Jeremiah—means bringing justice to the poor (22:16). So it is empathy and solidarity Jeremiah is looking forward to—as a gift of God. This anticipates crucial texts of the Apostle Paul and Acts, as we shall see later.

So the structural economic and political alternatives must be deeply linked with anthropological and psychological transformations. This leads to the discovery of a new understanding of the human being in the image of God in the Bible, starting with the prophet Ezekiel. Walter Wink has elaborated on this in the book *The Human Being*.¹⁶ In the sixth century BCE, at the beginning of the Babylonian Exile, in the midst of the Babylonian Empire and in critical engagement with it, Ezekiel received a vision of God who seemed “like a human form” (Ez 1: 26). On this basis, priestly circles close to the prophet were pressing toward revolutionary insights of man and woman as the image of God: “So God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God God created them; male and female God created them.” (Genesis 1: 26–31). In the context of the ancient oriental world this entire text is revolutionary.

- In the Babylonian Enuma Elish myth, human beings were created out of the blood of a murdered God, in order to serve the gods—and especially to work for them, because the gods were tired of working.¹⁷ In the biblical text, human beings are blessed and honored as man and woman to become God’s coworkers. Apart from this, in ancient oriental societies only the king is the image of God. In this case, to speak of the image of God meant an ideological legitimization of authority, and therefore of the right to not be obliged to work, but rather to let others work for them. In contrast to this ideology, Genesis 1:26–31

regards all human beings as created in the image of God—to freely and responsibly work together with God. Thus this text, written by deportees in the Babylonian captivity, is an eminently subversive text, directed against imperial powers and forced labor through slavery.

- From the outset, human beings are created as male and female in the image of God, that is, as relational beings—both with regard to their relationship to each other and the other creatures as well as in their relationship with God. It is well known that *ruach*, God’s spirit in Hebrew, is a feminine noun. And in the vision of God as “something that seemed like a human form” and of the “living creatures” carrying and moving God’s throne in Ezekiel 1, one-third of the nouns and verb forms are feminine. The language oscillates between the masculine and the feminine. Indeed, the words of the text show beyond doubt that God himself/herself is relational and explicitly with male and female poles.
- On this basis follows the surprising insight that only God is fully human. To be human as the *imago dei*, the image of God, means becoming human in the sense of being oriented to God as the genuine human. Insofar as God becomes incarnate in us, we will become human. “Jesus embodied God in his own person in order to show us how we can embody God. And to incarnate God is what it means to be fully human.”¹⁸ In other words, the classical Eastern Orthodox theological concept of *theopoiesis* can be understood as “becoming truly human.” This, of course, in the tradition of the theology of (for example) Gregory of Nazianzus, means that also the truly human, which is the divine, cannot be defined, controlled, and manipulated. It transcends our perception and, to become truly human, needs the inspiration of God’s spirit.¹⁹
- When the prophet Ezekiel, overwhelmed by this vision, falls down on his face according to the *proskynesis*, the humiliation of the people in front of the Ancient Near East emperors, God puts him on his feet saying: “O, human child, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet” (2:1f.). God does not want God’s children to live with a servile mentality. They have to confront the powers that be, Ezekiel is told. Therefore, they need a bold spirit.

This is again confirmed in the Book of Daniel in the famous vision in [chapter 7](#). The world’s empires appear as carnivorous beasts, who are confronted and overcome by the Kingdom of God with a human face: “I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven” (v. 13).²⁰ And God says that the power of the imperial beasts is limited in reach and time, but that

the power of the human one is enduring. This power of the human one is incarnated in the true Israel, the people of God living the Torah, which is the just orders of God toward life. However, this vision is still conceived as a kind of alternative empire:

The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them. (Dan 7:27)

This is taken up again in calling Jesus, the Messiah, the “human one,” which means the ultimate incarnation of the human, that is, God.²¹ Jesus himself often refers to this text (cf., for example, John 1:51). But he completely turns around and even reverses the content of “the human one”:

For the human one came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

He says this in the context of two (male) disciples asking to sit at his right and left hands when he comes in the glory of the completion of the kingdom of God. They want to rule after all the travail of discipleship in the strenuous context of the prevailing beastlike Roman Empire. But Jesus tells them:

You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be the slave of all. (Mark 10:42–44; followed by verse 45, quoted above).

The word “serve” in the original Greek text is *diakonein*. In the patriarchal world of the Roman Empire, this word and its content are reserved for the manual labor of women and slaves. So Wink is correct in translating “kingdom of God” as “God’s dominion-free human order.”²² So when Jesus makes the kingdom of God the center of his message and life, he shows that the exploitative, violent, and imperial civilization of his time and of all times cannot be overcome by simply using the same methods and gaining victory. Rather the structures and essence of power have to be changed. Power has to be relational, a mutual service. It is a completely different culture, a “new creation,” as Paul calls it (Gal 3:26–28).²³ So it is extremely important to work for alternatives, not just mirror the existing system with all its implications. This is the case when it comes to the fundamentalists

ready to fight the “evil empire” even with atomic bombs—represented in figures like former US president George W. Bush. He mirrors the temptation of post-Constantinian Christianity all through its history. The whole of western culture is permeated with this kind of blasphemy.

Accordingly, in Matthew 25:31–46, the parable of the presence of Jesus in the poor, all men and women and all peoples shall be judged by “the human one” on the basis of whether they lived in empathy and solidarity with “the least” in order to satisfy their basic needs: hunger, thirst, clothing, shelter, health, and freedom. Jesus’s entire life, words, and actions, as well as his cross, which was a result of his resistance, were to this one end: to liberate the humanity in human beings and to help each one to a breakthrough toward the goal of establishing a new culture of life.²⁴

4. Spirit, the Renewal of Reason, and the Ambiguity of “Fulfilling” the Law

It is nearly impossible to understand what spirituality means in the biblical tradition using the categories of western modernity. René Descartes conceptualized these categories at the beginning of the sixteenth century CE. He saw spirit as the rational male subject facing the bodily world of material objects, governed by mechanistic laws. On this basis he defined the human being as the “Master and owner of nature.” This became the foundation for all western science and technology, economics, and politics. Max Weber drove this dualism into ethics as well. He distinguished between an ethic of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*), that is, observing the execution of the autonomous laws of the “fields of life,” and an ethic of disposition (*Gesinnungsethik*), that is, making arbitrary decisions of preference without any possibility of joint, argued judgments. This approach is deeply individualistic. It is characterized by pseudoneutral observation from a distance, not participating in a social process of life-enhancing reflection and action. Reason can only make means-end judgments; this is what is called instrumental reason.²⁵ It can be used by any power system, and is therefore responsible for the death-bringing consequences of western civilization.

The contrary is true for the biblical understanding of spirit. This is the spirit of life in its wholeness and the power to resist life-endangering structures, attitudes, and actions. Hence it can serve as an inspiration for developing a new culture, characterized by life-enhancing relations. It has nothing to do with amplifying the consciousness or the super-elevation of psychological or mental states. In relation to pseudo-charismatic positions we also speak of “salvation-egotism.” As westerners we can approach the issue of spirit and “spirituality” only in a deeply self-critical way.

Some of us have tried to see the workings of the Holy Spirit in terms of political economy.²⁶ We wanted to transcend the individualistic spirituality connected with the means-end rationality of bourgeois modernity:

This document invites us to be sensitive to the disclosures of the Holy Spirit in history and to put “instrumental reason,” the kind of reason operative in advancing our interests, at the service of “pneumatological reason,” the kind of reasoning that takes us into the struggle for “justice, peace and the integrity of creation.” (8)

We can detect the manifestations of the spirit against the idols of money, market, and empire as unfolded in the Bible. Here the spirit of God always appears in tension with powers obstructing life with regard to three perspectives: prophetic, creative, and community related.

1. The prophetic manifestation of the spirit.
2. Martin Buber pointed out that in Ancient Israel, before the monarchic period, spirit only appeared as prophetic charisma.²⁷ The “judges” had to become *nabis*, or seers, before they could help to bring liberation when the tribes were attacked by aggressors and before they could bring justice to those oppressed by certain powers. After the introduction of monarchy, prophets are even defined as the ones standing up critically against power. First of all, the prophetic critique is directed toward the kings and aristocratic elites. After the spreading of the property-money-interest economy in the eighth century, the spirit also drives them to stand up against those who use economic mechanisms to accumulate land and enslave the debtors. In addition to powerful persons, classes, and institutions, they also address the lack of justice and righteousness of the whole people as being linked with idolatry. In that period the people were particularly tempted by Baal (meaning Lord and owner of property). This means that prophecy is always about testing and discerning the spirits.
3. The creative manifestation of the spirit
4. The most obvious aspect of the creative spirit of God is breath. God breathed life into the human being in one of the creation stories (Gen 2). The Hebrew *ruach* (spirit) also has the connotation of “wind.” But this spiritual power is not neutral either. The priestly creation story in Genesis 1, written in Babylonian captivity, tells of the spirit hovering above the chaos water—a common symbol for aggressive peoples, particularly imperial powers who endanger life. It is no accident that the Genesis story concludes with the disempowering of the Babylonian empire by disrupting the unified imperial language (Gen 11).

5. The community-building manifestation of the spirit
6. The Pentecost story in Acts 2, written at the time of the Roman Empire, is the counter story to Gen 11. The Romans follow the principle of “divide and rule.” The Pentecostal spirit brings people together—not in the uniformity of the oppressive *Pax Romana* but in a way honoring different idioms and cultures. People can understand each other in their diverse identity, and they form supportive communities. They also implement a contrasting economic program, as we saw above. According to Acts 4:32ff., people do not claim private property beyond their need; rather, they share what they have so that there are no poor among them. The spirit of empathy and solidarity inspires them.

These three dynamics of the spirit—prophecy, life giving, and community building—are also present in the letters of the Apostle Paul. Yet he adds another extremely important dimension: the spirit inspires the overcoming of the life-destroying co-optation of reason and law by greed. In other words: he critically engages Greek reason and Roman law. In doing this he offers a basis for (self-)critical thinking that engages the whole of western modernity. Franz Hinkelammert developed this new understanding of Paul by interpreting the First Letter to the Corinthians and the Letter to the Romans,²⁸ which was backed up by Brigitte Kahl in her commentary on the Letter to the Galatians.²⁹

The First Letter to the Corinthians is written for the benefit of members of that congregation who use the messianic spirit for quarrels and competition, boasting about the wisdom they received through the power of the spirit after being baptized.³⁰ Paul responds by saying (1:17–25):

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs, and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

The first thing that strikes us in this passage is that the liberating messianic spirit can be misused for the sake of accumulating institutional power. The

people concerned—apparently many in the congregation of Corinth—have assimilated to the calculating competitive thinking (wisdom) of the prevailing (Hellenistic-Roman) world order. Paul had visited Athens and held discussions with people, including philosophers, on the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–34). Some of them scoffed at him when he talked about the resurrection of the crucified Messiah. They thought he was mad. Paul calls this “wisdom madness,” a better translation than “foolishness” or “stupidity.” Their wisdom is not stupid. They are clever in terms of the world of competition. But seen from (the perspective of) the wisdom of God, they are looking at the world from the wrong perspective.

What is this wisdom of God? Paul continues (1:26–28):

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters, not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.

Here he builds on the liberation experience in the Hebrew Bible. God Yahweh elected the Hebrews, the slaves, and the outcasts at the margins of the empires and city kingdoms of the second millennium BCE (Ex 3ff.) to liberate them from exploitation and oppression. Throughout the history of Ancient Israel, God is found at the side of the poor. Jeremiah summarizes this by equating the knowledge of God with bringing justice to the poor and needy (22:16). The same is true for the Second Testament. Mary in her Magnificat praises God with the words: “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1: 32f.). Jesus himself summarized his mission with the words of Isaiah 61:1f: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” For Paul, in the Hellenistic-Roman context, these people are the plebeians (common people), those who have to do manual labor and have no time for philosophy, or even slaves, all of them despised by the property-owning respectable citizens. So the key characteristic of God’s wisdom is that the Plebeians and the slaves, the despised, are the elected of God. This is madness in the eyes of the wise, the powerful, and the respected.

Paul puts this into the categories of Greek philosophical and Roman imperial thinking, but transforms both of them: God chose “things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.” Greek philosophical thinking builds on essence (substance) as a key to understanding truth. Paul starts from looking at what is not (yet). He does not look at reality from

the perspective of the status quo in terms of wisdom and power, but from the perspective of what still needs to appear in terms of justice (kingdom of God). This means that one does not see and practice truth from the standpoint of the system. Paul's position can be summarized in three points:

1. In weakness there is power.
2. The elected of God are the plebeians and the despised.
3. What is not (yet) reveals what is.

Out of this wisdom of God grow justice, sanctification, and redemption. This is “spirituality,” according to Paul—in conflict with the powers and the wisdom of this world order. The authorities of this world order cannot tolerate this messianic spirit, as he continues in [chapter 2](#) (6–9):

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

The rulers of this world order, specifically the Roman Empire, *must* kill the Messiah of another wisdom and order, according to their law. Their whole power system is challenged. The cross is the legal punishment for rebels and fugitive slaves. Declaring the plebeians and the despised to be the elected of God is madness and rebellion in their eyes. God's wisdom of giving glory to human beings is blasphemy to them. The glory belongs to the rulers, particularly the divine emperor, not to ordinary people. Irenaeus of Lyon took up Paul's revolutionary thought, claiming: *Gloria Dei vivens homo* (God's glory is that the human being lives), which Archbishop Óscar Romero modified as: *Gloria Dei vivens pauper* (God's glory is that the poor live). This is what can be called an “anthropological revolution.” Unfortunately, the imperialized church after Constantine the Great in the fourth century BCE reversed this again, turning back to worldly hierarchies, which was the wisdom of the age.

Let us finally look at the meaning of spirit and spirituality in 1 Corinthians (2:10–15): these things God has revealed to us through the spirit; for the spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world order, but the spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's

Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. This is quite an unusual understanding of "spirituality." It is not a state of high consciousness, a special relation to a transcendent world, or extraordinary knowledge. Rather it is critical discernment of the reality of this world. God's spirit reveals that it is not the strong and noble who have wisdom and power by God, but it is the plebeians and the despised, empowered in the midst of their weakness, who are elected by God to build God's kingdom. What is the criterion of this critical discernment? Paul gives the answer in [chapter 13](#): it is love. Love is the criterion of all knowledge and prophecy. Why? The wisdom of this world order calculates, competes for the sake of enlargement and defense of the ego—even going to the lengths of killing to fulfill the law of this world order. Love understands and demonstrates that "the other" is the condition of one's own life.

Summarizing this interpretation of 1 Corinthians, it can be said: reason and wisdom without love is madness, which even kills in the fulfillment of the law, as the crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans shows. Love is the criterion of reason. It is a reversal of reason and wisdom (from the perspective of God's wisdom) to compete for the power of the ego. It is a reversal of the messianic spirit and its charisms, an assimilation to the wisdom of this world when members of the church in Corinth use baptism and charismatic powers to compete for institutional positions. Humans can only survive as humans when they live in community, in love. Therefore, in the body of Christ the charisms serve each other instead of dominating (1 Cor 12). The highest charism is love, which is solidarity in the midst of the Roman merciless way of life without solidarity (1 Cor 13).

Paul picks up this insight again in Romans 12:2:

Do not be conformed to this world order, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds (*nus*), so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Mind, reason, wisdom—and acting according to the will of God—need constant renewal if they do not want to fall into the madness of the wisdom of this world. The result of this madness is death, as Paul unfolds in his Letter to the Romans, to which we now turn.

The Letter to the Romans develops the argument presented in 1 Corinthians, which now relates to reason and wisdom (thinking) in relation to law (acting).³¹ The starting point is (1:18):

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all idolatry (*asébeia*) and injustice (*adikia*) of those humans who by their injustice suppress the truth.

Truth here does not mean abstract, intellectual knowledge but rather living according to truth. The Hebrew word behind truth is *aemet*, meaning “keeping faithful to what has proved to be reliable.” Therefore, it is regarded as a key attribute of God Yahweh. It also can be understood in light of one of Mahatma Gandhi’s key concepts: *satyagraha*, keeping to the truth. The word is directly related to the key concept in Romans: faith. Faith is not the intellectual assumption that something, for example, dogmas, may be true, but instead means trusting in somebody because he/she has stood the test of time. So for Paul, in the context of global idolatry and injustice as experienced in the Roman Empire, having faith in God and God’s Messiah means adhering to God’s justice, received through the Messiah Jesus, who was crucified following conflict with the rulers of the system of general idolatry and injustice.

So, on the basis of 1 Corinthians, Romans asks: If the plebeians and the despised are the elected of God, what does this mean for action? What does justice mean when the plebeians and the despised are the elected of God? Is justice the fulfillment of the law as given in the Roman law or the Torah? Is sin the violation of this law? What is the law?

Law is a dimension of all incorporation into a society or association. Paul says (Romans, 2:14): When Gentiles, who do not possess the Torah, do by nature what the law requires, these, though not having the Torah, are a law to themselves.

In [chapter 13:9](#), he specifies this as follows:

The commandments, You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; you shall not covet; and any other commandment . . .”

These are some of the commandments of the second table of the Decalogue. But some of them are also central in the argumentation of Plato’s dialogue *Politeia*.³² Here Plato argues against the thesis that the person who does not recognize any law is most advantaged and subsequently has a good life. He proves that even a gang of robbers needs to abstain from murdering, stealing, and cheating among each other if they want to exist at all. Otherwise they would extinguish themselves and not be able to murder and to steal from others. So they use the law (among themselves) to do injustice to others.

This is the key problem with which Paul is struggling in his letter. How can we understand that the law, which is necessary for life, kills? The key is the Tenth Commandment, he says: “You shall not covet,” which relates to the desires. The Ancient Greeks also dealt with this problem. Plato in the *Politeia* makes the desires (*epithymiai*) responsible for the captivity of people, binding them to illusion and injustice (as in the cave parable). Particularly interesting for us is Aristotle who, in his book on politics, analyzes the illusion of people who misuse money for greedy and limitless accumulation.

He does not call this unjust, however, but unnatural. Paul, building on the Torah, radicalizes and generalizes the problem of coveting and greed.

This perspective is extremely important for the central issue of this book. We have shown in [chapter 1](#) and in the first part of this chapter that the introduction of private property and money, as well as the mechanisms and laws around this (contracts!), changes not only the structures of the economy but also people's thinking and behavior. They start to calculate everything in order to maximize wealth and pleasure for their ego regardless of the effects on their neighbors and the community. This is why the Torah not only prohibits murdering and stealing but also coveting. All law prohibits stealing and murdering. But while a contract for a loan can be completely legal, it can steal the land of indebted farmers and even drive them into hunger and death as it is fulfilled. This is why the fulfillment of the law can kill, when it is subordinate to the law of coveting. This is most obvious in capitalism, the climax of the money-interest-property economy. Whole countries have been manipulated into the debt crisis and the subsequent structural adjustment programs. The consequence was extreme impoverishment, and it entailed an increase of hunger and death, including environmental destruction. The end is not in sight. Back in Paul's context, that of the Hellenistic-Roman empires, there was first a swing toward globalizing the money-property economy, and whole countries were subjected to this system of legal exploitation, stealing, and killing. It is no accident that Roman law is the basis of all bourgeois civil codes, which are based on the sanctity of private property and the concluding of contracts. So Paul's argumentation is highly relevant for us today.

Let us go into the details of Paul's arguments. Of course, he is also speaking of tangible sins as acts of injustice. But his main point is sin as such—which may occur just by fulfilling the law. We find this already in Jesus's words and actions, for example, when he deals with the Sabbath. The Sabbath can be used against the life of people when they still their hunger on Sabbath. Against this, Jesus states in Mark 2:27:

The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath.
The human being is lord even of the Sabbath.

We find the same argument in the Lord's Prayer in relation to the debt mechanism. Here Jesus teaches us to pray:

And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors.

The debts beyond our means that we owe to God can only be forgiven when we have forgiven the debts beyond the means of our neighbors. Otherwise we would kill them in fulfilling the law of the debt contract. The "Christian"

West is doing just this with the “developing countries,” which have even been manipulated into this debt as a consequence of colonialism and all kinds of tricks.³³ This killing in the fulfillment of the absolute law was anticipated by post-Constantinian theology. In the eleventh century CE, Anselm of Canterbury argued that the repayment of debts is an absolute law that even God must fulfill. This is the reason why God had to kill God’s own son in order to repay debts beyond the means of human beings. This monstrous doctrine was accepted widely in subsequent theologies, and was even raised to become official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent. This is exactly the practice of capitalism. In contrast, Jesus annihilates the legal rights of creditors if they would ruin the debtor. He makes the law dependent on the acknowledgement of the other as a person with physical needs. This is the precondition of all legal justice. If legal justice is placed above the life of humans, it kills.

This is also the core of Paul’s argument. The experiential background in the case of Paul is his encounter with Jesus in Damascus (Acts 9). He had persecuted the followers of the Messiah Jesus in fiercely fulfilling the law. He heard Jesus asking him in a blaze of light: “Why are you persecuting me?” Paul fell off his horse and found out he was blind. Jesus advised him to contact the community of his followers in Damascus. In communicating with those he had persecuted, his eyes were opened, and his understanding and behavior profoundly changed (*metanoia*). What did he learn to see? That he had been killing to fulfill the law. This is sin in the singular.

He develops this insight in Romans 7–8. As already shown, Paul refers to the law in the double sense: for example, the law forbids murdering and stealing, and also forbids coveting, which is a law going beyond any justiciable crime. “The issue is how this coveting is dodging round the law thus transforming it into another law, without changing the literal content. This for Paul is the problem of liberation from the law.”³⁴ In Romans 7:6, Paul says:

While we were living according to human standards, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged of the law, dead to that which kept us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

This refers back to the statement in Romans 1:18 about “suppressing the truth by injustice.” Now it becomes clear that this does not refer to the lack of fulfillment of the law but rather to the fulfillment of the law (transformed by coveting). He continues (in 7:7–12):

What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what

it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

This is a crucial passage. It shows that sin is not natural desire. Paul clearly states that without the law there is no sin. Sin “lies dead.” Death-bringing sin is the one that uses the law. It transforms natural desire into an abstract, limitless greed, typical of one’s accumulating money beyond one’s need. The law, however, is not the cause of that killing. The Torah is particularly geared to preserving life (cf. Deuteronomy). Sin is using covetousness to transform the law. It produces the illusion that by fulfilling the law one produces justice. “The sting of death is sin, and the power of the sin is the law” (1 Cor 15:56). This is exactly what happens in asking for the fulfillment of a debt contract until the debtor dies. No law is violated, but rather, the law is fulfilled—to the bitter end.

But how can it be that the good and holy law kills? Paul writes (7:13):

Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. That the good, i.e. the commandment, becomes the cause of death, points to the problem of trying to act justly by fulfilling the law.³⁵

This can be shown by looking for the subject who is trying to act justly by fulfilling the law (7:15–17):

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So trying to act justly by fulfilling the law, sin transforms the good law into a law at the service of my covetousness.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (21–23)

So sin is not just some malicious act. Rather, through deception, sin acts as the subject in the human being, leading to injustice and death. This is similar to what Karl Marx analyzes as the fetishism of commodities, money, and capital. Within the given capitalist society, which has institutionalized

greed in all aspects of the economy and thus also governs people's thinking and actions, human beings are no longer free subjects but instead follow the governing laws of maximizing profits and utility for themselves. Since the rule of law protects this law of maximizing profit on the basis of property (by civil law), it is part of the law that kills. This is clear in terms of colonialism, neocolonialism, and present-day imperialism, which each year produce the death of 30 to 40 million people who die from hunger and its consequences. Just fulfilling the laws of an imperial state, which is connected with the laws of capital accumulation, kills. This is why Jean Ziegler keeps saying: "Every child who dies of hunger in today's world has been murdered" (in view of the fact that there is enough for everybody). Another example is the policy of the European Union (EU) or the United States against refugees. At least 1,000 people are drowned every year trying to cross the EU's maritime borders. There is no obligation on the part of the EU countries to assist them. This is law that murders. And we all are part of the laws of this world order. So Paul, under Roman conditions, cries:

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

His answer is (Romans 8:2):

The law of the Spirit of life in the Messiah Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

What is this law of the spirit of life? It is operative in the new community of God's elected people who, according to 1 Corinthians, are the plebeians and the despised. It is not the institutional belonging to any privileged group, not even the Jews (as a category of the "flesh"), as outlined in [chapters 9–11](#). Certainly, Israel was elected, but as "Hebrews," which means the the outcast and enslaved. This remains the root. It has received the Torah for life, which means to keep the freedom from slavery. But once the Torah is subverted by covetousness into the framework of Roman law, it cannot save. It must be liberated. Justice does not come through the fulfillment of the law in the sense of legality. It is the community of faith of all people and peoples who receive their justification as a gift and therefore acknowledge each other as subjects in the solidarity of love:

Owe no one anything except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment are summed up in this word. "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. (13:8–10)

“Love your neighbor as yourself” is taken from the Torah. But now this instruction is understood and practiced on the basis of faith in God’s choosing the plebeians and the despised, and thus, in the community of the least (Matthew 25:32ff.), it is liberated from covetousness. Paul, like Jesus, sees that we live only if the other, even the weakest, lives. This is love, as Bishop Desmond Tutu reminds us in the tradition of the African culture of Ubuntu, which is expressed as, “I live when you live, you live when I live.”³⁶ Or in the terms of Emmanuel Levinas: “Love your neighbor, he/she is yourself.” So Paul, in his critique of the law, builds on the Torah, but liberates the intention of the law: life in the community of subjects, who realize that their lives can only be saved in the mutuality of complete solidarity.

In his new book on the political history of Israel’s grand narrative, Ton Veerkamp illuminates these findings by relating Paul to the question of the implementation of the Torah in the Torah Republic.³⁷ Here it was possible to live the alternative desired by Yahweh by separating the community from the peoples following the normal order of exploitation. However, when this order totally took over in the Hellenistic and Roman Empires, Paul realized that this had become impossible. So implementing the Torah called for a world revolution. It could happen by building new communities all over the empire where Jews and Greeks (*gojim*), men and women, masters and slaves, whom the empire was dividing, lived together as the body of the Messiah in equality and solidarity.

In her book on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, Brigitte Kahl comes to similar conclusions. It is not the Torah and circumcision as such that Paul is arguing against. It is the Torah and circumcision as co-opted and perverted by Roman law. Here, too, the answer is “faith working through love (solidarity)” (Gal 5:6). All are God’s children, not those in the hierarchy by Roman grace (5:26–28):

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Again we see faith in the dismantling of all structures of domination and hierarchy through the Messiah—analogue to the faith in the election of the Plebeians and despised in 1 Corinthians—as well as the liberation of the Torah through faith in the tradition of Abraham. But this liberation

is hated by the rulers of this age. It is regarded as subversive, and therefore not only the Messiah must be persecuted but also his followers. This is why those opposing Paul's liberating message in Galatia try to convince the congregation to abide by Roman law.

Paul relates liberation not only to humans. The spirit inspires the whole cosmos with the longing, the sighing in the labor of bringing forth a new creation. All creatures wait and hope for liberation from the corruption that is coming into the world through the violence of inhumane humans, according to Gen 8. He writes in Romans 8:18–21:

I consider that the suffering of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God . . . the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

We are only just beginning to fully appreciate this perspective in the face of the dying of species and the climate catastrophe caused by the merciless law of limitless growth for the maximization of profit. This suggests that living and acting according to God's spirit by becoming God's children is not a matter of ethics but a crucial condition for liberating creation from devastation and decay. It means that churches lose their right to call themselves churches on biblical grounds when they are not publicly seen to be prophetically resisting the predominant capitalist and imperial destruction of nature.

The way in which Hinkelammert and Kahl have reinterpreted Paul's theology makes it highly relevant for our own global context.³⁸ Paul reveals that it is not some specific misdemeanor with negative social and ecological consequences but the fundamental law governing the civilization of covetousness/greed and imperial domination that systematically leads to death. It is the very fulfillment of this law that kills, as the consistent application of a calculating utilitarian rationalism leading to irrationality and madness.³⁹

Paul also reveals that Jewish communities of the Torah, originally given for life, as well as the messianic communities, originally liberated by the spirit, can be co-opted by the empire to become slaves of the imperial system—often by fear of being persecuted or at least of losing privileges. This we call the “Thermidor” of a revolutionary experience.⁴⁰ The final Thermidor of the Jesus revolution, starting in the congregations of Corinth and Galatia but opposed by Paul, happened in the imperialization of the Church by Constantine and his successors. As of then, the defenders of the Jesus revolution came to be regarded heretics and had to suffer a lot by the assimilated churches. In our time the most obvious example of this is the

persecution of liberation theologians by the US empire in cooperation with the Vatican.⁴¹

Let us summarize the short biblical recollection of the biblical witness of the spirit. We do not find any spirituality that is not in combat and struggle against life-endangering realities.⁴² A spirituality acquiescing in circumstances under the dominion of sin and just seeking individual spirituality is contrary to the biblical witness. It is by no means neutral, but rather supports injustice. On this basis a critical reassessment of the whole of modernity is needed. We not only have to deal with economic laws in the strict sense of the word, but also with the laws of philosophy, the sciences, technology, political and legal systems, and anthropology in terms of their life-killing logic in order to find ways toward a new, comprehensively life-enhancing culture. This will include the need to design new institutions. However, Paul warns us that every institution and law, though necessary for life in society, tends to turn into self-preserving law that kills. So the task is to anticipate the danger of a Thermidor. This can only be done through designing the necessary institutions in such a way that participatory structures allow the subject, “the other,” to rebel against any transformation of life-enhancing institutions into life-killing law.

How does all of this relate to other spiritualities in the Axial Age and their potential contribution to a new culture of life? They also arose in the presence of people suffering from injustice and violence, which was heightened by the new political economy. Within this common context, all Axial sages were looking for ways to enhance compassion, empathy, and solidarity. An outstanding example is Buddha. But these spiritualities also have to be protected against abuse.

CHAPTER 4

Buddhism in the Axial Age

1. The Context

In 1987, the historian Uma Chakravarti from New Delhi published a book on the social dimension of Buddhism.¹ She repeated her ideas in a seminar at the Center of Social Analysis in Madurai in July 2005 under the title “Can Dalit/Buddhist Culture Be an Anti-Capitalist Resource”?² In her view, Siddharta Gautama experienced his conversion and enlightenment to become the Buddha in the following context. Between the eighth and the sixth century BCE, a new economy penetrated North India, which built on private property and money and which was supported by the monarchic power. Consequently society split into impoverished people and those who enriched themselves on the basis of the new economic mechanisms. It was under the pressures of this context—together with his strong inspiration to liberate human beings from suffering—that Prince Siddharta was motivated to abandon his privileges in order to find a way to overcome such suffering in society. He came to understand that poverty and suffering were caused by greed grounded in the illusion that an ego could be protected by aggressiveness. His solution was to overcome greed through meditation on the interrelatedness of all beings and to let go all superfluous things.

The context could have been described in exactly the same way by somebody outlining the situation in Israel and Judah during the same period. Here the prophets and the peasant liberation movements reacted to the growing gap in society in their own way, that is, with criticism and legal reforms. This confirms the assumption that the Hebrew Bible and consequently Jesus and his movement were responding to a very similar context as that of the Buddha and early Buddhism. And this common context is characterized by the rise of the money-property economy, which prefigured later capitalism. That is why reinterpreting the Axial Age is so important for us today.

Starting from this observation, it is not surprising that—as in the Christian ecumenical movement—there is a growing interest in contemporary Buddhism to reread Buddhist tradition as an important source for coping with the present socioeconomic and ecological crises. As neoliberal capitalism has dramatically increased the destructive consequences of this model, more and more Buddhist movements and intellectuals have been dealing with these issues since the 1980s. Let us look at some of them.

2. Buddhist Economics

The first to rediscover and even coin the term “Buddhist economics” was E. F. Schumacher with his claim that “small is beautiful.” In a few pages,³ he sketches the irrational character of western “rationality” in comparison with Buddhist economics. It reads like the Pauline contrast between the wisdom of this world order as foolishness and madness, and the wisdom of God as the truly reasonable. In a second book he outlines the philosophical background of his arguments.⁴ While modern Buddhist economists in the age of financial capitalism concentrate on the foolishness of the money-oriented economy, Schumacher begins with the issue of work.⁵ He summarizes the Buddhist view in three purposes of human work:

First, to provide necessary and useful goods and services.

Second, to enable every one of us to use and thereby perfect our gifts like good stewards.

Third, to do so in service to, and in cooperation with others, so as to liberate ourselves from our inborn egocentricity. (3f.)

By contrast, in modern economics the first purpose is to increase the production of goods to a maximum with as little labor as possible, thus placing goods above people and the maximum consumption of some over the necessary, useful, sustainable, and pleasant consumption of all. Secondly, labor is split into stupid little pieces for the sake of cost efficiency so that the creativity and joy of human work is killed. Thirdly, people are driven into cutthroat competition against each other to boost their ego—making them desperate when they fail or are excluded (as we see today, with growing physical and psychological illnesses and depressions that lead to increasing rates of suicide). The more work is rationalized, the more irrationality appears. Of course, Schumacher sees the consequences for ecology. He illustrates this by showing how differently the Buddha perceives trees as compared with modern economics, which sees them as “resources.”

This does not mean that Schumacher rejected technology. On the contrary, he perceived the benefits of it for human beings. But it should be for the welfare of humankind, not for irrational “efficiency.” He was one

of the first to develop the concept and practice of “intermediate” technology, which was, later in the ecumenical movement and elsewhere, also called “appropriate” or “popular and participatory” technology.⁶ All of this is unfolded as the explanation of one of the requirements of the Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path: “right livelihood.”

After Schumacher, many Buddhist scholars and activists developed more research and concrete practice. One of them, the Thai author and activist Sulak Sivaraksa, founded the International Network of Engaged Buddhists.⁷ Utterly rejecting capitalism as the core of western civilization in his many publications, he especially stresses the interaction between socioeconomic and ecological justice and personal transformation: “Personal and social liberation are two sides of the same coin.”⁸

David R. Loy of Bunkyo University in Japan confronts Buddhism and the western capitalist civilization in two great books.⁹ The approach taken in the first book resembles that of Horst-Eberhard Richter on the “God complex” of modern scientific-technical and capitalist civilization.¹⁰ The Judeo-Christian and Greek Axial Ages produced countermovements against lack and suffering that were built on transcendence and ethics. When they broke down, western civilization concentrated on filling this void by itself. Human powers were regarded as godlike—with all the violent and destructive consequences we experience to this day. Loy advises the West to learn from Buddhism. The struggle of the ego to ground itself in the self—against others—can be overcome by a compassionate spirituality in which we experience ourselves as part of the whole, together with others. This spirituality awakens compassion within us, and life with others becomes a joy. This approach is developed in the second volume, which looks at personal and community practices. It can be compared with the *ora et labora*, pray and work, of the Benedictines, and the interconnectedness of “contemplation and struggle” of the brothers of Taizé and the sisters of Grandchamp.¹¹ The special importance of these books for our present considerations is the search for a clear alternative to global capitalism from an interreligious perspective.

A further facet of the increasing Christian-Buddhist encounter can be found in Paul S. Chung’s book on Martin Luther and Buddhism.¹² He takes the dialogue back to its biblical and reformation foundations. He analyzes Luther’s understanding of justification by faith as showing that we cannot, and need not, ground our existence in ourselves, because we are accepted by God. On this basis we are free to show compassionate co-suffering with others, just as Jesus in his commitment to others took upon himself the suffering of the cross—the punishment of the Roman Empire for rebels and fugitive slaves. This connects Luther’s teaching with the Buddha, whose central message was compassion aiming at the liberation of others from suffering.

Ernst Tugendhat takes a similar interreligious line.¹³ A Jew himself, he has developed an understanding of Buddhism that includes elements of Taoism. He sees the two traditions connecting mysticism and empathy most clearly incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth.

Let us now look in more detail into the implications of these Buddhist considerations for the economy and economics, these being a core aspect of western civilization. As mentioned in [chapter 1](#), Karl-Heinz Brodbeck did monumental work in tracing the roots of western modernity back to the origins of the money-property economy and its consequences for science, technology, and philosophy since antiquity. His main contention is that money has not only changed economic structures but also thought forms. Calculating has superimposed itself on speech as the main way of communicating in social processes. The foundational categories of this modern approach were formulated by René Descartes, who defined the human being as a (male) rational subject who is master and owner of nature as an object, thus legitimating the “neutral” observation, calculation, and conquest of western civilization. The result is precisely the destruction of society and nature we experience every day. As this approach is characterized by a systematic lack of compassion, the Buddhist ethics of compassion and mindfulness offer an answer and the basis for a paradigm shift in economics that will save humanity and the earth. He elaborates on this in his study of “Buddhist economic ethics.”¹⁴

This is by no means an isolated effort. The most elaborate Buddhist research on economics in the Asian context is that of Professor Apichai Puntasen, director of the Rural and Social Management Institute (RASMI) in Thailand. His main ideas are found in articles and his book *Buddhist Economics*.¹⁵ He starts from the “threats, leading to the extinction of the human species” and originating from human actions alone.¹⁶ The main threat is global warming. Puntasen identifies human greed as the root cause for both this disaster and the financial crisis. “The *problem* of everything starts from the *introduction of money as a medium of exchange*” (our emphasis). Like Brodbeck and the other authors mentioned above, he sees this development as intensifying in the eighth century BCE. He also realizes that—with the spread of money as a medium of exchange and a unit of account—accumulating money means accumulating wealth. This changes the human mind from sharing and caring to greed: “personal or a family’s security has a priority over the person’s love given to neighbors” (ibid. 2). Without referring to the concept of the Axial Age, he also sees the proximity to the Buddha’s and Aristotle’s teaching, in distinguishing “use value” from “exchange value” and need-related from greed-related (“chremastic”) economics.

As to modernity, he also sketches the historical phases up to the present stage of financial capitalism. The key innovation of modern capitalism is

making more money through “investment, ” that is, transforming money into capital. This can be done through trade or later through manufacturing and industry in the form of money-commodity-more money (M-C-M1) or through interest-bearing credits in the form of money-more money (M-M1). “[As] soon as money has become a capital, human greed has been stimulated even more” (ibid. 4). Here it is fully understood that we have to deal with the inseparable interaction between structural and personal greed. He also analyzes the complicity between kings (and later governments) and the money dealers, starting from the period of money as gold and silver, moving on to paper money guaranteed by central banks, to electronic money and derivatives that divorce the financial markets from the real economy. Speculation has led to a situation in which, according to estimates, “the value of the financial sector is more than 500 times that of the existing real products (excluding the existing assets).” “This is why it can be predicted with a high degree of accuracy—the future financial crisis will come at a much shorter time span each time as the result of the interaction of various natures of money that have evolved continuously to correspond with increasing human greed. . . . Human beings have become slaves of their own creation, known as: money—simply because money is the reflection of human inner greed and money has evolved to spur that greed further.” The phrase “slaves of their own creation,” which is idolatry, indicates the religious character of capitalism (ibid. 6f.).

However, greed in relation to money accumulation is only one side of the problem. Capitalism in its industrial form needs to stimulate buyers to consume the products produced in order to make more money. In other words, capitalist production needs to stimulate greed for more material goods. “Simply stated, the more you consume, the more you will enjoy even though your per-unit enjoyment will decrease with each unit of additional consumption; in other words: *more is better*. This theory is also supplemented by the belief that the act of following self-interest is ‘rational behavior’. The sum is that greed is acceptable or even good human behavior. In reality, while greed by an individual may not be very harmful for society, the aggregate greed or societal greed can be fatal for all. . . . The wasteful use of resources through consumption is the major cause responsible for leading human beings to near catastrophe in spite of loud warnings” (ibid. 8, emphasis in original).

Here we have, in the clearest form, an understanding of why and how capitalism *must* systematically produce financial and climate crises with all their devastating social and ecological consequences. In order to accumulate capital for capital owners, people must develop greed for more money and more consumption. The crises have their “root cause from the quartet known as *money-capitalism-industrialism-consumerism*” (our emphasis). In order to overcome this root cause of the life-crisis, Puntasen “reformulate[s]

the concept of consumption efficiency” from the perspective of Buddhist economics (ibid. 8).

Puntasen contrasts mainstream capitalist and Buddhist economics with the following definitions:

Mainstream economics can be defined as: *a subject related to economics activities with the goal of an individual achieving maximum utility under the condition of resource constraint and for the society to reach maximum welfare under the same condition.* Given the said definition of economics, Buddhist Economics can be defined as follows: *a subject related to economic activities with the goal of both individuals and society to achieve peace and tranquility in a material world under the condition of resource constraint.*¹⁷

The difference reflects “different paradigms of human nature. Under the scientific materialism paradigm, mainstream economics observes that each human being normally follows his/her self-interest. Therefore, an individual’s following self-interest is ‘rational’ behavior. Also, according to Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), the ultimate goal of human life is to avoid pain and to seek maximum ‘pleasure.’”¹⁸ Pleasure, in economic terms, means utility. The typical way to gain more “pleasure” is to “have” more material possessions. In [chapter 1](#), we saw that money and private property spread intensively at the same time in history and are intimately interlinked. Money structurally defines property rights and psychologically impels the calculating individual to say “I” and “mine.” Here we see that having possessions at the same time defines happiness, as understood in this paradigm. Moreover, mainstream capitalist economics also adopts the Darwinian theory of “the survival of the fittest”—another element of the western paradigm. “Hence, the core values of mainstream economics (more popularly known as ‘capitalism’) are ‘self-interest’ and ‘competition.’”

As a result, “*capitalism, industrialism, and consumerism* come in one package (our emphasis). The main purpose is for more capital to be generated through increased production and consumption.”¹⁹ The consequence is “infinite growth”—with the well-known catastrophic ecological consequences. “In reality pushing for more production all the time will turn out to be an unsustainable downward-spiral resulting in more waste generation and resource depletion causing environmental degradation and eventually: human self-destruction.” It should be noted at this point that the latest self-deception in the West is the concept of “sustainable growth” or the “Green New Deal.”²⁰ This presupposes that under the paradigm of money-capitalism-industrialism-consumerism, the ecological problem can be solved by applying green technology. Certainly, impoverished countries under the auspices of colonialism and neocolonialism still need some “growth” of the economy in sustainable ways up to a certain level of sufficiency. But the

capitalist paradigm excludes a sustainable economy because it must grow for its main purpose: capital accumulation. So there can be no systemic solution to the growth question and consequently the ecological problem as long as the capitalist model prevails. This conclusion is the most feared and hated insight in the West.

Puntasen, therefore, concludes that “*consumption-efficiency* becomes the key for the survival of humanity in a foreseeable future . . . Only Buddhist Economics can deal with this key concept in a meaningful way; it can actually save this world from the end of humanity and solve the immediate problems of the world financial crisis in much more meaningful ways” (our emphasis).²¹ We would add: We need a concerted effort of all the religions of the Axial Age. All of them have the potential to overcome the dominating system of money-capitalism-industrialism-consumerism. But let us look now at some more details of the Buddhist approach.

While mainstream economics, interpreted with Buddhist eyes, sees the sequence from production to consumption as “goods and services as inputs produce pleasure and waste”²² Buddhist economics would replace “pleasure”/“utility” with “healthy body and healthy mind.” This goal is called *sukha* (the quality of mind that is the opposite of *dukha*, which means uneasiness, conflict, contradiction, alienation, or suffering). Mainstream economics confuses this goal of the economic activities with “pleasure from acquisition,” which in Buddhist terms would be *kamasukha*. “Pleasure from acquisition cannot be considered as *sukha* as it leads to further *dukha* in the next round.” This should be clear from reality because wealth creation under the present paradigm leads to the impoverishment and suffering of people and destruction of the environment.²³

True *sukha* exists at various levels.²⁴ Basically it is pleasure from non-acquisition in two forms: pleasure from meditation and pleasure from emancipation (*nibbanasukha*). The latter is the highest form. It must not be misunderstood, as it usually is in the West. Here the normal understanding of *nibbana* (Pali)/*nirvana* (Sanskrit) is interpreted as the departure from the world into some void. However, *nibbana/nirvana* is a perfect state of mind capable of being free from all defilements. It is the state of a purified mind resulting from the practice of *sila* (morality) and a calm mind from the practices of *samādhi*, or concentration (including right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration), and—under these two conditions—the clear mind from the emergence of *pañña* (Pali)/*prajna* (Sanskrit) (unity of wisdom, morality, and meditation). At this state, the mind will be completely free from *dukha*, that is, be fully liberated. Consequently *nibbāna/nirvana* leads to loving-kindness, compassion for others, relieving others of *dukha*, sympathetic joy in seeing others happy—on the basis of overcoming self-centeredness through understanding things in their very nature, that is, interconnectedness.

In his book,²⁵ Puntasen describes this process of reaching *nibbāna* in more detail:

Pañña emerges as a part of the process of *sikkhattaya* or the threefold training. The threefold training can be combined into only one and be translated as the *maggā* or the Noble Eightfold Path. The eightfold path can be subdivided into three groups. They are *sīla* or morality (including right speech, right action and right livelihood), *samādhi* or concentration (including right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration) and *pañña* (including right view and right intention). It is a process of study through actual practices which is central to *Buddha Dhamma*. The threefold training must be carried out altogether without missing any one. The process may begin from *pañña* in its most basic form of faith, or belief. That is the belief that there is value in living a moral life by only thinking and doing good. This faith or belief will induce the practice of *sīla* by doing only good things and refraining from doing bad things to oneself as well as all other living things. *Sīla* will then contribute to purify the mind. With a purified mind, concentration can be achieved more easily. In this way the volitional activities incline not to make any desires that do not conform to reality. In other words, the volitional activities will mostly take the position of neutrality. This will give rise to a situation where feelings and perceptions play unbiased roles. The mind cannot be controlled by defilements such as anger, hatred or delusion. Under this condition *pañña* will develop further.

At the new level of development, *pañña* will understand more of the nature of life. This time, it will not require belief or faith, but will have come to a deeper understanding of the real benefits from practicing *sīla*. There will be further improvement of moral thoughts and actions resulting in a better level of concentration. At this point a person will have clearer understanding of life. Finally the conditions of a clean mind, from *sīla*, a calm mind from *samādhi*, and a clear mind from *pañña* will result in a unified state of mind called *nibbāna*. This is the state of mind that is completely free from *dukkha*. The goal of each human life on earth is to try to reach and maintain *nibbāna*. If a person is able to maintain such condition of mind all the time, that person will attain the status of *arahanta*, the worthy or deserving one or the one who attains *nibbāna* all the time. An *arahanta* is considered to be a holy one. This state of mind does not imply that the person must be disassociated from worldly activities. The fact that such a person is contented and without any defilements does not mean that they will not be involved in any activities. In fact, it is just the opposite and such a person will be able to help more of the suffering ones by giving them *pañña*. The closer a person is to the state of *arahanta*, the more that person will be able to contribute to the pained or suffering ones. A person can in fact perform the roles of a human being most efficiently in this state. It is

because the ability to be without all defilements will increase the person's ability to help others more."

What then is "efficiency of consumption"²⁶? This can only be understood by differentiating between "needs" and "wants." In Buddhist teaching (Buddha *Dhamma*), there is only one level of needs, that is, physiological needs. Other levels are included in *pañña*. "According to *Buddha Dhamma* [transl. as teaching], consumption is needed to relieve the pain from physiological needs and is to be distinguished from the consumption for desires and wants." This is the key: Consumption for desires and wants is not needed if one has enough *pañña*. "Consumption, informed by needs, can be considered the most efficient as it is the only consumption *needed* and minimizes resource consumption" (emphasis in original). For such need-related consumption, production would also be limited to products really needed—so it could be sustainable.

The core mistake of capitalist mainstream economics is mixing up self-interest with desire and greed.²⁷ Self-interest has to be distinguished from desire and greed because these, in the last analysis and in reality, are against the self-interest of human beings—they cause *dukkha*, suffering. Therefore, "Buddhist Economics proposes an additional condition based on being free from suffering (*dukkha*): any action of self-interest must not cause any burden on oneself or anyone else." Capitalist economics must ignore this insight. As its very goal is capital accumulation, it must declare greed natural and rational. "The inability to recognize and acknowledge such different concepts as need, wants/desires, and greed and then lumping all of them into the concept of self-interest and describing the motivations of this 'self-interest' as rational is, in fact, an irrational practice. If everyone were greedy, the world would not be a happy place for human beings to live in. Greed should rather be considered an irrational behavior and should not be explained as rational undertaking." With Brodbeck, we come to exactly the same conclusion: the irrationality of western rationality, the unscientific character of economics as a discipline—as we shall elaborate in more detail in part 2.²⁸

In conclusion, Puntasen presents a diagram.²⁹ It shows that Buddhist consumption efficiency in real self-interest leads to survival, providing the conditions for sustainable development and promotion of a peaceful life, while the devastating consumption, following desire and greed, endangers survival and peace. "When net goods and services produced are more than enough to maintain the existing system of production, sustainable development and the reduction of conflict of contradiction yielding a more peaceful body and mind, is the result. Excess production can be used to reduce the pain and suffering of those who need it. With the help of technology, production efficiency can be improved." This kind of economics, called *pañña-ism*, leads to peace and tranquility, to real wellness (*sukha*),

the opposite of *dukkha*, suffering. “*Sukha* does not derive from consumption, after consumption has already reached or passed the point of sufficiency. With such understanding consumption can be kept at the level of necessary minimum. . . . The role of money will be left to its own natural roles without much interaction of human greed. Caring and sharing or compassion, the good nature of human mind will be restored. . . . However, in order to avoid the end of humanity before its own natural course, global effort in changing from the triad of capitalism-industrialism and consumerism is necessary.”³⁰

It should be noted that, within this approach, money is not abolished but reduced to its “natural roles.” This is Aristotelian language meaning that in a “natural” economy, that is, an economy that provides the means of life for the household (*oikos*), in contrast to a chremastic, money-generating economy, money is used exclusively as a means of exchange and unit of account. The same is true for technology being geared to improving the usefulness, not the utility, that is, capital accumulation, of the goods and services.

That the global effort to break the domination of money-capitalism-industrialism-consumerism is not impossible is grounded in the insight that any domination system can only survive as long as the subjects go along with it. When in the French Revolution the people decided to oust the king, his power was gone. The same is true today. Brodbeck concludes from a Buddhist perspective that “the many must wake up, at least most of them.”³¹ They can do this once they compassionately understand that we human beings are completely dependent on each other and therefore must and can overcome illusion, greed, and aggression. “Nobody will doubt seriously that the available technical and logistical knowledge completely suffices to implement the really existing possibility to at least feed all people. More precisely: doubting this real possibility is only possible for someone who claims those monetary property rights and false thinking, hindering exactly this praxis beyond the greed for money”.

The Buddhist basic theoretical considerations as well as the practical examples (to be looked at in more detail in part 3) are in complete harmony with the biblical approach of an “economy of enough for all,” or in short, an economy in the service of life. Certainly, there is prophetic critique, even on a very deep level of critical thinking that implies the perspective of a completely different paradigm for economics on the basis of a culture of life in relationships. There is also resistance in terms of non-cooperation with the dominating model. The Jesus approach of empowering alternative communities is also forcefully visible. The only dimension more strongly emphasized in Judeo-Christian tradition is the effort to regulate institutions by public law. The fact that this aspect seems to be missing in Buddhist economics may be due to the insight that predominant

totalitarian capitalism cannot be legally reformed. It must be replaced. But the question remains: by what new institutions? This includes the level of labor. Besides the need to replace the present money system, there is an urgent need to reorganize labor. The workers cannot just be regarded as a production factor. Reproduction is at stake. The money-property economy has, since its beginnings, endangered the lives of the workers and their families. Therefore, there are two key prohibitions in the biblical texts: no exploitation of human labor (at that time: antislavery) and no hoarding of wealth.

How does Islam deal with these issues?

CHAPTER 5

Islam, a Renewal of Axial Age Spirituality

1. The Context

Like Christianity, Islam does not belong directly to the Axial Age but can be regarded as an offshoot or another stage of it. As far as money and property is concerned, Islam has basically taken over the approach of the biblical traditions. The special context in which Muhammad (ca. 560–632 CE) received his first revelations is characterized by conflicts with the rich class of traders in his hometown of Mecca.¹ Most inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula were nomadic Bedouins. Some tribes settled in small towns, which were normally meeting points between the sedentary and the nomadic people on the occasion of trade, markets, and pilgrimages. Mecca was situated at the trading route between the Yemen in the South and Great Syria in the North. In this situation, people had begun striving for individual wealth, and the traditional forms of behavior and tribal virtues (loyalty, hospitality) had started to erode. People were starting to expect immortality from hoarding money, as Aristotle had put it in his analysis of the money economy. Muhammad began to oppose these economic and social developments—with the consequence that he and his disciples were oppressed, boycotted, and persecuted by the ruling elites.

After he fled to Yathrip, then renamed al-Madinah (Medina, “the city”—of the prophet Muhammad), in 622, the context of the revelations changed. Now the word of God addressed the building-up of the community of the faithful, their personal and socioeconomic lives, and their relation to the former inhabitants of the city, including the Jews and some Christians, as well as to other Arabic tribes including the Quraysh in Mecca.² Muhammad twinned the believers from Mecca with the faithful in Medina to make them friends:

And the believers, men and women are friends one of another. They enjoy good and forbid evil and keep up prayer and pay the tax for the poor, and

obey God and His messenger. As for these, God will have mercy on them.
Surely God is Mighty, Wise. (Sura 9.71)

Of course, there were also those Muslims who formally obeyed the leadership of the Prophet, but did not participate honestly and identified with the enemies, because they had lost their privileged status from before. They were called “hypocrites.” The same problem arose with the majority of the Jewish community and some Christians who also had played a significant role. Muhammad criticized them because they did not live up to their own Scriptures, covering up exploitation and injustices with Bible verses. So it was social, not religious, misbehavior that created the controversy. As for the other Arab tribes, Muhammad tried to covenant with them and convince them to become believers. Eventually even Mecca surrendered.

2. Wealth or Eternal Life?

According to tradition, Muhammad received the first revelations of the Qur’an in the year 610 CE, when he was 40 years old. Revelations continued until his death in 632. Especially the revelations during the first time in Mecca (until the exodus to Medina in 622) deal intensively with the issues of money, interest, and wealth. The key question concerns the accumulation of riches beyond what is necessary for life—exactly like what we saw in the biblical and Buddhist traditions.³ This wealth produces the illusion of eternal life without God.

Acquisitiveness turns you away
Until you reach the graves
Oh then you will know
Surely you will know with a knowledge certain
You will see a blazing fire
Then you will see it with an eye certain
At that time then
You will be asked about true well-being. (Sura 102.1–5)⁴
Woe to every backbiting slanderer
Who gathers his wealth and counts it
Thinking with his wealth he will never die. (104.1ff.)⁵

Positively speaking, the issue is to be involved in economic activities for providing what is necessary for life, not wasting anything and sharing generously:

And give thou to the kinsman his due, and to the poor and the wayfarer, and squander not thy wealth extravagantly. (17.27)

Interest (*riba*) is denounced as the main instrument for the hoarding of superfluous wealth:

O ye who believe! Devour not interest involving diverse additions; and fear Allah that you may prosper. (3.131)

Those who devour interest do not rise except as rises one whom Satan has smitten with insanity. That is because they say: "Trade also is like interest"; Whereas Allah has made trade lawful and made interest unlawful. If he to whom an admonition comes from his Lord and he desists, then will that which he received in the past be his; and his affair is with Allah. And those who revert to it, they are the inmates of the Fire; therein shall they abide. Allah will abolish interest and will cause charity to increase. (2.275–276)

In this passage, several aspects deserve our attention. Trade is clearly permitted, while making money from money through charging interest is condemned. This mirrors Aristotle's distinction between a "natural" barter economy (also with the medium of money) and a money-accumulation economy via exchange and interest (*chremastiké*). The former is allowed, while the later has to be prohibited (by and within the polis). Secondly, the sure refers to the meaning of wealth according to God's purpose. It is to serve a social balancing in order to provide the poor with what is necessary for life. Theologically the argument is the same as in Lev. 25: "To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth" (2.284).

The sharing of wealth beyond what is needed happens through almsgiving, which is the divine purpose of wealth. The Qur'an itself does not yet distinguish between a legally defined social tax, that is, a tax for the needy (*zakat*), on the one hand, and voluntary gifts (*sadaqua*), on the other hand, but uses both concepts synonymously.⁶

"But they who believe and do good works—those are the dwellers of Heaven; therein shall they abide. And remember the time when We took a covenant from the children of Israel: 'You shall worship nothing but Allah and show kindness to parents and to kindred and orphans and the poor, and speak to men kindly and observe Prayer, and pay the Zakat'" (2.82f.).

To give beyond what is legally prescribed is the real piety. "Never shall you attain to righteousness unless you spend out of that which you love" (3.92). The contrary is greed, which is institutionalized in the form of interest. Those who hoard the riches given by God instead of using them according to their divine purpose will be judged.

And those who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah—give to them the tidings of a painful punishment. On the day when it shall be made hot in the fire of Hell, and their foreheads and their sides and their backs shall be branded therewith and it shall be said to them: "this is

what you treasured up for yourselves; so now taste what you used to treasure up” (9.35). “And how much shall we give to the poor according to God’s will? All what is beyond enough. And they ask thee what they should spend. Say: “What you can spare.”” (2.219)

These prescriptions of the Qur’an are the basis of Islamic banking.⁷ Besides charging interest, speculation (*gharar*) and gambling (*maysir, quimar*) are prohibited. In return, several financial instruments are allowed: profit sharing (*mudaraba*), meaning that a bank or a capital owner shares the profit with the entrepreneur or somebody who works with the loan; financing trade with subsequent sharing of the profit (*murabaha*); cooperative financing by temporary participation (*musharaka*); and cooperative insurance (*takaful*). The key principle is avoiding an additional payment by the debtor ahead of the economic result, which would be interest. Both creditor and debtor wait for the result of the economic activity and then share.

3. Basis for a Critique of Capitalism

In principle this approach stands in clear opposition to capitalism. In reality, however, many tricks have been invented to circumvent the clear prescriptions of the Qur’an.⁸ This has happened throughout history, and still occurs today. On the other hand there are creative and positive examples of alternatives in Islam. It is no accident that, after the recent financial crisis broke out, many capital owners hastened to invest in Islamic banks. So there is a clear potential in Islam to contribute to the necessary transcending of capitalism.

It is interesting to see that the main starting point for today’s critical Muslims to criticize and overcome capitalism is the distinction between wants and needs—just as we have seen in Buddhism. In his presentation to Colloquium 2000, an international gathering of theologians and economists, Mohammad Abdus Sabur stated:

Economists, by and large, believe wants are unlimited, and therefore that consuming more goods will bring pleasure. . . . Islam, on the other hand, distinguishes between wants and needs. Real needs are not unlimited. Rather, they are determined by the physical, social and moral nature of a community.⁹

On this basis he presented five principles for an Islamic framework for economic development (24f):

1. All wealth in heaven and on earth belongs to God. Islam favors the use of these resources for the collective welfare. The worldly owners of resources are merely trustees.

2. The eradication of poverty is the primary objective. “Poverty in the midst of plenty is a negation of the very principle of brother and sisterhood by which Islam stands and falls.” “He who eats his fill while his neighbor remains hungry by his side is not faithful.” The Islamic strategy enables the poor to be involved in the production, distribution and financing of economic activities through *ushr* and *zakat*. Both have a formidable impact on the reduction of income inequalities. The prophet disapproved of share-cropping systems (*mukhabira*, *muhaqila*) which are exploitative.
3. The Qur’an lays great stress on distributive justice. It opposes the accumulation and hoarding of wealth. It discourages the circulation of wealth among the rich. Islam intends to root out the last vestige of *Zulum*, meaning all forms of inequality and exploitation. The Qur’an permits the oppressed to fight against exploitation and oppression. The highest kind of *Jihad* is to speak up for the truth when governments (*sultan*) deviate from the right path.
4. Islam emphasizes the comprehensive improvement of human qualities, that is to say, to make them *insan-e-kamil*.
5. Islam encourages solidarity and cooperation. The prophet said: “The faithful are to one another like (parts of) a building—each part is strengthening others.” Thus, mutual cooperation in all phases of life is a fundamental requirement of Islam.

In this text we find various elements showing a common thrust with the biblical and Buddhist tradition: The gifts of creation are for the life of all; priority is placed on the poor; the hoarding of wealth is rejected; the human is understood holistically, in contrast to materialistic reduction, as in the West; solidarity and cooperation are emphasized rather than competition as the true human nature.

4. Muslim Liberation Theology

This approach has also been summarized as Muslim liberation theology.¹⁰ Here the key is justice as grounded in the Scriptures of the Qur’an and the normative traditions. Irfan A. Omar quotes Sura 5:8:

You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to god and bear witness impartially: do not let hatred of others lead you away from justice, but adhere to justice, for that is closer awareness of God.

So justice and God are inseparably linked together. This also shapes the understanding of *jihad*, normally misunderstood in the West as holy war.

In its original meaning it means the spiritual and social struggle for justice, as can be perceived in Sura 4.75:

Why should you not fight in God's cause and for those oppressed men, women, and children who cry out.

The first leader after Muhammad, Abu Bakr, building on the scriptural base, even resonates with the Apostle Paul's contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world in 1 Cor 1:

No doubt I have been made your ruler (wall) and though I am not better (than) you. If I render good (to you) help me, if I indulge in (something) bad, correct me . . . those of you who are weak are powerful unto me until I restore their right unto them with ease and those of you who are powerful are weak unto me until I snatch from them what (they unjustly claim) to be their right.¹¹

It is interesting to note that Irfan A. Omar refers to Emmanuel Levinas as the teacher of both Ali Shari'ati, one of the first Muslim liberation theologians, and Enrique Dussel, one of the key figures in Latin American Christian liberation theology, when the two of them studied at the Sorbonne. Levinas is *the* philosopher of "the other" in the tradition of Martin Buber, having proposed that "Love your neighbor as yourself" should read "Love your neighbor—it is yourself."

However, Islam as all other religions, faces a fundamental problem. Who defines what true Islam is? This, of course, is a crucial question for all religions. In the context of Islam, a Muslim liberation theology group called the Progressive Muslim Network has raised it with great clarity.¹² They say that true Islam cannot be approached in a neutral way but only in solidarity with those people who suffer from injustice and struggle for just relationships—because all of humankind is in a state of returning to God in the context of all creation. We shall come back to this in part 3.

CHAPTER 6

Classical Greek Philosophy

The first thinker to present a developed theory on money was Aristotle (following Plato).¹ As previously mentioned, he distinguished between two types of economy. One supplies households and the broader community (*polis*) with the goods needed to satisfy basic needs (*oikonomiké*). The other is used to increase monetary property for its own sake (*kapiliké*, buying and selling as part of the artificial form of acquisition, *chremastiké*). This chremastic economic form, according to Aristotle, arose from the former, natural form of economy, since it, too, used money as a means of exchange for vital goods, first in the form of precious metals like silver and gold, and later in the form of coins.

As a motive for the origin of the second, “unnatural” form of chremastic economy, Aristotle—here, too, linking up with Plato—identified human desire (*epithymía*). The boundless accumulation of money creates the illusion in the individual person of accumulating infinite “means of sustenance” and means of pleasure, and thereby living forever.² Accordingly, the striving for more property provided by monetary mechanisms is based on the desire for eternal life, transcending the individually desired object. Chasing after this illusion, the individual destroys community (and eventually him-/herself, as human life depends on community). As an antidote to this community-destructive way of acting, Aristotle suggests, first, ethical education and, second, political prohibitions (i.e., protecting the good of the polis).

This ingenious analysis of money and its effects is of the same spirit as that of Ancient Israel and Buddha. However, in relation to the question of labor, Aristotle is far behind the spirit of the Axial Age. Typically for the Greek and Roman civilizations and economies, he defended slavery with the argument that slaves are slaves by nature. Sociologically, Greek society was a class society. The basic economic unit was the household, the *oikos*, the private economic and living space for meeting needs. Here the farmer ruled as the absolute head of the household (*despótes*) over slaves, women,

and children. On this basis the farmer gained the freedom and leisure to meet as *polites*, citizen, at the *agora*, the center of the city, and to discuss and discharge the common affairs of the community. Trading took place here, but the main thing was politics, including religious, judicial, and sporting activities. The people's assembly met here. In view of the time required for this, it is clear why the full citizen needed leisure. Smallholders without slaves, or farmers losing their land retained the heritable status of citizen, but they could in fact only participate in political life to a limited degree. They were dependent on public money to be able to attend political events and the theater.

The noncitizens: slaves, freedmen, and metics (*métōikos*) were distinct from the citizens, and they could not participate in political life. The last-mentioned were Greek citizens who had come to the city from other *poleis*. They were mostly merchants and craftsmen (*bánausos*), who, unlike the land-owning citizens, had to pay a poll tax. In terms of property law the picture was as follows:

1. "Citizens can own everything;
2. Slaves, although legally not even able to decide for themselves as an "ensouled instrument" can possess movable goods to which their master has no automatic access;
3. Metics as non-citizens cannot possess land and generally not buy houses in the city. A metic can therefore not grant a loan to a citizen if offered land as security—what could he do if it fell to him? Metic property is mobile (money and valuables, clothes, tools, animals and slaves), but it is still unrestrictedly their own;
4. What slaves earn belongs to them only with the consent of their masters;
5. It is similar with women, who can enjoy the status of a free person and owner, but can neither enjoy legal capacity nor be entitled to inherit or possess wealth without the consent of their husband or male guardian;
6. The same applies to children and minors."³

It would be anachronistic to envisage the polis as an integrated market with modern economic laws. The actual economic activities in the modern sense, like agricultural production, urban crafts, trade, and monetary transactions were carried out by noncitizens. But money gradually began to play a role in the contractual organization of urban work, sharing outside credit arrangements.⁴ The full citizen had to do with economic matters only as a landowner, mine lessor, and loan giver for risky maritime trade.⁵

Accordingly, Aristotle's ideal was not the accumulation of wealth as such. Freedom for political matters was to be acquired through having

slaves work on the landed property, enabling a cofinancing of community service (*leiturgia*), that is, that which was necessary in emergencies and to organize religious and cultural events. Therein lay the glory and honor of citizens. Noncitizens' interest in wealth was despised. This was Aristotle's concern in his critical argument against limitless money accumulation at the expense of what he called the "common good."

In the ancient polis there were already indications that property did not just provide the basis of freedom of farmer-citizens toward the aristocracy, but also generated divisions in society. That was shown by Solon's reforms of 594 BCE. At the time, a good hundred years after the emergence of the polis, many farmers apparently had not only lost their land because they were not able to repay their loans, but had also become debt slaves. By contrast, others had risen to the position of large land owners. The losers called for a redistribution of land, which proves the historical possibility of egalitarian approaches in ancient Greece, and for the abolition of debt bondage. The power base of this demand lay less in revolutionary phenomena, however, than in the newly introduced (in 700 BCE) war technology of the Hoplite phalanx, for which trusty freemen were required.⁶ Solon abolished the subjection of farmers and debt bondage, but expressly rejected land reform.

In this way there were many classes among those enjoying the political rights of citizens of the polis: the full citizens who, through the work of slaves on their properties, had the freedom and leisure to fully participate in the agora; the middling farmers, who while owning land were forced to work themselves; and the landless who had to hire themselves out as day laborers but retained their civil rights. "That is a political solution for a political problem: how can citizens remain citizens?"⁷ This political constitution that is related to property classes was called timocracy. Around the year 400 BCE, about a quarter of the citizens of Athens owned no land.⁸ It is therefore noteworthy that this first form of democracy was expressly linked to (unequally distributed) property and slavery.

It should be noted that Socrates and Plato had prepared the ground for Aristotle's elaborate theory. German philosopher Georg Picht interpreted Socrates's philosophy through the interconnectedness of three sentences:⁹ The sentence "the *areté* is a knowledge" is the highest principle of the Socratic thinking; the sentence "the *areté* is the congruence of knowledge and life" is the highest principle of the method to practice the testing of the first sentence; the sentence "I know that I do not know" is the result of this testing (92). In the Socratic testing, the *elengxis*, a trial is launched, in which a legal claim is being debated. Most people claim to have knowledge... In the process of the trial the validity of this claim is to be tested (93). The human being can only "reach his or her real being when liberated from the captivity in the illusionary knowledge. By knowing one's ignorance

one reaches the congruence of thinking and life, in which the true *areté* is grounded. The congruence of knowledge and life has become the congruence of life with the insight that one does not know (93f.).

This reflection is very near to the thinking of the Buddha: the cause of suffering is the illusion (produced by the greedy and aggressive ego). And key to Aristotle's later argument is that the greedy accumulation of money is built on an illusion. That the illusion also for Socrates is directly related to money comes out in Plato's "Apology of Socrates."¹⁰ Here we read how Socrates collected enemies by testing the "knowledge" of politicians, poets, and craftsmen. Summarizing, Plato puts the following words into Socrates' mouth (ch. 17): "O Athenians, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you; and as long as I breathe and am able, I shall not cease studying philosophy, and exhorting you and warning any one of you as I may happen to meet, saying as I have been accustomed to do: 'O best of men, seeing you are an Athenian . . . are you not ashamed of being careful for riches, how you may acquire them in great abundance, and for glory and honour, but care not to take any thought for wisdom and truth, and for your soul, how it may be made perfect?' . . . For I go about doing nothing else than persuading you, both young and old, to take no care either for the body, or for riches, prior to or so much as for the soul, how it may be made most perfect, telling you that *areté* (virtue) does not spring from riches. . . ."

Socrates himself—in contrast to the Sophistic philosophers—does not take money for his examining (*elenctic*) praxis and states: "I am in the greatest poverty through my devotion to the service of the god" (ch. 9).

Evidently Socrates sees the greedy, limitless striving for wealth—comparable to Aristotle's later analysis—as a widely spread illusion that he unmasks as ignorance, which is very dangerous for people and society. Thus Socrates too turns out to be one of the thinkers in the Axial Age who was trying to overcome the destructive effects of the new money-interest-property economy that had been in place since the eighth century BCE.

Plato follows up the insights of Socrates, as is well known, in his parable of the cave.¹¹ The context of the parable is the key issue of this dialogue, that is, whether doing injustice in a hidden way, so that nobody realizes it, can lead to happiness, as the Sophistic philosophers teach. He argues that the violence hits back on the inner life of a person and on the polis, creating conflict and unhappiness. The parable itself shows people sitting at a seat (the body), fettered to it by desires (*epithymiai*). In front of them they see people acting on a wall, and think they see reality. But in reality these actors are acting behind the sitting people, while the actors' shadows are projected onto the wall by a light. As the sitting people do not realize that their neck is turned around by desires, they cannot see reality in the light of truth, which for Plato is identical with goodness and beauty. This they

could only realize if they would turn their heads, precisely what they cannot do because they are fettered by desires.

This parable reflects Plato's anthropology and ontology. Within the visible human being he perceives a threefold soul: a multiple animal-like part with many heads of wild and tame animals (*epithymetikon*, the desires); something courageous, ready to wage war (*thymoeidés*, later called will); and the reasoning power (*logistikón*), the really human, even divine. When desires rule, there is unrest, competition, striving, and violence. When the "inner human being" or the reasoning power rules, it reconciles the other parts of the soul, makes them friends so that justice and peace unfold. The same is true in a polis: If the philosopher kings rule according to the law (*nomos*), there is justice and reconciliation; if the business people rule or if the warriors rule by imperial war, like Pericles, there is strife and violence and injustice. What Plato does not see is the insight of the Apostle Paul that reason and law can also be perverted by personal and structural greed—which makes it worse, because then there is killing in the name of calculating reason and law.

There is another problem with Plato and the Greeks. The parable of the cave has a continuation. There is the possibility for people to liberate themselves from desires, turn their heads around, and look into the light (truth, goodness, and beauty) by leaving the cave and going out into the open. Here they start knowing the truth, which, in the deepest depth, is the ineffable "one." However, the "one" can be grasped by understanding the mathematical structures (*idéa*) within all appearances. This is the task of the philosopher (*theoría*). Yet he must not stay outside, but return to the cave, trying to painfully turn around the necks of the ordinary people in order to lead them toward knowing the truth and acting accordingly. Only in this way can there be justice and peace in individual persons and the community. This sounds convincing, but has very ambivalent consequences. Firstly, it is the foundation of modern science and technology, reducing the phenomena to what fits mathematical models, oppressing elements of the whole of reality. As we see today, it leads to the irrationality of the rationalized in science, technology, and economy (according to mathematical models). Secondly, it represents an authoritarian model of top-down politics.

In Aristotle's work, the first aspect is mitigated by his more empirical approach, while the second is even reinforced. It is no accident that his disciple Alexander the Great became the first Hellenistic emperor. Aristotle closes book 12 of his *Metaphysics* by stating that only one individual should rule: "The rule of many is not good; one ruler let there be."¹² However, in the field of economics he presented an analysis of the money economy that has remained true to this day.¹³ Money does not exist by nature, but has been thought up by humans as something basically new. It is a unit of

measuring something, a yardstick, and cannot be measured by anything else. It mediates between the different needs of people. This is why, in principle, people have the power of defining what money is.

But this power of definition also entails the possibility of abuse. This consists in the perversion of means and end. If money in a given community has to mediate the exchange of goods necessary for satisfying basic needs, then money accumulation as an end in itself is not a moral problem—it destroys life. People who do not recognize their limits, and so fall prey to the illusion of being able to buy endless means of life by endless accumulation of money, destroy the community and so finally themselves, because human beings can only survive as social beings. This is why Aristotle demands a political prohibition of charging interest and of monopolies, as well as the ethical education of the citizens concerning these matters.

So classical Greek philosophy has ambivalent consequences. While it keeps up resistance against the domination of money, it has, in its Platonic form, a tendency to overpower reality with mathematic models, and it has, in its Aristotelian form, a tendency toward male, imperial supremacy. Both tendencies become even stronger in modernity to which we turn now.

PART II

Critique of Modernity and a New Critical Thinking¹

Introduction

As shown in [chapter 1](#), modernity since the late Middle Ages has built on the foundations of antiquity, particularly those developed beginning in the eighth century BCE. Modernity has brought enormous new scientific-technological knowledge, coupled with an increase in living standards for part of the world's population. At the same time it has developed destructive powers and behaviors, and it is able to make human life on earth impossible. Against this destructive potential, emancipatory countervailing movements have emerged over the last five centuries up to this day, including sectors from within the faith communities. In view of the dangers for humanity and earth, these movements are working to understand the root causes of the present situation in order to overcome the ambivalence of modernity and embark on the path toward a new culture of life. There are also fashionable trends that are making false promises—such as what is called postmodernism.

Postmodernism is modernism without scruples, modernity in extremis. The following chapters in part 2 are based on this underlying thesis. The excesses into which modernism has strayed give cause for urgent reflection. They must be scrutinized in two respects, the first being the point at which modernism has currently arrived, which is frequently erroneously described as postmodernism. Secondly, modernism must take a critical stance toward itself. This does not mean abandoning modernism, but rather establishing a new relationship with it on the path that it has adopted.

Modernity's development has long been the object of discussion. This book is intended to contribute to that debate. However, the book will also try to go a step further; in this respect our definition of modernism differs from many other theories. We understand modernity as the historical era in which

the whole of society is subjected to the concept of formal rationality—or, to use Max Weber’s term, “means-end rationality”—and interpreted according to its precepts. In this respect our definition approaches that of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. However, in contrast to these two authors, we see the emergence of modernism taking place as early as the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, and we would not dispute that its harbingers are to be found as far back as the beginnings of Greek culture. In the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, means-end rationality pervades the whole of society at every level, starting with the individual. Empirical science is born; astronomy discovers that the earth is round; and following the conquest of America, empires develop whose objective is to rule the entire world. Manufacturing concerns start to apply new scientific understanding. With the invention of double-entry bookkeeping, the first capitalist enterprises establish themselves as legal entities, even though they are still held to be the property of individuals. With colonial trade, a world market with mass-produced goods is established in which companies operate on a global basis.

At the same time, the Reformation gets under way, stressing the liberating relationship between believer and God against the manipulation of the people by the medieval church (which later in modernity has been misused to legitimate individualism). Modern, utopian thought also steps into the arena, apparently planning its utopias on the basis of social engineering. The medieval heaven is replaced by a new dimension, one of infinite economic-technological progress stretching into the future and linking earth and heaven like a Jacob’s ladder.

Within a few centuries, the new rationality that determines human action comes to exercise a monstrous power over the whole earth, without any resistance worthy of the name being anywhere forthcoming. In subsequent centuries it imposes conformity on the whole world.

Most theories about modernity do not recognize that it began as early as the period between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. They recognize the start of modernity in some of its typical characteristics; however, these only manifest themselves much later, and so, in the course of its development, they are pushed to the periphery. This becomes particularly clear in the case of Jean-François Lyotard. In developing his own concept of modernity, he refers to the theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Karl Marx, describing them contemptuously as “legitimation narratives.” Once their philosophy is dismissed as obsolete, it is easy to talk of postmodernism. And yet the critique of modernity began with the philosophy of Rousseau and Marx. As long as modernity is defined as a conglomeration of their thought, it is easy to define the dismantling of this thought as postmodernism. In reality, what we are dealing with is a barefaced modernity that no longer accepts criticism. Modernity today is constructed on the basis of philosophical conformity.

To declare, with Jürgen Habermas, that the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries is the beginning of modernity seems to me equally inappropriate. Certainly, modernity finds its particular expression in the Enlightenment; however, modernity is not philosophy but a historical epoch. A historical epoch does not consist in the articulation of ideas; rather, the ideas develop from the epoch. In fact, the Enlightenment is one of the peaks of modernity in its developmental phase.

Using Lyotard's terminology, we could argue that the Enlightenment elaborates the "legitimation narrative" for the whole of modernity. However, the first critical thinking with regard to modernity also makes itself felt at the time of the Enlightenment, particularly in Rousseau's thought and in his idea of a democracy of the free and equal citizens. Instead, it is the English Enlightenment that elaborates modernity's "legitimation narrative," its most important representatives being John Locke, David Hume, and Adam Smith.

Lyotard never speaks of modernity's legitimation narrative. Nor could he afford to, because if he did, his concept of a supposed postmodernism would fall apart. However, the legitimation narrative of modernity stemming from the Enlightenment persists to this day, despite almost every form of opposition, criticism, and sound argument against it. Its consequences threaten the very survival of both humankind and nature on earth.

Modernity's legitimation narrative consists of three narrative layers, which may be briefly summarized as follows:

The Narrative of John Locke (at the Close of the Seventeenth Century)²

In Locke's thinking we find, in secularized terminology, the first draft of a global empire—a bourgeois global empire to supersede every prebourgeois society. His justification for the bourgeoisie's transformation of the world into a single empire lies in its absolute right to subjugate the world to itself. Although the British imperialism of ensuing centuries was based on Locke's ideas, Locke was not the philosopher of British imperialism but of the bourgeois global empire. Locke was not a nationalist, but an imperialist in favor of a single global empire, namely the bourgeois global empire. The idea that England should become the imperialist nation to put the desire for a global empire into practice is not part of Locke's core thinking. Nor does this make his thinking anti-English. Locke is simply writing at a point in history where only England is in a position to realize the call to a bourgeois global empire. And only in this sense can his thought be defined as English. Just as Louis XIV could claim to be the first servant of the state, so too could the England of that particular era claim to be the first servant of the empire.

When Antonio Negri³ defines empire today as the new world order that is heir to earlier nationalist empires, he is making a historical error. The goal of modernity was always empire, even though it is only in our day that a single power—the United States—is capable of asserting itself globally against all other powers as the first servant of the Empire. The idea of empire is not new. The clashes between imperial powers in past centuries were always mighty battles to gain the position of first servant of the imperium. The United States occupies this place today and fights to ensure that no one can dispute its position in the future. This explains why modernity has never been concerned with nationalist empires in the strictest sense. Nationalism was only the banner behind which individual countries fought for the position of first servant of an empire, which was always a global empire. The theory of imperialism espoused particularly by Marxist authors since the end of the nineteenth century also takes this view.

Not even the conquest of America was a nationalist campaign. It also had its roots in the vision of a global empire, whose servants were Spain and Portugal. However, this was a Christian, and not yet a secular imperium. That came only later with Locke, who secularized the imperium in favor of the bourgeoisie and so was able to develop his great theory of the bourgeois global empire.

The Narrative of David Hume

Hume lays the foundations of means-end rationality, which combines the causality philosophy (cause-and-effect-philosophy) of the natural sciences with the means-end philosophy of the social sciences, uniting them in the market and private ownership. He brings the rationality of the natural sciences and the rationality of the social sciences together in such a way that a concept of empirical science emerges that embraces all the sciences. For Hume, the scene of action where they all act in combination is the market together with private ownership.

However, Hume is no empiricist, even though later interpretations (e.g., George Edward Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 1903) frequently seek to reduce him to such. Hume does not found a neutral empirical science; instead, he develops a particular ethic in the name of science, which is in fact exclusively an ethic of the market.

The Narrative of Adam Smith

Taking up from David Hume, who assigned the market a central role in modern society, Adam Smith develops the idea of the self-regulating market system. In principle, the market system only needs the state in order to assert the ethic of the market and to guarantee it with the aid of a legislature that is concentrated on private property. In this way the state ascribes the

function of creating ethical values and resources almost exclusively to the market. Ethics follow market trends. For his main thesis, Smith coins the term “invisible hand.” He claims that, owing to the logical working of this invisible hand, the market is the social entity that secures the general interest of society. One could say the market is simply a producer of goods, but this production of goods presupposes an ethic—Weber later calls it the “market ethic”—which aspires to fulfill the highest aim: that of the general interest, which replaces the term “common good” used in earlier ethics.

This combination of the philosophies of Locke, Hume, and Smith creates modernity’s legitimation narrative, and Rousseau and Marx refer to this combination in their own philosophy. Although these three classic proponents of the legitimation narrative develop their philosophy in line with bourgeois society, laying the foundations for the capitalism of their epoch, we can still rightfully describe them as philosophers of modernity and not just of capitalism. Even historical socialism, which emerges after the First World War, is influenced by the paradigms of these philosophers, although several key points of terminology are altered—for example, private property is replaced by socialist property and the tendency of the market toward the general interest is replaced by the tendency toward communism. Despite these alterations in terminology, soviet society develops in close analogy to bourgeois society, even if its manifestations are completely contrary. It is this insight that justifies our definition of the philosophy of Locke, Hume, and Smith as constitutive of modernity as a whole and not just of capitalism. Granted, we spoke of the capitalist mode of production on the one hand and the socialist mode of production on the other in times of historical socialism, but with reference to modernity we can clearly understand them both as different modes of production. Following the collapse of historical socialism, the philosophy of Locke, Hume, and Smith—modernity’s legitimation narrative—becomes again clearly identifiable with contemporary capitalism.

However, as soon as this capitalism mutates to a single global system with a uniform philosophy, it enters a state of crisis. This crisis is neither economic nor related to the accumulation of capital within the system. The global capitalist system itself enters a state of crisis because, by way of indirect effects that are frequently nonintentional effects, it threatens the reproduction of human life on a global scale. Business appears to be going well in spite of some signs of economic crisis. Yet, without the power structure itself showing any indication of being in trouble, capitalism sends the whole of humanity and its survival into crisis. This is why capitalism’s motto is: “There is no alternative.” The motto itself exposes the—otherwise unacknowledged—desperation that takes hold as capitalism increasingly destroys the very conditions that make human life possible: by excluding large parts of humanity, by undermining relationships between human beings, by increasingly destroying the environment. Or, more to the point, it is not capitalism that enters a state of crisis but human life

itself, because of the indirect, nonintentional effects of capitalism. The dissident and opposition movements that are speaking out everywhere today are responding to the threat to the fundamental conditions for life, making this the starting point for their confrontation with capitalism. The more these movements engage with contemporary capitalist society, drawing attention to the fact that something has to change, the more perceptible the crisis in capitalism becomes. The structure does not enter a state of crisis in itself, but humanity, seeing itself threatened by the indirect effects of the prevailing structure, demands the right to live a secure life now and in the future. This is why humanity is attacking the structures of contemporary capitalism and exposing the crisis brought about by it. Capitalism does not enter into conflict with a particular social class, but with the portion of humanity that is rising up and demanding the right to life.

We are witnessing quite different responses to the crisis. They are frequently utterly irrational, but irrational in a new way and to a degree hitherto unknown: more and more suicide attacks are taking place. In the United States they were already a phenomenon of the eighties. Soon after, we saw the same happening in Europe and Japan, then in China, Africa, and Ukraine. The phenomenon spread all over the world until the series of suicide attacks reached its macabre climax in the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, but also within Israel and Palestine.

However, at the same time a rebellion is taking place. We specifically use the term “rebellion” because here we are not dealing with a revolution. The rebellion is spreading throughout all social classes. It is demanding another society, which is why it has as its motto: “Another world is possible”—as can be heard at the World Social Forums, which started in Porto Alegre. This motto dismisses the claim of the system that there is no alternative.

This other world that people are demanding must be a world in which everyone and everything, including nature, has a place. It was the Zapatista in Mexico who first coined the motto; they highlight another important consideration: that the many worlds of diverse cultures and traditions too have their place in this future world.

Contemporary capitalism has no answer to this; instead, it continues to stammer out the same old phrase—“There is no alternative.” This, too, exposes the crisis it has reached.

Within this context a new debate has surfaced concerning “the subject.” We are no longer dealing with René Descartes’s subject, but with human beings, who are open to being subjects and demanding to become just that. Human beings as embodied, living subjects are demanding the right to be recognized as subjects in society. A debate on the “subject” is taking place currently in many parts of the world: in Latin America, in the historically socialist eastern European countries, in western Europe, and in India. It is in this context of the crisis of modernity that we are discussing “becoming human” by transcending the spirituality of money in this book.

CHAPTER 7

The Basic Characteristics of Modernity: Functional Mechanisms, Efficiency, and the Trivialization of the World

In the context of the origin of money, we encountered the calculation of utility. However, it is necessary to widen this concept. We are not dealing with something that could be simply interpreted as egoism in any moral sense: we are not making a simple accusation in the sense of Friedrich Nietzsche's disparaging of moral self-righteousness. Of course, giving a gift also involves a calculation of utility.

In order that this calculation can be a truly quantitative calculation of utility or advantage, it presupposes the quantification of calculated elements. It therefore presupposes the existence of money and relationships between goods. Money is a true leveler, capable of transforming everything in the world into an object of this calculation, reducing everything to the same level, so that even honor and every sacred thing—once it has been given a price tag—can be transformed into an object of calculation.

1. The Calculation of Utility Becomes Generalized

This kind of calculation becomes generalized at a particular point in history. It presupposes the generalization of commodity relationships, but equally the existence of a subject capable of turning every possible object into an object for the calculation of utility.⁴

The historical turning point emerges during the Renaissance, in the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Rather than using Renaissance philosophy to demonstrate this, I would like to examine a social technology that revolutionized the entire economy and provided the foundation for the whole of modern society. It emerges in the form of Italian bookkeeping, notably in the cities of Venice and Florence, from the fifteenth century onward. The balance appears with “debtor” and “creditor” entries, along

with the corresponding calculations of income, expenditure, losses, and gains. Today it is known as “double-entry book-keeping.” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe mentions this Italian system of bookkeeping in his novel *Wilhelm Meister* when he says there are two great inventions in the history of humankind, the first being the wheel and the second the invention of Italian bookkeeping.

Double-entry bookkeeping brings with it a new world view that is characteristic of modernity: It is an understanding of the world as a functional mechanism—a mechanism that is always cyclical.

The new worldview emerges in the enterprise with its calculations of cost and utility. The business acquires inputs in order to manufacture products. The products, or outputs, are then sold to provide income. The profit (or loss) results from the difference between cost and income. This is a cycle. Sales bring in the income required to buy the necessary inputs, which in turn enable the manufacture of products for sale. Without inputs there are no products as outputs, and without outputs there are no inputs. Thus we have the input-output cycle, which is also a means-end cycle.

The company is a functional mechanism in a market that is itself the condition for companies to be able to function as such. In this sense, the market is a secondary functional mechanism, secured by the transformation of the state into a guarantor of the regulations that have been designed by the mechanism as a whole and that determine the legal system under the Code Civil.

In the company as functional mechanism, the maximization of profit can now be completely formalized and the whole of society swept along with it. The movement created is then called “progress,” which is conceived and mythologized as infinite progress.

These functional mechanisms are necessarily cyclical, and now the whole of society—and, ultimately, the world—is committed to this cycle. This is why, exactly at this point, a large number of other cycles appear, which also turn out to be functional mechanisms. For example, in an entirely different sphere, the circulation of the blood is an idea that was developed in the sixteenth century and given its definitive formulation by William Harvey in 1628. This cycle was then transferred to a much wider context, as a metabolic cycle consisting between living things and the whole of nature.

What this reveals is a vastly expanded dimension of the calculation of utility, which is now completely formalized within the worldview of these functional mechanisms. This means that novelty does not consist simply in the discovery of these cycles, but rather in the fact that the calculation now takes on the form of these functional mechanisms and becomes fixed. In the case of a business, it presupposes the ability to calculate money, which makes it possible to reduce all elements of trade to quantities. This in turn provides the precondition for a maximal utility calculation. There is no

qualitative difference between the separate positions any more: everything is reduced to a mere difference in quantity.

This results in a worldview that consists in understanding the whole world and all its constituent parts as a functional mechanism. Of course, it is not the discovery of this kind of reduction that creates this new worldview. Rather, this new view of the world as a functional mechanism must already be in place in order for it to be able to translate into a social technology from which the understanding of the new worldview may then be drawn.

In order to see what has happened here, we must continue to ask ourselves what this worldview actually is. It has found its best expression in the cost-and-profit calculation of the new capitalist enterprise—of necessity a monetary calculation—where all qualitative differences between people or animals and the natural world that surrounds them are blotted out. Everything is reduced to quantities of money, and in this sense reduced to the same thing—transformed into an object of calculation. It is a question of making everything available, that is, of placing everything at the calculation's disposal. Thus it is the assertion that all elements of the world are totally expendable as far as human action within these functional mechanisms is concerned that brings about the historical turning point.

Within this calculation of cost and profit, all inputs (and their costs) are, quantitatively speaking, placed on an equal footing, whether they are material inputs or working hours. They can therefore be substituted one for the other without limit. Moreover, all work is included in this leveling process, not just paid work. Even the “director's earnings” appear next to the workers' wages and all remuneration for human work—they are all on the same level as a piece of wood, working animals, water (if it costs money), minerals like copper and iron, and so forth. Everything is equal and therefore equally expendable. The director's income appears similarly on the other side of the balance sheet, expressed in money, the amount varying according to the constitution of inputs and the applied technologies. Based on this, a maximization calculation can be made. The machine can now replace human work without any qualitative limit. Even the director's pay appears as a mere quantity alongside the workers' wages, although it is quantitatively much higher. The difference remains only quantitative. Everything is a means to the end of maximization, and all profit is a means of accumulation within the process of each functional mechanism. An immense dynamic force is unleashed.

This is a historical innovation. Preceding societies were incapable of making such a cynical calculation on a universal basis. Although such calculations appear at various junctures, any movement toward making them universal is always met with insurmountable resistance and condemnation. We could say that Aristotle's critique of chrematistics is one such critique. Restraints appear in these societies that cannot be overcome.

In the nineteenth century, people often asked why capitalism did not originate, for instance, in Roman antiquity, despite the fact that there were generalized commodity relationships and there existed both a formal law and a state that was, to a large extent, a state under the rule of law. A vast array of hypotheses was put forward, the most convincing, in our opinion, being that of Friedrich Engels. The reason, he argued, was that these societies did not yet have the practice of abstractly ascribing equality between people. Instead, slavery and the inequality that came with it were considered necessary and as such were broadly accepted—which put an unbreachable boundary in the path of capitalism. We can expand this argument still further. What was not yet in place was the ability to regard the whole world and all humanity as expendable, without any qualitative difference, as simply at the disposal of the calculation of utility. It was inconceivable to regard the income of an aristocrat as differing only in a quantitative sense from the costs of keeping a slave, in the same way that we would not make a comparison between paid work and the work of a horse. This is broadly how people thought about slaves. However, what cannot even be conceived in thought cannot be done either. Something similar then applies to the relationship with nature: it cannot be thought of as abstractly expendable. The issue ultimately is that, as far as these cultures are concerned, there are places that are sacred, and there are souls in the heart of nature.

What this demonstrates is that a change in these relationships took place in the Middle Ages that allowed them to be thought of differently. I believe that the new worldview came with Christianity—to be precise, in its orthodox form as founded by Augustine. It brought forth a subject that drove forward the transition to modernity in the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. In fact, we find in Augustine the first formulation of a perfect functional mechanism, which Augustine describes as human life after death in heaven.⁵ The Christian anticorporealism that arises as a consequence is not as such anti the body, but condemns the real body in the name of an ideal body that is a perfect functional mechanism for the soul. The ideal body perfectly carries out the will of the soul and thus perfectly fulfills the law. This is already a perfect functional mechanism, and probably the first time it is conceived. But it is conceived in heaven, and it takes nearly one thousand years before this ideal is presented in the form of perfect, earthly functional mechanisms. However, in the course of those one thousand years the subject is brought forth, which becomes the vehicle for these functional mechanisms and, with their help, turns the whole world on its head. This is the cultural revolution that leads to modernity.

This is a subject that despises the real human being in name of an ideal human being who functions ideally. In neoclassical economic theory this subject is called “*homo oeconomicus*”; such a person perceives himself as human capital.

The birth of functional mechanisms provides the calculation of utility with a new element. There is now a calculation of perfection with respect to the mechanisms, and this perfectionism is called “efficiency.” The calculation appears as a calculation of efficiency, focused on perfecting the functional mechanism, which operates with the calculation of cost and profit. Although it is created within an economic enterprise, it transforms all institutions, which are now seen as functional mechanisms that must be perfected. Not only is the enterprise imbued with the calculation, but also the state, the sports club, the churches, and family households. Furthermore, in his relationships with the world, every individual calculates his life opportunities on the basis of cost and profit, thus transforming himself into human capital—for himself and for his fellow human beings.

Thus the functional mechanisms acquire their own subjectivity. The company pays its bills. Even if the company is the personal property of the entrepreneur, as owner he also draws his income from his enterprise. He signs his name on the payment order, but it is paid by the company. This is how it appears in the accounts. This is much easier to see in the case of joint-stock companies. The agent that issues a payment is always a functional mechanism—in this case the company—although it is always a human subject who signs the payment order. Because the company issues payments, it has to be a legal entity, and as such it stands opposite to the owner.

The entrepreneur’s utility calculation is a calculation of efficiency for the company that he heads, whether as owner or manager. However, the subject of the calculation is always in duplicate. There is always a human subject who calculates his own advantage, but he does that by means of the efficiency calculation of the enterprise that he leads, even though he is the one who makes that calculation. But he always calculates in the name of the other subject, that is the functional mechanism.

Thus the entrepreneur sees himself as the mainstay of the company he heads and in whose service he finds himself—and he serves by calculating his advantage via the company’s efficiency calculation. Although he is the entrepreneur, he is not the master: he finds himself in the service of the enterprise whose efficiency he calculates and secures. Through this calculation, the enterprise gives the orders, which the entrepreneur has to follow. The utility calculation has metamorphosed into a law, which dictates the company and subjugates everyone, including the entrepreneur, to its own will. Everyone obeys this higher will, expressed through the efficiency calculation and demanding humble submission. Religious people, particularly if they follow the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Puritans, experience this as the will of God. And it is indeed a will from the “higher” world of enterprises.

We would now like to show how this worldview turns up in philosophy, by first quoting Ludwig Wittgenstein from his famous *Lecture on Ethics*, in 1929:

Suppose one of you were an omniscient person and therefore knew all the movements of all the bodies in the world dead or alive and that he also knew all the states of mind of all human beings that ever lived, and suppose this man wrote all he knew in a big book, then this book would contain the whole description of the world; and what I want to say is, that this book would contain nothing that we would call an ethical judgment or anything that would logically imply such a judgment. It would of course contain all relative judgments of value and all true scientific propositions and in fact all true propositions that can be made. . . . If for instance in our world book we read the description of a murder with all its details physical and psychological, the mere description of these facts will contain nothing which we could call an ethical proposition. The murder will be on exactly the same level as any other event, for instance the falling of a stone.⁶

The worldview that Wittgenstein presents, and which he ascribes to an omniscient being, is immediately clear. It is very obviously the conclusion reached if one views the world through the lens of Italian bookkeeping. That Wittgenstein ascribes this worldview to an omniscient being is completely superfluous, but it is understandable in the context of bookkeeping as a perfect functional mechanism. Indeed, such an omniscient being has to be introduced so that bookkeeping can be perfectly conceived. This apprehension of the world results from viewing it from the standpoint of efficiency and a totalitarian utility calculation. In this view of the world there really is no difference between a murder and the falling of a stone. Wittgenstein does not register this at all: he is totally blind to it, perceiving it as the only objective way of viewing the world. He goes on to sing the praises of ethics, but regards them as transcendent, without relevance to reality. The reality he sees is naked, primitive, and, above all, banal. For Wittgenstein there is simply no other reality, which is a reality born of what we call analytical philosophy.⁷

Once the world is seen from this point of view, there is neither any difference between a concentration camp like Auschwitz and a school, nor between a tank and a grain store, nor between a murder and the falling of a stone. Everything, even analytical philosophy, reduces itself to banality to the exclusion of everything else. The conclusion: Banal evil is based on a banal world and a banal philosophy.

Martin Heidegger makes the same analysis, although his analysis is permeated by horror:

Plowing the fields is now a motorized food industry—in essence, the same as the production line of bodies in gas chambers and concentration

camp, the same as the blockade and starvation of countries, the same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.⁸

In contrast to Wittgenstein, there is a palpable horror in Heidegger's words. His understanding is also close to our notion of functional mechanisms, although it is strictly limited to technologies in the engineering industry and therefore static and without dynamic. In effect he says the same as Wittgenstein. But for Wittgenstein it is an almost metaphysical question about world truth per se, and from his ivory tower he does not even notice what he is saying.

Heidegger has often been criticized for the words we have just quoted. However, we have not been able to find any criticism of Wittgenstein's words, although he says the same thing.

Legal positivism argues in the same manner. What is not forbidden is allowed, and is not therefore evil. The consideration that something is evil is simply an arbitrary human decision for which there are no grounds.

Here is an anecdote about G. W. F. Hegel. During a discussion, one of the participants put forward the thesis that that which is forbidden is evil because it is forbidden, and conversely, that which is not forbidden can never be evil. Hegel replied: would you murder your father if it were not forbidden? He would have said the same to Wittgenstein.

Seeing the world in terms of a banal reality in no way excludes ethics. However, any ethic put forward will always implicate functional mechanisms. Without relationships between commodities there is no utility calculation, nor is any formulation of efficiency possible. However, there is no market without a market ethic. Each functional mechanism develops a bureaucracy in its innermost workings, but every bureaucracy implies an ethic of bureaucracy. This is why Weber, too, advocates both ethics as part of science, and he advocates them expressly as part of reality. They contain no material value judgments, but Weber never expressly analyses the consequences for his methodology of science.⁹

However, these ethics are functional and therefore cannot judge the results of the efficiency calculation. The results are not subject to any ethic: Only the functioning is appraised and perfected. Plato called this type of ethics the "ethics of the robber band."

In his book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1987), one of the most remarkable books on this horrendous subject, Zygmunt Bauman interprets the Nazi death camps as functional mechanisms that were in a constant process of perfection. The aim was to produce dead bodies and dispose of the corpses. According to Bauman, it is precisely this form of efficiency calculation that prevents any differentiation between, or evaluation of, aims: a murder is no different from the falling of a stone. There is, however, another criterion of differentiation: one can constantly perfect the function. The technical specialists devise the plan, companies produce the

installations and the poison, and workers carry out their work to the best of their ability. An ethics of function even evolves with respect to these functioning mechanisms: Heinrich Himmler, in his Poznan speeches in 1944, celebrated the high ethical standards of the SS, who kept the good work going. The same applies to all: There is no difference between a murder and the falling of a stone.

After Hannah Arendt had taken part in the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1962, she talked about the “banality of evil,” suggesting that Eichmann was neither an ingenious criminal, nor a beast. Rather, he was a bureaucrat, who kept a functional mechanism going and in so doing did a good job. Everything concludes in banality, even his execution. However, unlike Bauman, Arendt did not yet analyze the banality of the world as seen from the viewpoint of the efficiency calculation of functional mechanisms. But, of course, it is there implicitly.

This continues today. Governments place orders for weapons of mass destruction, technical experts develop them, companies produce them, and the military puts them to use. All of these participants perform their tasks with an utterly impeccable ethic. However, it is just a purely functional ethic, without which the functional mechanisms cannot function. There is no difference for any of the participants between a murder and the falling of a stone.

However, everything works: The company does everything that its calculation of efficiency dictates; the company director is expected to comply with it as a higher will. They cut down the Amazon rainforest simply because there is profit to be made. They pay starvation wages because they can, and therefore they must. All this is efficient, and is done with an impeccable respect for the prevailing ethical norms. There is no difference between a murder and the falling of a stone; there is no difference between the hunger of the starving and the thirst of the automobile that gobbles up food for the hungry in the form of agrofuels. The ethical stance is always beyond reproach. Companies deliver factual evaluations, and their directors act accordingly. The ethic is functional, it is respected—and this is exactly what gives the directors an easy conscience. They maximize profit, calculate efficiency, and maximize their advantage. They do nothing wrong: Everything is banal. So the perpetrators of these deeds can justify themselves completely. The ethic itself is transformed into fuel for exploiting others and nature.¹⁰

2. The Dream of Reason Produces Monsters

The system does, however, reintroduce the difference between a murder and the falling of a stone—but from a different angle. This time the calculation itself, of efficiency and utility, is the criterion. The calculation is derived from the secondary functional mechanisms of market and state.

The market governs the commodity relationships between enterprise and buyer, and the state secures the stability (governability) of the system as a whole. But a hierarchy arises between states, with the most powerful one in charge. It is from the calculation of this country's stability that enemies are identified, against whom the state has to act. These enemies can be other countries that threaten the existing hierarchy, or they can be groups and popular movements that are in opposition to the system. They threaten stability, and are thus perceived as enemies and, therefore, as evil. The state in charge can count on absolute power over the means of communication, which are in the hands of the entrepreneurs and which transmogrify anyone opposed to them into monsters. The difference between a murder and the falling of a stone returns, but this time the murder is committed by the enemies of the state. The accusation of murder becomes part of the logic of the ruling functional mechanisms. Anyone who disturbs them is always bad, or even a murderer. What is relevant here is not the fact that a murder takes place: That remains trivial. What becomes relevant is rather the fact that the enemies commit murder, thus proving that they are monsters.

This monster production is a kind of assembly-line production. The first great monster of the twentieth century was the Jewish world conspiracy produced in the years leading up to World War I, which was always anti-communist in character. There then followed the construction of communism as monster. Today it is terrorism, incarnated in individual monsters like Manuel Noriega in Panama, Yasser Arafat, Saddam Hussein, or Osama Bin Laden. With the popular movements in the Middle East starting in 2011, new monsters have been invented. Leaders who had hitherto been the props of the "free world" in the Middle East, particularly Hosni Mubarak and Mu'ammer Gaddafi, became monsters overnight. They did nothing differently compared than before, and they also did nothing other than what the military apparatuses of the western model democracies have been doing for more than a decade and are still doing in Iraq and Afghanistan. But when *they* do it they become monsters, whereas the model democracies of our world simply serve the functional mechanism that they then project onto the Middle East, which is why they continue to perceive no difference whatsoever between a murder and the falling of a stone. This is the rationale that results from the perfection of a functional mechanism.

The monster production is justified through the discourse over human rights, and it commits its own brutalities in the name of humanitarian intervention. The brutalities are the same, although seen quantitatively, they far exceed the brutalities of the monsters. But they stabilize the system.

The western model democracies have as foundation for their policies a globalization strategy, which in its inexorable logic is destroying the very foundations of human life on this planet. So that they can do this in a climate of stability, they require brutal regimes in large areas of the

world in order to suppress any potential opposition. This is why the western democracies encourage and support them: They need them in order to exist. These brutal regimes are the skeletons in the cupboard of the world's model democracies. When the brutal regimes stop being functional for the world order, the West takes up the human rights banner in order to transform them into monsters that have to be eliminated. Again, they do this because in order to fight a monster, one has to become a monster oneself. They invent monsters so that they can become monsters themselves. This is the "curse of the law" (Gal 3:13).

The model democracies are not concerned with promoting democratic movements in the world. If, however, they cannot be avoided, their single concern is to influence them in such a way that they continue to do what the brutal regimes did previously when they were in their service. In Iraq and Afghanistan they have achieved this.

Naturally, the only sensible course of action never occurs to them—namely to make the globalization strategy flexible so that the needs of the excluded and plundered populations can be made central. Such action, however, would presuppose a different economy: an economy that systematically intervened in the markets at all levels with this goal in mind.

3. The Prison of Language: The Trivialization of Language

We would like to show the implications of this confrontation with the curse of the law, with the help of a saying by Hugo Ball, a Dadaist from the World War I period. He said, "Language is the prison of poetry"—which is completely the opposite of what Heidegger later said: Language is "the house of being."

After World War I, Karl Kraus puts forward the same argument as Ball. He wrote his drama *The Last Days of Humanity* to portray the destruction of language that took place in the course of that war: its transmogrification into a language of slogans, transforming war into yet another functional mechanism that is to be perfected. Language has been transmuted into a primitive carrier of empty language shells ready for the production of monsters—a phenomenon that is later expanded to encompass more and more areas of life. On the one hand, a language is created that is reduced to a conveyor belt for language stripped of any ambivalence. On the other hand, we have public speech, a language that is to a large extent determined by propaganda and advertisements. We see the two faces of a language that on the one hand is stripped bare, reduced to nothing more than a functional mechanism to be perfected, yet on the other hand is capable of whipping its listeners up into a frenzy, of delivering magical promises and demonic, monstrous threats. Indeed, a language that is anything but a "house of being." Going back to Ball's formulation, we can deduce what poetry is still

capable of. For poetry can express things through language that language otherwise cannot—or can no longer—say. Poetry must thwart language. It becomes an art in itself to keep rediscovering poetic language: this means constantly reconstituting language precisely from the way we perceive reality and act within it.

Our relationship to language has indeed changed, particularly since the end of the nineteenth century, when the whole view of the world was already trivialized because of the subjugation of everything to the vantage point of functional mechanism and to the efficiency and utility calculation. This way of viewing the world also infected language. Language has metamorphosed into a secondary functional mechanism, just like the market and the state. Seen as a functional mechanism, language is, in fact, nothing more than a bearer of information, and to this language, poetry is nothing more than interference, a “noise.” The perfect language is then a language that allows information to be passed on in a straightforward manner, without ambiguity, without ambivalence—with the minimum of intrusive “noises.” It is the language of naked function. Within this understanding of language, poetry is, of course, the most imperfect kind of speech there can possibly be: It says nothing. Even the everyday language of the people similarly becomes an object of disdain, although the construction of the perfected language necessarily depends upon it as its starting point. Everything is imperfect in this world, even the most perfectly constructed language.

Without a doubt, this language that has been reduced to a functional mechanism undermines all real languages. They appear to be languages full of imperfections, far removed from any ideal. As a result, all languages develop the tendency to trivialize language in exactly the same way that the world and evil have been trivialized. Seen from the viewpoint of functional mechanisms and their optimization, language thus becomes, in the way it is beheld and managed, a contributor to the overall trivialization of the world.

Many philosophers try to avoid this trivialization by developing an artificial language. Heidegger did this, and so today do others, particularly French philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and frequently also Michel Foucault. But these are still extremely alien, artificial products.

What happens to beauty? A crisis ensues in art as a whole, resulting in its reconstitution. An art evolves that sees the world in a new way, so that it can still see it as a humane world.

At the same time, however, and parallel to it, an art evolves that aestheticizes the functional mechanisms themselves. The functionality itself becomes an aestheticism—as, for instance, in Bauhaus. But this aestheticization is increasingly driven by the advertising industry. Functional

mechanisms have no other meaning than their own functioning, which is a tautology. The notion that the meaning of life should be to live one's life—and in such a way as to enable all others also to live their lives—ceases to be regarded as meaningful. The aestheticization process instead provides a substitute meaning through the advertising industry

Advertising as substitute for meaning largely submits itself to the cultural life produced by the culture industry. Advertising is aesthetic, even poetic. It takes all the arts into its service and permeates cultural events, such as football and festivals, in so far as they draw in the masses. Every football player becomes an advertising column. Advertising offers daily delusions of happiness, with the message that everything can make one happy provided one buys it. This is quite simply the flip side of the monsters that are produced: nonexistent monsters versus nonexistent happiness.

We would like to demonstrate this using a poem created by commercial advertising. It originates from one of the big Swiss banks and is both a poem and a hymn:

Gold is validation; its promise carries weight.
 Gold is surprise; it exceeds the greatest expectations.
 Gold is security; on its stability the world depends.
 Gold has charisma; it never loses its shine.
 Gold is faithfulness; it never betrays its owner.
 Gold is eternity; its fascination outlives time.
 Gold is secret; no one can completely fathom its allure.
 Gold is gratitude; it knows how to express itself in immortal words.
 Gold is love; there can hardly be a more noble manifestation.
 Gold is trust; its value endures.
 Gold is affection; it can express feelings better than a thousand words.
 Gold is longing; its attraction never fades.¹¹

This is the crux of all thought that has its roots in functional mechanisms: We see here not the periphery but the very heart of its credo. Yet at the same time it implies the destruction of all humanity, of all meaning in life. It is a poem that would be better described as a nonpoem, and yet it is a masterpiece of language as the consummate prison of poetry.

Nietzsche said there are no facts but only banal—or trivial—interpretations. Our conclusion is different: There are no facts that have not been interpreted, no facts preinterpretation—which is something very different. It means there are no naked facts, but rather the so-called naked facts are the result of an interpretation of the facts. Here is interpretation seen from the viewpoint of functional mechanisms.

The world is an interpreted world and not a world of naked facts existing before all interpretation, as Wittgenstein would have it. What is banal is the interpretation of the world, not the world itself. The interpretation

issues from this stance: namely the utility calculation and maximization of efficiency of functional mechanisms—to the extent that the whole world is interpreted as a gigantic functional mechanism. Yet, as part of this interpretation, the trivialized world also has a heart and soul that reverberates through the hymn to gold, as quoted above. What is heartless is the heart itself.

4. Mythical Reason

This interpretation is the categorical framework for our modernity; it is developed as mythical reason, which justifies its mysticism. It creates a myth of infinite progress, infinitely perfected efficiency, and the self-regulating market with its invisible hand. It is the mythical reason of modernity, but at the same time the mystification of death and killing. It is the mythical reason of death as practice, or convention. This mysticism not only imprisons poetry but also all human life—and with it every aspect of life. It suffocates everything.

It is reason's dream, which produces monsters.

There is no other response to this categorical framework and its accompanying mythical argumentation than to put forward not just another but a truly alternative categorical framework: one that ultimately rests on the belief that the meaning of life is to live in coexistence with all life. This belief also creates its own mythical reason, which must, too, be urgently developed. As we have seen, the apparent objectivity of the empirical sciences rests on an interpretation expressed in the form of mythical reason. It therefore still applies that all facts are interpreted facts, but this interpretation is based on arguments of mythical reason.

In conclusion, we would like to demonstrate this with the help of an article from *Le Monde diplomatique*, which analyzes the popular movement of the indigenous people in Bolivia. The title is “Errors and Mystification Relating to the Indigenous Godhead in Bolivia: The Spectre of Pachamama.”¹² The article is an incisive critique of the following position:

Only one single country rejected the Cancún international agreement to combat climate change: Bolivia. The Bolivian President, Evo Morales, rejects the “market mechanisms” envisaged in last December’s wording in favor of a “new global paradigm for the preservation of life”: the defence of Mother Earth, the Pachamama. He invokes an indigenous tradition in order to contribute to the “decolonization” of the ideological atmosphere. The Cochabamba Declaration—which sharply criticizes the capitalist model—suggests that, in order to stop the “destruction of the world,” the world must not only “rediscover and relearn the ancestral principles and ways of the indigenous peoples,” but must also recognize

“Mother Earth as a living being,” granting her her own “rights.” This was an idea that caught the attention of parts of the anti-globalization movement.

The sarcastic undertone is immediately apparent. At the end of the article, the criticisms are condemned in the name of modern science—a condemnation voiced by a modern and even prosocialist scientist, who is purported to be the voice of truth:

The geographer David Harvey, who is mindful of the urgency of the ecological crisis, rejects any dichotomy between human society and nature. “People”—he argues—“like every other organism, are active subjects who alter nature according to their own laws”: human society produces nature in the same way that nature brings forth humanity. Therefore, the alteration of an eco-system here or there does not suggest the need to defend the rights of a hypothetical “Mother Earth”; rather, it suggests the need to change “the forms of social organization that produced them.”

As an empirical scientist, Harvey reduces the problem simply to one of functional mechanism. He sees “Mother Earth” as a hypothesis, and an extremely unstable one at that. He imagines her as a metaphysical substance. The reduction to a functional mechanism is obvious: “Human society produces nature in the same way that nature brings forth humanity.” He believes it is a question of finding a solution to the functional problem of a functional mechanism—a problem that can be solved by social technology: In other words, the structures must be changed.

However, the reference to “Mother Earth” is by no means a hypothesis, still less a metaphysical one. It is a statement that demands a response: for it is a statement of mythical reason, which, for an empirical scientist, is no argument at all. He believes he has grasped reality when he has interpreted it as a functional mechanism. However, to understand the earth as Mother Earth means, in the language of mythology, to acknowledge and recognize her and act toward her as subject. This means she cannot be reduced to an object of recognition and action. Those who do so destroy her: They cannot but destroy her. As Mother Earth, on the other hand, she is recognized as a partner, not simply as an object of exploitation. To reduce the earth to a functional mechanism only legitimizes the process of destruction: It is completely unworkable. However, to understand the earth as Mother Earth and act accordingly is realistic.

Or perhaps it is more mythical to speak of Mother Earth than to spread the myth of infinite progress? Our heads are skewed by a kind of brainwashing, over centuries or even millennia, which has caused us to hold up

the myth of infinite progress as realistic rather than the myth of Mother Earth. But there is only one myth that is realistic—that of Mother Earth, which is expressed in many other ways, too.

What we need is to develop a human subject that is capable of both recognizing and treating the earth and nature as a subject.

Harvey does not see the need for such a subject; what is important to him is the skillful calculation of the functional mechanism. However, seeking to do this with the mechanism of the market makes a mockery of reality. Action that has been reduced to market-based action is precisely what has gotten us into this situation, and for this reason it will never offer us a way out. Every year congresses take place and every year they fail, and every year the situation becomes more catastrophic. It is nothing more than opium for the people.

It is not a question of doing away with thinking in terms of functional mechanisms, for, in spite of everything, it is useful. Rather, it is a question of acknowledging that it is no more than ancillary when it comes to the perception of reality. All modernity's empirical science can be no more than an auxiliary contribution, for it is not in a position to perceive reality. When it passes itself off as cognizant of reality, it leads to the destruction of actual reality. Reality is lived reality, and empirical science can have nothing at all to say about this reality—at any rate, it does not say anything about it.

This lived reality is, however, subjective—which is an objective fact. The corollary is that if we cannot develop a new subject for a new relationship with nature, then there is no solution. But it is not just about our relationship to the earth. The same applies to our relationship with our fellow human beings. In this subjective reality whatever applies to one applies to the other. This can be summarized in the challenge: I am, if you are. This applies as much with respect to human beings as it does with respect to the earth. It is the challenge to be realistic. Speaking of reality from this angle means speaking realistically.

CHAPTER 8

The Irrationality of the Rationalized: A Methodological Commentary on Instrumental Rationality and Its Totalitarian Character

Several years ago, on a flight from Santiago de Chile, I, Franz Hinkelammert, found myself sitting next to a Chilean businessman. In the course of our conversation I talked about the consequences of structural adjustment measures for Latin America, the increasing destruction of the environment, and the exclusion and impoverishment of a growing section of the population. The businessman replied: "All that you say is true. But you cannot deny the increase in economic efficiency and rationality." This reply exposes the problem of economic rationality in our day. We extol the virtues of rationality and efficiency, yet destroy the very grounds of our existence, and still it does not occur to us to examine our perception of rationality. We are like two men, each of whom is sitting on a branch of a tree. They compete to see who can saw his branch off faster. The more effective competitor is indeed the one who can saw through the branch he is sitting on faster. Although he is the first to fall, he still wins the competition in terms of efficiency.

Is this kind of efficiency really efficient? Is this kind of economic rationality really rational? While our houses are becoming ever cleaner on the inside, their surroundings are becoming ever dirtier. It cannot be denied that companies are improving the productivity of every workplace. But if we relate the product to the available human workforce, including an entire population that has been excluded, and if we add to that the external costs of any enterprise, then it is clear that productivity stagnates, and may even decrease. What appears to be progress turns out to be a dead end.

Today efficiency and rationalization are considered the twin pillars of competitiveness. Measured against a benchmark of competitiveness,

efficiency and rationalization become the highest values.¹ This kind of competitiveness leads to a loss of any hold on reality. Reality is only perceived virtually: a coat that cannot be produced competitively cannot be produced at all, even if it is warm and protects against the rain. This “virtual” reality, in which everything has a value solely in relation to its competitiveness, does away with any notion of practical value. Formal considerations are given more credence than any practical value, and all values concerned with human life are subjected to the rigors of this formal model. Moreover, any culture that is not capable of bringing forth this competitiveness has to disappear. Children who are not expected to be capable of competitive work as adults are not permitted to be born. Freedom and self-determination may only be pursued insofar as they encourage competitiveness. If emancipation destroys or inhibits competitiveness, then it has to stop. Competitiveness dominates to the extent that it does not even allow for the removal of the destructive effects for which it is responsible. It even makes it impossible to register the fact of the destruction in the first place.

This is what we call the irrationality of the rationalized, which is at the same time the inefficiency of efficiency. The process of increased rationalization that goes hand in hand with the development of modernity also allows irrationality to gain ever more ground. We can no longer speak of progress if the results of progress are retrograde, if progress loses its meaning. But a lifestyle that has become meaningless goes on to prevent a society from developing any meaning to life at all. Human life loses its point. The call for the “end of utopias” only confirms this all the more: that we have lost the meaning of life. And we have lost it because our society has committed itself to a development that no longer makes sense. A life that has no meaning cannot make sense. Nihilism sets in because reality is moving in the direction of emptiness.

1. The Theory of Rational Action in the Tradition of Max Weber

The irrationality of the rationalized brings us into conflict with the usual conceptualization of rational action. Max Weber coined a classical formula for rational action that remains the prevailing view to this day. He carried out his most important analyses in the first two decades of the twentieth century, although his concept of rational action was already foreshadowed by the neoclassical economic theory that had been outlined a few decades earlier. This theory, first developed by William Stanley Jevons in England and his contemporaries Carl Menger and Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk in Austria and Germany, continues to hold a fundamental significance for economics to this day, along with the theories of Léon Walras and Vilfredo

Pareto, which build on it, and the Property Rights and Public Choice theories developed in the United States following the Second World War. The neoliberal theories prevalent today may also be understood as particular variants of this neoclassical economic theory.

The concept of rational action that relates to these theories views action as a linear activity; it connects means with ends in linear form. Accordingly, an action is deemed rational if it succeeds in employing the chosen means in the pursuit of certain objectives, with optimal results. Whether the means have been employed rationally or not is determined by cost. (Formal) rationality, therefore, is the norm for measuring the rationality of the action: the idea is to achieve a particular end while incurring a minimum cost. This means that the ends pursued according to this criterion cannot be general aims, for example, to honor one's country, benefit humankind, or give glory to God; they must be specific ends that are attainable by means of a calculable human action. This, without exception, is what characterizes the ends of all industrial enterprises: they pursue the end of producing (shoes, wheat, cars, etc.) or of offering services (laundries, fund management through banks, film production, etc.).

In order to achieve these ends, means are required. Leather is needed as a raw material in order to produce shoes. Wood is needed in order to produce furniture. In addition, manpower is required in order to achieve the aim of production, and this is measured in man-hours.

Thus means and ends are connected linearly. The end is not the means; rather, it is the end that decides the means. Today's prevailing theory of rational action takes as its starting point the means-end relation. It inquires after the efficiency of this relation by comparing the ends to be pursued with the means applied in order to achieve those ends. Efficiency is measured according to the costs incurred in applying the means to achieve ends, and so efficiency can only be judged quantitatively when both ends and means are expressed in sums of money. Ends and means, then, have their price. The efficient achievement of the end is judged according to whether the costs—expressed in monetary terms—incurred by the means are lower than the price of the end product.

The means count as input, as the factors involved in the production of a commodity. The means-end relation is transposed into the relationship between the production costs and the price of the product, in other words, the relationship between input and output. In this way efficiency becomes quantifiable, and by measuring efficiency one can measure the profitability of the production process. A production process is profitable if it yields a profit, and the profit serves as an index for the higher price of the product in relation to its production costs. If, however, the production costs exceed the price of the product, the result is a loss. This is how efficiency is measured by profitability.

In a society, the most diverse means-end relations, measured by the relationship of production cost to product price, exist side by side owing to different production processes. Although the market connects them, this connection only arises as a result of the struggle between the various enterprises. This struggle is called “competition.” It is the result of the competition that decides the efficiency of each producer. The result tautologically exposes those production processes that are enduring and those that are not. The winner gives proof of acting more efficiently simply by the fact of winning, but this means there are also casualties in this struggle, that is, those who are not able to gain the necessary advantage.

When the whole of society is subjected to such a norm, that is, of efficiency as defined by the struggle of the markets, efficiency and competition become the highest values, by which the validity or otherwise of all other values is then judged. The entire rationale for action can be summarized in the words “efficiency” and “competition.” Values that increase competitiveness are affirmed, while all values that limit or disrupt competitiveness are rejected. Competitiveness itself does not produce values, but becomes instead the most important benchmark for judging the validity of all values, and this is why competition does not appear to be a value in itself. Competition indeed brings forth no definite ethical values. Competitiveness, however, by virtue of its function as the deciding norm by which all values receive their validation, is accorded the highest value of all.

This is why the underlying theory of rational action justifies the particular feature of competitiveness as absolute norm above all other values. This has come about owing particularly to a theory that originated in the eighteenth century, which was first put forward by Adam Smith: that competition, by fulfilling the general interest, produces social harmony as a nonintentional byproduct. Smith describes this supposed tendency to harmony as “the invisible hand” that coordinates every productive activity in the automatism of the market and thus serves the general interest. The theory could be expressed another way: What is rationalized can never bring forth irrationalities. Expressed in this way, the ethic behind the theory of rational action is exposed: Competitiveness counts as the supreme norm above all other values.

This theory of rational action presents itself as “realism,” and at the same time claims to make no ethical judgments and to be ethically neutral. This has happened distinctly since Weber gave expression to the theory. And it is in truth a great utopian dream. It is this theory that we shall now examine.

Weber claims that all empirical science relating to rational action limits itself to judgments over means-end relations. He calls these judgments “instrumentally rational judgments.” Weber is therefore also claiming that science is value-free: Provided the ends are given, science’s task is to judge the rationality of the means. Weber calls this rationality “formal

rationality.” The judgments to be made by science are, according to him, material judgments and not value judgments. However, the choice of ends does not fall within the scope of the sciences. Weber describes the range of ends as “value-rationality,” and with that leaves the complexity of their selection to pure decisionism. For Weber the selection of ends involves judgments of a “material rationality.” The word comes from legal jargon, and thus denotes not so much the materiality of things but the content of a structure. This definition seduces Weber into treating all judgments of material rationality as judgments of taste. If, between two shirts that are identical but for the color, I choose the blue rather than the white one, I am making such a choice. Weber calls the motive behind this choice a value that results from material rationality. Occasionally, Weber follows the doctrine of utilitarian value, in which case he speaks of advantage. The value relates in this case to a desire; the desire decides on a specific end and, after evaluating the advantage, the means-end relation is then directed toward that end. Values of this kind can, of course, also represent proscriptions that exclude certain specific ends. But they are always specific ends.

In this way Weber transfers the theory of rational action, which reduces all rationality to means-end relations, to the entire field of epistemology and methodology in the empirical sciences. Instrumental rationality becomes the basic epistemological and methodological stance of science. Science can only make judgments that relate to the means-end relation. Anything that goes beyond that is no longer scientific. The consequence of this is that reality continues to have a place only as the space in which these means-end judgments, which relate to specific ends and means, are falsified or verified.

This theory of rational action quite simply denies that a person who acts can have a nonlinear relationship to reality, and so disputes the scientific value of any judgment on such a nonlinear relationship.

2. Material Judgments That Are Not Judgments within the Bounds of Means-End Rationality

Let us return once again to the example of the two people whose action involves sawing off the branch they are sitting on. Both are following a means-end principle. The individual person’s work and the saw as the instrument are the means; the end consists in sawing off the branch. According to the theory of rational action formulated by Weber, this is a means-end relation, and all that science can say about it is whether the means are appropriate to the end. Science can only judge whether the particular procedure is suitable for the purpose, in other words, whether the saw is sharp enough. It is then able to predict the scientifically determinable outcome, that is, that the branch will be sawn off.

Yet we have a curious outcome here. The person succeeding in this action falls and is fatally wounded. What becomes of means-end rationality in this case? After all, as a result of the action, the person is eliminated and destroyed. The aim is to saw off the branch, but the very moment this aim is achieved, he can have no more aims at all, because a dead person can no longer pursue ends. The aim, therefore, is annulled in its fulfillment because the person can no longer determine whether he has achieved it. There are two possibilities here. It is possible that the person is aware that the result of this action will be death. In this case it is a matter of suicide as an intentional act. But is suicide an end? The end is to saw off the branch; however, the result is suicide.

Suicide techniques do exist, and there are books on suicide that set out various possibilities to choose from². Even Seneca commented on such possibilities³. In Weber's theory of rational action, ends can be material products or services. To which of these categories does suicide belong? The production of shoes, the services of a bank, or the presentation of a film in a movie theater can serve as ends. Is suicide another end in this sense, or is it something else? A medical procedure, such as an appendectomy, can be an end, which, if the procedure is carried out successfully, heals the patient. But is medical assistance in committing suicide the same kind of medical service? The aim here is the death of the patient. If the procedure is successful, the person is not even able to say thank you. Whom, then, has the doctor served? If a patient dies following an operation, the procedure has failed to deliver the service. But if the service consists in killing the patient, what service has the doctor rendered to the patient? His/her death only proves that the service has been delivered successfully. Can the death of a person as a result of an action constitute an end in terms of a rational action?

Yet there is another possibility: It is utterly feasible that persons who saw off the branch they are sitting on are not aware that this will bring lead to death if their rational action succeeds. In this case, death is the unintended result of a means-end action. Although we are, once again, dealing with a suicide, this suicide is not an intentional act. The individuals die as a consequence of their own—in the sense of means-end rationality—totally rational action. Their death is the nonintentional consequence of a rational means-end action, and therefore consistent with means-end rationality. However, the action is blatantly contradictory in the sense of a performative contradiction: By destroying themselves, the actors destroy the end they were pursuing. But not only do they destroy this end but also any opportunity to have ends. This is why we have the proverb: "Don't saw off the branch you are sitting on."

This popular wisdom is normative in form: It expresses a "should." But even this, according to the theory of rational action, is not a value judgment. The saying goes: You should not commit suicide, even unintentionally.

Is suicide rational, value-oriented action in the Weberian sense? Is it possible, in the name of value neutrality, to talk about death as a value on the same level as one can talk about life as a value? In death there are no values, just as in death there are no aims, as we have already stated. By causing death we not only destroy aims, but values too.

Is suicide a crime? A crime presupposes values that are contravened, and that is why there is punishment. Suicide, on the other hand, does away with all values; therefore, if it succeeds, there is no punishment. So suicide cannot be a crime, even though all reality is based on the refusal to commit suicide, that is, on the capacity to have ends and values at all.⁴

3. The Meaning of Rational Action

The theory of rational action gives us no answer to the problem of the relationship between facts and values. It accepts everything as given, but in so doing avoids the problem that rational action must have a meaning. Weber does indeed refer to this problem, but only in an attempt to subject it to his concept of rational action. He thus defines rational action in the following way:

“Action” should in this sense imply human conduct (whether it be external or internal activity, omission or sufferance), when and in so far as the actor or actors associate with it a subjective *meaning*. “Social” action, however, should imply the kind of action which relates to the conduct of *others* and is directed towards this as it runs its course, according to the meaning of the actor or actors.⁵

We return to our example of the competition between two people who are busy sawing off the branch they are sitting on, each striving to be the more efficient competitor, to be the first to saw off their branch. This is undoubtedly a case of rational action in the sense of Weber’s definition. The “intended meaning” lies in one person striving to outdo the efficiency of the other in this competitive race. The one relates his/her action to that of the other, and vice versa. While the action is social action, it becomes a meaningless action in a competition of this kind, where both are sawing off the branch they are sitting on, although it has meaning in the sense of Weber’s theory. Sawing off a branch can only be meaningful as social action if both persons refrain from sawing off the branch they are sitting on, and instead they saw off any other branch, for example, in order to obtain firewood. In this case the “intended meaning” at least has the chance of being meaningful, because it can be understood as means-end rationality, while the aim of the action can be understood as a value-oriented decision, for example, concern for the welfare of the actor’s family.

But if an action aims at sawing off the branch the actors are sitting on, then the action loses its meaningfulness, although it has “intended meaning” according to Weber’s theory. However, for the action to hold the meaning intended by Weber, we would have to abstract from the actors and their lives. But if we abstract from the actor, then the action does not exist either; in this case the action could have meaning for others but not for the actor. Since the theory of action must necessarily start with the actors, then the actors who saw off the branch on which they sit cannot give their action any meaning. Meaninglessness is an objective constituent of such an action. If, on the other hand, someone saws off a branch that he/she is not sitting on, then the action holds the possibility of having meaning. The meaningfulness of the action, however, is not defined by the fact that it is an end-oriented action, that is, to saw off the branch that one is not sitting on. The potential meaning depends much more on the “intended meaning.” The actor can have the intention of obtaining firewood or producing furniture, or obtaining land for agriculture, and so forth. But in order for the action to have any possibility at all of being meaningful, the result cannot be suicide, whether intentional or nonintentional. What is the meaning of life? It is to live life. It is not possible to have a meaning that is attached to life from the outside.⁶ This would be like attaching existence to existence. For this reason an action can, potentially, only have meaning if it does not involve the suicide of the actor.

Should the suicide be the nonintentional effect of a means-end-oriented action, a meaning follows that is contrary to the action. It is possible that the someone who saws off the branch he is sitting on is not aware of what he is doing: The person may see the intended meaning of his action as obtaining firewood for his family. But even if the person is unaware, objectively his action becomes meaningless because it brings with it the unintentional act of suicide. Although the person interprets his action as one based on means-end rationality and commensurate with the intended meaning, objectively he performs a meaningless action because it destroys any potential meaning.

However, an actor can only recognize the objective meaninglessness of his other action if he does not think of it solely in terms of the means-end-relationship, but includes himself as the subject of the action. If the person fails to do this, then the objective meaninglessness of the action will undermine the “intended meaning” of it and ultimately destroy the action itself. If, however, the person includes himself as subject of the action, then he can freely decide whether or not to abstain from that particular action and replace it with another, or whether to commit suicide intentionally. The nonintentionality of the action disappears, and the action becomes intentional: Either the person decides not to saw off the branch, or else saws it off in order to commit suicide. In both cases, however, the action, which consists in sawing off the branch the person is sitting on, loses its meaning.

As long as the theory of rational action restricts itself solely to the strict confines of linear means-end rationality, it remains blind to the meaninglessness of the action. Since it excludes the actor from any calculation of the means appropriate to the ends, it abstracts a priori from the potential effect that the fulfillment of the ends can exert over the life of the actor. It is not that this effect has been carelessly overlooked, but rather that the terms of reference themselves render the problematic nature of these effects invisible. For the terms of reference used to justify everything are the efficiency of the means-end relation and competition as the means of maximizing that efficiency. The result is that, in the name of science, the relationship between the ends to be achieved and the life of the actor is excluded from the equation.

Weber's theory of rational action removes evaluations of this kind from the jurisdiction of science: He treats them as though they were matters of taste. He explicitly eliminates the relationship between aims and the life of the actor.⁷ This can only be understood if we distance ourselves from the theory of rational action as we have investigated it so far. For the theory is based on means-end rationality and equates means-end rational judgments (judgments based on ends) with material judgments: It rejects the possibility that material judgments may not be means-end rational judgments. However, when the decisions we make have an aim that relates to the life of an actor, then they are not means-end rational judgments: The life of the actor cannot be regarded as an aim that can be secured through the calculation of means. This theory of rational action is founded on partial aims: One can only speak of an aim if different aims are competing with one another. But according to Weber, if a competition between several aims is involved, science cannot contribute to the decision because it has to regard all judgments in favor of one of the aims as judgments of taste.

However, the life of the acting person cannot be an end that is in competition with other ends. Therefore, it cannot be treated as an end. Anyone who chooses death is not choosing an end but rather the death of any potential to have ends. If we come across a robber who confronts us with the threat "Your money or your life," we know these are not two viable alternatives. If we choose money over life, then we lose both our money and our life. There is only one single solution: to choose life (and lose the money). Life is not an end in itself but instead the potential to have ends, and it is in this sense existential. If, therefore, we regard the person who acts as a living being behaving in opposition to his or her means-end relationships, then we understand the person as a subject. A subject only becomes an acting person after deciding on ends and the means necessary to fulfill those ends—including personal action. One has to be a subject in order to carry out an action.

And so anyone who, realizing that he is sawing off the branch on which he is sitting, and chooses life is acting as a subject. The person steps outside

the means-end-relationship and acts in opposition to it. However, the person does not use some different form of calculation of the means-end relation in order to do this, because this decision is completely incalculable. In terms of calculation, our lives are an infinite quantity, and a calculation with infinite quantities is completely impossible. As a subject, we face the calculation of the means-end relation. Here, without question, we are dealing with rationality, but not means-end rationality. Means-end rationality is linear, whereas this other rationality is cyclical and therefore reflective. It is the rationality of the natural cycle of human life, upon which all means-end rationality is based. It is a reproductive rationality, because it relates to the conditions that make human life possible. Thus no action calculated as means-end rationality can be rational if in its execution it eliminates the subject and with it the acting person.

This basic, fundamental rationality comes to light because the means-end calculation fails to expose the effects that a fulfilled end has on the conditions for human life. In the light of means-end rationality an action can appear completely perfect; however, in the light of reproductive rationality equally it can be completely irrational. Actors who saw off the branch on which they are sitting are in no position to deduce from the means-end rationality of their action that they will fall into the abyss as a result of their action. They have calculated well; the saw is of good quality and well sharpened; they achieve maximum productivity in the work. And they also achieve the end, namely to saw off the branch, with optimum results. Only it is means-end rationality that is the deciding factor here. However, actors as subjects think quite differently. As subjects they judge what the achievement of this end will mean for their life and future survival. They too use calculations, of course, but instead of employing a means-end calculation, they employ a factual judgment. This kind of judgment belongs to science: It is one that science can—and indeed must—make. But in terms of Weber's concepts, it is a judgment of material rationality. These are life-and-death judgments, and yet in his understanding of science Weber fundamentally rejects such judgments, banishing them instead to the area of value judgments, which means judgments of taste, in his terms. Yet the actor who seriously abstains from such life-and-death decisions is like a person wandering in the dark through regions full of abysses. In the absence of any precautionary measures, he is bound to fall into one of these abysses. The person ought really to take a light, but because of the ban on value judgments is forbidden to use a lantern. What results is the irrationality of the rationalized. The very person who follows means-end rationality to its bitter conclusion has nothing to prevent him from taking completely irrational steps. On the contrary, the more he trusts in means-end rationality, the greater the danger.

Reproductive rationality can only come into play when we understand the actors as persons who think and act beyond means-end relations. We then

understand them as subjects, whereas within the means-end relation they are actors. As subjects, human beings define ends, and the potential to have ends is part of human life. As subjects, however, they may not achieve all ends that appear achievable; rather, they have to exclude all those which, in their fulfillment, would jeopardize their ability to live and thus continue achieving ends. As subjects, the actors can be understood as the sum of all their possible ends, but at the same time the realization of each end must be compatible with their existence as subjects in time. If this compatibility is not secured, then they even destroy their ability to exist, which means sawing off the branch on which they are sitting.

The actor is a natural being, and as such is mortal, constantly subjected to the danger of death because physically belonging to nature. But precisely because people are part of nature as corporeal beings, they can also be subjects; they seek to achieve ends by appropriate means, integrating these ends and means into the natural cycle of their lives and thus subjecting them to reproductive rationality. Within this natural cycle of human life, human beings behave as subjects. One could even speak of a metabolic exchange between humans, as natural beings, and nature, which surrounds them.

Understood as subjects, actors are the sum of all their possible ends. Therefore they as subjects precede each particular end. Subjects must identify their ends within the natural cycle of human life: This means that a subject has basic needs, without really having to identify any particular end. And any particular end can always be replaced by another particular end. However, the actor must first be integrated into the natural cycle of human life in order to exist at all. And so on the one hand the human as subject precedes all personal aims, but on the other hand the natural cycle of human life precedes the subject. This fundamental principle is the basis for human life and so is not something that simply emerges as a result of specifying ends according to circumstances. Actors specify their ends, but if they do not want to destroy themselves, they must align them with the natural cycle of human life, for that is the condition that makes all specifiable ends possible.

There is a story that at the beginning of the French Revolution, Queen Marie Antoinette, on hearing a throng of human voices, asked her counsel why this was so. He replied: "Your Majesty, they have no bread," to which the queen replied: "Then let them eat cake." She paid a high price for her cynicism when the people sent her to the guillotine.

And yet in a certain sense she was right. It was not that the people were lacking bread in particular: They could have satisfied their need with corn tortillas, rice and beans, potatoes, even with fish and meat, and of course cake. The point is that the people did not have a specific need for bread as such, but a basic need that they could not satisfy. When the queen's counsel answered that the people lacked bread, he was not necessarily referring to bread as a specific end. He was referring to the basic need to eat, and he

expressed this by using the word “bread,” which was the basic foodstuff in France. If there was no bread, then surely another food would have sufficed. However, when the counsel pointed out that the people had no bread, what he really meant was that they had no alternative to bread either and that as a consequence they were hungry. If something similar had happened in Berlin, the counsel would perhaps have said: Your Majesty, they have no potatoes. In Peking, he would have said: Your Majesty, they have no rice. Marie Antoinette knew exactly what she was saying, and that is why her reply was so cynical.

In terms of our theory we could express this another way: Basic needs force humans to live within the natural cycle of human life. Outside this natural cycle, there is no life: Outside this natural cycle, humankind perishes. And yet not one single specific item is absolutely necessary as an end. As subjects we specify our needs as specific ends, and do this within the limits set by our condition as natural beings. The simple means-end calculation, however, offers no assurance that our integration into the natural cycle will actually succeed. The means-end calculation can prevent or even destroy this integration. Therefore the human as acting subject must keep working to ensure that the means-end-rationality does not end up being in conflict with the need to integrate with the natural cycle of human life. This is why reproductive rationality proves to be the basic norm for means-end rationality.

At the root of all actions based on means-end rationality are the essential needs of humanity. If, however, those needs are not taken into account as the basic norm that must precede all means-end rationality, then an irrationality of the rationalized ensues that threatens humanity’s very existence.

The needs of the human as a natural being are physical, but not simply “material.” Rather, these needs are at the same time material and spiritual. Humanity does not live on bread alone but on bread that has been blessed. But the blessing can never replace the bread itself. The material aspect to the satisfaction of basic needs is indispensable, even though the basic needs may differ considerably historically. For example, until they were exterminated by genocide at the beginning of the twentieth century, the indigenous people of Tierra del Fuego survived virtually naked in a climate that would kill a twenty-first-century European in a few days.

What the subject of reproductive rationality actually means is an essentially needy subject, rather than a subject with specific needs. As natural beings, we experience ourselves as needy subjects by virtue of the fact that we have to satisfy the conditions that are fundamental to our existence. We define this requirement to satisfy our basic needs by identifying ends, which we then fulfill through action, that is, by employing the necessary means. As needy subjects, we are duty bound to subjugate these goals to reproductive rationality by ensuring that they are integrated into the natural cycle of human life.

Can such a subject become the object of the empirical sciences? The answer seems obvious to us. However, this affirmation implies that a fault has appeared in the theory of rational action derived from Weber. The fault cannot simply make the theory disappear, nor can it replace it with another theory. The problem is not so much that the validity of the theory needs to be questioned, but that the theory removes a vital aspect of reality from the jurisdiction of science. In so doing, it obscures the irrationality of the rationalized and, without any justification, makes means-end rationality the absolute be-all and end-all. This problem must be brought to light in order for the irrationality of the rationalized to become visible. Only then can action become rational. In the process of becoming rational, the theory of rational action would undergo a fundamental change, but its continued application would not be questioned. Nor would there be any question that every empirical science must be founded on material judgments rather than value judgments. The quintessential problem here is that material judgments and means-end judgments are identified as one and the same. The point is that there are material judgments that are not means-end judgments, nor may they be reduced to such. But in making this assertion we are, of course, shattering the apparent consistency of Weber's theory of rational action.

The theory of rational action is based on the linear means-end relation, on its efficiency and the recognition it has won because of its value in terms of profitability in the competitive market. At the end of the day, the theory can only judge its own validity through falsification or verification, that is, through trial and error, because it analyzes all reality from the standpoint of a means-end relation that is partial. If an end is attainable, it is possible to find the means that are sufficient to achieve that end. This approach is proved wrong if the given means do not achieve the anticipated end. In that case, either the *aim* must be abandoned or another means of achieving it must be found. This process of falsification/verification is as unsatisfactory as the means-end relation itself. Its rationality too is linear.

But if, on the other hand, we judge from the standpoint of the subject and his or her reproductive rationality, the statements cannot be falsified. For from this angle we are not dealing with empirical means-end relations, but with a circular rationality that includes the life of the acting person as subject of the action. In this circular form, action cannot be falsified. If we return once more to our example, anyone who saws off the branch on which he is sitting falls into the abyss and meets his death. The actor is not in a position either to falsify or verify this statement. True, the statement contains falsifiable elements, for example, that there is a tree, that beneath it there is an abyss, and that the actor really is sitting on the branch and sawing it off. But if we analyze it, the statement results simply from the fact that actors, as the subject of all their possible actions, are natural beings.

No one dies only a little or in part. Neither are the subjects in a position to verify anything once the action has been carried out, because they are dead. Nor, therefore, are they in a position to proceed according to the method of trial and error by repeating the act. Only observers are in a position to verify anything, but they are not the subjects of the action on which they may wish to pass comment.

When it comes to judgments of reproductive rationality, we as subjects are always involved as the sum of all our possible actions on the one hand, just as our integration into the natural cycle of human life is involved on the other hand as the condition that makes that life possible. We are dealing here with relationships that cannot be analyzed within the bounds of means-end rationality, and so it is fruitless to seek for norms in the falsification/verification of means-end relations.

Here the judgment must address the question as to whether the subject can live with the consequences of an action that has been calculated according to means-end criteria. It is based on the assumption that as subjects we have to integrate ourselves into the natural cycle of human life. Therefore we must first judge whether the rationalities are compatible with each other, and in this evaluation, reproductive rationality decides over means-end rationality. The touchstone for this decision is therefore life and death. The problem here lies in achieving clarity as to whether actions that are oriented toward means-end relations are compatible with sustaining the lives of subjects. The action that is true/right is the one that makes the two rationalities compatible; the action that is false/untrue is the one that brings the two rationalities into contradiction with each other.

If life and death is the norm for reproductive rationality, then it must also be the ultimate norm. Means-end rationality loses its legitimacy if it comes into conflict with the sustainability of the acting subject's life. In fact it becomes a performative contradiction. Means-end rationality is thus subordinated to reproductive rationality. The irrationality of the rationalized consists in the fact that both rationalities exist in open contradiction to each other. Means-end rationality then tramples human life (and nature) to death, and thus its potential irrationality is brought to light.

Seen from the point of view of reproductive rationality, the product of an action is—in the sense of the means-end relation—a use value, that is, an object the possession of which decides over life and death. This does not mean at all that the availability of a particular product must decide over life and death. Rather, it means that every product that is understood as a use value belongs to the sum of practical values, whose absence results in death. This in turn is based on the assumption that the acting person is mortal, in other words, that one day he will inevitably die. But the lack of use values is the particular reason for a particular death. Therefore life can only be secured if access is secured to the use values that make life possible in the first place.

The theory of rational action on which the neoclassical tradition of economic thinking is based to this day refuses to discuss the products of means-end action as use values at all. In so doing, it disregards the fundamental neediness of the subject, turning the subject instead into a subject of preferences. It speaks of the usefulness of products, but understands usefulness basically as a matter of taste that follows the desires and preferences of the consumer. In this way it boycotts the scientific discussion over the necessity for the subject as natural being to be integrated into the natural cycle of human life.

4. The Means-End Cycle Given Absolute Supremacy

The more action is oriented toward means-end rationality, the more difficult it becomes to make the necessary discrimination between rationalities. In fact, means-end rationality is rarely as transparent as in the example of the actor sawing off the branch on which he is sitting. In modernity it undergoes changes due to the dizzying expansion of the social division of labor and along with it the relationships between goods. With the growing complexity of modern society, the relationships between goods set in motion a means-end cycle that has now taken over the entire planet. With few exceptions, every end in this cycle is the means to another end. Ends and means merge one into the other. The shoe that is an end for the shoemaker is a means for the buyer to get some exercise. The book that is an end for the author is a means for the reader. For producers, the end is a product or a service, but this end is also a means for them to earn an income and have access to products that they need but do not produce themselves. What appears from one point of view to be an end becomes a means from another point of view.

We are dealing here with a circularity that can be described, paradoxically, as linear circularity. The linear means-end calculation of each actor integrates itself into a means-end cycle—in which every end is simultaneously a means and every means simultaneously an end—and retains its linear character in the process. The concept of the market espoused by neoclassical economic theory is the clearest illustration of this circularity. It does not disrupt the actor's linear calculation, but, by connecting the means-end relations in linear form, establishes a market that has today become a global market. We can picture the circularity by analogy with the geometry of a circle. Paradoxically again, the circle, in order to calculate it, is represented in diagrams of linear circularity. Let us assume that the simplest form of a polygon is a triangle, where the angles are joined together by straight lines. We can then imagine polygons with a larger number of angles. From a quadrilateral, we progress to a pentagon. As we keep increasing the number of angles, the straight lines that connect the angles become shorter and shorter and the polygon increasingly approaches the form of a

circle. If we then progress to a polygon with an infinite number of angles, the lines become infinitely short and eventually the polygon becomes identical with a circle. Pi is then worked out according to this supposition ($\text{Pi} = 3.14\dots$) so that the circumference and diameter of a circle may be calculated. And from this we have linear circularity.

We can understand the means-end cycle in an analogous way. All actors continue to pursue their linear means-end calculation, and together they make up the circularity that we call the market. The market now becomes the locus for means-end rationality, in effect as circularity based on the linear calculations of the actors. As the many chaotic means-end acts are transformed into the circularity of the market, the market emerges as a structure to keep things in order. This ordering function of the market arises as an indirect (nonintentional) effect of each actor's actions, which are calculated according to criteria derived from the market (from prices). Since Adam Smith, the structuring of the market has been called the "invisible hand": it creates order in the market. Bourgeois philosophy sees this "invisible hand" as having a singularly harmonious function; it ascribes to it the capacity automatically to create equilibrium and fulfill the general interest.

The market is established as a means-end cycle not only in theory but also in reality. In both cases—in reality and in theory—something is being left out of the equation. In order for the market to be able to establish itself as a means-end cycle, a company must calculate its costs to the exclusion of reproductive rationality. This is done by means of double-entry bookkeeping. Effects on reproductive rationality appear as externalities. All costs are expressed in prices, and this applies to the price of manpower as well as to the price of nature. The prices reflect extraction costs that (can) give no information about the need for sustainability. The means-end calculation becomes instrumental reason.

The company thus excludes reproductive rationality from all aspects of its calculation, and this happens in reality because a company that does not exclude reproductive rationality loses its competitive edge. Both economic theory and the theory of rational action effect the same exclusion on a theoretical level as soon as they make it their business to legitimize the function of the market as a means-end cycle. They treat the exclusion of reproductive rationality as a problem for science, so they declare all judgments that relate to reproductive rationality as nonscientific and describe them instead as value judgments. With the emergence of neoclassical economic theory at the end of the nineteenth century, this particular orientation of the sciences gains more and more ground and receives its methodological justification from Weber. In its extreme form today, all bourgeois economic thought is focused, in the name of science, on disregarding reproductive rationality and finding its own justification in a theory of rational action based exclusively on means-end rationality. First, Weber reduces all

material judgments to means-end judgments. Since empirical science can only be based on material judgments, means-end judgments thus become the empirical sciences' only legitimate judgments. Weber denounces all other judgments as value-rational judgments, without even making any attempt to define value rationality. He defines it in a purely negative sense as the rationality of all judgments that are not means-end judgments and therefore have nothing to do with means-end rationality. These judgments are not within the remit of empirical science; he describes the rationality here as material rationality, which is opposite to the formal rationality of the empirical sciences. Thus all judgments over reproductive rationality count as material rationality, which has no role to play in the sciences. In this way the methodology of the sciences perfectly reflects the real process of exclusion that is taking place in the market and legitimizes it in the name of science. The exclusion is the same in each case. The products of human labor are henceforth no longer regarded as use values; instead, their value consists solely in the subjective desires and preferences of consumers.

When it comes to reproductive rationality both theoretical reflection and the market completely lose their way. According to the market norm, all means-end rational actions count as rational, even if they have destructive effects, according to the norms of reproductive rationality. The market drives the destructive means-end rational actions forward in the same way it drives those actions that are compatible with reproductive rationality: It is just as rational to saw off the branch we are sitting on as it is to saw off a branch we are not sitting on. The market thus inevitably develops a tendency to destroy both human beings and nature, which is indispensable to human existence. Yet science has, in the name of science, been forbidden to raise any objection. We describe this as the tendency toward the irrationality-of-the-rationalized. Each step forward is like the pronouncement of the Brazilian general who, according to an anecdote, declared after the military coup in 1964: "Before, Brazil was standing at the edge of a precipice: with the military coup, we have now taken a big step forward."

And yet the tendency to destroy both man and nature does not by any means have to be the result of any wicked intent. Rather, it turns out to be the nonintentional result of means-end rationality and the fact that it has been made the absolute be-all and end-all. The market itself, as the system that coordinates the social division of labor, is the cause. Destruction can, of course, be caused intentionally, but today's destructive processes are clearly to be interpreted as nonintentional effects of means-end rationality. Which is why when neoclassical theory mentions these effects at all, it speaks of the "external effects" of companies. In terms of means-end rational, linearly calculated action, they may indeed be defined as external effects. But seen from the point of view of reproductive rationality, they affect the inner workings of human society as a whole.

These destructive effects are visible everywhere today. The exclusion of a large part of humanity from the social division of labor, the advancing destruction of the environment, and even the increasing breakdown of social relationships cannot be overlooked. Even extreme neoliberals do not deny they are there. However, easier to overlook, because not immediately visible, is the fact that these effects are the indirect and thus completely nonintentional result of the prevailing notions of efficiency and the absolute supremacy given to means-end rationality. All markets are subjected without scruple to the central norm of competitiveness. The complexity of the means-end cycle tends toward obscuring the connection between means-end rationality and its destructive processes, and the prevailing economic theory and science's prevailing methodology do their bit to prevent this causal connection becoming known.

What we need, therefore, is an empirical science that takes as its starting point the conditions essential for human life and hence reproductive rationality. This empirical science must see itself as a critical theory of the conditions for life today. However, not every critique is critical science *per se*. What we need is a science that confronts means-end rationality in a critical way with the foundation on which it depends, that is, with the whole array of conditions essential for human life. These conditions necessarily include the life of the natural environment, because man is a natural being. Empirical science must confront means-end rationality with reproductive rationality in order to explain why means-end rationally oriented action must be subordinated to another norm, that is, the integration of humanity into the natural cycle of human life. And it must explore the opportunities for doing just that.

Expressed in terms of methodology, such an empirical science would assume that it is possible to have material judgments that are not means-end judgments. A critical empirical science for today can only be founded on this fundamental statement. The norm for such material judgments is life and death, and not the falsification/verification (trial-and-error) norm. The aim of empirical science based on such material judgments is to analyze means-end-oriented action in such a way that it remains compatible with reproductive rationality; it is also to develop norms for appropriate intervention whenever it turns out that a particular means-end-oriented action is incompatible with reproductive rationality. By implication this empirical science also has the task of directing activity toward constructing both a society and an economic system that allow means-end action to be measured against reproductive rationality. Such an empirical science must expose the illusions of any economic system that succumbs to the notion of a self-regulating market automatism—that makes this market automatism the be-all and end-all and measures efficiency according to one central norm: to maximize the rate of economic growth. Such an empirical science

would show what is really happening and would not become slave to whatever value judgments or judgments about what should and should not be that may be prevalent.

Market regulation reveals a double bind. In positive terms, market regulation results from chaos putting itself in order. At the same time, however, its destructive tendencies with respect to humanity and nature bring forth a deathly dis-order. This is the reason why we call western civilization a death-bringing civilization, in its reduction of rationality to the means end-rationality. It is therefore a question of developing an order and a culture that are in a position to act against the tendency to fatal disorder.

5. The Return of the Repressed Subject

It is striking that those analyses that give absolute supremacy to the means-end relation almost completely fail to reflect critically on their own methodology. The most important and influential authors of empirical science methodology—Weber, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Karl Popper—take hardly any trouble to examine their own arguments using the methodology they have themselves put forward.⁸ It is, therefore, hardly surprising that their explicit methodology comes into conflict with the methodology implicit in their argumentation: They use arguments that they have denounced in their explicit methodology as devoid of scientific value to advance this very methodology, or to analyze empirical reality. Popper dismisses all dialectics using dialectic reasoning. Weber accounts for the supremacy of the means-end cycle and the exclusively scientific approach of formal rationality, based on means-end rational relations, with arguments of material rationality that he himself defines as value judgments according to his own methodological norms and that he would therefore have to label as unscientific. The authors also challenge transcendental concepts and the idea of a transcendental subject with arguments based on transcendental concepts and the idea of a transcendental subject. It is, therefore, not surprising either that widespread antiutopian reasoning lives off the absolutely utopian idea of a society without utopias. The society that describes itself as realist, declaring that it can manage quite well without myths, turns itself into a myth, blissfully unaware that the realism it asserts represents a mythology in itself.

The contradictions are the consequence of awarding absolute supremacy to the means-end cycle in a totalitarian way. What they reveal may be described as the return of the Repressed.

Reproductive rationality cannot be effective in reality if means-end rationality is given absolute supremacy and so held to be the only rationality for scientific thought. The point is that reproductive rationality is not a discovery made by philosophy but a postulate of reality that cannot simply

be brushed aside. The totalitarianism of means-end rationality may seek to discredit any reflection on reproductive rationality, but it cannot make the reality that prompts that reflection disappear. The idea of reproductive rationality may be suppressed, but the reality behind it means that it will inevitably reappear over and over again. The more one tries to discredit reproductive rationality, the more the action of purely means-end rationality makes itself conspicuous for its negative effects., for instance, in the exclusion of large parts of the population, the destruction of the environment, underdevelopment, and so forth. The satisfaction of essential needs is either restricted to a level that is intolerable or even made impossible. This is why these problems are making themselves heard in protests. And where vociferous protest is not possible, as for example in the case of the environment, the disregard for reproductive rationality becomes manifest in environmental crises. Air pollution, global warming, the expansion of the desert, and increasing erosion are indicators of this disregard. And where social protest is impossible, there social crises become indicators for the disregard of reproductive rationality: the crises of human coexistence, migration, criminality, and corruption. Jean-François Lyotard makes the following comment:

Justice comes not from suffering; it comes from dealing with suffering, which makes the system more performative. The needs of the most disadvantaged must not be allowed to serve as the system's regulator as a matter of principle. For once the means to satisfy those needs is already known, then satisfying them cannot improve the system's performance but only be a drain on its expenditure. The only negative indicator is that not satisfying needs can destabilize the structure. This works against the capacity to regulate itself according to weakness.⁹

The basic need appears as an extreme limit whose rationality and legitimacy are rejected. It is not so much the needy who suffer, but the system that suffers the consequences. This is the return of the Repressed.

Weber also addressed basic needs in their rational and legitimate form when he attempted to justify the market system. But in his view they are not basic needs so far as the system is concerned. It is thanks to those needs that the market system exists, but it does not follow that the system should be directed toward meeting them.

The same happens with absolute supremacy (totality) as a key concept in relation to the utopian ideal. We have already seen how the concept of absolute supremacy turns its back on reproductive rationality because the basic need of the subject to integrate himself into the natural cycle of human life follows from it. Subject, society, and nature are founded as a whole on this condition essential to human life.

The theory of rational action cannot comprehend, from its perspective, either the integration of the subject, or society and nature, as part

of the whole picture. But they do not simply disappear. Rather, the whole picture is recognized, and philosophy awards absolute supremacy to the means-end cycle by adapting to it. This supremacy replaces wholeness. It is expressed in different forms, the theory of the “invisible hand” of Adam Smith being one of the most important. This, in turn, has been taken up by neoclassical economic theory in the concept of market automatism, with its “tendency towards harmonization.” Critical theory’s requirement of reproductive rationality, namely that it adapt to the natural cycle of human life, is exchanged for a utopian promise, within the absolute supremacy of the means-end cycle that emanates from a blind submission to market automatism—identified with the “general good.” The very doctrine of market automatism, whose indirect effects destroy human life and nature, is now carved in stone and celebrated as the surest way to save life and nature. This is the utopian piety of the bourgeoisie. The totalitarian supremacy of the means-end cycle is clearly visible in Weber’s thought. On the one hand he emphasizes the prejudice of human knowledge:

Each time the Light bestowed by those highest ideals falls on a constantly changing and finite part of the immensely chaotic stream of events that marches through time.¹⁰

All reflective knowledge of infinite reality by the finite human mind therefore rests on the tacit proviso that in each case only a finite part of that reality can form the object of scientific understanding, that only that finite part can be “essential” in the sense of “worth knowing.”¹¹

If Weber takes the first statement seriously, he cannot then talk about the general harmony of the markets, but must limit himself to talking about harmony in the coal or steel market. And when he claims that reality is infinite, he is not talking about a part of reality but about reality in its entirety. He mentions it in order to claim that hardly a part of it is known. His argument uses the whole in order to demonstrate that science cannot speak of the whole. Why does he not show us that our knowledge is limited without referring in his argument to the concept of an infinite reality as a whole? It is obvious that this would be for him a logically impossible request, which is why his argumentation contradicts itself. If the reference to the infinite reality as a whole were removed, it would be mere prattle.

But Weber refers to the whole of reality not only in these negative terms. When he speaks of the general harmony of the markets, he is also reflecting in a positive way on the supremacy of the markets, finding in them the invisible hand of Smith:

The phenomenon that a bias towards one’s own naked interests and those of others produces effects that are the same as those effects that one has sought—very often in vain—to bring about by setting norms, has wakened

great interest in the economic sphere: in fact it was one of the sources of the founding of national economics as a science.¹²

He ascribes an effect to the totality of all markets as a whole that is analogous to the bias that “one has sought—very often in vain—to bring about by setting norms,” that is, by means of an ethic of brotherliness. This is the general interest of Smith. However, it is not “a finite *part* of reality,” but infinity as a whole, which he said could not be addressed by science. But the point is that it is not actually the whole of the natural cycle of human life, but rather the totalitarianism awarded to market automatism.

It is from the absolute supremacy of the means-end cycle and the disregard for the natural cycle of human life that the constant tendency of modernity to totalitarianism develops. This tendency has become perceptible nowadays in the structurally adaptive measures of neoliberal policy. The democracy that is driving neoliberalism proves itself more and more to be a democracy marked by totalitarian features. We have already had experience of such developments. Stalinism in particular was a product of the absolute supremacy awarded to the means-end cycle. The “general interest” that capitalism describes as the result of the “invisible hand” of market automatism is called “communism” in Stalinism, which automatically follows from central planning. Even National Socialism displays a similar structure. It does not promise a general interest but instead a definition of the human being way beyond any humanist definition that is based once again on the means-end cycle, driven in this case by the paroxysm of all-out war. This form of totalitarianism also proves to be the first extreme example of modernist antiutopianism.

This tendency of the unbridled supremacy of the means-end cycle toward totalitarianism proves once again that the need to address the whole does not disappear just because the true supremacy of the natural cycle of human life is denied. Instead, the Repressed returns in a perverse form.

6. The Subject as Object of the Empirical Sciences and the Right of the Subject to Be Subject

When empirical science speaks of the conditions necessary for the subject as a natural being, then as a critical science it is speaking in a paradoxical way of the subject. In order to speak of the subject, it must treat it as an object. Yet to speak of the subject as subject transcends the remit of any empirical science. This transcendence takes place instead in philosophy, theology, and mythology.

However, the necessity to transcend empirical science is neither philosophical nor mythical. Rather it is empirical. The necessity arises from the fact that the problems of reproductive rationality cannot be solved with the

aid of a calculation along the lines of the means-end rationality calculation, because this type of calculation is sufficient unto itself.

This clearest illustration of this is a company, which calculates cost and profit. Profit is generated by the difference between the production cost and the price of the manufactured product (or service). The maximization of the means-end relation is measured with the target profit in mind.

The costs are purely expenditure. The wages reflect the expenditure of human labor. Not only is the labor of others expended, but the employer also expends his own labor. In the same way as labor is extracted from others, so the employer extracts his own labor. For this reason the employer also calculates his own labor based on an “employer income,” which he pays himself as owner.

In the same way, “raw materials” are extracted from the environment. However, the environment receives no wage in return.¹³ The extraction costs of the “raw materials” consist of the labor required to extract the natural resources, together with the production means necessary to extract them. Costs are incurred in order to wrest natural resources from the environment. The success of such activity is then measured by profit. If the product extracted from the environment is sold at a price that is higher than the costs incurred in extraction, there is profit, which proves the means-end rationality of the procedure.

For all these reasons the potentially destructive effects on human beings and the environment that may result from this calculation do not appear in the company accounts. From the point of view of the company, these are indirect, or external, effects. The costs of felling a tree are incurred from the payment of wages for the labor used and the price of the means of production (e.g., a saw). If, as a result of tree-felling on a massive scale, the desert expands or catastrophic climate changes occur elsewhere, the company will not regard these consequences as costs. And this is not only because the company does not actually take these indirect effects into account as costs, but because it is not in a position at all to do this. Neither a capitalist nor a socialist enterprise would be able to carry out such a calculation.

This kind of accounting is the necessary condition both for the calculation to be sufficient unto itself and for the company to be able to exist as an independent producing body. Nonetheless the indirect effects of means-end rationality undermine the reproductive rationality of both human life and nature, whose replenishment is an essential condition of human life. The supremacy given to means-end rationality is responsible for these indirect effects, and that is why this rationality can do nothing to counter them. The indirect effects make the irrationality of the rationalized visible.

This demonstrates that reproductive rationality cannot be reduced to the calculation of costs. Rather it only arises as a consequence of this calculation. The accounts of an autonomous company can only be drawn up

at all because the company reduces the costs to extraction costs. In order for this to happen, both costs and ends have to be oriented toward limited means. As soon as any cost turns out to be infinite, calculation becomes impossible. Each calculation reckons with quantities; however, infinity is not a number but a limit beyond every number that can be registered. On the other hand, when it comes to the logic of reproductive rationality we are dealing with costs that are tending toward infinity. Represented in terms of calculating cost, death causes infinite costs for the actor, which is why the actor's relationship with death cannot be registered by means of a calculation of costs. The same applies when fertile land is transformed into desert. A clear expression of cost for this is completely impossible; it simply means catastrophe for all who live there. Costs are not factored in relating to the appropriateness of the action either. So we have a catastrophe that must be prevented but that cannot be calculated.

The estimation of costs depends on certain conditions that cannot be reduced to calculation. Every estimation of cost is therefore secondary and of relative significance. As a consequence, reproductive rationality forces us to apply norms that are nonquantifiable.¹⁴ Taking this as our starting point obliges us to transcend the narrow angle taken by a discipline that regards the subject as its object; instead, we must direct our energies toward recognizing the subject as a subject in his subjectivity.

7. The “Playboy Paradox” and the Objectivity of Reality

The Playboy paradox states: “Life has become too expensive; I’ll shoot myself in the head so I can save what little I have left.” This is, in a nutshell, the extremism of means-end rationality. The paradox demonstrates the limits of its rationality. What little one has left is destroyed by suicide. However, in terms of Weber’s theory of rational action, the thought process itself is impeccable in its logic. The end consists in saving money, and the means to the end is not to continue living. What the resultant absurdity proves, however, is that even means-end rationality is only possible if the acting person is able to live. To live and to survive is the ultimate end of all rationality. If this condition is not expressly included in the calculation, the calculation leads to the absurdity of expending infinite costs as a means to a finite end, but in this case it is impossible to use the means-end calculation at all. However, this only applies so long as the calculation takes place within the supposedly valid framework of the theory of rational action. If we want to apply the means-end calculation within the limits of the possible, this can only be achieved by subjecting means-end rationality to reproductive rationality. The theory of rational action developed by Weber cannot even see the problem, which is why—so long as it excludes the conditions fundamental to means-end action—it ends up being meaningless to the point of absurd.

The paradox can only be solved by transcending language itself. Language is not transcended by means of a meta-language but by the living subject¹⁵ that understands itself as subject not only of the action but also of the language. By transcending language, the subject can give speech a meaning. Everyday language is clear because it indicates that it must be transcended. On the other hand, analytical philosophy of language is not clear at all. For this reason the question as to the set of all sets—called the Russell Paradox—indicates that no single formal system is consistent in itself. Only human life unifies the set of all sets. Life is not the set of all sets but the condition for the existence of all sets. The subject brings together all the sets because it represents the totality of life.

But even the ethic of discourse ends up in this paradox. If all speakers decide together and unanimously upon collective suicide, then they have formulated a universal norm that, according to this ethic, must be valid. But of course if this norm were to be applied, reality would disappear, because it can only be applied once. The discourse leads into nonsense and absurdity. Karl-Otto Apel believes he should have the debate with the skeptic. But that is wrong. He should have the debate with the person committing suicide. In order to answer the suicide, the condition fundamental to discourse must be introduced, which is the condition fundamental to the whole of human life. That condition given, the speaking person becomes a corporeal being who reflects the details of his or her actual life through speech. If this physical being cannot live, then neither can he speak about reality. Reality is a matter of life and death, and not a problem of the “objectivity of things” as such. The philosophy of humans as natural beings with the gift of speech becomes paradoxical if they disregard this very fact. The paradox points out the performative contradiction.

8. Learning in the Face of the Life-and-Death Norm

Seen from the viewpoint of means-end rationality, learning is understood as the result of trial and error. Subject each time to other conditions and also to new learning experiences, an experiment is only repeatable for so long until it produces a result. The idea underlying the trial-and-error learning model is that of a reversible world. By a process of trial and error we seek and find the means to a particular end. If we want to go to the moon, we look for the means until we find it, and if that does not fit the purpose, then we look for another means. There is too always a—functional—ethics latent in such learning processes, which is concerned with formal values related to action, such as discipline, paying attention, responsibility, and so forth. In the context of the supremacy given to the means-end cycle, these values foster an attitude of humility, in the sense of subjugating oneself to the demands of the means-end cycle. When people speak of anthropocentricity, they mean

this rationality. But humanity does not stand in its center at all. Instead, what we are dealing with is a market-centricity or capital-centricity that makes the human being in its own image, as a being without a body but with a mind that rightfully belongs in the purse. Even more generally, we could speak of a “mind-centricity” that includes not just capitalism but historical socialism. Hence we are dealing with a phenomenon that affects the whole of western civilization, not just one clearly defined part of it.

Seen from the viewpoint of reproductive rationality, a completely different understanding of the learning process emerges. The subject knows he confronts death, and so learns to avoid it. In this learning process it is not a question of achieving a particular end, but rather of doing everything possible to avoid the occurrence of any breakdown that would rob the subject of all opportunities to achieve ends. Behind this reproductive rationality there is always the threat of death. Death’s threatening proximity is experienced in the “quasi accident.” An accident that results in death no longer allows experience, whereas the quasi accident belongs to everyday experience: In the midst of life we are in death. The quasi accident accompanies life as a constant experience and challenge to learn. The decision to avoid everything that has been experienced as a quasi accident and to prevent a repetition of such incidents even under different circumstances follows from the affirmation of life. This learning experience stands in contrast to the one made through trial and error. Learning from the quasi accident is negative: one must do everything to ensure that the situation does not repeat itself. Hence to affirm life means not achieving a particular end. It is rather an intention, the intention to keep oneself as a subject who wants to achieve certain ends. In other words, to pay attention to the ground upon which the achievement of all ends is based. Any action following from this intention aims at integrating all ends within the life-defining intention, which means extinguishing all threats to life so that ends may be achieved in life. Ends that are not compatible with such an intention are seen as illusional, even if they are technically realizable. If the subject were to realize such ends, he would end up sawing off the branch he is sitting on. The quasi accident offers the opportunity to learn in order to prevent the real accident. Conversely, the accident that results in death offers no further opportunity to learn because it puts an end to every possible learning process. This is why an accident is not to be confused with an error that disproves a hypothesis in the course of learning through trial and error. For this reason it cannot be a question of avoiding possible error in the course of testing a hypothesis, but rather of avoiding the death that will end the intention to live¹⁶. The intention to live, however, is not necessarily only the intention of an individual life but can also be the intention of the life of humanity, into which all humanity’s aims must be integrated in order for the intention to remain possible. Learning in the logic of reproductive

rationality has to do with an unknown future where failure is a possibility. In the action that follows from this logic there are values at play as well, but values different from those of functional ethics: values of solidarity, of respect for one's own life and the lives of others, including the life of nature, values of wisdom and caution. Such values put means-end rationality in a completely different light, giving it the character of a subordinated, secondary rationality. To perform this relativization is itself a question of life and death. For the totalitarianism of means-end rationality overlooks the fact that these values are vital as the conditions that make human life possible.

Learning from the confrontation with life and death must necessarily accompany all means-end-oriented actions and indeed proves to be their real foundation. The possibility of understanding an action according to trial and error, that is, as a reversible action, is always limited. The life-death relation is always present and demonstrates that reversibility is only provisional. Conditions of reversibility can be set up systematically, for example, in workshop and laboratory. But the MCA (maximum credible accident) is always there as a threat. There is never any guarantee that the process can be repeated, and each repetition is always only an approximate repetition. According to the trial-and-error method, a person cannot even cross a busy road. The threat of accident is constant; the person is learning constantly from quasi accidents. There is the constant danger of being eliminated from the natural cycle of human life, especially if the satisfaction of essential physical needs is not secured. As a consequence, a person strives continually to integrate himself into the natural cycle of human life and to safeguard this integration. One must have a place in the cycle in order to continue pursuing ends that are dependent on it.

Reproductive rationality must, therefore, be labeled just as "empirically scientific" as means-end rationality. If it really claims to be empirical, then empirical science must grapple with reproductive rationality. In so doing, however, the traditional differentiation between empirical sciences and the humanities, between empirical science and philosophy (and myth but also theology) becomes to a large degree obsolete.

Learning through the confrontation with life and death transcends the means-end relation: knowledge gained through this learning cannot be reduced to means-end relations. Instead, knowledge causes the subject to experience himself constantly as one who cannot, as an independently acting person, limit himself to behaving according to means-end rationality. When the subject makes decisions as part of this learning process, he still remains a subject, regarding himself and others as subjects that are the object of knowledge.

With that the limit is reached for analyzing the subject as object. Beyond this analysis an aspect comes into play that we can talk about but

that cannot become the object of analysis. This aspect is the condition for the subject to be able to act in the first place. It is the mutual recognition between subjects. An acting subject does not find the affirmation he needs for his life without this mutual recognition. The subject must enable other people to live and so affirm life. Only then will he find his own life recognized and affirmed. It is not simply a case of dialogue partners acknowledging each other as speakers, but rather of subjects mutually acknowledging each other as natural beings who can only exist if they help each other to integrate into the natural cycle of human life. No one has the capacity alone to save himself when faced with life-and-death situations.

9. The Rationality of Madness and the Madness of Rationality

The idea of an individual who consists in and for himself alone is a trap. In his analyses of stock market panics, Charles Kindleberger demonstrates the nature of such traps.¹⁷ The problematic nature of the means-end cycle becomes most clearly visible in the stock market as its hegemony leads it to establish the market as a self-automating system. If the market structure enters a state of crisis, both the practical constraints contained within it and the disorder hidden by it become visible. The crisis draws the market players into a vortex from which they know no escape. The irrationality of the rationalized triumphs. Kindleberger quotes a stock market speculator who hit the nail on the head when he said: “When the rest of the world is mad, to a certain extent we have to imitate it.”¹⁸

Giving absolute power to the market leads to the renunciation of every form of rational behavior. To be rational is now to be insane. All the rules end up in confusion, and a way out is nowhere to be found, even though each individual is behaving rationally from his particular standpoint. Kindleberger summarizes where this “crazy rationality” leads in one sentence:

Each participant in the market, in trying to save himself, contributes to the ruin of all.¹⁹

Everyone wants to save himself, but because everyone wants to save himself individually and alone, all of them together make saving everyone impossible. This is how people behave not only at the stock exchange but also in the market when its automatism is given absolute supremacy.

Wanting to save oneself is a necessary condition for getting out of the mess, but not sufficient on its own. In such a crazy situation all human relationships have to be freshly defined. There will only be a way out if all the players recognize each other mutually as subjects who will help each

other, on the basis of this mutual recognition, to satisfy essential needs and to subordinate the means-end cycle to this end. A solidarity is needed that begins with this recognition, but only becomes possible if it is made a reality.²⁰

Hence it is not just a case of mutual recognition as market players, but of mutual recognition as natural beings with essential needs. Such recognition is only possible through solidarity, and this solidarity must in turn be realized by the mutual recognition of the subjects. As long as this does not come about, the rationality of madness will only lead continually to new crises, the extent of which will make any solution more and more difficult, if not prevent one being found at all.

10. The Mutual Recognition of Subjects as Dependent Natural Beings and the Laying of the Foundations of Objective Reality

Subjects who recognize each other as natural beings with needs transcend the limits of the market relation in order to make their judgments. Of course, in so doing they also transcend its language. As we saw in [chapter 1](#), the money-subject in the market communicates by calculation. To transcend this, to become real subjects, humans as natural beings with needs have to communicate in a social process of mutual recognition and solidarity. This transcendence always takes place within the market and language relations, but instead of being subordinated to them, it contends with them in order to inform them with reality. It is this subjective reality that decides on the shaping of market and language. For the subject who decides is constantly at a crossroads between life and death. The reality of the world that both market and language have to deal with is based on this fundamental choice, and the subjectivity involved therefore earns objective validity precisely because of this. That is why objective reality is constituted of material judgments, the norm here being life and death. Reality does not exist independently of such material judgments; rather, an action that is consequent upon material judgments either creates or obstructs reality. Objective reality is not a quantity that exists independently of human life. Human beings, who throughout their lives of creative action seek to avoid death, create and are the keepers of objective reality. This is why suicide eliminates reality; the collective suicide of humanity would mean the definitive end of reality. There is no objective world without humanity, for without it, the objectivity of the world disappears. Objective reality does not exist first, followed by humans, but is both proviso for and corollary of human life.

Material judgments made according to the model of means-end rationality ignore this aspect of reality. Neither can any idea of the world based

on them proffer any information about the objectivity of things. Because it is unable to use subjectivity to justify objectivity, it is constantly forced to waver between questioning the material world (Jeremy Bentham to Jean Baudrillard) and dogmatically postulating its objective existence (Hilary Putnam), using viciously circular arguments. In contrast, material judgments that are based on the life-and-death norm automatically constitute objective reality as soon as reality is subjected to them. Thus objectivity is justified subjectively, but the subjective character of the acting person is an objective fact. Therefore to negate the subject is also to contradict the facts, and it prevents the objective recognition of reality at the same time. Where there are no essential needs, neither is there any longer an objective world. Objectively, reality exists solely in eye of the subject as a dependent natural being.

There is a famous vignette by Bertolt Brecht. In ancient times, the Chinese emperor invited all sages to come together to decide once and for all whether the world really existed objectively. The sages argued for many weeks without coming to any agreement. Suddenly a mighty storm rose; the flood that followed swept the congress to destruction. Many sages died; the survivors were scattered to the four winds. And because of this natural catastrophe the problem of objective reality has remained unsolved.

Cristina Lafont questions the idea that German hermeneutic philosophy asserts “the priority of meaning over reference” and interprets the “linguistic turn” accordingly. She instead puts forward the dogmatic postulate of the objectivity of things in line with Putnam’s thinking.²¹ However, when she refers to the “return of the repressed,” she uses the following argument:

A hypothesis that supposes that language decides *a priori* what can appear in the world—in advance and completely independently from what actually happens in the world—is only remotely plausible (or, at the very least, it is difficult to explain why the species hasn’t long since gone under because of a similar adaptation).²²

If Lafont’s argument is right, then Putnam’s argumentation is wrong. But in that case the result of Lafont’s analysis itself is wrong. Without being clear about it herself, she uses a proposition whose norm is life—or death. This norm is the reason why the species and the objective world exist. It is a subjective norm. But such a norm is incompatible with Putnam’s dogmatic postulate of the objective reality, which Lafont endorses.

The error of German hermeneutic philosophy lies not in the fact that it gives priority to meaning over reference. It errs because of its inability to put the subject at the center, whose norm is that of life and death. In German hermeneutic philosophy the subject is replaced by tradition (Hans-Georg

Gadamer) or “life-world” (Jürgen Habermas). Lafont brilliantly exposes the problematic nature of these concepts, which succeed in totally relativizing reality itself; however, she does not succeed in going beyond them. The mountain labors and brings forth a mouse: She is close to the solution, but it evades her, rather like the journalist who found the news story of the century but failed to recognize its newsworthiness.

The subject moves along an objective horizon, that of life and death. The horizon is objectively given to him as subject. And this is precisely what makes him a subject. The horizon sets him free from the constraints of tradition and “life-world.”

Without this freedom to move, which transcends all traditions and “life-worlds,” there would be no traditions in the first place. Tradition can only exist where we are able to go beyond it. That which cannot be transcended cannot constitute tradition. The heartbeat goes on throughout all generations, but because we cannot go beyond it, it cannot form a tradition either. On the other hand, what we do today will become tradition for our children in the future. If we were determined by our tradition, we would not be able to create anything that would belong to future tradition. Our children would have recourse to tradition without reference to us, but there would be no tradition at all because this would have happened over and over again throughout previous generations.

The dogmatic postulate of an objective reality also falls under this paradox. If reality existed objectively and independently of the life/death norm, we would not be able to explain why the species still continues to exist. But because today reason is reduced to means-end rationality and completely disregards the life/death norm, the survival of the species is threatened. We can only survive if we recognize the subjective nature of objective reality and in this sense give priority to meaning over reference. However, means-end rational action is based on a perception of reality that is independent of the life/death norm with its attendant material judgments, and this is bringing about the collective suicide of humanity—which is precisely why we speak of the western life-killing civilization.

Yet even if subjects mutually acknowledge each other as dependent natural beings, this does not mean they have acknowledged “life.” The acknowledgment of life assumes that reality is already objectively constituted through the mutual recognition of subjects, which in turn implies the recognition of the natural cycle of life and with it the close connection of human life to nature. Thus the objective reality of nature too is constituted through the mutual recognition of subjects. Here, however, it is not a question of recognizing the “human species” as the object of a survival strategy. The “human species” as object completely disregards the mutual recognition of subjects, indeed makes it absolutely impossible. It is rather a question of recognizing the other person and oneself in mutual concern as

dependent natural beings, for no human being can be excluded from this recognition. It is in this sense a universal recognition, but not an abstract universalism. Instead mutual recognition becomes the universal norm for evaluating all potential abstract universalisms (for instance, the abstract universalism of the totalitarian market), and as such has real and universal application. But we can be even more specific about the real and universal character of this norm. Mutual recognition of subjects is ultimately an option for particular subjects, that is, an option for those whose lives are under immediate threat. The life-and-death norm implied in the mutual recognition of subjects as dependent natural beings is one that puts the threatened person as victim at the center of all deliberations. The threatened person too exists not to die, but to live. And so it is the human being who is victim of prevailing conditions who becomes the norm—and thus the basis for a culture of life where relations are marked by justice.²³

CHAPTER 9

In the Face of Globalization: The Return of the Repressed Subject

The definition of the human being as subject is one that appears at the beginning of modernity and runs consistently through the thought of this period. But the way in which modernity develops results in an overall denial of the subject. In the process of this development, however, the concept of the subject has undergone profound changes, and it is for this reason that we feel an urgent need to readdress the question of the subject today.

The concept of the subject acquires its meaning in the analysis of the subject-object relation, to use René Descartes's expression. Here the human subject is regarded as the locus of thought that is confronted with the object—*res cogitans confronting res extensa*. We have a thinking subject confronting a world of objects. This subject sees all physical reality as his object; therefore, he perceives not only the physical reality of the other as his object—the natural environment, other human beings—but equally his own body. All bodies, including his own, are *res extensa*, over which the subject, as *res cogitans*, adjudicates; the subject is not, therefore, a physical entity. This conceptualization led to an understanding of the entire physical world as the objectification of the thinking subject, the result being that the entire external world appears to be the product of the thinking self.

The subject derived from *cogito ergo sum* is a transcendental subject. From its stance outside the physical reality of the world, it makes judgments over that world as an objective reality. The subject is not part of this world, but rather its judge. In order to be such, it must be presented as being without physical reality. If it then claims to exist, it can only do this as a result of self-reflection. Since it has no physical reality, it cannot be the object of any sensory perception, for the senses can only perceive physical bodies. Hence it is a transcendental subject, because it thinks about the objective world of the senses in a transcendental way.

At the same time, this thinking subject is an individual who owns property. Yet an owner of property is just as imperceptible to the senses as the thinking subject: We perceive people, but we do not perceive them as owners. It is this subject, man as owner of property, who confronts the physical reality of the *res extensa* in order to control and own it. The subject emerges as a property-owning individual whose relationship to the entire external world is that of ownership and who even views his own body, including his thoughts and feelings, as part of that external world. As an individual, therefore, this subject has an understanding of himself as owner of his own body and everything that springs from this bodily state. The subject of the subject-object relationship is not only *res cogitans* but, as owner, an individual who acts in relation to the objective physical world as *res extensa*. Seen from this subject's point of view, then, all human rights are reduced to property rights.¹

In the last hundred years this subject disappeared as a concept. As transcendental subject, the subject thought of himself as counter to a world of objects. In so doing he granted himself existence—*cogito, ergo sum*—and so thought of himself as an entity that, through thought, becomes an object. The thinking is the object, but as he is at the same time a thinking subject, it is an object without physical substance. This leads to an infinite regress and begs the question: What is the subject who thinks himself into existence? I think that I think, and I think that I think that I think, and so forth. There is no way out of this self-reflection as such, and so it is abandoned and simply disappears. But this does not solve the problem, because now the subject in all its guises has to disappear, even the subject that is represented within the structures. So when Claude Lévi-Strauss talks about transcendentalism without a subject, referring to structures, he abandons the idea of a subject that creates those structures and is represented by them. But this does not resolve the position for which the subject of *cogito, ergo sum* was intended. Lévi-Strauss continues to analyze the structures from an external standpoint, and in fact he continues as the transcendental subject who appears as observer. But this position is no longer reflected upon, and so no way is found out of the position of subject-object. Moreover, the object is there as a physical object and all its derivatives, while the observer in fact remains the transcendental subject that is neither embodied nor represented by structures.

The denial of the transcendental subject has, therefore, had no effect at all on the position of the property-owning individual who is its simple equivalent. Instead, the thinking subject has been replaced by the acting subject, who owns property and calculates his interests. He continues to interpret all physical reality as the object of his action, but sees himself as a calculating being, moving in this world of pure objects to which his own physical nature belongs. He calculates his chances of accessing this world in order to consume it and accumulate an ever larger part of it.

As an owning and calculating subject, his own body is just as much an object as the external objective world. He is not a physical entity, but instead he owns his own body and parts of the external, physical world. The denial of the transcendental subject has had no effect at all on the individual as calculating subject.

With regard to this problem there is, however, another position relevant to today, which casts doubt on the subject-object relation itself and which is self-reflecting in its confrontation with it. Insofar as human beings see themselves as physical creatures, who think within and from the confines of their physical state, they also make themselves present as living subjects to others. They, in turn, also see themselves as living subjects, reflecting on their lives, and therefore behave toward the whole world as natural beings. This relationship is one of embodied thought toward embodied thought. Therefore it is not a question of whether I exist, but how I continue to exist and continue to live. It is not a question of whether life is a dream but of the conditions necessary for physical existence as a living being. Even if life were a dream, I would still have to solve the problem of whether I can live my life as a living, physical being. The problem does not go away because life is a dream.

When, in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock cries out: "You take my life when you do take the means whereby I live," it is the living subject who speaks. And if someone says: "I don't want to be treated like an object," again it is the living subject who speaks. And if a person says: "Regrettably I can see no escape from this situation where I am being treated as an object," here too speaks a living subject, even if now he is the oppressed subject. But if someone says: "We are free when we all treat others absolutely equally as objects," then not only has he relinquished being a subject, but the subject itself is also crushed. The paragon of today's market-oriented society consists in just such a notion: To transform everything into an object, including oneself, is presented as both freedom and the solution to everything.

1. The Calculating Individual as a Starting Point for Reflection

In the following analysis it is not so much our intention to show the philosophical or theological dimension of the reference to the living subject, but rather to identify real instances where the human subject is visible today, in order then to reflect on the subject from diverse points of view.

If we wish to acquaint ourselves with the living subject, it seems to us best to start with the property-owning individual, who is put at the center of all social relationships in today's society. He is a calculating individual, who calculates his material interests with regard to his consumption and

the accumulation of opportunities to increase his income. From this point of view all objective reality is seen as capital, including so-called human capital, since man sees himself as a means to this accrual. The property-owning individual sees himself, body and soul, as his own capital. He then uses all his capabilities, even his social standing, as capital in the calculated pursuit of his material interests. In speaking here of material interests, we are not only referring to physical, material objects but we are also referring to every objectively presented opportunity to pursue any aim.

However, these material interests are always calculated, particular interests, and so opportunities are calculated to promote these interests. In this sense the calculation is one of advantage, and this advantage may express itself in opportunities either for consumption or accumulation. If a human being as a person is thus nothing more than a calculating subject, then he is reduced to being an isolated individual who fulfills the ideal of the *homo oeconomicus*. The calculation is a means-end calculation, which is also called a cost-benefit-calculation: It pursues a quantitatively optimum result with given means, or a particular result with minimum expenditure of means. And it chooses the ends according to the advantage that the individual expects to reap as a result. This behavior is regarded as rational action. The calculation requires that it be expressed in monetary terms in order that a quantitative comparison of means and ends may be made.

Rational action as seen from this angle is the prevailing activity in the social system in which we live today. The fact that efficiency and competitiveness, above any consideration of the conditions necessary for life on earth, are seen as the most important benchmarks stems from this view of rational action. It was Max Weber who first articulated this extreme model of the theory of rational action, although its central line of thought appeared long before him. However, this interpretation is not limited to what we generally define as the economy, but applies to all areas of culture, religion, and to how we define what is ethical. Not only does it dominate economic thought, but it turns up in sociological, philosophical, and theological thought also. For instance, as the starting point of his philosophy in *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger too develops this model of rational action. It is taken for granted in just the same way in all postmodern thought.

Seen from this view of rational action, the entire social system is transformed into a mechanism that is designed with its own functioning in mind. Everything is an input for an output; everything is a means to an end because every end is in turn a means for other ends. An end no longer has any value in itself; instead, the product of the whole mechanism is judged according to the maxim of maximum growth. Education and health systems are transformed into systems for creating human capital; the distribution of income is transformed into an incentive system to drive this dynamic growth; culture becomes an activity that gives meaning to

this meaningless process. Ethics become the functional ethics of the system that sets and implements norms that provide for the smooth running of the system. The same applies, in the case of the market, to norms that ensure the guarantee of property and the fulfillment of contracts. The dynamics of the system itself require these norms and their implementation. Even religion is subject to functional norms. Weber considered the Protestant work ethic indispensable to the emergence of the spirit of capitalism. The system, therefore, demands that religion so order itself that it becomes a prop to the system's apparently inexorable dynamic, which is geared toward optimizing that dynamic. Here we see the nihilism of modern society: It is the fruit of a dynamic that has no purpose or set of values that is not itself a product of that dynamic. The dynamic thus becomes self-perpetuating, putting all forms of human expression and values at the service of its own ends and annihilating them in the process.

This kind of system is only capable of acknowledging a human subject as an element of its environment, as Niklas Luhmann puts it. It controls everything, and has no aim that is not the perpetuation of its own dynamic. However, the subject appears as something quite other than a mere element of the system's environment as soon as we take into account the consequences of this system for humanity.

2. The Regulation of Calculated, Material Interests

If the system is regulated according to the pursuit of calculated material interests—of calculated advantage—then the regulations do not take into account the effects that this kind of activity has on the whole of society and the environment within which the activity takes place. Market regulations are a typical example of this. The activity of the market creates an order, but it is an order that undermines the whole context within which it arises. It saws off the branch it is sitting on.

What we have here is the problem of intentional, calculated action's nonintentional effects. The more action is oriented toward the particular means-end calculation, the less it can take into account the effects that it has on the whole context of societal and environmental issues, because these aspects cannot be included in the calculation of the action. The system exists within a context, but this context represents a whole spectrum of considerations that the calculation cannot and does not take into account. As a result the system distorts the whole context and undermines it so that the nonintentional effects of calculated action become perverse effects. We in turn experience these distortions as crises—crises not necessarily within the system itself, but crises unleashed by the system on society and the environment as a result of its heedless intrusion. These crises engulf the whole world without the system itself entering a state of crisis. Business is good, so

from the point of view of the system, there is no crisis. Yet these crises are all too obvious today: the ever-increasing exclusion of parts of the population, the crisis within social relationships as a whole, and the environmental crisis. The more action is oriented toward calculated advantage, the more these crises turn into global threats to which the system is incapable of reacting. The structure develops a tendency toward destroying itself, and so becomes self-destructive.

This is how the irrationality of the rationalized develops. Seen from the point of view of the means-end calculation, the action is completely rational, but its irrationality is exposed once the nonintentional effects, which it inevitably produces as a byproduct, are taken into account. Indeed these perverse effects are completely unavoidable so long as the system is regulated according to the calculation of material interests. Whatever applies to the system as a whole must also apply to its subsystems: All regulations are self-undermining if they consist in the unrestricted calculation of material self-interest.

A discussion of the nonintentional effects of action calculated according to material interests takes place in modernity in conjunction with the emerging bourgeois, capitalist system of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, itself a nonintentional result of the calculation of material interests that came to be the dominant force behind it. The discussion begins in eighteenth-century England with its classic representatives, David Hume and Adam Smith. They, however, interpret these nonintentional effects as exclusively benign. They show that an order does in fact emerge from the hegemony of calculating particular material interests—the bourgeois order—but they omit to show the ambivalence of this order. Smith indeed comes to the conclusion that the nonintentional effects of calculating particular interests translate into an “invisible hand,” which works to ensure that particular actions promote the general interest of the whole of society, whether intentionally or nonintentionally. They can do this provided the action takes place within the market as the sphere of influence of the invisible hand. In this way the nonintentional effects of calculated action appear not to raise any further particular problems.

Marxist critique, however, points out that this order is far from purely benign; rather, it is utterly ambivalent. Means-end-oriented action that calculates material interests does indeed create an order, but an order that undermines itself. It is an ordered chaos. Through its creation as a nonintentional product of the action, the order produces in turn perverse nonintentional effects: The realities of society as a whole and the external environment of humanity are destroyed. This results in self-destructive tendencies. Karl Marx summarizes his analysis as follows:

Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth —the soil and the labourer.²

Accordingly, the intentional production of wealth undermines, in a non-intentional way, the sources of all wealth: humankind and humankind's milieu, the environment. Production thus becomes self-destructive. In the pursuit of calculated and particular material interests, the whole context is not taken into account, nor can it be. As a result the whole is undermined. We see the consequences in crises, whether related to the environment, the exclusion of the population, or to social relations themselves. These are the true horsemen of the apocalypse. Ultimately, the system itself is threatened by these crises, which it has brought forth as a byproduct of its insistence on the unbridled supremacy of the interest-calculation in creating order. This is precisely the conclusion of George Soros, the well-known financier, who insists that besides the hegemony of capitalism, capitalism has only one more enemy: capitalism itself.

This threat does not by any means lead automatically to the replacement of capitalism by a new society. It only threatens capitalism because it threatens humanity's survival, upon which capitalism's own survival ultimately depends. There can be no survival of capitalism without the survival of humanity, yet the very logic of this capitalism threatens both.

3. The Internal Fault in the Model of the Pursuit of Particular Material Interests

What we are experiencing today is an inherent fault within the model of pursuing calculated material interests, because the interests themselves are undermined by the fact that the calculation of interests knows no boundaries. Particular material interests cannot be rationally pursued if this calculation becomes the ultimate authority for all human action. This demonstrates the irrationality of the rationalized, which has in turn become a global threat to the survival of humanity. It is for this reason that the immense crises of our time must be seen as evidence of this irrationality of the rationalized. These crises, which affect the whole, wider context of population and environment, arise as the nonintentional product (or as a byproduct) of human action, which is utterly rational within the terms of the means-end calculation, but utterly irrational in that it saws off the branch on which we are all sitting. That it does so in its utterly rational way only serves to demonstrate the irrationality of the rationalized.

This fault in the inner logic of calculated material interests demands an answer: an answer that comes not from somewhere outside the field of operation of these interests but from within. As natural beings, humans must orient themselves toward their material interests. All human life is embodied and requires the satisfaction of physical needs, without which nobody can live. Even the most spiritual ideals are dependent on the satisfaction of physical needs: The soul can never be anything more than the soul of a body.

For this reason, the answer can never lie in countering the pursuit of material interests as such; rather, it lies in saving the pursuit of material interests from its own logic of self-destruction, for this is the source of the problem. Therefore we must also acknowledge the fact—revealed by the fault in their logic—that these material interests transcend themselves, which means they require an answer in the form of a new rationality in response to the irrationality of the rationalized they have created. They must be subjected to different values, the need for which emanates from the totalitarianism of the faulty logic and is simultaneously suppressed by it.

Of course, there is plenty of opposition to the effects of rationalized irrationality today, but it is much less clear to people in general that we are dealing with the nonintentional effects of action that has been rationalized by means-end-calculation. It is for this reason that the opposition so often lacks direction.

The priority, then, must be to challenge the universally accepted principle of subordinating all material interests to the calculation of self-interest, not only at the global level but also within subsystems. The argument for doing this stems from the material interests themselves. Their sustainability must be secured, but it cannot be secured if the calculation of self-interest is the be-all and end-all. Therefore self-interest must be subject to the scrutiny of other considerations, so that it takes on a subordinate role.

In other words, calculated self-interest must be subjected to an ethic. However, we are not talking about a set of commandments that we can fetch down from Mount Sinai, but an ethic that evolves from material interests and is indeed imperative if human life, which depends on the satisfaction of physical needs, is to be secured. The ethic thus evolves from the consideration of benefit as against calculated advantage, since calculated advantage in the name of self-interest, with all its self-destructive logic, destroys any benefit in whose name it claims to act. The ethic is vital for the continued existence of humanity and so is not optional in the sense that Weber, for instance, understands value judgments to be. Of course, there have always been and will always be optional ethics. But an ethic of material interests is fundamental to human life, whose existence can only be secured by withstanding the self-destructive character of calculated self-interest. Calculated self-interest will deforest the entire Amazon region so long as it continues to yield large profits, and ever expand the production of material goods. In contrast, an ethic of material interests would oppose this, inasmuch as the destruction of the Amazon region means the destruction of a life-source upon which the future of life on earth depends. The ethic would articulate both material interests and benefit, and as a direct consequence it would resist the logic of calculated self-interest—all this in the name of a rationality that is a response to the irrationality of the rationalized. This

is why it must not be confused with the long-term calculation of interests. This is a benefit that goes beyond any calculation of advantage.

4. The Return of the Repressed Subject and the Common Good

To speak of a return of the suppressed and repressed subject today is to speak of the human being as subject of a rationality that is a direct response to rationalized irrationality. Reclaiming the subject can only mean liberation, for it confronts the particular action of calculated self-interest with the fact that it must act in harmony with the population and the environment, in other words with the global context that they represent. While particular and calculating action inevitably excludes such considerations and thereby unleashes the self-destructive tendencies in the system or its subsystems, their experience of this destruction prompts the human beings as subject to act, to call attention to the importance of the wider context. They therefore evaluate the calculating, partial action according to the destructive nonintentional effects that it unleashes within the wider contexts of humanity and nature, within the global system or its subsystems.

It is in this sense that human beings, as subject, challenge calculated self-interest, even though they are by no means prompted by any vision or ideal, but do so entirely out of material interest. They simply act in the name of an interest, shared with every individual, in respecting the global context so that the self-destructive tendencies that are a byproduct of the totalitarian calculation of self-interest may be countered. The subject thus has a vital role to play because, by respecting the global context as the fundamental source of human life, he is honoring the source of every single life. The human beings as subject do not “sacrifice” themselves for others or in the name of some universal ideal, but simply discover the fact that their own survival is inescapably bound up with the survival of others and of the environment. Nor do they sacrifice others. It is the calculating individual who sacrifices himself and others.

For just this reason, the subject is no individual entity or authority. Human beings cannot become subjects without knowledge of their intersubjectivity, of knowing themselves to be part of a web that includes all human beings and the environment external to human beings. Their own survival depends on the survival of others. According to Emmanuel Levinas,³ this is what loving one’s neighbor in the biblical sense means:

What does it mean, to love your neighbor “as yourself”? Buber and Rosenzweig got into difficulties with the translation at this point. So they departed from the traditional translation, and translated : “love

your neighbor, he is like you.” But if you have already decided to separate the last word of the Hebrew verse, “kamokha,” from the beginning of the verse, then you can also read the entire thing differently: “love your neighbor, this work of creation is like yourself”; “love your neighbor, that is yourself”; “this love of your neighbor is what you are yourself.”⁴

This is a call to become a subject. Human beings are not a subject as substance, but in the process of living they discover that they cannot live without fulfilling their role as a subject. There can be no survival for humanity otherwise, because life as a corollary of the system’s logic of inertia is self-destructive. It is a process that crushes and represses the subject. However, in resisting this destructive tendency, human beings become aware of the call to become a subject. Human beings, to secure their life, must resist the system’s logic of inertia; in resisting they develop as a subject.

This call emerges from a process, and so the subject is not an *a priori* but rather the result of an *a posteriori*. The human being as a subject is not matter, and is certainly not an *a priori* transcendental subject. The necessity to become a subject emerges as the system’s self-destructive logic of inertia becomes apparent. Unlike the individual, the subject exists as human potential and never entirely as a positive presence. It reveals itself first of all as an absence that is present and cries out: an absence that cries out.⁵ Becoming a subject is a positive response to the absence, but the response does not resolve the absence.⁶ It simply replies. The response has to become part of the system; the subject, however, as an absence that is present, stands in opposition to the system, because it is beyond the system and transcends it.

The response is the notion of a common good, a suggestion, an alternative that emanates from the subject. The response challenges the system in order to change it, and as a result indeed becomes part of the system. However, this challenge is rooted in humanity’s behavior as subject; the common good has no known values *a priori* that would then have to be realized. One can only show that the common good—and all that it requires—emerges as the answer. It is both consequence of and response to the self-destructive tendencies of the system in its movement of inertia. The common good then articulates in positive form the concern of the absent subject. It has no truth whatsoever *a priori*, but is a result of an interpretation of reality that emanates from the absence of the subject.

This idea of the common good is very different from the Thomist concept of medieval times. The latter is derived from a natural law that precedes all man-made order and that can be known independently of it. In this sense the medieval idea of the common good is static and *a priori*. It seeks to ascertain the requirements of the common good independently of the man-made order and its development process. However, the concept of

the common good that we have in mind is different. Here the requirements of the common good are discovered through the experience of the system's self-destructive tendencies. The values of this understanding of the common good are variable.

Neither can the positive presence of human beings as subject ever constitute the common good. Instead the common good requires the transformation of the system. This means introducing ideas of the common good into the system. It is completely possible that these ideas of the common good could end up working against human beings as subject once more if the system itself evolves within a mere movement of inertia. The requirements of the common good must therefore be constantly revised.

For this reason human beings as subject can never be identified with definite values; the subject is rather the benchmark for all values. The subject is thus affirmed as part of the wider, global context of the whole of humankind and nature, as against partial and calculating action and its material interests. This fundamental law states that an individual's life can only flourish if other human beings and their external environment are also entitled to flourish. Life cannot flourish if it involves destroying others in the process of securing one's own life. This can only lead to the unleashing of self-destructive processes that ultimately signify one's own destruction. That is why it is no sacrifice to seek one's own prosperity by allowing others to do to the same; instead, it is realism.

This is no long-term calculation that effectively keeps reproducing the problem that it set out to solve. Rather it is a question of transforming the system according to the needs of a society where everyone and everything has its place, including nature. This commandment goes far beyond all calculations of interest, yet the future of all human life depends on its fulfillment. In this sense it is both beneficial and necessary, even though it conflicts with self-interest's calculation of advantage. All respect for human rights—which are the rights of human beings as subject—is based on this commandment.

It is a question of ethical necessity: an ethic that is not optional but necessary. Humanity can no longer secure its existence today without making this ethic a reality.

CHAPTER 10

A Critical Theory and a Critique of Mythical Reason

Not all thought that criticizes is necessarily therefore critical theory. What defines critical theory is that the critique happens from a particular perspective, which is that of human emancipation: the humanization not only of human relations but of the relationship of humans to nature as a whole. Emancipation is humanization, and humanization leads to emancipation.

The whole of critical theory is founded on this perspective; it runs like a thread through all its utterances. However, we intend to limit our analysis to those elements, founding critical theory itself on the movement from humanity's humanization to its emancipation. The concepts of humanism and emancipation as they appear from the Renaissance of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe onward are products of modernity. Of course they have many precursors, but they are not a reclaiming of something that has gone before, as the word "renaissance" suggests. Even though the Renaissance era frequently expresses such a belief, nothing is reborn. Rather, we see the creation of a new concept that is the product of a secularized world, a world that is understood more and more as both secular and accessible to man.

Because the world is secular and is viewed as such, the emerging claim to humanization is necessarily universal. In the words of Friedrich von Schiller, "Man is created free, and is free, though he be born in chains."¹ In other words, human beings have human dignity, even if they are born in chains. The chains here are the denial of what human beings are: Chains mean dehumanization. Humanization, on the other hand, means freeing the human being from these chains. Freedom means freedom from chains, and it is the task of critical theory to analyze and deduce what produces these chains. Equally its task is to question the freedom offered by the realm of ideologies, to test to what extent these promised freedoms contain new sets of chains and even render them invisible.

The cry for humanization and liberation becomes particularly and persistently audible in the first half of the nineteenth century, finding its

expression in the philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx, who also draw on G. W. F. Hegel's philosophy. Bourgeois society was founded, particularly in the French Revolution, as a means of emancipation from the secular and ecclesiastical powers of the European Middle Ages, and presented itself as *the* emancipated society, indeed as the end of history. However, in the meantime other emancipation movements had emerged whose focus were the effects of just this bourgeois society. These emancipation movements appeared from within bourgeois society in order to oppose it. From the point of view of a developing bourgeois society, emancipation was understood as a clash with the powers of another, "premodern" society. However, new emancipation movements were now presenting themselves as movements of emancipation from bourgeois society and its effects. The first clash found its symbolic expression in the French Revolution that guillotined, along with the aristocrats, the powers of an earlier society from which people wanted liberation. However, they also guillotined three people who were symbols of the new emancipation movements that came from within bourgeois society itself: François-Noël Babeuf, who sympathized with the emerging workers' movements; Olympe de Gouges, who was in favor of the emancipation of women as citizens of the state; and, under Napoleon, Toussaint Louverture, one of the central figures in the abolition of slavery in Haiti, who was strangled in prison. Bourgeois society was against the emancipation of humans from humans. Other emancipation movements were later added to these, such as the liberation of colonies, cultures, and finally nature itself. Bourgeois emancipation had limited itself to the rights of people as individuals and partners in contract. Now emancipation movements were appearing that were founded on the notion of human beings as physical beings in all their diversity. The meaning of the word "emancipation" had changed. Now it referred particularly to the emancipation movements that emerged from within bourgeois society itself.

From this point onward, new understandings of emancipation appear that still apply today. Starting with these, we would like to set out a rough categorical framework of thought that can be, and indeed is, used today to define critical theory. We will do this in three stages, starting with the ethic of emancipation, followed by the concept of justice on which the process of emancipation is based, and finally the relationship between the subject and the common good that underpins the whole process.

1. The Ethic of Emancipation: The Human Being as Highest Being for Humankind

Critical theory as we understand it today appears within the context of the emancipation movements that emerged starting at the end of the eighteenth century onward. We find its strongest expression in Marx, and for this

reason we would like to begin our introduction to critical theory with the aid of two statements by him, which, we believe, illustrate the paradigm within which critical theory is still developing today:

They are remarks from Marx as a young man:

1. "Philosophy," which he already understands as critical theory, passes judgment "against all heavenly and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity."² (Self-consciousness, according to Marx, is always to be understood as conscious being. "Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process."³)

2. "The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *man is the highest essence for man*—hence, with the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence."⁴

If we combine the two quotations, they give us two fundamental statements on what we could call the paradigm of critical theory:

1. Critical theory passes judgment on all heavenly and earthly gods that do not acknowledge that the human being is the supreme being for humankind.
2. Critical theory passes judgment on all heavenly and earthly gods in whose name the human is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being.

In order to emphasize his critical standpoint, Marx speaks of a higher being, even of a supreme divinity. However, this supreme being is secular, not, for instance, a heavenly god.

The highest being for humanity is humanity itself, but not, of course, humanity as it *is*, but rather as it is *not*, that is, humanity when it is humane. The challenge for human beings is to grow into their very humanness. It is an absence that must be made present.

The corollary of this is a transcendence that attends the sphere of human relations, providing a platform from which criticism is directed toward the dehumanization of humankind. Humanism is based on the premise that the human is the highest being for humankind: Humanism is bound up with human emancipation as part of the process of humanization.

The fact that the human is the highest being for humankind leads to a criticism of the gods and thence to a criticism of religion, which in the case of Marx always begins with a criticism of Christianity. This criticism declares all gods to be false that do not acknowledge the human as the highest being for humankind.

What is striking here is that the criticism is not only directed at heavenly gods but at earthly gods too. But which are the earthly gods? The answer, to Marx, is obvious: The earthly gods have to do with the market—and capital in particular—on the one hand, and the state on the other hand. In their apotheosis (Marx speaks later of fetishism), they oppose the premise that the human is the highest being for humankind, and instead declare capital and state to be the highest beings for humankind. Through their association with heavenly gods, they create false gods that fail too to acknowledge the human as the highest being for humankind. They force themselves on the human beings and subject them to their own logic of oppression.

The human, as the highest being for humankind, transcends humankind and takes up its claim for humanity. Marx expresses this claim as the right “to overthrow all relations in which the human being is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence.” The transcendence of human beings means that they are not to be treated as degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible beings; instead, through a process of emancipation, they are to “overturn all relations” that cause them to be treated as such.

It is understandable that, as a consequence of this, Marx turns his attention to criticizing the political economy and capital as the ruling earthly gods. He analyzes the self-logic of capital, which he now calls fetishism. There is in this respect no difference between the young and the mature Marx. The Marx who now turns his attention to the critique of capital does this within the paradigm of critical theory that he developed as a young man.

Although Marx talks about materialism, a spirituality of humankind derives from this, for this spirituality could also be called materialism insofar as it is based on the physical world. We could perhaps summarize historical materialism in the following way: “Do as God does and become a human being.” An ethic ensues that is both a necessary ethic—for without it the survival of humanity cannot be secured—and at the same time an ethic of the “good life.”

Here we have a critique of idolatry, a critique of false gods; however, the criticism is based on secular, human norms and not any religious norm. If the human is the highest being for humankind, then it follows that there will be criticism of religion, which becomes in turn the benchmark for all criticism of mythical reason.

To say that the human is the highest being for humankind is another way of saying: “God has become a human being.” Christianity itself—all too frequently nonintentionally—comes into conflict with the orthodoxy of this humanist spirituality, which is, in fact derived from the origins of Christianity: “Do as God does, become a human being.” In Zurich in the 1980s, young people protested outside the banks with that very slogan: “Do as God does, become a human being.”

Presumably Marx was not aware of this, but we are not dealing here with a straightforward secularization. The secular view of the world is derived from Christianity, and stands in opposition to Christian orthodoxy. And it is within this secular world that the fact of God's becoming a human being becomes apparent. It is an anthropological phenomenon that is discernible to a secular consciousness—and thus not merely a remnant of something that has gone before, as the word “secularization” could suggest.

However, Marx drew a conclusion from his analysis that is certainly not tenable today, although it is understandable within the context in which he was writing. The conclusion he came to was: if God has become human and so man is the highest being for humankind, then why have gods at all? He was assuming that religion would die out—as a consequence of humanism itself. Marx never wanted to do away with religion, and he definitely did not want some kind of militant atheism, as claimed by later Marxist orthodoxy. But he expected that religion as such would die out. The conclusion of his reflections was that the spirituality of humanness, which is rooted in man's physical being, would lead to the death of religion itself. Atheistic humanism appeared to be the only unequivocal solution. Marx believed that the criticism of religion was over, insofar as it dealt with the heavenly gods. The problem as he now saw it was the criticism of the earthly gods.

The fact remains, however, that the earthly gods against whom Marx's criticism was directed continue, perhaps today more than ever before, to be accompanied by heavenly gods, so that the necessity for a critique of religion quite obviously persists. The heavenly gods of Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush play a decisive role in legitimizing their power, just as Adolf Hitler's heavenly god played a decisive role in fascism. And many churches were accomplices, and still are today. The same applies to the heavenly gods at work within the fetishism of today's economic relations. The current globalization strategy, particularly as it is manifest in the United States, would lack power without the forces of Christian apocalyptic fundamentalism and the fundamentalism of a theology of prosperity behind it. Here Max Weber succumbed to the same error as Marx. Weber believed that eighteenth-century Protestant Puritanism was but a transient form of the secular capitalism that was to follow and that in the future the system would perpetuate itself from within. This assumption, too, has proved to be largely erroneous. The system instead develops a spirituality of oppression, which then appropriates the realms of the mythical and the religious for its own ends.

Exactly the same thing happened in the 1970s, when the US government declared liberation theology to be one of the most significant threats to US national security. There followed a persecution of Christians in Latin America in which many thousands of martyrs were sacrificed to the heavenly gods of the system.

Marx's wording of the critical paradigm itself reveals the false conclusion that led him to anticipate the inevitable death of religion, and also caused serious damage to later socialist movements. Let us then pose the question: what is the status quo of the gods who hold man to be the highest being for humankind, who therefore stand with those who insist on overthrowing all conditions in which man is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being? Marx did not ask himself this question, but the wording of the critical paradigm already forces the question. If the question is not posed, the critique of mythical reason remains stuck from the start. The wording of Marx's critical paradigm has a blind spot that he simply overlooked.

And yet it was precisely in this sense that liberation theology originated in Latin America, within critical theory and its fundamental paradigm. Liberation theology came into being—within an existing tradition, in this case the Christian tradition—through the revelation of a God who holds the human beings themselves to be the highest being for humankind and in whose name “all conditions in which the human being is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being (are to be) overthrown.” This is the God in whose name Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador reinterpreted the words of Irenaeus of Lyon from the second century: *Gloria dei, vivens homo* (The Glory of God is a human being fully alive). This God is a God who cooperates with human beings, who is an accomplice to human emancipation.

For this God, the human is the highest being for humankind. God is Supreme Being in that he reveals the human as the highest being for humankind. This is the meaning of the phrase in liberation theology “God has become human.”

Liberation theology emerges exactly at the juncture exposed by Marx's critical paradigm but left unexplored. It is through liberation theology that the blind spot in Marx's critique of religion becomes visible. Today atheist and religious humanism stand side by side, united by the recognition that both forms of humanism are possible and that neither can have exclusive claim.

The belief is the same: that the human is the highest being for humankind. Based on the premise that the human is the highest being for humankind, it is independent of every religious stance. To live out this belief takes precedence over every question about religion. It is the belief underlying the critical paradigm itself—in all its forms—and it represents human dignity. It is a humanist belief. The liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo expresses this position most clearly when he talks about a constituent anthropological belief, which therefore can appear in all genuine religions.

From this we can see that liberation theology is not actually Marxist, but it has become part of a broad critical paradigm demonstrated by Marx that is not purely Marxist but human. Liberation theology itself is born

of its own tradition. But it becomes part of what the critical paradigm describes and provides a bridge to the development of a critique of mythical reason. Liberation theology evolves with the revelation that has been modernity's central myth for 2,000 years: "Do as God does, become a human being." This myth runs through the period up to the Renaissance, where the seeds of modernity are already present. It is at the heart of the labyrinth of modernity, and is the basis for understanding it. This incarnation of God is our Ariadne's thread for today, and, according to Greek mythology, it is red in color.

The notion that the human is the highest being for humankind is not exclusive to Marxism; rather, it defines humanism. Nonetheless Marx's thinking continues to remain the pillar on which the development of the critical paradigm rests. In this sense, critical thought is not possible if it does not also involve a critique of mythical reason.

2. Emancipation and the Principle of Justice

The belief that the human is the highest being for humankind constitutes an ethic. However, it is not simply an ethic of the "good life" but an ethic of life itself. An ethic of the good life presupposes, quite independently of the ethic, that life is secured, although it is fair to assume that without an ethic of the good life, life is dull, trivial, or miserable. In this sense the ethic of the good life in itself is secondary and optional.

Marx needs his analysis of capital in order to justify his ethic of the critical paradigm as a necessary ethic, that is, as an ethic that is necessary in order to be able to live at all. According to this ethic, life does not depend on "value judgment," in contrast to Weber. As a result of his analysis of relative added value in the first volume of *Capital*, the only volume that was published by Marx himself, he concludes:

Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth —the soil and the labourer.⁵

This quotation anticipates our current perception of the world and gives expression to our critique of capitalism. It articulates a point of view that has to a large extent become universal for people today, beyond right- or left-wing politics, beyond social class.

At the same time, in a nutshell, it gives us the key point of Marx's critique of capitalism. Instead of empty phrases about infinite values that are derived from some indefinable human essence, the quotation presents to us those values that Marx himself stood for, in particular his concept of "justice." I believe we still have no concept of justice that surpasses it.

The concept of justice presented in the quotation evolves against a background of injustice. This is easily deduced from the text: Injustice arises when wealth is produced by “simultaneously undermining the sources of all wealth: the earth and the worker.” The term “worker” refers here not only to the working class but to humans as laboring beings. We can go on to deduce what justice is: to produce wealth in such a way as to *protect* the sources of all wealth, that is, the earth and the worker. In other words, we could say that the quotation defines the “common good” for today, a good that is in everyone’s interest and therefore in the interest of every single individual. To fight for justice today really means to fight for the common good.⁶ Thus justice is not limited to so-called “distributive justice,” but encompasses the whole of human life.

This is the proposition: Capitalist society produces wealth by simultaneously undermining the sources of wealth production. It does not have to be understood in absolute terms. Historical socialist societies had, to a significant extent, analogous effects. This said, what our experience today shows once again is that capitalist society is at the core of this kind of destruction.

It is not at all an “economistic” (German *ökonomistisch*) proposition, because it relates to the conditions necessary for the survival of human life. They alone determine what justice and the common good are. However, these conditions are “physical.” Although the proposition refers to society in all its guises, it defines society according to the conditions necessary for the survival of human life. The result is a norm that relates to the whole of society and therefore also applies to the economy, if we understand the economy in the usual contemporary sense as the space where scarce means are assigned to fulfill ends.

The conditions necessary for the survival of human life establish a cycle: the natural cycle of human life. Human life is not possible if it is not integrated into this natural cycle; to be separated from it means death. And undermining the sources of all potential production is simply another way of undermining this natural cycle of human life.

Justice is about safeguarding the natural cycle of human life. This is why we speak of “life in just relations” as the key concept for a new culture of life. But the natural cycle of human life cannot be safeguarded unless it simultaneously fulfills the ethic of emancipation as expressed by Marx in his critical paradigm and categorical imperative. Unless the justice rooted in the categorical imperative is accomplished, there can be no survival of humanity. The ethic of humanization (and of emancipation) proves to be at the same time a vital ethic and an ethic of the good life. The material calculations of barefaced capitalism lead to a self-destructive process; material evaluations with an ethical bias lead to the humanization and emancipation of humankind. Here they unite in one voice: The survival of humanity

cannot be reduced to a technical problem, but is inextricably linked to an ethic of humanization and emancipation that includes the emancipation of nature. It is not CO² that is responsible for global warming, but the injustice of our society as we have just defined it. CO² simply plays the role of the means—absolutely a nonintentional means—by which the injustice of society threatens the survival of humanity through the uncontrolled production of CO². Liberation theology calls this ethic of humanization the option of the poor.

3. The Subject and the Common Good

This ethic, based on justice, expresses the common good. The common good is not the same as the general interest, a term used in the tradition of economic liberalism. There it is used to express a particular ideology of power—ultimately, economic power—which passes off unconditional subordination to that power as being in the interest of all.

If we take the expression in its literal sense, then all modernity since the Renaissance is based on the thesis that the human is the highest being for humankind, and economic liberalism is therefore no exception. However, it does not come to the same conclusion as the critical paradigm, that is, to overthrow all conditions in which the human is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being. Instead, economic liberalism draws the opposite conclusion, upon which its poor dialectic is based: In order that the human beings may be the highest being for humanity, they must subordinate themselves unconditionally to the market and its laws—and hence the ruling powers. This is what the ideological construction of an invisible hand, of the so-called market automatism, actually means, with its automatic bias toward harmonization. It affects every aspect of the market, and has shaped economic liberalism's ideas since the time of Adam Smith. Such a bias, if it exists, exists only in divisions of the market, but never in the overall context of the markets as a whole. The way in which it has been elevated to the status of a virtually divine invisible hand is nothing short of an ideological deification of both market and capital. Economic liberalism promotes the ideology of the absolute power of market and capital in the name of the general interest, portraying itself as serving the best interests of humanity. In so doing it lays claim to magical powers, which can guarantee—provided there is absolute subordination to a power external to the human—that the human will become the highest being for humankind.

All authorities and powers in modernity, wherever they are awarded such absolute supremacy, to the point of deification, are constructed on this poor dialectic. The approach is widely used. For example, we find the same argumentation in the *notification* in which the Vatican recently judged the liberation theologian from El Salvador, Jon Sobrino. In the verdict we see the

same absolute, divine authority awarded to power: in this case an ecclesiastical authority within the Roman Catholic Church. The fact that God did not become a Christian but human, and that when God speaks, humanity is responsible for what She/He says, completely escaped the Vatican. Many theories of democracy also suffer from such a deification of political power, even if they are democratically legitimized. The same argumentation also appears in all contemporary movements toward totalitarianism; it was also there in historical socialism. In this case the arguments were developed in the course of constituting a so-called avant-garde of the proletariat. The conclusion, however, is always the same. If every person subjects himself unconditionally to whichever legitimized power it happens to be, it will be better for all: every person must submit in order that the human may become the highest being for humankind.

The whole of modernity is founded on God's incarnation, but this is articulated in starkly contradictory ways, depending on a group's or an individual's position with regard to authority and power. All hold that the human is the highest being for humankind, but what divides them is precisely what Marx presents as his categorical imperative.

The common good, which follows from the critical paradigm, sets the boundaries of power and its sphere of influence, and is the opposite of an imposed general interest. The common good considers the good of all in terms of the reality of human life, which is based on the human's corporeality as a natural being. This is not a collective good but the good of each and every one, which the market cannot bring about. On the contrary, it destroys it when left to its own devices. We are dealing with a good that is founded on the realities of human life, and so can only be brought about when the market is divested of its absolute power and is instead directed, by systematic intervention, toward sustaining human life and nature as a whole, upon which life depends. In rejecting such interventions, the market (and capital) metamorphoses into the highest being in opposition to humankind and thus becomes a fetish (a false god). Of course this is couched in ideological language to support the claim that the human beings will indeed become the highest being for humankind as long as they relinquish the right to self-determination.

We are dealing with an idea of a common good that stems from a view of the human as subject rather than as individual in the individualistic sense. Our interpretation is not derived from any human characteristic that is an a priori given, as in the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition of the common good. The notion of common good that concerns us is historical. It is revealed through the experience of life itself, indeed everywhere where "the human is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being." Its norm are the human beings—in their corporeality—as the highest being for humankind. (In liberation theology: *gloria dei vivens homo*, The Glory of God is a

human being fully alive, is the norm for God as well as for human beings). Since we are talking about the good of each and every one, then emancipation is not limited to the emancipation of those who have been discriminated against. The act of emancipation leads to the emancipation of all. I am, if you are. If you are not, I lose myself. If I kill you, I kill myself.

If women are to be emancipated, then men must also change, since they are in relationship with one another. However, if women are truly emancipated, then men too are set free from their artificial masculine status as masters and stand to gain by improving their lives, even though they have lost in terms of calculable power. Emancipation begins with that part of humanity that is discriminated against, but in exposing the discrimination it also holds up a mirror to the discriminator, who is able to see the hollowness of his own position as master. Through this discovery he becomes part of the emancipation process, and in losing he actually gains. This is true of all emancipation processes, and is the reason why they serve the common good and not merely a group interest. The fact of discrimination exposes the inhumanity of the dominant party, but in treating discriminated persons as human beings in all their dignity, the dominant party is able to liberate himself from his inhumanity. In freeing his slaves, the slave master frees himself from his own inhumanity; in emancipating the worker, the person exploiting the worker becomes human too. Improving one's life is not to be equated with having more calculable power. This notion of a general interest gives rise to a conflict not only within society but within every person: the conflict between freedom and the struggle for more calculable power. Even though these conflicts always also imply class conflicts, they cannot be reduced to those. For these conflicts expose discrimination and with it the need for the discriminator also to free himself from the inhumanity of his own position.

In this sense emancipation not only defends the interests of the discriminated as a group, but attends to the well-being of each and every one, which is the common good. This is why we cannot do without the concept of the common good in the sense we have described. It takes as its starting point the interests of discriminated groups and people, but there is a dimension to these interests that is also the general interest. Always at stake in these conflicts is the common good, which is the good of each and every one, and therefore includes the good of the person who is the discriminating party in the conflict. Emancipation must, therefore, never be confined exclusively to the group interests of those who are discriminated against. Only then may we speak of emancipation. Seen from the perspective of the common good, any group that limits its idea of emancipation to its own individual group interests in order to maximize them undermines those very interests. The group destroys the common good and instead brings about its opposite: a general "un-good."

We are dealing with a conflict between, on the one hand, the calculated advantages and power of groups and individual interests, and on the other, a better life for each and everyone. We are dealing with a genuine struggle, which is always also an ethical struggle, even in the social and political spheres, indeed particularly in those spheres. Through this conflict, the human beings become subject and transcend themselves as an individual. It is a conflict between two different definitions of usefulness: between the advantage calculation from the standpoint of group and individual interests, and the benefit in the sense of the common good, which cannot be calculated in quantitative terms. We are dealing with an advantage that appears precisely in the sense of the advantage calculation of individual interests to be useless. But of course, benefit in the sense of the common good also has to depend on calculations; however, in this case the calculations are not merely calculations of means that have been defined by ends. It is precisely because the calculation of advantage has become the determiner of the ends that we are threatened by a total breakdown. The fact that the common good must transcend all our calculations drives out political pragmatism in favor of political realism.

What could this look like in terms of a realistic vision and practice?

PART III

Vision and Praxis of Interreligious Solidarity for Life in Just Relations Today

In the previous parts of this study, we have shown that the different crises facing us today are elements of a deep systemic crisis of modernity. There is no doubt that science, technology, and capitalism have brought tremendous new knowledge to humankind and increased the material living standard of a small part of the world's population. There have also been gains in emancipation. However, these are fettered in increasingly destructive forms of direct, structural, and cultural violence. It is evident that this civilization and way of life has no chance of continuing forever. The earth will not tolerate it. Climate disaster with all its haunting consequences and the acceleration of species extinction are only the most obvious signals. Social and psychological destruction is increasing, too, driving whole societies into chaos and violence. The ambivalence of modernity has turned from the period of (partial) progress into the phase of accelerating lethal developments. Therefore, the crucial issue is: How can we move from a eurocentric modernity to a "transmodernity" as "a global project of liberation" in which the victimized, the other side of the conquests, become the subjects?¹ How can we find the leverage to overcome the destructive mechanisms and dynamics of western civilization (not only capitalism as an economic system, but eurocentric modernity as a whole) and move toward a culture of life?

Certainly, the key to change is praxis, linked to critical thinking. We witnessed this in Tunisia and Egypt, where people lost their fear of the existing laws and structures of power and became protagonists of their own history. This proves the insight of liberation theology that acting is the necessary starting point, enabling people and communities to see and to judge. However, acting must include a compassionate view of reality, and

critical judgment, in order for people to act in an informed and focused way. Seeing, judging, and acting constantly interact as in a circle or spiral. Therefore, before turning to alternative praxis linked to reproductive rationality, let us first have a look at the vision of a new paradigm on the basis of our reflections in part 2 on the common good.

CHAPTER 11

The Vision of Life in Just Relations

1. New Developments in the Sciences

A revolution toward a new paradigm is taking place even in *western sciences*.² Of course, this started with quantum physics more than a century ago, demonstrating that the “objects” look different from different “subject” perspectives, that is, experimental arrangements (light as corpuscle and wave). Recently brain research, in particular, has presented groundbreaking insights for alternatives. Brain research demonstrates that the original founder of western science’s basic assumptions, René Descartes, was empirically wrong. It shows this by pointing to the necessary interaction between thinking, body, feeling, and environment.³ More specifically, the discovery of mirror neurons in our brain suggests that we have been created to feel spontaneously with others (empathy).⁴ When a person cuts his finger and sheds blood, others who see it will automatically feel pain with him. The same applies to our empathy with animals. So it is not true—even according to the standards of objectivizing science—that we are created as isolated individuals competing in a war of all against all, as Thomas Hobbes maintained.

Biology is also contributing tremendous insights to alternative thinking. Among others, David Korten⁵ and Leonardo Boff⁶ have presented fascinating overviews, describing the miracles of evolution and the complex interrelationships making life possible. British physician and biologist James E. Lovelock⁷ plays a key role in this regard, followed by Lynn Margulis⁸ and others. Lovelock received a commission by NASA to develop models for discovering life on neighboring planets of the earth. On studying the earth’s life system, he found out that there is an incredible balance of factors making life possible. He especially explored the atmosphere and oceans, built on balanced physical and chemical interactions. If the concentration of one element, for example, oxygen, were changed, life would die. Indeed, the history of the cosmos and the earth has experienced catastrophes, but the earth system has kept the basic parameters for life, self-organizing its

own sustainability.⁹ Lovelock gave this web of life, the earth, the name of the earth goddess in antiquity, Gaia. Now, however, humans can destroy life, or at least can make human life on earth impossible. Our civilization is heading systemically in this direction. This is why it is necessary to turn to a culture of life, moving from *homo demens* to *homo sapiens*.

In part 1, we touched upon relational psychology (in contrast to individualistic, drive-oriented theoretical methods). This field shows that the human subject emerges from intersubjectivity, that is, from the relation between the self and its relating partners, beginning with the baby-mother relationship. In Emmanuel Levinas's terms, the "self" emerges in relation to "others." The more a baby receives recognition and love, and the greater the appreciation of his/her response, the stronger the self becomes, and vice versa.¹⁰ It is this mutuality that makes the difference. However, in the course of a child's further development, the adult partner does not consist of only one person. On the contrary, society at large, groups within society, and political and economic institutions also become partners and mobilize early childhood experiences and the psychological patterns of the infant, albeit via his/her experiences of specific persons. We called this perspective primary intersubjectivity, referring to the ultimate relatedness of the emerging psychological subject. To respond to this basic *conditio humana* is crucial for the new vision. It is a tremendous asset when it comes to putting the vision into practice. It can motivate and mobilize people. Much of the psychological harm produced by neoliberalism is caused by isolation and exclusion. Consequently, bringing people together in resistance and struggles for alternatives has, at the same time, therapeutic effects. Even economic happiness research concludes that flourishing relations are the main factors for making people feel happy.

Empathic and cooperative life can even be discovered in animals. Biology has discovered that many animal species besides primates participate in the mirror neuron system, showing empathy.¹¹ Charles Darwin (*The Descent of Man and Expressions of the Emotions in Man and Animals*) in his later works realized the emotional, social nature of animals. "Darwin came to believe that the survival of the fittest is as much about cooperation, symbiosis, and reciprocity as it is about individual competition and that the fittest are just as likely to enter into cooperative bonds with their fellows."¹²

2. Alternative Political Economy

All this may be convincing, but the main test of whether it will work for a new culture of life is whether it enables a new relational political economy. Christian Felber and others call it the common good economy (*Gemeinwohl Ökonomie*).¹³ The dominating system has been very successful in maintaining that competition, even cut-throat competition, is the "natural" state of affairs

in the economy, society, and politics. One argument is also that the centrally planned economy did not work. In part 2, we showed that both are the children of modernity and that both are not sustainable. However, it is crucial for a new vision of an alternative political economy to demonstrate its feasibility.

First of all, let us look at successful examples of cooperative business. Recent research has proven that all major advances in the history of humanity are linked to cooperation.¹⁴ Even though the capitalist system still dominates the global economy, we can find very successful common good-related economic initiatives: banks, factories, and businesses. There are 35 alternative banks in Europe, cooperating in the International Association of Social Finance Organisations (INAISE).¹⁵ Felber reports on a new initiative in Austria. Within one year, between October 2010 and September 2011, three hundred fifty firms joined to organize their economic activities not for the goal of profit maximization but for the common good.¹⁶ The most famous example of cooperatives is that started in 1943 in the Mondragon Valley in Spain.¹⁷ It contains many economic activities—from banking to high-tech operations—and has more than eighty thousand employees, working in 256 companies in the fields of finance, industry, retail, and knowledge. Together these organizations own the cooperatives and make the decisions in participatory ways. It is the leading business in the Basque province of Spain, and the seventh largest in the whole of Spain in terms of turnover (EUR 15 billion annually). Of course, they also strive for good work and performance, but there is no competition of all against all. On the contrary, strong subcooperatives support weaker ones, and the banks vary the interest rates according to capacity. All decisions are made in participatory ways. The drive in humans to vie with one another in a system of cut-throat competition can be very salutary in a cooperative framework. As in playing games or artistic creativity, we want to produce good results, but without desiring to exclude or kill one other.

David Korten, choosing life as the guiding metaphor, has drawn conclusions from these insights for an economic paradigm transcending capitalism and centrally planned economy.¹⁸ Building on research results of biologists like Margulis, he designed an economy patterned on the model of living organisms. They work in a decentralized, yet coordinated, self-organizing way. No cell is allowed to grow disproportionately—this would be cancer (like capitalist growth). No cell dominates the rest (like in a centrally planned economy). Rather every cell cooperates with the whole for the survival of the whole. On this basis he has developed six lessons showing how life can teach economics (121ff):

1. *Life favors self-organization;*

Human economics can and should function as self-organizing system in which each individual, family, community, or nation is able to

exercise its own freedom of choice mindful of the needs of the whole, and no entity has the power to dominate any other.

2. *Life is frugal and sharing;*
Human economies can and should be organized to contribute to life's abundance through the frugal use, equitable sharing, and continuous recycling of available energy and resources to the end of meeting the material, social, and spiritual needs of all their members.
3. *Life depends on inclusive, place-based communities;*
Human economies can and should be built around inclusive, place-based communities, adapted to the conditions of their physical space, adept at the collection and conservation of energy and the recycling of materials to function as largely self-reliant entities, and organized to provide each of their members with a sustainable means of livelihood.
4. *Life rewards cooperation;*
Human economies can and should acknowledge and reward cooperative behavior toward the efficient use of energy and resources in providing adequate livelihoods for all and enhancing the productive capacities of a shared pool of living capital.
5. *Life depends on boundaries;*
Human economies can and should have managed borders at each level of organization...which allow them to maintain integrity, coherence, and resource-efficiency of their internal productive process and to protect themselves from predators and pathogens while cooperating to enhance the potentials of the larger whole.
6. *Life banks on diversity, creative individuality, and shared learning*
Human economies can and should nurture cultural, social, and economic creativity and diversity and share information within and between place-based economies. These conditions are the keys to system resilience and creative transcendence."

There follows a design of nine elements for a postcorporate world: (1) human-scale self-organization, (2) village and neighborhood clusters, (3) towns and regional centers, (4) renewable energy self-reliance, (5) closed-cycle materials use, (6) regional environmental balance, (7) mindful livelihoods, (8) inter-regional electronic communication, (9) wild spaces.

Institutionally this approach for a life-inspired and life-enhancing economy can be complemented by the concept of "commons." It avoids the absoluteness of private property or state property, which concentrate economic and political power at the top.¹⁹ In mainstream economics commons have been downgraded because of the myth of the "tragedy of the commons"—a myth because the arguments claiming that commons were overexploited

and therefore did not work have been based on the misunderstanding that commons were no man's land. In reality, commons can be, and have been, managed well by the communities using them. This happens by cooperation, not by competition. In an interdisciplinary group of researchers and practitioners we tried to describe what commons are:²⁰

What are commons and why are they significant? Commons are diverse. They are the fundamental building blocks and pre-condition of our life and social wealth. They include knowledge and water, seeds and software, cultural works and the atmosphere. Commons are not just "things," however. They are living, dynamic systems of life. They form the social fabric of a free society.

Commons do not belong to anyone individually nor do they belong to no one. Different communities, from the family to global society, always create, maintain, cultivate, and redefine commons. When this does not happen, commons dwindle away—and in the process, our personal and social security diminishes. Commons ensure that people can live and evolve. The diversity of commons helps secure our future.

Commons are the foundation of every economic activity. Thus, they must also be the result of what we do. We have to constantly revitalize our commons, because everything we produce relies upon the knowledge we inherit, the natural resources that the Earth gives us, and cooperation with our fellow citizens. The activity known as "the economy" is embedded in our social fabric. Depletion of resources, failures in education, needless barriers to creativity, and weak social bonds compromise the generativity of the whole. Without vital commons, production is impossible. Without commons, companies cannot earn money.

Commons are often destroyed and thus driven from our consciousness. One reason that commons are threatened is because many individuals claim a limitless right to use things. But where fair usage rights to water and seeds are curtailed by economic calculation or through governmental policies, where resource exploitation destroys our natural inheritance, where breach upon breach is inflicted on public spaces, where patenting software limits creativity and impedes economic progress, where reliable networks are lacking, there dependency and uncertainty will increase.

Commons are the very basis for life, theologically a gift of God to all creatures. All economic activities, therefore, have commons as reference point. In his draft of a confession of guilt by the churches, Dietrich Bonhoeffer states: "The church confesses her guilt in relation to all ten commandments. . . . She was not able to communicate God's care credibly enough so that all human economic activity would have received its task from this perspective."²¹ This means that all economy must be built on God's gifts to secure the life of all creatures—in contrast to the commodification of

nature in the interest of accumulating capital (cf. Leviticus 25:23). The key issue is: is nature a gift or a commodity?²²

Commons do not relate to nature only. As our definition says, “they include knowledge and water, seeds and software, cultural works and the atmosphere.” This is clear with regard to knowledge and software. Neoliberal capitalism does everything to privatize these spheres. Even in Europe, where universities have a long and successful history of public management, university councils have been established where business and banks have gained major influence. The Bologna process in Europe forces students to follow standard curricula in order to be streamlined for later functioning in the commodified world. Hardly any time remains for creative interdisciplinary, intercultural studies. Instead of concentrating on research and teaching, university instructors have to increasingly engage in fund-raising. Software is one of the major machines of capital accumulation.

However, there are strong countercurrents against the privatization of commons. Austrian and German students went on an education strike in 2010. Wikipedia is the most successful system of sharing knowledge. Linux and Open Office can compete with Microsoft. Firefox is a very successful browser, and Thunderbird a viable email program. The Open Source cooperation is not just a technical innovation. It is a social phenomenon, and as such represents a completely new organization of work and thinking transcending the hierarchical and competitive work organization of industrial Taylorism. People cooperate voluntarily and work at the same level, characterized by mutual confidence, respect, recognition, fairness, and tolerance. Every aspect of thinking and working is undergoing change, as happened with the introduction of writing and printing. We move from competitive individualism to cooperative creativity, experience, emotions, and knowledge—from exchange-value property to commons.

If it is true that property and money are the key areas in which detrimental developments have taken place since the eighth century BCE, we have to find out how we can shape these basic systemic elements for the common good. In our book *Property for People, Not for Profit*, we tried to develop a new vision of a “property order from below.”²³ The guiding principle is use value, not exchange value. It is exchange value, measured in money, which makes the accumulation of capital beyond useful, real economy possible. This means that property has to be—and can be—organized in a way that all people affected have access and participatory rights. Legally this can take different forms, as the Swiss economist Hans Christian Binswanger proposed in relation to land, as an example:²⁴

1. turning real estate into public property, be it that of the municipality or the state;

2. distinguishing between property for use or for disposal, and turning the latter over to the local authority or the state; property for use would be subject to public regulations; dividing property up in this way in urban settlements, and turning over property for disposal to newly formed public owners' associations, either consisting of all inhabitants or of the owners but allowing the inhabitants a say;
3. excluding the right to build on property;
4. retaining a comprehensive concept of property, but having the state or local authorities restrict the freedom of use;
5. maintaining the guarantee of ownership, but restricting the freedom of disposal by the local authorities or the state;
6. introducing state taxes on the basic income from the landed property, which also gives direction to the market;
7. adopting state regulations on ownership, for example, so that legal entities can only be owners in the public interest and that only restricted ownership of housing and building land is allowed—as it relates to a proprietor's own use.

Industrial production can be organized with full participation of the workers and ecological carefulness. This, too, can take different forms, for example, workers own the factory, as already mentioned in the case of Mondragon, and as happened in Argentina after the crisis in 2001. Or the capital of a company can be neutralized by organizing it in the form of a foundation.²⁵ In any case, the absoluteness of private ownership of the means of production has to be overcome in order to deprive capital of its exploitative power. If there is private ownership, then it should involve property for use, with adequate legal and institutional provision that it must also contribute to the common good. This was even postulated in the German Basic Law (GG 14.2), but has been more and more neglected by the neoliberal governments.

Besides the property issue, the second key question in the vision for a life-enhancing and just political economy relates to money. Can money be organized as commons in order to become a facilitating instrument in the real economy instead of being a commodity to accumulate money by money for the owners? This is already happening on a small scale.²⁶ There are group currencies like the Local Exchange and Trading Systems (LETS), or liquidity cooperatives like the Swiss Economic Circle (Wirtschaftsring-Genossenschaft; WIR). But the key question for the macrosystem is whether the states can take back the bank's legal right to issue money through interest-bearing loans. It is this debt money that drives the economy to grow at all cost, and that accumulates wealth in the pockets of the capital owners without their lifting a finger to advance the real

economy. Instead, only public institutions would have the right to issue money for real economic activities. At the World Economy Conference in Bretton Woods in 1944, John Maynard Keynes even proposed having a global central bank money as reserve currency, called “bancor,” a shadow of which has been implemented in the form of the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF’s) special drawing rights (SDRs).²⁷ The social movement Attac in Austria has taken up this proposal in a declaration for an alternative financial system: “Money is a Public Good.”²⁸ A further step in this direction is to create democratic banks and step by step replace private banks. We will come back to this in detail later. Here we are still outlining a new vision.

3. Integral Democratization

In summary, this new vision means the democratization of all spheres of the economy. Without this, political democracy will also disappear and be replaced by plutocracy, which is already happening at dramatic speed.

Just as economic democratization has to build up from below, the same is true for the political and legal systems at all levels. All people as citizens have to be the agents, the subjects of politics, because the life of all within the planetary web of life is at stake. We have seen that traditional democracy started in Greece among the male owners of property, the house fathers. Liberal democracy, as conceptualized by John Locke, followed this tradition, making the protection of (male) property the only purpose of the state. Although in subsequent western history, women and workers succeeded in gaining voting power in representative democracy, their real power continuously diminished, because they did not have decision-making power about the material basis of life, the realm of economics. Politics has less and less control over the capitalist markets; rather, these manipulate and blackmail the political institutions in neoliberalism. Designing and discussing politics in purely formal terms is smoke-screening the real issue. This is why the liberation philosopher Enrique Dussel from Mexico, in his “Six Theses toward a Critique of Political Reason,” criticizes western political theory as neglecting the basic issue of the production and reproduction of life.²⁹ His first thesis starts with this fundamental aspect:

Ratio politica is complex precisely because it exercises different types of rationality. It has as its foundational content the imperative to produce, reproduce and develop human life within a community, and in the last instance of humanity in general in the long run. Therefore, the practical-political claim to *truth* is universal. In this sense political reason is *practical and material*. (80, emphasis in original)

Only on this basis does discursive communication have material substance, as Dussel maintains in thesis 2 against Jürgen Habermas and others who leave out the material base of politics:

Ratio politica should discursively, procedurally or democratically achieve validity (formal legitimacy) through the effective, symmetrical and democratic public participation of all the affected, who are citizens as autonomous subjects, and who exercise the complete autonomy of the political community of communication. It is this political community of communication, as the inter-subjective community of popular sovereignty, that then serves as the source and destination of law. Its decisions therefore have a *validity* claim or universal political *legitimacy*. In this sense, *ratio politica* is *practical-discursive political reason*. (84, emphasis in original)

This means that the first and fundamental purpose of policy making is to secure material life in community. It must have priority and power over the market to give it a framework and to intervene in the service of life. Only on that basis can discursive political communication and law exercise a legitimate and legal function. Guided by these two fundamental dimensions of political reason, there is a third: the strategic, testing the feasibility of institutional, legal, and systemic possibilities of achieving the fundamental purposes (87ff.). The fourth dimension is critical political reason, recognizing failures from the perspective of the victims (89f.). So there is a constant need to listen to those who are negatively affected by certain policies. From here follows the fifth dimension, that of critical-discursive political reason (90ff.). Finally, there is *ratio liberationis*, the critical-strategic political reason that initiates feasible transformations (93ff.). Altogether this means that there has to be a constant, dynamic process to secure life for communities in fully participatory ways—including the political regulation of the economy.

Representative democracy alone cannot secure these political dimensions. What is needed is the expansion of direct and participatory democracy.³⁰ In terms of major issues like huge projects, or fundamental technological developments such as nuclear and genetic engineering, the people concerned must have the chance to hold plebiscites. This is already happening, for example, in Switzerland. Participatory democracy has already proved to be very effective in relation to communal budgets, for example, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. In capitalism and historical socialism, the main political-economic systems of modernity, decisions have been made top-down. The vision of the future order is bottom-up.

As we have seen, the most basic elements to be legally and institutionally transformed are the property and money systems. Another basic area to be handled politically concerns the supply system for goods and services

necessary for life, like water, energy, education, health, care for the aged, and transport. Neoliberal governments tend to want to privatize all these, subjecting them to the logic of capital accumulation. This trend has to be reversed by making them public goods and services. However, this will only be possible if the public institutions can regain tax sovereignty. At present, individuals and corporations with incomes derived from capital and assets avoid taxes, thus causing public budgets to go into debt. This situation calls for fundamental change.³¹

Such necessary transformations will not come by merely talking to those in power. The only way forward is for people to organize themselves in social movements. The classical examples in the history of capitalism are the labor and women's movements. However, since imperial capitalism is conquering all spheres of life, social movements of different kinds have been springing up, for example, ecological movements, peace movements, civil rights, and indigenous movements. Recent examples show that they can change the political power system toward transformational processes. In Latin America, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela are on the way toward basic changes in the political economy in the direction of more just relations. The people of Tunisia and Egypt were able to liberate themselves from dictatorships, and are now struggling to transform their institutions toward real democracy—all this of course while the West is trying everything it can to restore the traditional hegemony. There are reports that during the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt people developed an astonishing solidarity. They organized themselves to dispose of garbage, or to guard against looting, partly stimulated by the anciens régimes' wanting to create a pretense for cracking down.³² Some initiatives like The Invisible Committee in France, with the book *The Coming Insurrection*, draw a radical conclusion in view of the totalitarian character of capitalist destruction. They recommend anarchic self-organization in communes, which would engage in networking among each other.³³

4. Becoming Human by and in Solidarity³⁴

In order to achieve the necessary transformation toward a new culture of life, the personal level is as important as the institutional. Revolutions have often neglected this so that they very often resulted only in an exchange of elites. The cultural revolution needed today is so basic that it will not happen without a change in at least the majority of individuals, alongside the collective struggles for structural change and even intertwined with them. A king can only be a king as long as the people accept him. The same is true with the dictatorship of money and finance today. This has been forcefully demonstrated by Karl-Heinz Brodbeck, the Buddhist economist mentioned in part 1. As long as everybody keeps asking, "What's in it for me?",

calculating each act and person as a money subject, money and finance will dominate the world. As long as the elites in the rich countries consume without limits, capitalist consumption and pollution of the limited planet will continue. What are the psychological and spiritual possibilities of liberation in our vision for a life in just relationships?

In [chapter 3](#), we saw that neoliberal capitalism has destructive psychological effects, creating split and disassociated personalities. The opposite pole is solidarity, reassociating the person with the other(s). We saw that babies existentially depend on mutual, constructive relationships. The unconditional solidarity of parents is crucial. Solidarity is grounded psychologically in the experience and internalization of empathy and sympathy in relations of emotional reciprocity. From experience we acquire the ability to live in solidarity. It is important to note that the solidarity experience starts between de facto unequal persons: the strong parents and the dependent infants. The key, therefore, is that even unequal human beings enjoy equal dignity, which shows itself in mutual respect and recognition. This applies to the later relationships in adult life within society. German relational psychologist Horst Eberhard Richter calls this the sympathy principle. “The sympathy principle calls for equality, the genuine sharing of strength and weakness. The symmetry of giving and taking. It needs the political liberation of the oppressed, but not the reversal of an oppressive relationship after victory.”³⁵

The reality of neoliberal capitalism creates exactly the opposite: social and psychological destruction. The elites live a pathological, limitless narcissism, pushing the losers into fatalism. This is why personal and structural emancipation have to go hand in hand. Psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton and sociologist Eric Markusen in their study on the Holocaust and nuclear warfare have coined the expression “genocide mentality.”³⁶ In neoliberalism, a new version of this has emerged in the form of systemic exclusion, creating an “exclusion mentality.” The authors counter these destructive forms of mentality with a “species mentality.” This has to be nurtured in order to move toward solidarity in personal and structural forms. It includes care, empathy, faithfulness, and in the most embracing form, love. The Greek word for this, central for the New Testament alternative to the Roman Empire, is *agape*, normally translated as “love,” but meaning “solidarity.”³⁷

In part 1, we examined the fetishism analysis of Karl Marx. This concept also shows how the fetishism of commodities, money, and capital captivates individuals and whole societies and drives them into alienation from themselves and others. Without critically understanding and breaking these fetters, there will be no solidarity in personal and social relationships. The two things have to go hand-in-hand: overcoming private (exchange value) property as the basis of capitalism on the one hand and the

possessive individualism together with the corresponding anthropological and psychological features on the other hand.

This interconnection has been most lucidly demonstrated by Erich Fromm, particularly in his groundbreaking book *To Have or to Be?*³⁸ Here are some of the characteristics he attributes to the new human being (139f.):

1. "Security, sense of identity, and confidence based on faith in what one is, on one's need for relatedness, interest, love, solidarity with the world around one, instead of on one's desire to have, to possess, to control the World, and thus become the slave of one's possessions.
2. Love and respect for life in all its manifestations, in the knowledge that not things, power, all that is dead, but life and everything that pertains to its growth are sacred.
3. Trying to reduce greed, hate, and illusions as much as one is capable.
4. Developing one's capacity for love, together with one's capacity for critical, unsentimental thought.
5. Shedding one's narcissism and accepting the tragic limitations inherent in human existence.
6. Sensing one's oneness with all life, hence giving up the aim of conquering nature, subduing it, exploiting it, raping it, destroying it, but trying, rather, to understand and cooperate with nature.
7. Knowing that evil and destructiveness are necessary consequences of failure to grow."

Fromm projects the move from "having" to "being," including life in just and empathic relationships. However, this conversion is only possible when linked to the transformation of society to what he calls "humanistic socialism." Here are some of the main features of the new society, according to Fromm (141ff.):

1. "It would have to give up the goal of unlimited growth for selective growth, without running the risk of economic disaster . . .
2. It would have to create work conditions and a general spirit not material gain but other, psychic satisfactions are effective motivations . . .
 1. To achieve a society based on being, all people must actively participate in their economic function and as citizens. Hence, our liberation from the having mode of existence is possible only through the full realization of industrial and political democracy . . .
 2. Active participation in political life requires maximum decentralization throughout industry and politics . . .

3. All brainwashing methods in industrial and political advertising must be prohibited. . .
4. The gap between the rich and poor nations must be closed.
5. Women must be liberated from patriarchal domination.
6. A system of effective dissemination of effective information must also be established.”

How to get from here to there?³⁹ How do we go from the old to the new order of becoming human in solidarity and creating a humane society? The key bridge is the solidarity protest movements, resistance, and the work for alternatives. They are the emerging subject (change agent) that rejects and transforms the totalitarian functional mechanisms of cost-benefit calculation, which are the law that kills. They represent the various aspects of the social and psychological destruction that cause suffering to people, societies, and our planet. They form the countervailing power that aims at responding to the holistic personal and social needs that are neglected by the disembedded capitalist economy. They care for the society and Mother Earth as a whole. It is fascinating to see that Fromm develops his transformational wisdom by blending the insights of the Buddha, Marx, and Sigmund Freud:⁴⁰ (137):

1. “We are suffering and are aware that we are.
2. We recognize the origin of our ill-being
3. We recognize that there is a way of overcoming our ill-being
4. We accept that in order to overcome our ill-being we must follow certain norms for living and change our present practice of life.”

Insight without praxis is empty and inconsequential. Psychological diseases with socioeconomic and political causes cannot be treated just by personal methods such as individualist piety or traditional psychotherapy. Joining social movements offers people an alternative. Here is an example. A German woman we know experienced an incredibly disastrous family situation as a child, and was placed in a children’s home, run by nuns, where she experienced similar discrimination. Although highly intelligent, she found herself illiterate without any possibility for a “normal” life. She happened to run into people from the Communist Party in the 1980s. They taught her to read and write in spite of her dyslexia. She read Marx (her role model being Rosa Luxemburg), and she joined social movements struggling for justice. Enlisting in social movements that are struggling against the racism, dehumanization, victimization, and disorientation that are produced by neoliberal capitalism is at the same time a therapy for persons and societies. It is important, however, to guard against the temptation to mirror the attitudes and behavior of the society by competing, hating,

and violently hitting back. After all, the way is the goal, to quote Mahatma Gandhi. The struggles for alternatives must reflect the alternative: solidarity, empathy, and mutual respect.

One way to deal with this problem is the culture of historical resistance memory. The victors write the history books, making the victims invisible. It is extremely important for relational struggles in solidarity to remember the forerunners of a life in just relations and learn from their victories and failures.⁴¹ There are many examples of this. The Nobel peace prize laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, president of the foundation Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ), is one of the protagonists of the movement for a “Dialogo Memoria Compartida” (Shared Memory). In May 2004, an international meeting of Nobel Peace Laureates in Barcelona launched this initiative.⁴² The purpose was “to reflect on the economic power, militarization, culture, historical memory and the proposal ‘another world is possible.’”⁴³ Linking the present struggles with the historical memories is a very strong force on a continent that has gone through terrible dictatorships, which were overcome by the struggles of the people, who paid a high price. Pérez Esquivel’s motto in this struggle is “the memory of the past has to illuminate the present.” In Latin America, social and ecumenical movements celebrate liturgies in which they publicly call the names of martyrs who were murdered by the military or paramilitary. The members respond after each name: “Presente,” meaning they are present among us. A whole series of volumes have come out that are rewriting the history of the church from the perspective of the victims of western colonialism and neocolonialism (Comisión para el Estudio de la Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina y el Caribe; CEHILA). In the German context we remember the resistance theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others. In such historical remembrance, people also learn revolutionary patience. In Christianity, Jesus himself is the foundational figure of the struggle for life in just relationships. His way of being with the marginalized and confronting the powers-that-be is exceptional. In our western societies of bourgeois character, he has to be liberated from the image of an individualistic savior, which is being done more and more through sociohistorical, contextual Bible research.

As we have shown in [chapter 2](#), losers, winners, and the middle classes suffer from different pathologies, caused by neoliberalism. Accordingly, therapies must be specific. For the losers, the classical example in capitalist history is the labor movement. It has offered the basic experience of “I am not alone” and, at the same time, brought about tremendous results in improving people’s situation. We owe the short period of welfare capitalism after the Great Depression in 1929 to the countervailing power of the labor movement. It has created a whole culture of solidarity. It is no secret that neoliberalism, particularly after the implosion of historical socialism as a competing system in the 1990s, has managed to considerably weaken

the power of the workers and their organizations. They also have the internal problem in most world regions that they do not include the excluded, but only the exploited workers who have a job. The majority of the losers around the world just struggle for survival. And even in the rich countries the number of the excluded continues to grow. Take the situation of the European Union (EU), particularly the eurozone, in 2011. The financial markets are knocking down one country after the other, as a consequence of the governments' turning the losses of the financial speculators into public debt. This is leading to national over-indebtedness, if not bankruptcy. The IMF and the finance ministers take the money from the taxpayers and social-benefit recipients to bail out the banks (structural adjustment programs). The people go into the streets to protest when these policies hit their country. But what would be more effective is a general strike of solidarity in all countries of the eurozone in order to force the governments to control and tax the banks, and perhaps to abolish the private banking system altogether.⁴⁴

There is another problem—which is also an opportunity—concerning the labor movement. As we saw, neoliberal capitalism is affecting all areas of life. Therefore social movements have emerged in multiple contexts. Besides the traditional women's movements, there are ecological, farmers, human rights, peace, gay and lesbian, north-south solidarity movements, and others. Many of them have built alliances, resisting neoliberal globalization like the Attac movement in almost all European countries and beyond. Most of them have their international platform in the World Social Forum (WSF). In Latin America, they have been able even to change the political landscape. And in Tunisia and Egypt, the people of all sectors of society have discovered a new way to revolutionize those countries by new methods of electronic communication. However, all of this has not yet overcome the power of global capital. Therefore, alliance building, particularly between the trade unions and the social movements, must be strengthened.

One of the reasons why this is not yet happening to a sufficient degree, it seems to us, is the indecision of the middle classes. Although about two-thirds of their members are suffering a socioeconomic downfall through neoliberalism, they have not yet understood the situation and joined the struggle of the main losers. Their illusionary consciousness still keeps most of them imprisoned by their affinity to the elites, driving them into depression or into scapegoating foreigners and others.⁴⁵ One opportunity seems to be the fact that many of them are starting to understand that plutocracy is dismantling democracy and that quality of work does not count any more. Both democracy and good work normally count a lot in the middle classes. Their destruction could be a wake-up call. Unfortunately, most mainline churches in the West, whose members are mostly middle class, are far from realizing the dangers of the situation. In Europe, they contribute to the

illusion that we are still living in the times of a “social market economy.” However, ecumenical grassroots networks are developing clear positions, joining the struggle for life in just relations.⁴⁶

Politically a key question for the future is whether the middle classes will become capable of building alliances with the losers. Since the beginning of the labor movement, the elites have operated according to the old principle of “divide and rule.” In Germany, this happened from the time of Otto von Bismarck in the late nineteenth century onward. The middle classes got a few extras in order to cultivate their feeling of being better than the proletariat. They may have been called “white-collar workers,” as distinct from “blue-collar workers,” and received special health insurance or other perks.⁴⁷ Since neoliberalism appeared, the same strategy has been deployed in relation to the workers. They are split into various categories and played off against each other. So the counterstrategy must be to build alliances from the organizations of the unemployed up to all kinds of middle-class employees. How effective this may become was seen, for example, in Argentina after the financial crisis around 2001. A broad spectrum of the population went into the streets and brought down the neoliberal government; workers and management together took over bankrupt factories. The new government, because of the broad support of the population, was even strong enough to challenge the IMF by paying back the (mostly odious, that is, illegitimate) debt only according to their own criteria. The revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt would not have been possible without these alliances between the under- and middle classes. Therefore, politically speaking, there is no other way to break the dominance of the financial markets over governments and societies than this unity in popular and social movements. One bridge is the ecological issue. Here there has been a change in consciousness in broad sectors of societies.

Psychologically the same is true. From experience we can say that with the global crises since 2007, even in the West, middle-class people listen carefully when confronted with the psychological findings presented in this book, although on the other side there are moves to the right like the Tea Party in the United States and the anti-Islamic movements in Europe. Where middle-class people join the struggle of the movements, their depression disappears. They can contribute their good education to the struggle and are, therefore, respected by all members of the movement. As “organic intellectuals” (intellectuals joining the struggles of the labor movement), they are even indispensable for the good cause (Antonio Gramsci). In the scientific world the issues are very complex, so the alternatives have to be well founded. We argue for a broad public debate on the political and psychological situation of the middle classes, and on their role, in view of the fact that they are currently being misused by the elites against their own objective social and psychological interests.

What about the “elites” themselves, the winners? What is their situation and role in the necessary transformation process? As a class there is no chance of expecting their conversion. The rich man, because of his many possessions, left Jesus sad, and his comment has been true down the centuries: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25). Therefore, politically it is the wrong strategy, to expect change from a “dialogue with the powerful,” as do many churches in the West. Historically there is no evidence that the powerful, even though their politics led to catastrophe, renounced their wealth and power voluntarily. Hence change will not come from above but only by countervailing power from below. This does not mean that some rich persons cannot change. Zacchaeus is the prime example in the New Testament (Luke 19:1ff.). He enters into the joy of sharing and again becoming a member of the human community. The pathological narcissism of individual winners of an unjust system can be healed. We also have famous examples today. In Germany, there is an initiative whose name translates as “Wealthy People for a Wealth Tax.”⁴⁸ Another example is Joseph Stiglitz, economist and professor at Columbia University. He served as Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank (WB) (1997–2000). When he realized that the neoliberal structural adjustment programs of the WB and the IMF were having murderous consequences, he started to publicly criticize this policy—and was fired. Under his leadership, a commission appointed by the President of the UN General Assembly in 2008 produced the Stiglitz Report on the reasons for and solutions to the financial crisis. In 2011, Stiglitz supported the Spanish protests against EU policies in the euro crisis and their social consequences, as well as the “Occupy Wall Street” movement. These examples of converted elites are very important for the strengthening of the social movements. Thus personal dialogue with selected representatives of the elites is useful, but not a decisive part of the popular strategy for change.

5. The Role of Religions and Cultures for a New Vision

In the last analysis, a given society is shaped by the question of what finally counts. In religious language this is the God question. Veerkamp interprets the conception of God as “a concentrated formula for social order,” as reflected in political and economic structures as well as in people’s hearts and minds.⁴⁹ For example, Jesus’s demand to decide between God and Mammon means making a decision between a system governed by justice for all or by wealth accumulation for the few property owners. So a new vision of society and culture also means a new understanding of God.

We have looked at the Judeo-Christian, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions, that is, some of the different waves of the Axial Age religions. We have argued that all of them respond to the spread of the new money-property economy and its effects on the socioeconomic structures of society and on the thinking and feeling of people. The God question appears in this interconnectedness. With their responses, these faiths have implanted visions, ethics, practices, and institutional possibilities into humanity, influencing billions of people to this day. However, as these spiritual sources are very powerful, the economic, political, and ideological powers of this world have kept trying to co-opt the religions, unfortunately not without success. Hence, as we shall see later in more detail, critique of religion is the necessary starting point of rediscovering the spiritual power of the ancient sources. A great help in this regard is the critical, sociohistorical reading of scripture. Theologically, this reading is guided by the perspective of the suffering victims of the respective power systems, called the “preferential option for the poor.” This approach is now the common starting point in the progressive sectors of all faith communities.

As we found out in looking at the various traditions, the common denominator in all religions of the Axial Age—of course, in different characteristic expressions—can be seen in the search for life in just relationships. The Buddha most clearly articulates the fact that life is a web of relationships. It is *the* insight into his experience of enlightenment. Brodbeck puts it as a philosophical principle: relation has priority over the related. This includes a fundamental critique of the classical Greek philosophy, giving things a substance, and the subsequent modern philosophy, establishing a dualism between the rational subject and the material object. Methodologically this has far-reaching consequences as well. We cannot acquire knowledge by observing but only by participating in a social process with compassion. Economically and anthropologically, the ego (money-subject), calculating his or her cost-benefit, is an illusion and leads to illusion. Greed and aggressiveness, linked to this illusion, destroy not only other humans and nature but eventually the persons themselves.

Ancient Israel, historically the first to react critically to the new socioeconomic developments since the eighth century BCE, puts justice into the center of its faith response. The prophet Amos expresses this in the powerful call: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (5:24). In order to understand this fully, we need to realize that the Hebrew words for justice (*sedaká*), judging (*safát*), and judge (*sofét*) are already relational.⁵⁰ They do not refer to a neutral, distant judgment, but to a community. *Sedaká* means a practice furthering the well-being of a community. *Safát* is an intervention into an asymmetric relationship. The weaker receive support, and the stronger lose (usurped) power. The classical text is the song of Mary, pregnant with the Messiah: “He (God) has brought

down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:52). This is not a philosophical insight, but a practice of resistance against the reality of oppression, the discovery of a countervailing power called God.

God in biblical tradition is not seen as another substance, but as a relational being or rather source of just relations. The first revelation of God’s name happens in the context of the cries of the Hebrew slaves, being oppressed by the Egyptians (Exodus 3:1ff.). Moses, one of them, while keeping the flock in the wilderness near Mount Horeb, sees a bush, burning, but not consumed. He hears a voice asking him to confront Pharaoh with the demand to let his people go. Moses asks the voice: “What is your name?” The voice answers: “I am Yahweh.” This does not mean “I am who I am,” as wrongly translated in the spirit of Greek philosophy, but “I am with you” (at your side, helping you in the conflict with Pharaoh). So the crucial thing about the God of the Bible is: God is a voice in the wilderness of oppression, assuring the downtrodden of God’s solidarity, called “compassionate love.” This is where God can be found—it is the same with God’s Messiah Jesus, who hides among the most disadvantaged (cf. Matthew 25:31ff.). And Yahweh’s voice is heard a second time in the desert, at Mount Sinai: “I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods (legitimizing asymmetric power relationships) into my face” (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6). This is the preamble of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, making sure that the liberated slaves keep their freedom by not reproducing unjust relationships against others (including greedy desires, Tenth Commandment). This is taken up by Jesus when he puts the domination-free order of God’s kingdom (in feminist terms: God’s kin-dom) and its justice into the center of his mission (e.g., Matthew 6:33). Thus the biblical God must never be defined into an image (Second Commandment) because this is bound to be manipulated (by the powerful). God has to remain the voice in the wilderness of injustice, the source of the spiritual power of restoring just relationships between humans and also between humans and the earth.

Later Christianity framed this into the concept of God as Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit. This has sometimes been misused as a dogma imposed onto people and peoples as a law. But the concept can be rediscovered when understood as the perfect community of love, being the source of life in just relationships. Especially, when son and spirit are seen as the “two hands of God,” the spirit, “blowing where she chooses” (John 3:8), can be understood as the bridge between Christianity and all other religions and cultures.⁵¹ Loving this God is inseparable from being in solidarity with one’s neighbor—especially with the most vulnerable.

A whole series of studies, published by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT),⁵² looks at all religions from the perspective of liberation—even under the name “Colección TIEMPO

AXIAL.”⁵³ Another initiative is the World Forum on Theology and Liberation,⁵⁴ which meets regularly in connection with the WSF. Here, too, theology is broadening its scope to engage in dialogue and cooperation with all religions.⁵⁵ This shows that there is a broad movement in Christian liberation theology to work for interreligious solidarity for justice. Similar developments are emerging in other religions.

Islam has taken up the biblical message in its own way, but also with the key understanding of God as being merciful and compassionate. Each sure (chapter) of the Qur’an starts with “In the Name of God the Compassionate the Caring.” This is why there cannot be faith without doing justice. Farid Esack quotes Izutsu as saying: “The strongest tie of semantic relationship binds *‘amal al-salih* [righteous conduct] and *iman* [faith] together into an almost inseparable unit. Just as the shadow follows the form, wherever there is *iman* there is *salihat* . . . so much so that we may feel justified in defining the former in terms of the latter and the latter in terms of the former.”⁵⁶ There are two aspects of just social relations, promoted by the Qur’an. The one is “*huquq*—rights which are obligations that one has upon or owes society and which must be offended—and *ihsan*, generosity beyond obligation.”⁵⁷ The latter particularly relates to the marginalized, such as orphans. But, as in the Bible, this aspect has political implications.

Hence the spiritual, economic, and political struggle—personally and collectively—for compassionate life in just relations proves to be the deepest basis for interfaith relations as far as the religions in the tradition of the Axial Age are concerned: Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Esack expresses the same conclusion even in the title of his book *Qur’an Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*. And there are others who follow the same line.⁵⁸ This approach also relates to, but is not identical with Hans Küng’s search for a global ethic.⁵⁹ Küng confronts everybody, especially the elites, with this global ethic, calling them to responsibility. Similarly the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) is concentrating on leaders. Like Esack, we are, according to our reading of scripture, consistently trying to build solidarity from below, starting with the marginalized and oppressed. Methodologically this means that the locus of interreligious “dialogue” is the struggle of the people and peoples for liberation from exploitation and oppression, including the struggles against destruction of Mother Earth. This does not exclude the powerful, especially not as persons, but they are not the first agents of change, rather the last, according to Jesus’s assessment of the situation.

This argument has been most clearly elaborated by Aloysius Pieris from Sri Lanka in his article “A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism.”⁶⁰ He contends that we must distinguish what is common in all religions and what is specific (not to claim superiority but to enrich each other).

Thus he confronts both fundamentalism and the interreligious irenism of some dialogists:

The *beatitudinal spirituality*, or the “happy life” which knows neither hoarding nor anxiety, as advocated in the Gospels, is the *Christian version of the common soteriological absolute*, but spelt out in theistic categories in some religions and in non-theistic idiom in others. The belief in *God crucified in Christ who is One Body with the Oppressed* defines *Christianity’s uniqueness*. (2) (emphasis in original)

“Primordial spirituality,” which is prebiblical and extrabiblical, is the vision of the healthy cosmic order of a shared abundance, which humans responsibly care for as coworkers with God (Genesis 1–2). All religions have to defend this against the western Cartesian vision of “Man exploiting Nature.” “This cosmic religiosity, which reveres this world as sacred, should, therefore, serve as the common foundation on which all religions must meet and celebrate religious pluralism as a gift to humanity, appreciating and encouraging one another’s unrepeatable identities” (6). This spirituality has its core in rejecting the idolatry of Mammonism, accumulated and unshared wealth, as well as making absolute what is relative, such as color and caste, religion and race, language and land. So the conflict of God against Mammon “is the specifically Christian formulation of a common religious heritage” (7).

Within this conflict, God does not remain neutral. “She is *bound by a covenant* to identify herself with the victims of that sinful option” of exploitation and hoarding (emphasis in original). Therefore justice is the canon within the canon of the Scriptures. Here we wish to add that there is a special relation of the Christian to the Jewish faith because we share the Hebrew Bible together. Jesus and Paul build fully on the foundations laid throughout the history of Israel. So Jews and Christians are on common ground at this point. At least 40 of the psalms are “an appeal to *God’s* (covenantal) *love and fidelity towards the poor*, in stark contrast with *God’s* *wrath towards their oppressors*. . . i.e. *the anger of the victims appropriated by Yahweh, their defence ally*. Hence our unique contribution to the inter-faith dialogue is to confess that *Jesus is God’s defence pact with the poor*—not by mere words but by actively joining God’s own defence of the poor” (7) (emphasis in original).

With the following words Pieris summarizes his position, which we share:

“A twofold Christopraxis conceals a Christology of Religious Pluralism. Our fidelity to our own Christian identity requires,

- in the first place that we proclaim Christ as the One who demands conversion from mammon-worship (Mt 6:19–24) rather than conversion from

other religions (Mt 23:15), *thus confirming the common spirituality* of all religions within our own distinctively specific faith;

- secondly, in keeping with our *Christian uniqueness*, we must confess from that common platform, both by word and deed, in liturgy and life that Christ-Crucified and Risen is God's defence pact with the oppressed, so that our action-filled confession of this distinctive feature of our faith would drive us to a relentless struggle for justice and peace, as the mission of the *seed that must die to bring forth life*, rather than a *weed that kills the religious identity of others in the name of evangelization*. The other religionists can join such a struggle for justice and peace without compromising their faith, as is amply attested in many multi-religious 'Basic Human Communities' in Asia today" (9f., emphasis in original).

Pieris's conclusion fully reflects the exegetical findings concerning the critique of religion with regard to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament to be developed in more detail in chapter 13.1.⁶¹ It is not the other religions and gods per se that are called into question. It is the violent injustice against the poor and weak and the misuse of one's (own and foreign) religion for power purposes that contradicts the God of the Bible. On the other hand the Bible knows those "who fear God" in all peoples of the earth.

This approach to life in just relations does not only resonate in the religions and wisdom of the Axial Age. There are cultures all over the world offering alternative visions in line with the primordial spirituality and allowing for each religion's specificity. Of course, there is hardly any culture today that is not affected by western culture, but, given the global crisis of life, we have to trace all possible elements of alternative thinking and praxis. This crisis compels the global community today to urgently explore the possibility of a life-giving civilization that affirms relationships, coexistence, harmony with creation, and solidarity with those who struggle for justice. Let us look at the concepts of *Ubuntu and Sangsaeng* (相生).⁶² *Ubuntu* is a key notion of community-based African anthropology and cosmovision as illustrated in the catchphrase "I am because we are and we are because I am." *Ubuntu* is an expression of human relations lived in community and in harmony with the whole of creation. *Sangsaeng* is an ancient Asian concept of a sharing community and economy that allows all to flourish together. Like *Ubuntu*, it may be expressed in English as something like "living together," "living intersupportively," or "living interdependently." It is a convivial order of life among all living beings. All living beings in the cosmos are interrelated, and their life is mutually dependent and supportive.

Ubuntu and *Sangsaeng* exemplify African and Asian paradigms of life-giving forces that call all beings in the cosmos into harmony with one another. Resonating with the biblical concept of *koinonia*, *Ubuntu* and *Sangsaeng* are important resources as we face the critical issues of developing

a life-giving civilization that is capable of transforming our worldview in the twenty-first century.

The convergence of *Ubuntu* and *Sangsaeng* highlights the conviviality and relationality of all God's creation. Both are about the eradication of hatred, anger, private wealth without sharing, oppression, and exploitation, as well as about harmony and peace with the cosmos. *Ubuntu* and *Sangsaeng* are exemplified through life-giving agriculture/gardening, which is a process of connecting our cycle of life with that of God's creation, emphasizing the capacity to give birth, to nurture, to heal, and to grow into maturity, thus exhibiting the convergence of economic justice, ecological justice, and the oneness of the whole of life.

To be sure, there have been many efforts to articulate an alternative worldview, including theology, in more interrelated and interdependent ways. Important examples are indigenous cultures in Latin America and the Caribbean. "Indigenous cultures are not 'living fossils', nor are they cultures whose power has been lost forever through assimilation into modern culture. Indigenous cultures survive around the world, usually in communities defined by environmental rather than geopolitical boundaries. Indigenous people have adapted to modern challenges and innovations while holding tenaciously and courageously to their ways. The core of these ways is deeply connected to, and arises from, the Earth."⁶³ The indigenous concept of the earth is not only a strong force in nongovernmental organization (NGO) circles. It has even entered the Ecuadorian constitution in chapter seven, "Rights of Nature":

Article 71. Nature, or Pacha Mama, where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes.

All persons, communities, peoples and nations can call upon public authorities to enforce the rights of nature. To enforce and interpret these rights, the principles set forth in the Constitution shall be observed, as appropriate.

The State shall give incentives to natural persons and legal entities and to communities to protect nature and to promote respect for all the elements comprising an ecosystem.⁶⁴

One of the concepts reflecting this worldview is *Sumak Kawsay* (Quechua language).⁶⁵ In Spanish it is translated as *buen vivir* or *vivir bien*. In English it means "living together with sufficiency, or comfortably." It is a key concept for the worldview of the Andean peoples. It aims at material, social, and spiritual well-being/contentment of all members of the community—but not at the expense of other members or the natural foundation of life. It has been included in the preamble of the constitution in Ecuador as "living together in diversity and harmony with nature." Bolivia has also included it in its constitution. Similarly, Bhutan has replaced the western concept of

gross national product (GNP), measuring economic growth in monetary terms, with “gross national happiness” as the indicator for the well-being of the society. In 2009, the World Social Forum in Belém, Brazil, issued a Declaration of Indigenous Peoples—in opposition to imperial capitalism. Here is the summary of their indigenous worldview:⁶⁶

The Native Indigenous Peoples practice and propose: unity between Mother Earth, society and culture. Nurturing Mother Earth and to be nurtured by her. Water production as a fundamental human right and not for its commodification. Decolonization of power with the theory “lead by obeying,” community self-government, multinational states, self-determination of the peoples, unity in diversity as other forms of collective authority. Unity, duality, equity and complementarity of race. Spiritualities from the everyday and diverse. Freedom from every domination or racist, ethnic or sexist discrimination. Collective decisions regarding production, markets and economy. Decolonization of the sciences and technologies. Expansion of the reciprocity in the distribution of work, products and services. From all of the aforementioned to produce a new social and ethical alternative to that of the colonial and capitalist profit-making market.

There is also a special People’s World Movement for Mother Earth, which organized the first World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in April 2010.⁶⁷ Strongly rejecting imperial capitalism, the Peoples Agreement recommends principles of a new paradigm:

1. “harmony and balance among all and with all things;
2. complementarity, solidarity, and equality;
3. collective well-being and the satisfaction of the basic necessities of all;
4. people in harmony with nature;
5. recognition of human beings for what they are, not what they own;
6. elimination of all forms of colonialism, imperialism and interventionism;
7. peace among the peoples and with Mother Earth.”

The Agreement also proposes a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth and demands for practical action.

Ecofeminism

Many ecological initiatives have revitalized indigenous worldviews. Understanding the earth as a living whole, giving life to all, can be the

starting point to counteract the Cartesian definition of the human being as (male) “master and owner of nature.”⁶⁸ This has become a particular concern of ecofeminism. Rosemary Radford Ruether has presented a comparative study of three representatives of ecofeminism: Ivone Gebara from Brazil, Vandana Shiva from India, and Carolyn Merchant from North America.⁶⁹ They all reject the western male, rationalist, mechanistic, racist, sexist, imperialist epistemology, as formulated by Francis Bacon, Descartes, and others:

They all also reject a view of nature as “dead matter” to be dominated in favor of an understanding of nature as living beings in dynamic communities of life. They all call for democratic relationships between humans, men and women, ethnic groups, and those presently divided by class and culture. Ultimately, they each seek a new sense of partnership between humans and nature. The keynotes of interrelationship, interdependency, and mutuality echo across all three perspectives The divine is understood as a matrix of life-giving energy that is in, through and under all things. To use the language of Paul in the book of Acts, God is the “one in whom we live, and move and have our being.” (17:28) This life-giving matrix cannot be reduced to “what is” but has a transformative edge. It both sustains the constant renewal of the natural cycles of life and also empowers us to struggle against the hierarchies of dominance and to create renewed relations of mutual affirmation. (91f.)

A pivotal book in feminist theology, precluding these approaches, was written by Isabel Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation*.⁷⁰ Her key starting point is “In the beginning is the relation.” Like Dorothee Sölle and Irving Greenberg, she sees western civilization as being the root of the Holocaust (77ff.). This crime against humanity is the “antithesis to relation” “negation—obliteration, total destruction—of relation” and must be the starting point of all theology after Auschwitz. “God is our power in relation to each other, all humanity, and creation itself. God is creative power, that which effects justice—right relation—in history” (6). Consequently she sees Jesus as the power in relation, the power of justice that is right relation, empowering others to life in just relations (36ff.).

Of course, women are not the only ones to rediscover a relational theology of ecojustice. There is a whole new research field on “Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology.”⁷¹ Leonardo Boff has written several books on the subject, the recent one in relation to the Earth Charter.⁷² He outlines a new paradigm of civilization for the community of life, built on mutuality, a new spirituality and emotional intelligence, overcoming the dominating one. Sigurd Bergmann has presented a critical overview

of ecological liberation theologies⁷³ and also a fascinating vision of religions as guardians of the earth as sacred space.⁷⁴ He largely agrees with ecofeminism and Gaia-spirituality, but raises two critical questions: Is God creator or creation? What about the misuse of holism for violent aggression against others? He sees the central challenge to the faith communities and the faithful, speaking and acting in mutual respect for each other and the earth, in “translating the faith in the earth as a holy place and as the space of the life gift into a peaceful vision and praxis” (62f.). Theologically, the vision is based on the insight that the earth is not a material resource for the manipulation of the (ruling and possessing) human beings, but rather God’s gift for the life of all creatures (Psalm 24:1). Because this “ecological spirituality” can be found in all religions, they must participate in a universal social process addressing the central question “how religion and the faith in God and the sacred may qualitatively contribute to keeping the space open for the other, the alien and the new” (210). Philosophically, Bergmann transcends dialectics, thinking in contradictions, and develops a “trialectic aesth/ethic.” This he understands as a “vision of diversity in a common space in which the alien and the self create a special environment unfolding itself as an art/technique of life within a mutually flowering community” (46).

These examples—and they could be amplified in many ways—illustrate that women are playing a crucial role in developing a new culture of life. This should be already evident from the interreligious and intercultural methodology “from below” that is proposed above. After all, women are the most universal group of victims of western civilization, based on ancient imperial cultures. This is why they are now becoming primary subjects of change together with other marginalized groups, who have meanwhile become agents of liberation theology: in feminist theology, womanist theology, ecotheology, Minjung theology, indigenous theology, Dalit theology, and black theology, to name but a few. Parallel to these theologies, we believe that we can find a new emphasis on holistic theology and worldview, expressing the interconnectedness of life in just relationships, in all religions and cultures. If the progressives in these faith communities joined hands, they could be a tremendous power for resistance and renewal in regard to what finally counts in the development of humanity and earth: life or death.

In summary: From Axial Age insights up to new discoveries in western sciences, there are plenty of resources and agents for shifting from the life-endangering dominating civilization to a life-enhancing culture. With this conclusion, we are not aiming at a theoretical discussion of theologies of religion or theoretical interreligious dialogue. There is valuable literature on these subjects, especially by Paul Knitter,⁷⁵ Amos Yong,⁷⁶ Geraldina Céspedes,⁷⁷ and others. The latter particularly stresses the necessity to

deconstruct and reconstruct religion in concrete contexts in order to overcome its ambiguity. The criterion for this critical exercise is the question of what the respective religion has to contribute to the liberation toward “another possible world,” which is necessary for our survival. This is exactly what is emerging in engaged dialogues. And it is exactly what the vision we have sketched out seeks to highlight.

How can this vision come true?

CHAPTER 12

Alternative Political Economy: Transformation Strategy and Praxis

There is not one blueprint for a new political economy, but rather there is a multiple-transformation strategy. Nor *should* there be one single blueprint to be implemented by an avant-garde elite seizing power. This would just change the elites. The “perfect society” is not a goal to be achieved with a means-end rationality. That is the model of the total market and Stalinism.¹ As the alternative must be people-centered and people-driven, it must come from below with the flexibility of diversity. In Immanuel Kant’s terms, the utopia, the vision is a “regulative idea.” The vision of a society in which all have a place in harmony with nature emerges out of the real-life conditions of people and their struggles, and continues to move ahead with every step of its implementation.

Therefore, the key task is to mobilize as many people, groups, and movements as possible to engage in the emancipatory struggle to be waged in solidarity with humanity, the earth, and future generations. The encouraging fact is that worldwide these movements are emerging and getting stronger. The recent example is the awakening in the Arab world, starting in Tunisia and Egypt, then also occurring in Greece and Spain, and now even in the United States. Elites in the economic and political institutions may become allies, but without pressure from below they will have no chance in the finance-dominated structures. With that popular support, they are important bridgeheads for the necessary institutional transformation. This is already visible in Latin America where the social movements were able to change the political landscape, like in Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Uruguay, and to a certain extent also in Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay. How and with what strategy can this progressive development spread?

David Korten summarizes the needed multiple strategy in the handy slogan “Starve the Cancer—Nurture Life.”² What exactly does this mean? As we have said, within the paradigm of living relational organisms,

it becomes clear that a single cell that continues to grow egoistically, with no regard for the entire organism, is a cancer cell. It grows and multiplies until it has killed the host organism—and then dies itself. Here, murder is suicide—exactly what absolute capitalism does with all societies, and ultimately with the earth, if it is not stopped. But how is it to be stopped? One of the strategies by which a living body fights a cancer is to withdraw energy from it. One finding of recent medical research on cancer therapy involves stopping the sugar supply to the cancerous cells. By analogy, we have to withdraw energy from the capitalist system, at the same time nurturing life-enhancing forms of the political economy. Let us look at the following elements of a multiple strategy:

1. *Withdrawing energy from the capitalist system*
 - 1.1 Demystifying the neoliberal ideology in order to overcome disorientation
 - 1.2 Defiance and resistance
2. *Nurturing life*
 - 2.1 Postcapitalist alternatives at the local-regional level
 - 2.2 Struggles toward the reappropriation of stolen resources at all levels in a perspective transcending capitalism
 - 2.3 A new “grand narrative” with many stories of hope.

1.1. Demystifying the Neoliberal Disorientation Ideology

No power system can survive without legitimacy. Thus, demystifying the system is a crucial task because people are made to believe it is without alternative. Walter Wink calls this the “unmasking of the powers.”³ Showing by their contradictions that they have feet of clay (see Daniel 7) reveals that their myths are lies. That neoliberalism is an ideology, not a scientific theory, has been demonstrated by the many crises it has produced in the last few decades. For example, Argentina was the best pupil of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) until the country’s economy collapsed around 2001. A scientific theory, once disproved by reality, gives way to another theory that helps to explain reality better. The contrary is happening in the case of neoliberalism. Disproved by reality, it is constantly thrust upon people and countries by the financial markets, governments, or even by military interventions of the imperial states. A recent example is the management of the financial crisis after 2007. After the privatization of profits earned by speculators, the latter are being saved by socializing the losses through increasing the debt of the national budgets. And this debt is to be paid by the taxpayers and the poor—without reregulation of the financial markets. Now the speculators are even stronger than before, and they speculate against the indebted states.

It is important to realize that neoliberalism became hegemonic not only through financial and political power, but by a planned ideological offensive. The main ideological power center was the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) with its main protagonist Friedrich August von Hayek. This story has been well researched.⁴ A key element is the concentration of the neoliberal counterrevolution on universities, schools, churches, and media in order to brainwash the broad public. Western intelligence services have understood this and applied it to put down social movements.⁵ They call it the “socio-psychological power” they have to wield. Frantz Fanon calls this the “colonization of the mind.” It serves to entrench the real mechanisms of oppression.

Let us briefly look at some of the neoliberal myths legitimating the power of capital in the hearts and minds of people.

Myth 1: Technological development destroys jobs; economic growth creates jobs. This is why social and ecological concerns take second priority compared to economic growth. People who do not find a job are told it is their own fault.

Since the 1990s, statistics have shown that in spite of growth there are fewer jobs and, if there are new jobs, these tend to be on a casual, temporary basis. This is called jobless growth.⁶ Technological progress reduces the time necessary to produce the same number of products or services. If productivity gains were used to reduce working hours, everyone could work less, there could be a better gender balance at work, and people would have more time for social and political engagement. In the present capitalist system, however, the productivity gains go nearly completely into the pockets of the capital owners, who use the myth of jobless growth to dump the wages and increase the profits. Neoliberal policies in the service of capital accumulation cynically fight the unemployed instead of unemployment. On top of this, they abolish or lower the taxes of companies and wealthy people, and neglect to close the tax havens. With the accumulated capital, the owners and their agents—banks and investment funds—speculate in the casino markets, privatizing the gains and socializing the losses, further downgrading social welfare, and starting the next cycle after each crisis. This is a criminal system, not (only) a matter of individual immorality.

Myth 2: Neoliberal globalization benefits everybody. It creates growth and welfare, decreasing and eventually abolishing poverty.

China and the East Asian “tigers” like Korea, Thailand, and Taiwan are cited as examples. This argument has to be reversed, as these states became strong through protectionism. As soon as they liberalized their economies—particularly the capital flow—speculators attacked their currencies and sparked the Asian crisis of 1997. China has been able to avoid this traumatic experience by maintaining strict control of capital flows. However, all of these countries have a widening gap between rich and poor. The neoliberal trickle-down myth can be expressed in the ironic advice: If you

want to feed sparrows, feed the horses so that the birds can find the remnants of grain in the horse droppings.

Myth 3: New technologies will solve all the problems of humankind. This myth is particularly advanced by genetic engineering, electronics, and nanotechnology⁷.

This myth is particularly dangerous because of the incalculable risks inherent in genetic and nanoengineering.⁸ The latter is rather unknown because it deals with matter on an atomic and molecular scale. It raises concerns about the toxicity and environmental impact of nanomaterials but also about its potential to manipulate people. Moreover, technological development in the capitalist system exclusively aims at capital accumulation. Useful technologies for humans, if not profitable for capital, are neglected, for example, developing better drugs against malaria.

Myth 4, particularly promoted in Europe: Our system is not capitalism, but a “social market economy.”

In 2010, the most powerful communication corporation in Germany, and one of the largest in the world, the Bertelsmann Foundation, commissioned an opinion poll on the Germans’ attitude toward the present economic order.⁹ Ninety percent of the people interviewed wanted a new order with more ecological and social concern. However, when presenting the results of the poll, the foundation avoids the questions about the system. They link the findings with the term “social market economy.” This concept is popular in Germany because people have good memories of the 30 years after World War II, when the German economic miracle increased the welfare of the population. Now they call it the “ecological-social market economy,” but they mean green-washed capitalism. The same strategy is used by the Initiative New Social Market Economy (INSM), which propagates neoliberal contents under this label. Both the Bertelsmann Foundation and INSM use extremely vicious methods of lobbying. They send propagandists as “experts” to talk shows and also into government offices. In this way people who want a change are instrumentalized into keeping neoliberal concepts under a new name, and the public debate about capitalism is sabotaged.

In reality, the European Union (EU) has abolished the social market economy.¹⁰ The key definition of economic and monetary policy of the Treaty of Lisbon, amending the EU’s two core treaties, the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community, reads as follows:

For the purposes set out in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union, the activities of the Member States and the Union shall include, as provided in the Treaties, the adoption of an economic policy which is based on the close coordination of Member States’ economic policies, on the internal market

and on the definition of common objectives, and conducted in accordance with the *principle of an open market economy with free competition*. (Article 119, emphasis ours).

The remnants of the former social market economy are being dismantled step-by-step as the financial markets undermine the financial basis of public actors.

Myth 5: The answer to ecological problems is green capitalism.

In Europe, particularly in Germany, and even the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations (UN), there is a move to make green capitalism the new hegemonic project. This is the latest myth, promising to solve climate change by green technologies. In this context Reinhard Loske sees a schism emerging within the Green Party in Germany—between those who want to solve the ecological problems with more technological efficiency, leaving the growth dynamics untouched, and those who realize that we need a totally new culture of sufficiency instead of turbo innovation.¹¹ At the European Network Academy organized by Attac in Freiburg, Germany, in August 2011, Elmar Altvater called green capitalism an oxymoron. He presented the following concise arguments against this myth:

- Green capitalism builds on the assumption that the material and energy throughput can be decoupled from growth dynamics—which is impossible. The rebound effects eat up every technological improvement (one example is that while gasoline-saving cars are being developed, more and more people are driving).
- Green capitalism builds on the assumption that the limits to growth can be made irrelevant by expanding the sphere of knowledge, which may be true to a certain extent, but not absolutely.
- Green investments are fine, but within the capitalist system they must generate profit in order to accumulate capital. They will only be applied when they serve this end. Therefore, the key is the control of the financial markets, which is only possible in a postcapitalist system.

One particular hindrance to reaching a systemic transformation in the West is that the majority of churches¹² and trade unions follow the myth of a social and ecological market economy within capitalism. They help to create an illusionary consciousness in the population, avoiding the radical systemic transformation necessary to stop the destruction of social cohesion and nature. In the case of the churches, we are witnessing a revival of the Constantinian model, in which the church let herself be used as ideological helper of power—in this case capital power.

By contrast, demystifying the myths, showing that they are but a means of legitimizing capital accumulation and imperial domination, can liberate

people, transforming their understandable aggression against themselves and others into constructive energy for change. The disorientation trauma, which victimizes the victims a second time, can be broken. The cancer that is deceiving our immune system by disguising itself and lying is starved. We can walk upright again. Bishop David Jenkins enumerated all the myths of neoliberalism, calling them blunt lies.¹³ Similarly, Jean Ziegler, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food from 2000 to 2008, keeps insisting that a child who dies of hunger is murdered by the system.¹⁴

A special problem in this context is the role of the media. Most of them are controlled by capital, and, therefore, operate in the interest of capital and political power.¹⁵ David Bowman and John Pilger compare media mogul Rupert Murdoch, for example, to Alfred Hugenberg, who helped Hitler to seize power in the interest of capital. To counter the subtle and open propaganda of these media, there are many sources of alternative information, often produced by social movements. The criteria for this can be found in the People's Communication Charter.¹⁶ Developing alternative communication from below is one of the most decisive factors for making another world possible. The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, supported by the Internet, suggest that the new media have a high potential to serve popular interests. While communication technology is ambivalent, it can be reappropriated by the people.

It is very important to keep in mind the systemic character of the myths and to refrain from demonizing persons (who are but “character masks” of the system, in Karl Marx's terms). We all carry the myths within us. Nearly everybody calculates the benefit for him- or herself and competes with others as a “money subject.” If we are men, we carry at least remnants of patriarchal elements within us; if we are white Europeans or North Americans, we carry the heritage of racism within us. So exorcism has to start with our own demons, demystifying the myths of which we ourselves are victims. How ready we are to be liberated ourselves can be measured by the price we are willing to pay for our defiance and resistance—the second way to withdraw energy from the system.

1.2. Defiance and Resistance

The normal way to talk about globalization in the West is to maintain that it has its good and bad sides. This attitude derives from the confusion between the process and project of globalization. Indeed, the process of globalization has been a historical fact since people discovered that the world is round. It can serve to build up communication in solidarity around the world. By contrast, neoliberal globalization is a project—a project of colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism, and the domination of capital. This has no positive aspects, only negative ones. Therefore, it has to be answered

not by a Yes and No, but simply by a clear No. It has to be rejected and resisted by noncooperation and struggle. This clarity is another element of healing the disorientation trauma and of transforming the system. Let us look at some examples.

- A traditional and very effective way to resist economic injustice is a strike of the workers. This is why neoliberal politicians like Margaret Thatcher have done everything to break the power of the trade unions. Yet there is a problem within trade unionism itself. Following from the experience of the welfare state after World War II, the majority of unions tend to see their only task in the struggle for higher wages and social benefits for employed workers. They do not recognize that the time of a social contract has passed and that capital is engaged in a ruthless class struggle from above, taking the political institutions as hostage. They therefore have to rediscover the role of strikes in establishing political frameworks to control the absolute power of capital. There are some signs that this consciousness is growing in the intensifying crises. One example is Greece. When in 2011 the speculators' debt was absorbed into the public budget, this nearly led to state bankruptcy. The EU and IMF forced the country to apply the well-known austerity measures of the structural adjustment policies (SAPs), and the unions responded with general strikes. We also noted another new important feature: Many groups of the population joined in, out of solidarity. This is very important, as only broad alliances will have the power to counter the domination of national and international institutions in the service of capital. However, in this case it also became evident that national resistance is not enough. The euro states being the main actors in the euro crisis, it is clear that Europeans have to unite in resistance. The ideal would be a general strike with popular support in all countries of the euro zone. This is far from a real option at present, but the European Network Academy in Freiburg in 2011 started to think in this direction. We will have to look at the positive alternative to SAPs below, mainly consisting of using the instrument of taxing the rich to curb the public debt.¹⁷
- Another field of defiance and resistance, in order to withdraw energy from the system, is the disinvestment from commercial banks and investment funds and the use of alternative banks instead. These commercial institutions are major actors in the capitalist system, participating in tax evasion and speculation. Normal people do not have enough money to make the banks suffering economically, but image damage is a considerable force, as was seen this during the antiapartheid struggle. Banks in the United States and the United Kingdom ended their business in Southern Africa as a result of the pressure of

universities, churches, unions, and the general population, and thus contributed to the dismantling of the apartheid system.

- Boycotts of transnational corporations (TNCs) that are involved in social and ecological crimes and injustices are a very important instrument for withdrawing energy from the system. A prominent example is Coca Cola. After many union leaders in conflict with this company lost their lives in Guatemala in the 1970s and 1980s, eight union leaders were killed in Columbia between 1990 and 2002.¹⁸ The unions called for a boycott and, among others, the Catholic Youth organization in Germany responded by boycotting Coca Cola. It even convinced the organizers of the biannual Katholikentag, a lay gathering in Germany that brings together tens of thousands of Roman Catholics, to join the boycott. Not only was the image of Coca Cola damaged for a large number of people, but this was also a way of spreading information on the cooperation between the government, military, paramilitary, and big business, which were responsible for all sorts of crimes and violations of human rights in this Latin American country, and which were supported by the United States through its military bases. Another famous campaign was the “Nestlé kills babies” campaign against the company that was advertising milk powder as superior to breastfeeding. Nestlé is also responsible for the killing of picket and union leaders: “According to the Center for Trade Union and Human Rights [CTUHR], Nestle Philippines Inc. is responsible for the murder of about 30 picket leaders and union organizers since the Nestle Cabuyao factory workers and their union launched their strike on January 14, 2002. Previous to that, in 1989, the workers also launched a strike and the management allegedly sent hired goods [men] to kill union leader, Meliton Roxas.”¹⁹ Here, too, the boycott campaign is going on. Boycotts against TNCs are an important element of the struggle because they are downgraded by rating firms when their turnover shrinks, and they lose value on the stock market. Boycotts of this kind, with strong participation by church members, also in the West, helped to dismantle the apartheid system.
- *Resistance against industries destructive to people’s health or even life* is very successful. In Switzerland, Germany, and other countries, the antinuclear movements have achieved the exit from nuclear power. Of course, catastrophes as in Chernobyl and Fukushima have contributed to this success. However, it would not have been possible to withdraw from this technology without the persistent engagement of the movements.
- Campaigns against international neoliberal, imperial institutions like the IMF, World Bank (WB), and World Trade Organization (WTO) have been at least partially successful. Since the meeting of the WTO

in Seattle in 1999, this organization has been blocked in its attempts to further liberalize international trade. The Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI), intending to give TNCs legal instruments to fine governments for ecological and social protection measures, was dropped.

There are many more examples of defiance and resistance by people who are concerned, in cooperation with solidarity movements. The problem so far is the relatively small number of citizens and organizations participating in the West. The examples of Roman Catholic Youth joining the boycott of Coca Cola, and church constituencies participating in boycotts during the antiapartheid struggle show what a force for justice could develop if faith communities were to stand unambiguously at the side of suffering people and the endangered earth. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in their assemblies between 2003 and 2006 came out with a clear No to the neoliberal imperial system of the dominating political economy. This is of great significance. Yet the majority of the member churches in the West have not followed these decisions in practice, so there is still a long way to go.

2. Nurturing Life

The political economy has many levels—from local to global. As we are not proposing a blueprint to be implemented top-down, but a people-centered approach, we have to look carefully at the specificity of each level. People live in different regions, but, first of all, at the local level. However, it is not enough just to deal with alternatives at this level. The dominating macro-system would destroy, or at least hinder, the local alternatives. So strategies for the higher levels are also needed, and for interaction between them. Hence we propose two interrelated lines of action.

2.1. Postcapitalist Alternatives at the Local-Regional Level

Worldwide there are a host of local-regional postcapitalist socioeconomic alternatives. One key concept in this regard is (social) solidarity economy.²⁰ The term “social economy” is broader than “solidarity economy” and not in itself geared to systemic change. Some even see solidarity economy as only complementing capitalism. However, the majority of the protagonists of solidarity economy understand themselves as paving the way for a post-capitalist culture and economy. The very term suggests this, because it is founded on cooperation in opposition to competition, the driving force of capitalism. Wikipedia summarizes the definition as follows: “The solidarity economy can be seen a) as part of the “third sector” in which economic

activity is aimed at expressing practical solidarity with disadvantaged groups of people, which contrasts with the private sector, where economic activity is aimed at generating profits, and the public sector, where economic activity is directed at public policy objectives, or b) as a struggle seeking to build an economy and culture of solidarity beyond capitalism in the present.”²¹ One of the key international networks on the subject is ALOE, the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and Solidarity-based Economy. It has developed a charter giving a concise description of the aims and methods of solidarity economy.²² In Brazil, solidarity economy has even achieved public support. The Lula government established a State Secretariat for Solidarity Economy, supporting the civil society networks. The year 2006 saw a joint conference on the subject, bringing government and movements together. The president of Brazil himself took part in the opening session.²³

Many of the local-regional alternatives are presented in a handbook by Richard Douthwaite and Hans Diefenbacher.²⁴ They refer to mainly four areas of economic activities:

- *Postcapitalist ways to deal with exchange and money.* The most well-known examples are the Local Exchange and Trading Systems (LETS). Wikipedia summarizes the functioning of LETS as follows: “(1) Local people set up an organization to trade between themselves, often paying a small membership fee to cover administration costs. (2) Members maintain a directory of offers and want to help facilitate trade. (3) Upon trading, members may “pay” each other with printed notes, log the transaction in log books or online, or write checks which are later cleared by the system accountant. (4) Members whose balances exceed specified limits (positive or negative) are obliged to move their balance back towards zero by spending or earning.”²⁵ Point 3 implies the creation of a local-regional currency or a system of mutual liquidity support. The best example of the latter is the WIR Bank Cooperative in Switzerland, operating successfully since 1934. The turnover in 1993 was 2.52 billion, and in 2009 3.72 billion Swiss francs. Small- and medium-size businesses offer each other liquidity without interest.²⁶
- The second area is *cooperative banking*. As already mentioned, the most famous example of cooperatives in all economic fields is the Mondragon valley in the Basque region of Spain. Their cooperative bank is the Lankide Aurrezkia—the Working People’s Bank, or in Spanish, the Caja Laboral Popular. How the bank operates in relation to all other cooperatives is described in detail by Douthwaite (52ff.). The main feature builds on the principle that all savings of the region serve the real economy in the region in order to avoid the sucking out of interests by capital owners. In Europe, 35 alternative

cooperative banks network in the International Association of Social Finance Organisations (INAISE).²⁷

- *Alternative energy* is the third field that is making communities independent of capitalist oligopolies and structures. Energy is at the center of the crisis of capitalism, and, at the same time, the area in which alternatives are at hand. The crisis derives from the fact that the world is in the middle of peak oil. This means that the availability and quality of this fossil energy is decreasing, driving up the production costs and prices, until it is exhausted. Capitalist production in its industrial form is dependent on this intensive form of energy. There is an intensive discussion on the interlinkage of “peak oil” and “peak capitalism.”²⁸ Elmar Altvater speaks about “the end of capitalism as we know it.”²⁹ On the other hand, all alternative forms of energy are available in decentralized form for the communities: sun, wind, water, and biomass. In Europe, more and more villages and small towns have started to practice self-reliance with alternative energy. In Germany, the most famous example is the town of Schönau in the Black Forest.³⁰ This initiative has brought the town a tremendous advance in active participatory citizenship and solidarity economy. Living a cooperative alternative changes the consciousness of the participating people and leads to further steps in a postcapitalist culture.
- Finally, there is the possibility of *local production, marketing, and consumption*, particularly of staple foods. All who have bought their fruit, vegetable, herbs, salads, eggs, cheese, and so forth at a local farmers’ market know the joy of freshness and better ecological health. Sometimes there is even morning dew on the leaves. If one becomes accustomed to this, one’s senses detest the often withered and mostly plastic-wrapped products in the supermarkets. Sometimes there are producer-consumer cooperatives. There is one of these near Heidelberg, which also shows additional features of an alternative lifestyle. Every Friday afternoon and evening, people meet around an old oven in the pastor’s garden, baking their bread for the week. They gather with their children and use this opportunity to discuss matters of their village and society and even global problems. So economics is re-embedded into their social life. There are thousands of stories like this. Of course, one must not idealize the local economy. In areas of dire poverty, however, it is often the only way to survive, demonstrating that the most basic form of economy, serving life, is the local one.

While a new economy from below in the service of life must start from the local-regional level, it is of utmost importance to transform the macroeconomy and economic policy making into an instrument for the people and by the people.

2.2. Struggles toward the Reappropriation of Stolen Resources at All Levels from the Postcapitalist Perspective

It is evident that the alternatives in the political economy cannot confine themselves to the local and regional level. The global capitalist system is out to destroy, co-opt, or at least weaken these efforts, wherever they take place. Therefore, it is imperative to commit to transforming the structures and institutions at the national, continental, and global levels as well. How, and by what methods, can people mobilize successfully? This, of course, is a huge question. We can only point to some basic requirements and some main examples of the struggles to achieve an economic and political system in the service of life. As already said, we are not suggesting a top-down approach, designing a blueprint, gaining power by an avant-garde, and implementing the alternative for everybody. Rather, people have to become acting subjects, reappropriating the stolen resources for the common good—liberating themselves from the psychological and mental distortions caused by the system. Empirically this is initially possible at points where people are hit directly in their basic material conditions of life. From here, they can expand their engagement into the transformation of systemic economic and political institutions. Let us look at some of these strategic points of departure for concrete popular struggles.

1. For work for all—against unemployment

One of the main triggers of the Tunisian revolution was the growing unemployment, particularly of the young people, including members of the middle class. The rebellion started when Mohamed Bouazizi set fire to himself on December 17, 2010. He was middle class and unemployed, trying to make a living as a street vendor. When the police and the local bureaucracy wanted to deprive him of this economic activity so vital for survival, harassing and discriminating against him, he responded with self-immolation. This turned out to be the beacon for mainly young people to rise up in solidarity with him against the country's dictator, Ben Ali, a neoliberal politician with the best relations to western capital and governments (one of the ministers of the French government even offered him police and military to crush the uprising). Unlike the revolts in French and British cities, where the frustrated youth just applied destructive violence, the young people in Tunisia won the support of the broad population and were able to initiate a process of political transformation. It was similar in Argentina in 2001. After the breakdown of the neoliberal economic model, the lower and middle classes joined hands to change the government. In many cases, workers and (parts of) the management took over the bankrupt factories instead of

creating more unemployment in neoliberal fashion. The key is to use the productivity gains not for increasing profits for capital owners but rather for cutting working hours. Work for all with dignity is one of the most crucial aspects of an alternative economy that serves life. Society as a whole produces the fruits of labor, and therefore society as a whole must be reappropriate and distribute them.

2. *For gender-justice—against sexism*

It is the result of the women's struggles that in many countries labor relations have been improved to become more just and equitable. But neoliberal destruction has weakened the position of women (and children) again. Women are the first to be made redundant, and their unemployment rate is even higher than that of men. There are still large differences in wages for the same job. The most burning issue is that capitalism does not count reproductive work at all, because it is not measured in money. Here, too, the younger generation in many countries has developed an astonishing change of consciousness, moving toward a just sharing of productive and reproductive work. Women are even advancing in business, not only in cooperatives. Korten reports staggering figures: "According to the US government, by the late 1990s women owned about 40 percent of all small businesses in America [sic!] and were starting new businesses at about twice the rate of men. The rate for minority women was three times the national rate. Similar trends in female entrepreneurship are being reported from around the world."³¹ Of course, the balance looks quite different in big business. A general overview of the problems and alternatives of women in development is presented in *The Women, Gender and Development Reader*.³²

The main point in the context of our deliberations is the different quality that women bring to economic activity. "A feminist conception of an alternative economy will place the transformation of the existing sexual division of labor at the center of the restructuring process," Patricia Fe C. Gonzales points out in the tradition of Maria Mies.³³ Along these lines, there are a host of women networks organizing against the onslaught of neoliberal imperial and patriarchal globalization and working for life-enhancing alternatives. "Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)" is an international network of feminist scholars, researchers and activists from the economic South working for economic and gender justice and sustainable and democratic development.³⁴ The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) prepared a module on Globalization and Women, including a section on alternatives.³⁵ Also the Central America Women's Network is working on alternatives.³⁶ In some areas of Africa, women engage in

heroic struggles for survival in dignity, such as the Rural Women's Movement in South Africa (*sizani ngubane*).³⁷

Christian ecumenical organizations have joined the struggle of women worldwide. In 2004, the WCC organized a conference on "Women's Voices on Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE): A consultation of Southern Women on Alternatives to Economic Globalisation." One of the stimulating papers was "Reflections on a Just and Caring Economy: Alternatives to Globalization" by Barbara Kalima.³⁸ Athena Peralta, the special consultant to the WCC on women and economy, has published a summary of the efforts within the AGAPE process, entitled "A Caring Economy: A Feminist Contribution to Alternatives to Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE)."³⁹ WARC (now called World Communion of Reformed Churches; WCRC) published a special issue of *Reformed World* (vol. 56, no. 1, 2006), reflecting on the special role of women in following up on the Accra Confession "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth."⁴⁰

This short outline of some of women's efforts to create an alternative economy of care and solidarity shows how central this work is for a new culture of life in just relationships.

3. *For life-giving agriculture—against agribusiness*

Continuing the ecumenical efforts to create alternatives in the service of people and earth, a coalition, ECAG, organized a process and consultation (in 2005) on life-giving agriculture in contrast to agribusiness.⁴¹ Starting from existing examples, the participants in the consultation concluded that "agriculture is a matter of spirituality, not merely a matter of food." "The farming families were ever conscious that while they planted and watered, it was God who gave the rains, the sunshine and the produce." So they start from the assumption that land and all the necessary components of agriculture are not a commodity but a gift. "Many of the farmers we met in our exposure programs are struggling to live out a new spirituality, trying to restore the sense of sacredness of the land, basing themselves on their traditional wisdom. They manifest a sense of belonging to the Earth community. Community means finding our place in the interdependent web of life, giving space and respect to all creatures that share the oikos, our household, the Earth." Concerning actions, the participants affirmed:

"We commit ourselves to:

- Campaign for trade justice and fair trade,
- Promote organic producer and consumer networks and disseminate best practices in agricultural trade,

- Forge links between the Life-Giving Agriculture networks and environmental and consumer NGOs [nongovernmental organizations],
- Develop cultural movements promoting rural values and land-based living.”

The broadest network for life-giving agriculture is the *via campesina*.⁴² This movement describes itself as “an international movement that coordinates peasant organizations of small and middle-scale producers, agricultural workers, rural women, and indigenous communities from Asia, Africa, America, and Europe.” It passed a “Declaration of Rights of Peasants—Women and Men” in 2009, asking for an “International Convention on the Rights of Peasants.”⁴³ This should include the rights of peasants, for example, the right to land and territory, the right to seeds and traditional agricultural knowledge and practices, the right to means of agricultural production, the right to information and agriculture technology, the right to the protection of agriculture values, the right to biological diversity, the right to preserve the environment, the right to have access to justice.

There is another area, often forgotten: animals. The average annual meat consumption of Germans is more than 100 kilo, although, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 8–9 kilo per year/per person is enough for people to cover their need for animal protein—not to mention the possibility of vegetarian nourishment replacing the animal by plant protein.⁴⁴ Because the rich minority of the world’s population requests ever better and more meat, monocultures are grown to feed cattle. This takes away land needed to produce food for people. Furthermore, genetically modified plants like soya get into the food cycle. On top of this, animals are tortured by technological, unnatural methods before being brutally slaughtered. The overconsumption of meat and the methods used to satisfy it are violence against nature. Life-giving agriculture tries to respect the rights of animals. This also has deep religious implications.⁴⁵

If there is any place where it becomes evident that western civilization is life killing, it is agriculture and the issue of food security. Hunger and its consequences kill millions of people, particularly children, every year, although there is more than enough food, as the UN has documented in many studies and statistics.⁴⁶ Agribusiness is also destroying the fertility of the soils and biodiversity. On top of all this, the financial speculators drive up the food prices. Yet if there is a sector in which returning to a culture of life necessary, it is agriculture. And this turnaround is possible. Organic and traditional

farming methods exist and can be improved. Strong movements are there to implement the alternatives, and human-rights movements like FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) support these efforts.⁴⁷ But there needs to be stronger alliance-building to overcome the political economic power of TNCs and international neoliberal institutions and provide for life-giving agriculture and food security. Faith communities could play an important role.

4. *For the supply of public goods and services—against privatization*
 Capital is out to subject basic goods and services like water, energy, education, and health to privatization because the overaccumulation of assets requires new fields of profitable investment. On the other hand, this is the area affecting nearly everyone, and everyone is, in principle, motivated to join a movement. This applies more and more also to the middle classes. Therefore, conflicts around these issues are important occasions to form alliances transcending classes and religious affiliations. In educational terms, the concept of “privatization” relates to the basic issue of property. People getting involved in struggles around basic goods and services have a chance to better understand the foundational mechanisms of capitalism, and, consequently, move toward more systemic transformation strategies. All over the globe there have been significant struggles against privatization, many of them successful. Paradigmatic victories have been won in Latin America, in particular. The most famous example is Uruguay. After the social movements enabled a popular government to take power, the first action of the newly elected majority in parliament was to change the constitution. It passed a constitutional amendment in October 2004 prohibiting any form of private sector participation in the water sector. Now “Uruguay is the only country in Latin America that has achieved quasi universal coverage of access to safe drinking water supply and adequate sanitation.”⁴⁸ In Europe, the EU is pushing privatization and competition in all areas of basic goods and services, while social movements and unions are mobilizing against this trend. The classical example was the struggle against the “Directive on services in the internal market,” initiated by Commissioner Frits Bolkestein (therefore popularly termed the “Bolkestein Directive”). It was partly successful inasmuch as the competition among workers of different countries was restricted.⁴⁹ Another experience sensitized the population. Many towns fell into the trap of cross-border leasing.⁵⁰ Communities in a European country sell their public services to a US investor, who avoids paying taxes by this commercial transaction in a foreign country. The communities lease back their own infrastructure from the investor, receiving some cash from the saving of taxes. After the financial crisis in 2008,

many investors and in consequence communities fell into problems, so the latter are trying desperately now to get out of the contracts—with considerable financial losses. In Germany, around two hundred towns are affected, so many people's consciousness about capitalist structures and practices has been raised. In Europe there is growing resistance against privatization. In the educational area, students went on strike against more privatization; in the area of health there is a growing resistance against privatization; the same is true in the transport sector (in Germany, e.g., against taking Deutsche Bahn into the stock market). There is a new trend among the people to ask for public goods and services (as best represented in Scandinavian countries), while the political institutions continue in the opposite direction, as seen recently through the SAPs pressed upon overindebted Greece.

5. *For solidarity social insurance—against capital-based pension funds*

In Europe—in contrast to the United States—most countries had public pension systems, built on the solidarity principle until the 1970s. Present employees and the employers paid into a public fund on equal terms, financing the pensions for the aged. There were differences, insofar as in some countries only wage labor had to be involved, while in others all sorts of income were included in the solidarity system. The system functioned well until capital attacked it, winning over neoliberal governments to change the law and introduce a capital-based system for at least part of the pension. This is not only bad in terms of the weakening of the solidarity system, but also because the pension funds were main actors in the financial casino, endangering not only the security of the funds but also the stability of the entire financial system—not to speak of cases like ENRON in the United States, where the workers lost all their pension rights. So also here many people are affected and can be mobilized for the struggle toward alternatives.

6. *For tax justice—against bottom-up redistribution*

Taxes on profits and assets continue to decrease, while taxes on wage labor increase. There is a continuous bottom-up redistribution going on, while public budgets get deeper into deficit. The resulting debt crises started in the South and now have reached the richest countries like the United States and Europe. The neoliberal tax system is increasing injustice day by day. The gap between rich and poor is widening. Social movements have tried to develop countervailing power. The Jubilee Campaign, for example, put odious debts on the agenda. Attac France launched the challenge to introduce taxes on financial transactions (Tobin tax) in 1998. After thirteen years, in 2011, France and Germany asked the governments of the

euro countries to introduce this instrument for cooling down the speculation and propping up the deficit budgets—a demonstration that popular engagement can change economic and political policies. This, of course, is still too little to stop the general crisis, because tax dumping goes on, even within the EU, and the tax havens for the rich have still not been closed or penalized. The biggest barrier to stopping the machinery of producing private wealth and public poverty in Europe is the London City and Downing Street 10. So the struggle has to go on. One of the instruments to strengthen the popular efforts is the Tax Justice Network, formed at the 2nd European Social Forum in Paris in 2003.⁵¹ Kairos Europa has summarized the debate on the issue in a brochure, also reflecting on the biblical foundation of struggles for tax justice.⁵²

7. *For a new international financial system—against casino capitalism*

The international financial system used to be an issue only for specialized movements and NGOs. Since the global financial crisis after 2007, the situation has changed. People are starting to understand that banks and investment funds with their speculative gambling have created social havoc. Demonstrators in Europe carry banners like “We will not pay for your crisis!” Occupy Wall Street presents itself as “99 % of the population,” thus echoing the slogan “We are the people.” The impoverishment, caused by the crisis, was also one of the crucial elements triggering the Arab rebellions. Of course, the great danger is that extreme right populism will use the crises to play religious and social groups off against each other, as happened after the Great Recession in 1929, when fascists won the day. It is therefore very important to educate people about the real actors and systemic institutions responsible for the crises. There are several strategic entry points for popular struggles. One is the replacement of the IMF and World Bank by new UN institutions. John Maynard Keynes at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 proposed an alternative world economic system, rejected by the United States, which wanted to use the dollar as world currency.⁵³ Keynes proposed an International Clearing Union with its own currency, along with facilities for correcting member countries’ deficits and surpluses in their balance of payments and for supporting weaker countries. W. Hankel briefly describes the functioning of this system as follows:⁵⁴

“John Maynard Keynes’ original proposals to the Conference included an International Clearing Union as a reserve bank and an overdraft facility for the national banks. Reserves were to be held and clearing conducted in an international, ‘stateless’ currency created by the Union, *bancor*, the predecessor of today’s special drawing rights

(SDRs). Keynes also put forward an original System for balancing international payments; not only countries with debts (overdrawn accounts), but also those with surpluses would be penalized with progressive rates of interest. This was intended to apply pressure not only on countries running a deficit, but also on those running a surplus, to balance their books and thus avoid driving their partners on the world market into the red. From the start a policy of growth led by exports along the lines of Germany and Japan was to be avoided. The result would have been even more expansion of the global economy, and decreasing reserves of bancor would have been needed to balance payments To make the system acceptable to the structurally weaker developing countries (a term Keynes introduced into the discussion), Keynes also proposed setting up an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development funded by subscriptions from the richer countries.”

The Human Development Report 1995 picked up this proposal for the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), held in March 1995 in Copenhagen, but without success. It was not even considered. The interest of the dominating powers in pure liberalization was much stronger—like 1944 in Bretton Woods. However, this episode shows that Keynes’s proposals are still valid and even necessary in view of the ongoing financial crisis. Social movements should continue to press in this direction. Attac Austria has included them in its draft plan for a new financial architecture.⁵⁵ In addition, Attac calls for democratic control of the financial markets and a democratic banking system that is not identical with earlier forms of nationalizing banks, but rather builds on monitoring by citizens.

8. *For ecojustice—against destroying the earth*

Ecology has to be built into every aspect of the economy. Key areas are energy and food. There are hosts of ecological movements dealing with these topics. We have already dealt with the food issue (3.) and alternative energy in relation to local-regional alternatives (2.1). What needs to be added is alliance building for transforming the macroeconomic and political system. The key problem is climate change, which links the energy and food issue. All political attempts to stop or limit the warming of the atmosphere have failed so far. The disastrous consequences are well known: rising sea levels, flooding of Pacific islands and large parts of Bangladesh, weather catastrophes, desertification of large parts of Africa, and many more dramatic changes. Proposals for an alternative approach to the issue are available from the network of ecological movements and nongovernmental organization “Climate Justice Now!” (CJN) and other sources.⁵⁶ The most convincing and clear approach to the

complex issue uses a combination of several elements: (1) The starting point has to be the ecological debt of the industrial countries. From a historical perspective, they are responsible for 80 percent of all emissions that damage the climate. Even after the rapid growth of emerging economies like China and India, emissions by industrial countries still account for nearly 50 percent—although they represent only 25 percent of the world’s population. (2) As the atmosphere has to be regarded as global commons, no one can demand exclusive rights, so there has to be restorative justice. (3) The budget approach can make this demand operational. First of all, the warming of the atmosphere has to be kept under 2 degrees Celsius, compared to the preindustrial level. A ceiling for carbon dioxide emissions has been defined on this basis, for between 2010 and 2050. According to the concept of global commons, all inhabitants of the world have the same right to an “ecological footprint,” so all countries have a certain amount of emission rights within the framework of the global budget. Until the year 2050, all countries have to reach the level of 1 ton of carbon dioxide emissions per person. (4) In order to manage the transition, those countries that still use more will have either to pay taxes or buy emission rights in a noncapitalist market, managed by, for example, a World Climate Bank with the powers to sanction countries that do not fulfill their duties. (5) As these steps do not yet account for the historical ecological debt of the industrial countries, the protagonists of this strategy propose lump-sum compensations to developing countries. In order to monitor all these steps, the idea of an International Environment Court has arisen. It would have to implement International Environment Law for ecojustice.

9. *For peace with justice—against empire with imperialism*

Peace (*Salaam, Shalom*) is more than the absence of war. It is the wholeness of just relations in all dimensions of life. However, there is a particular element of direct violence involved that requires special attention of the social movements: the imperialist military arm of the capital empire, represented by the West under the hegemonic leadership of the United States. In [chapter 2](#), we looked at the imperialist history of Europe in the service of capital, leading to the hegemony of the United States, which after the breakdown of historical socialism remains the only superpower and uses the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or “coalitions of the willing” to crush any dissenter by military means, when financial and political pressures do not suffice. At the same time the EU and member states, especially Germany and France, do everything to transform their former defense armies into intervention troops for economic interests.⁵⁷ Besides the direct losses of human lives in wars like those against Iraq

and Afghanistan, there are tremendous social and ecological costs, caused by direct military action and already by the irresponsible arms race as such, mounting to an annual expenditure of US\$1,500 billion. We also have to see the human rights violations the military bases or military aid of the United States are causing around the world by protecting dictatorial and pseudodemocratic governments like in Columbia and the Philippines or in the special case of Israel, the spearhead of the United States in the Middle East.

How to respond to such an overpowering scenario? The key problem is that the peace movements do not sufficiently build alliances with the social and ecological movements. Certainly, the World Social Forum embraces all of them. But in concrete actions there is little cooperation and common strategy building. A sad example is the Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence (2001–2011). In 1998, the WCC Assembly in Harare gave priority to two major programs: the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) and to what was later called AGAPE. After 1983, these issues had been held together in the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC). After 1998, this interconnectedness of the global life issues was broken up. This was mainly due to the fact that the European churches, especially those in Germany and Switzerland, did not like the system critique of the AGAPE process. They jumped on the violence issue, avoiding the hard systemic problems, ending the DOV process with an irrelevant declaration and message of a final convocation in Kingston, Jamaica in 2011.⁵⁸ Many ecumenical grass-roots organizations tried hard to bring issues of direct, structural, and cultural violence together again, but without success. One example of these attempts was the proposal of the Ecumenical Network in Germany (ÖNiD) for an alternative Declaration of Life in Justice and Peace.⁵⁹

A united movement on justice, peace, and the liberation of creation in the framework of a new culture of life would be dangerous for the powers-that-be and costly for the protagonists. Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered in that moment when he started trying to bring the anti-Vietnam peace movement and the civil rights movement together. But this integral life coalition between uncountable groups and networks is the hope for humanity and the earth.

In all of these points, one crucial and open question arises: how do all these struggles relate to the state and intergovernmental institutions? This is a question of reappropriating political power by the people, who according to the theory of democracy are the sovereign. In reality they are not. In the United States more than 50 percent of the citizens have stopped going to the

polls because the choice is only between Republicans and Democrats, both, to various degrees, being dependent on Wall Street. The same tendency is visible in Europe. Here the EU has eroded even political democracy. More than 70 percent of the laws affecting the people in the EU member states are no longer passed by elected national parliamentarians. The legal acts in the EU can only be proposed by the European Commission, with the European Parliament having no right to initiate them. And the final decision is made by the heads of states in the European Council. National parliaments can only say “Yes” or “No.” The European Constitution was to be formulated by a Convention elected by the executive, not by the people. When it failed in countries that constitutionally had to present it to a plebiscite (France and the Netherlands), the EU packaged the same content into the Lisbon Treaty, which was pressed through even against the No of the people in Ireland. So the EU of the corporations and the growing imperial militarism could go on in the same way as before.

The reformist forces assume that it is possible to influence the existing states and the international community toward regulating the capitalist global economy in the direction of social and ecological goals. But the dominant neoliberalism has demonstrated that the main function of the bourgeois state, in keeping with its original aim, is to protect and advance property and contracts between property owners. Only the struggles of the women’s and the labor movement achieved a certain amount of social welfare and equality. In 1966, the socialist and some developing countries succeeded in adopting the International Convention on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, complementing the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. Yet the United States and others have not ratified the new rights, and global capitalism continues to neglect them, as there is no mechanism to sanction their violation. The only way to overcome this life-endangering situation is to rebuild the political institutions from below on the material basis of economic democracy, as suggested in our multiple strategy. In this way state institutions are being subjected to the criteria of the social, economic, ecological, and cultural human rights from the start, and not only in a secondary manner.⁶⁰ All of these criteria have one reference point: the right to life. The subjects, therefore, have to be real live human beings, not just the property owners. Whoever wants to implement human rights must join the struggle to overcome capitalism.⁶¹ Postcapitalist political institutions have to be built up, and this is possible. Representative democracy will, in this way, be complemented by economic, direct, and participatory democracy (see above). This presupposes that all movements engaged in the struggles mentioned under 1 to 9 have to have a political dimension. They have to reappropriate the very term “democracy,” which capitalism has hijacked. Realizing that capitalism and democracy are irreconcilable, the movements have to liberate democracy from its perversion.

This is only possible in broad alliances, and therefore, also must be coupled with broad educational processes. People have to be involved as producers and consumers. This first of all requires a repoliticization of the labor movement. Workers themselves have to overcome the competition among themselves, into which capital sends them to their own disadvantage. The class struggle from below has been given up, while capital is waging a ruthless class struggle from above. Internationalizing the labor movement is a key precondition for building up a solidarity economy worldwide. This would involve the networking between local and regional contexts, but also between small, medium-size, and large-scale production units. The trade unions would face a giant task if they took up this challenge, but one that would also lead to the satisfaction of experiencing solidarity.

This internal solidarity-building in trade unions would be strengthened by systematically working together with social, ecological and peace movements from local to global levels. They in turn would have to engage with the workers' struggles. Many such movements are middle-class-based, at least in the West, and they often do not especially show solidarity with the workers' organizations. As outlined above, this is exactly what the elites want. Again: covenanting between working and middle classes is decisive for the future. It would be in their own best interests. Alliances between both classes can be very efficient. One example is the joint struggle in France when the government wanted to pass a law disadvantaging those who start a job after finishing their education. Students and trade unions together organized against this legislation and were successful. The law was dropped.

Consumers, too, have to contribute to a new political economy. Capitalism is only possible as long as they follow the seductive marketing of products. It manipulates the desires of people so that hearts and minds are caught by the images of "take more," "eat more," "get richer," "be somebody," and so forth. Education and group experiences of *buen vivir*, of living better by living differently, can have transformational effects.⁶² Consumer-producer cooperatives are a special place for learning. From a long-range perspective it is most important to start with alternative education for children. Competition would be secondary to cooperation; success would be measured in terms of happy relationships and common creativity. This is not easy, because both children and adults are generally bombarded with other values. But it is possible, as many examples show, for example, in base communities in Latin America.

In all these alliances the long-range perspective is postcapitalist. But from a short-range perspective, cooperation must include those with reformist tendencies. There is no contradiction between the long-range perspective and, for example, the move to replace nuclear energy by regenerative energies in the framework of green capitalism. The multiple strategy is flexible without losing sight of the goal. Moreover, reality will catch up

with some reformists, who might also realize in the common struggle that their goal cannot be reached within capitalism. The most convincing motivation, however, is listening to stories of hope.

3. A New “Grand Narrative of *buen vivir*” with Many Stories of Hope

In his book on the god of the liberals, Ton Veerkamp gives a moving, because partly autobiographical, account of the “grand narrative” of the labor movement.⁶³ He concludes that the neoliberal fragmentation of society has prevented the emergence of a new grand narrative. This concept was coined by the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard.⁶⁴ His declaration of the “end of the grand narratives” has become the formula for what is referred to as “postmodernism,” although in our view it is the climax of modernity, modernity in extremis.⁶⁵ Veerkamp discovers a glimpse of hope in new narratives like those told by Portuguese Nobel prizewinner José Saramago.

Relating to the psychological issues raised in this book, we would need to collect stories about how losers, winners, or middle-class people became human in solidarity—how losers overcame their trauma, winners their addiction; how middle-class members turned their diffuse angst, which, within themselves produces illusionary consciousness and aggression against scapegoats, into an understanding of what really has to be feared and fought; how people in the struggle did not burn out, but could keep struggling in revolutionary patience. The wife of the ophthalmologist in Saramago’s novel *Blindness* is an example of the latter.

Korten in *The Post-Corporate World: Life after Capitalism* has presented a marvelous collection by the “new storytellers” (226f.). Concerning the losers, the ordinary heroes, one of the stories tells of the Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELASI), a group of predominantly Hispanic women. When corporations started to build production plants, damaging the environment in their neighborhood, they said “No more!”, organized themselves, and stopped their communities from being colonized by the cancer cells of capitalism. Many more of these stories are told in the biannual World Social Forum. Veerkamp (229ff.) retells other stories from Saramago’s novel *Memorial do Convento*.

There are even stories about winners whose eyes are opened and who learn solidarity. Besides the German initiative “Wealthy people for wealth tax,” referred to above,⁶⁶ there is a similar initiative in the United States, called “Responsible Wealth.”⁶⁷

Concerning the middle-classes, we have already mentioned some stories from Argentina and North Africa (chapter 11). There are also stories from North America and Europe. For example, in Germany there is an

initiative called “Ecumenical sharing—solidarity wage” in one of the regional Protestant Churches (Baden).⁶⁸ Pastors challenge the churches not to mirror the salary scales of the state (as is the case in Germany) but to have solidarity wages according to needs and participate in worldwide ecumenical sharing. They also organize programs for congregations to get involved in closing the widening gap between rich and poor. In order to do this credibly, they self-tax their income by 10 percent, creating a fund out of which they finance NGOs specializing in work for economic justice and economic literacy.

Solidarity movements with members of all classes and their many stories gather in the World Social Forum. They come from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and from the North. They include movements from within faith communities, some of which take part in the accompanying Forum on Theology and Liberation, mentioned above. The Christian ecumenical and Muslim delegations numbered several thousands at the last Forum meetings.

All these stories nurture the hope that the alternative movements will leave the niche of a counterculture and take the road toward a new hegemonic paradigm, in Antonio Gramsci’s terms.⁶⁹ Of course, the forces of the empire are doing everything to stop this development. It is interesting to note that the secret papers of the American military intelligence of 1987, reflecting on the breaking down of the Soviet Union, identify the social movements as the main enemies of the western powers in the future, because, in the tradition of Gramsci, they are gaining influence over the “hearts and minds” of the people.⁷⁰ In order to counter this influence, the papers suggest penetrating schools, universities, churches, and media with their own (capitalist and imperial) worldview.

Korten gives examples to show that this capitalist and imperial strategy is failing, however, and documents clear signs of a cultural shift toward a new paradigm (212ff.). He quotes polls that research how many people belong to three different groups. The result was: Modernists 47 percent, “Heartlanders” (Conservatives) 29 percent, Cultural Creatives 24 percent (i.e., nearly one-fourth). However, the most fascinating aspect of the research is that even in the modernist and conservative groups the values are changing, because people no longer trust the traditional mainstream. There are more and more “conversions.” Interesting in this context was the effect of a book by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin, *Your Money Or Your Life: Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Achieving Financial Independence*. A total of 750,000 copies were sold between 1992 and 1998, and for two and a half years it topped the *Business Week* bestseller list. It particularly attracted people from the middle classes. The secret was that it demonstrated how changing one’s consumerist lifestyle does not mean sacrifice, but rather a gain in quality of life. This example shows that the necessary alliance-building between lower and middle classes does stand a chance.

All over the world there are media telling stories of hope. In the United States we find *YES! A Journal of Positive Futures*, published by the Positive Futures Network. In one of the issues, Duane Elgin and Coleen LeDrew summarize the characteristics of a new integral culture:

An integral culture and consciousness involves a new way of looking at the world. It seeks to integrate all the parts of our lives: inner and outer, masculine and feminine, personal and global, intuitive and rational, and many more.⁷¹

The old system is still dominating the world with violent and seductive methods. However, it has lost legitimacy with the vast majority of the world's population. The more a system needs violence to survive, the nearer its end has come. A small stone from the mountains can make the monster break down (cf. Daniel 2:34ff.). However, it is of utmost importance that people prepare for the new era in small cells—as did early Christian communities in the midst of the decline of the Roman Empire. Otherwise populist, destructive forces may take over, like fascism after the crisis of the Great Depression in 1929. Let us therefore, in a final chapter, look again at the role of faith communities in the transition to a new culture of life.

CHAPTER 13

Interreligious Solidarity Practice for Life in Just Relations Today: A New Axial Age?

1. Critique of Religion as a Presupposition

It is not possible simply to take the insights of the religions and philosophies of the Axial Age and apply them as a response to the crisis of our civilization. We have seen that even religions are highly ambivalent. They can be used and perverted by political and economic powers to serve particular interests, even increasing injustice and violence. This is why we have to engage in a (self-)critique of religion before we are equipped to look at the role of religions in the implementation of the new vision and praxis of life-giving culture.

(1) Examples of the Perversion of Religion

It is hardly necessary to give examples of the perversion and misuse of religion by power interests in the history of religions. Let us just mention a few regarding the history of Christianity and Judaism. The crucial shift in the majority tradition of the western Christian churches happened when Emperor Constantine chose to use the Christian faith as the empowering ideology of the declining Roman Empire in 312 CE.¹ In the face of a decisive battle for power, he reportedly had a vision of Christ on the cross and heard the words “In hoc signo vinces (Under this banner you will gain victory). So the cross, a sign of protest against the empire, became the symbol of imperial, even militaristic power. Although it was the emperor Theodosius who in 380 CE made the Christian faith the only state religion, we speak of the Constantinian shift and Constantinian Christianity. Since that time there has been a constant temptation to assimilate the church to the authorities and power.² The radical alternative of Israel’s grand narrative, including

resistance to exploitation and empire, was saved for future generations in the form of the biblical canon, inspiring many reform and even revolutionary movements. But these used to be marginalized and even persecuted by the mainstream church. Also the Jews became the enemies, although the trinitarian and christological dogmas kept the narratives of Israel and the messianic scriptures together.

A main example of the perversion and misuse of religion by power interests in the subsequent Christian history is the Crusades in the Middle Ages.³ Under cover of liberating the grave of Jesus in Jerusalem, one of the major goals of these violent undertakings was to control the important routes of the trade with the East, especially India, in the interest of Venice, in particular. Money also played a major role, albeit indirectly, in changing central topics of Christian doctrine. Anselm of Canterbury transformed the understanding of Christ as overcoming the sin of the world system into an ideology that legitimated the idea that debts must be repaid at all cost.⁴ His argument went as follows. God is the absolute authority of the law. This means that debts have to be repaid. As humans have debts in relation to God beyond their capacity to pay back, God cannot forgive them. They would have to repay their debts in eternal hell. So God uses the blood of his son Jesus Christ as a means of redeeming debt. In return, people have to submit absolutely to God; otherwise, they will have to spend all eternity in hell to repay their debt. On earth, this implies that all debts have to be repaid. Later this ideology served to “save” the heathens by conquering them for Christ, and also to crucify the crucifiers, the Jews (not the imperial Romans!) and all other enemies of Christ. This completely turns around Jesus’s and Paul’s critique of the law once it does not serve life. Here the Sabbath is for human beings, not vice versa. God forgives the disproportionate debts once we have forgiven debts that are beyond the capacity of our neighbor, as expressed in the Lord’s Prayer. However, capitalism and the empires have been happy with Anselm’s reinterpretation of sin and forgiveness.

Yet not only secular protagonists applauded this perversion, but the western medieval church did so as well. When faced with the problem of the prohibition of interest, as found in scripture and canon law, the church developed the doctrine of purgatory.⁵ This runs as follows: as charging interest is sin, this sin has been paid for by the blood of Christ. Yet the price of this sin has to be paid in cash; otherwise, without this “indulgence,” the punishment will have to be endured in purgatory. So the income from selling indulgences channeled part of the forbidden interest from the bankers and others into church coffers. This economization of the church became the trigger for Martin Luther’s call for reformation in 1517.

However, the church of the Reformation also experienced its Thermidor.⁶ In order to resist the military conquest of the counterreformation, the

Lutheran churches crept under the roof of the Protestant princes, even making them bishops. This resulted in the symbiosis of church and state, which continued right up to the German Christians during the Nazi regime, transforming the evangelical church into an imperial church (*Reichskirche*). So in many cases Lutheran churches became a “mirror of society” instead of being the “salt of the earth.”⁷ Calvinist churches, another group of Reformation churches, fell into another trap. Their interaction with capitalism under Puritanism led them to justify wealth accumulation.⁸ Today under neoliberalism this in its most extreme form is repeated by the “prosperity gospel,” which is spread by the US megachurches.⁹ But there is also a more subtle way to assimilate to neoliberal capitalism. The Evangelical Church in Germany published a memorandum on freedom as a church attribute (“Kirche der Freiheit”), completely submitting the church to McKinsey criteria: How can the church be best marketed? How can it grow quantitatively? How can quality control be managed for church workers? The question of justice is expressly bracketed. In the categories of the South African Kairos Document (1985), these direct and indirect perversions of being the church can be categorized as “state/capital theology” and “church theology” versus “prophetic church” on the basis of the Bible.

In modernity there is even a direct link between the majority churches and empire. For the Spanish-Portuguese period, this is obvious.¹⁰ The atrocities of this symbiosis after 1492 are well known. But there was also a complicity of Christian missions with empires and capital in the form of corporations throughout the colonial age. Even in the twenty-first century we saw blatant complicity between right-wing fundamentalism and the US empire under President George W. Bush. Here, too, there are more subtle forms of cooperation, as can be seen in the coalition-building between the United States and the Vatican to suppress liberation theology and Christian base communities.¹¹ The United States is perhaps the most extreme example, with its whole history of linking religion with nationalism and imperialism—after starting out as a refuge for persecuted religious minorities.¹²

These are only a few of the recent examples. They show that in Constantinian Christianity those churches and communities that wanted to faithfully follow Jesus’s way of life on the basis of the prophets and the Torah have been marginalized and even persecuted. Further examples occur throughout the centuries, beginning in the fourth century CE. Just to mention a few names: in the fourth century, the Donatists in Northern Africa, rooted in the indigenous people of the Berber, and in the Middle Ages, the Cathars in Southern France, who were the followers of John Wycliffe, the Lollards in England, and the Brethren and Hussites in Bohemia. After the Reformation adapted to the instruments of power, the

nonviolent Mennonites had to suffer a lot of violence. And there are many more examples.

Summarizing, one can say that greed and money, linked to political and military power and accompanied by spiritual-ideological power, have co-opted not only reason and law, as Paul shows, but also churches bearing the name of the Messiah Jesus himself (already prefigured in Paul's opponents in his letters).

A recent example of the misuse of religion for power purposes is Zionism and the politics of the state of Israel, which must be clearly distinguished from Judaism and the Jewish people as such. Of course, it is not possible to deal adequately with the highly complex issue of Judaism and the Jewish people in world history in a few paragraphs. But at this point in our reflection, we cannot omit a reference to the Israeli government's brutal injustice against the Palestinians. It persistently violates international law and human rights while appealing to scripture.

Among other arguments, Jewish and Christian Zionism builds its claim to Palestinian land on the promise of God to Abraham and Moses.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." (Gen 12:1-3, 7)

In 2008, at a conference of the World Council of Churches (WCC) on "Promised Land," Ulrike Bechmann presented a meticulous analysis of this and other related texts.¹³ She builds on the insights of sociohistorical Bible research, showing that the Abraham texts were edited in the period when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, and the elites of Judah were deported to Babylon or fled to Egypt. "Most of the texts were written during the exile and post-exile period (after 586 BCE) after the land was lost! These texts discuss these problems by using remembered narratives, and in doing so they construct their history as well as their future. This is necessary in building up a new identity to explain how Israel is able to live in Judah/Jerusalem under Babylonian and later Persian rule, how the diaspora communities of Babylon and Egypt can relate to the people in Judah, how the people of Judah are related to the wider region and its inhabitants There are very different answers given in the texts about 'Abraham' and 'promised land', as there may have been shared answers about how to cope with living in exile and later in the diaspora in Babylon/Egypt, but also how to live in the land under foreign rulers.

Therefore, the Abraham-Sarah texts discuss such problems as:

- How to live in a land under foreign rule?
- How to worship God without a temple? How to settle in an unknown, even possibly hostile, land?
- How to rely on God's promise for a better future without results at hand?
- What does this 'promise' mean after the historical catastrophe of the loss of Jerusalem? Abraham and Sarah are living a mirror-image of the life of the people in exile. Abraham never possesses the land, never kills or expels people from the land in order to take it as a living. He can share the space with Lot, and he leaves without hesitation when there is not enough to live on. Abraham's problem is not land but again his lack of offspring (op.cit. 6f.)."

On top of these insights, both sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, who is understood as the forefather of the Arabs, inherited the land after they had together buried their father Abraham in peace. So the Book of Genesis gives no basis whatsoever for an overwhelmingly powerful Israel to occupy the Palestinian land and oppress the people by sheer use of force. This result might be challenged by referring to the texts in Deuteronomy and Joshua. But here, too, Bechmann shows a different picture based on critical biblical research (p. 9):

Totally different from the theological traditions of Genesis and in sharp contrast with them are the concepts of the Deuteronomistic tradition. There, land is obviously construed exclusively, in possessing it, with the licence to expel those who live there and take it over. Deut 7:22 asks Israel to comfort itself with the thought that the other people around them are meant to be eaten by the not yet vanished beasts rather than themselves. In the same line, the book of Joshua describes a total conquest of the land with no other people left.

These are at first sight terrible texts when compared to biblical standards such as Gen. 1:27, where all human beings are created in God's image. Are these passages promoting terror? A closer look shows us that these texts, too, were written at a time where Israel was defeated and had lost its land. Many references indicate that they were written to explain this loss—even the book of Joshua. A lot of passages tie together living in the land with conditions. Everybody has to fulfil the entire law—otherwise the land is lost. Promise and curse often go together. Deuteronomy and Joshua tell through their story why Jerusalem was destroyed. The condition (living according to the law) was fulfilled only once and will never be fulfilled again. Joshua is not written to repeat the process. It is written as a narrative to explain what Israel could have had—and that it is not God who is responsible for the disaster but the people themselves.

Even within the book of Joshua there is an indication that not even then are the whole people able to stick to the law (cf. Joshua 7). The absoluteness of defeat is explained through the absoluteness of failure of Israel.

What Jewish and Christian fundamentalists do is to pick out texts disregarding the context and the key theme running through the Bible, which is justice.¹⁴

The same is true regarding the Moses texts in the exodus tradition. Archeology and sociohistorical research have shown that the origin of the Hebrew tribes in connection with the liberation from bondage around 1250 BCE was not an ethnic but a social event.¹⁵ While the empires of the Egyptians and Hittites were in decline, as were their vassals, the city kingdoms in the coastal and valley areas of Palestine, the Hebrews, a marginalized and enslaved people at the margins of the power centers, known as *apiru*, were able to liberate themselves. Besides the Moses group that was liberated from slavery in Egypt, there were also peasants from Canaan, today's Palestine, who were able to shake off the bondage of the city kingdoms. However, the Moses people brought the faith in Yahweh, a desert God, not co-opted into the pantheon of the empires. Yahweh was understood as the liberator of the oppressed. This God, who hears the cry of the people and sees their misery, is ready to show compassion and come to their rescue and clash with their rulers (cf. Ex 3ff.). But Yahweh was also seen as the God of justice and solidarity, as reflected in the Sinai narrative (Ex 19ff.). So freedom is inextricably linked to justice and can only be preserved when justice is done.

These findings are clearly supported by the new book of Ton Veerkamp.¹⁶ He says in relation to the Torah Republic, breaking through the exploitation order of the normal societies and introducing the alternative order of autonomy and equality:

As the God of Israel (i.e., the liberator from slavery) is separated from the gods of the nations, also Israel has to separate itself from the nations and their orders, as long as it sticks to the hope for the order of *autonomy and equality*. The issue is not *true religion* and even less some kind of racism. It was not the ethnic aspect, but first of all the separation from the normal orders of the nations made the "separation" . . . a categoric duty for Israel. (125f.)

The separation from the nations is the consequence of liberation . . . Without freedom from slavery the peculiarity is pure and life-threatening presumption (*Anmaßung*), a mannerism of a hegemonic nation (*Herrenvolkallüre*). (139)

The same is true for the Apostle Paul in his famous passage on Israel and the nations (*gojim*; Rom 9–11): "He shows that the election of Israel is a

sovereign act, neither the ethnic lineage nor the meritorious life is decisive. This means, positively, that the God of Israel can also call those who do not belong to Israel and, negatively, that the election of the *gojim* does not mean the rejection of Israel.”

In biblical tradition, election is thus linked to God’s purpose to realize an alternative of freedom and equality. Paul concluded that the implementation of the Torah under the conditions of totalitarian Roman rule is not possible through separation but rather through the building of new inclusive communities throughout the empire in order to subversively revolutionize it.

Historically this biblical view may have been first inspired by the settlement of the liberated slaves and peasants in the mountains of Palestine (reflected in the Book of Judges). They organize themselves into clans and tribes without hierarchical pyramid structures (like monarchies), in solidarity and mutuality. This is why Norbert and Gerhard Lohfink call the original Israel and later the Jesus movement a “contrasting society.”¹⁷ Only if Israel, and later Christianity, are faithful to the covenant with the God of justice and therefore the God of the poor and marginalized, are they also elected to be God’s witness to the peoples of the world. Then, the peoples will make a pilgrimage to Zion, to learn peace (Isaiah 2). Then, living out the Beatitudes, they will be salt of the earth and light of the world (Mt 5:13f.). Paul makes it abundantly clear what it means to be elect, as we saw in part 1

(1 Corinth 1:26–28):

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters, not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.

Election is a call, not possession. Those not at the side of God with the poor and oppressed will be sent away by the Human One in the final judgment even though they think they belong to God (Mt 25:31ff.).

This means that both Jewish and Christian Zionism pervert both the Hebrew and the Christian Bible. But the silence of most mainstream churches on the systemic injustices of today’s Israel against the indigenous Palestinian people, putting itself above international law and human rights, is contributing to scandalous suffering in that country. A fundamental critique of religion, delegitimizing the religious underpinnings of the occupation of Palestinian land, must be the basis for the political struggle for justice. Using the scriptures as a base for an ideology for stealing

land, oppressing, and even killing other people must be fundamentally rejected.

This is what a minority of Jews and Christians are already doing. In the categories of the South African Kairos Document, they deconstruct the state theology that actively legitimizes the injustices, and the church theology, speaking of “reconciliation” without calling for justice. They call for justice as the foundation for liberation of both the oppressed and the oppressors. In his book on Jewish liberation theology, Marc Ellis demonstrates how biblical texts, formulated in the context of the oppressed, get turned upside down when they are used by the formerly oppressed to gain power and they become oppressors.¹⁸ He calls for overcoming Constantinian religion, be it Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. In the case of Judaism he insists on (1) deabsolutizing the state of Israel, (2) clearly distinguishing between the pre- and post-Holocaust situation and theology, and (3) redefining Jewish identity on the basis of the biblical solidarity and justice traditions (p.132ff.). He calls upon all religious traditions to join together in “movements of justice and compassion across community and religious boundaries.”¹⁹ Along the same lines, Mark Braverman in a compassionate book²⁰ demonstrates that the complicity between Jews and Christians in using the Bible to legitimate or tolerate the occupation of Palestinian land by the State of Israel has no ground in scripture. He shows how people in a weak or even persecuted position like the religious dissidents from Europe, who settled in North America; the Boers in South Africa, who were defeated by the British; and the European Jews, who suffered discrimination over the centuries to the point of annihilation in Nazi Germany, through emigrating to Palestine used the belief of being the elected people as a source of strength and resistance. However, once in a position of power, they turned this belief into a weapon against others, and from the oppressed they became the oppressors. He challenges the concept of election altogether. One can even strengthen this critique by showing that the election of Israel, and later the movement of Jesus’s disciples, essentially means the mission to develop an alternative society, always giving priority to the poor. In this case the very notion of election excludes those who do injustice in the name of the electing God, who is the God of compassionate justice. This interpretation of election underlies Braverman’s call upon Christian theology and churches not to betray the clear message of Jesus and Paul. In other words, they should not forget, or misuse, the promises of the Hebrew Bible. Election must not be interpreted as an exclusive possession of one people elected by birth but rather as a blessing and good news to all poor and oppressed people suffering from imperial domination. Jesus says: “I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness . . .” (Mt 8:11f.)

And Paul's message of justification by faith has the central focus on enabling Jews and Greeks, masters and slaves, men and women, to accept the new creation of God's domination-free new order as liberation from all structures of empire (Gal 3:26–28).

There are prophetic Christian voices joining the Jewish ones. For example, Naim Stifan Ateek²¹ rejects the political abuse of the Bible. He adds to the arguments the important observation that, according to biblical tradition, the land is not the property of humans, but belongs to God (104ff., cf. Lev 25:23 and Psalm 24:1). It is intended for the just use of people, not for arbitrary domination of others. He also unfolds all the passages showing God to be not only just but merciful. In 2010, leaders from all Christian churches in Palestine issued the Kairos Palestine Document, a strong plea to Christians, Jews, and Muslims to reject the policies and practices of the state of Israel, which is establishing an apartheid system in Palestine. They present their message out of faith, love, and hope. They reject both the violence of the state and the counterviolence of resistance, which have led to the deadlock of the situation. Instead, they call for Gandhian methods of defiance, boycott, and other forms of direct nonviolent confrontation. Virginia Tilley, a US political scientist specializing in the comparative study of ethnic and racial conflict, finds the Kairos Palestine approach even too conciliatory.²² She proposes a rereading of the 1985 Kairos South Africa document with its insistence on prophetic clarity, that is, on “full and equal justice for all.” A new document emerging from an international Kairos meeting in Palestine in December 2011 does just this. *The Bethlehem Call: Here we stand—Stand with us*²³ states:

God takes sides for justice against injustice. God does not take kindly to injustice and the perpetrators of injustice. “*He has shown the might with His arm. He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and has exalted the lowly*” (Luke 1:46–55). A spirituality that recognizes the face of God in every human being is, therefore, inevitably marked by a bias towards justice for the poor and the oppressed. “*One thing God requires of you is only this, to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God*” (Micah 6:8). This is the true essence of both Testaments. Christ still weeps over Jerusalem, (emphasis in original)

A Kairos is both the recognition of God's will and the urgency of our response. It is in the awareness of a God of the Now, who is deeply involved in the human predicament. God keeps us steadfast in courage, hope and love as we continue to struggle and resist.

We pray and plead for a radical change of hearts, policies and practices of the Israeli government and those governments that support it. If this does not happen, we pray in trembling and hope if it is God's will . . . for these governments to fall.”

The misuse of the Bible poses huge theological, spiritual, practical, and strategic questions. What is to be the remedy for unjust powers, when religion becomes an instrument of power—and an extremely powerful instrument? No secular system or person has more power than one with religious justification or toleration—which is true not only for Christianity and Judaism but for any other faith community. The problem is not that religions have a blot on their escutcheon, but that because of their power over hearts and minds, their role transcends the secular powers, for better or for worse. It is bad when the latter commit acts of injustice and destructive violence, but it is worse when injustice and violence are done in the name of religion. When there is sickness, it can be healed by medicine. But when the medicine is toxic, it is more dangerous because the patients take it in good faith and die, while those who see this happening lose their hope of healing. Religion adds to the paralysis produced by the system.

This is why it is extremely important to find out how to fight the perversion of religions. However paradoxical this may sound, a critique of religion is a primary task for religion if it wants to live up to its true mission and original potential. Let us look at some examples in the original documents of the Axial Age before we turn back to seeking solutions under the conditions of modernity.

(2) Critique of Religion in the Bible

The Bible is sometimes ambivalent. For example, it contains imperial texts in relation to the period of King Solomon. He was a normal Ancient Oriental monarch. However, the Bible characteristically rereads history critically, so there is a self-referential critique of events, actions, and attitudes (1 Kings 11ff.). The New Testament contains adaptations to Roman thinking in the later texts, such as the patriarchal letter 1 Timothy. Feminist and socio-historical biblical research has therefore carefully developed methods of detecting intrabiblical self-critique. The Bible itself helps in fulfilling this task because it is itself a prime example of a critique of religion.

The biblical critique of religion is not focused against other religions in order to promote its own faith, as one might assume. This is an invention of Christian fundamentalists. Rather the Bible turns against the misuse of religion, in the first place in relation to the perversion of Israel's own way of being the "people of God" but also of other religions, for power purposes and, therefore, for the violent oppression of the poor and the weak.²⁴ In Psalm 82:1–4, we read:

God has taken his place in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:
"How long will you judge unjustly

and show partiality to the wicked?
 Give justice to the weak and the orphan,
 maintain the right of the lowly and destitute
 Rescue the weak and the needy;
 Deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

Who are those “wicked,” favored by the gods, criticized by the biblical God? Another psalm reveals who they are (psalm 73:3–12). They are described as the powerful, accumulating their riches by violence:

For I was envious of the arrogant;
 I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
 For they have no pain;
 Their bodies are sound and sleek.
 They are not in trouble as others are;
 They are not plagued like other people
 Therefore pride is their necklace;
 violence covers them like a garment.
 Their eyes swell out with fatness;
 Their hearts overflow with follies.
 They scoff and speak with malice
 Loftily they threaten oppression.
 They set their mouths against heaven,
 And their tongues range over the earth.
 Therefore the people turn and praise them,
 And find no fault in them.
 And they say, “How can God know?
 Is there knowledge in the Most High?”
 Such are the wicked;
 Always at ease, they increase in riches.

The biblical God, the liberator of slaves, criticizes the gods who support and legitimize the rich and powerful. This is the core of the biblical critique of religion. However, it does not only turn against individuals of this kind. As we saw in [chapter 3](#), prophets and legal reforms criticize the whole system of the money-interest-property economy because it leads to the accumulation of wealth for a few and the destitution of the many. And they criticize not only other religions that justify these injustices but also the perversion of the Yahweh faith itself. There are texts showing how the God of Israel can be turned around to become a god of power, fertility, and wealth, like Baal. The classical account of this is in Exodus 32: the story of the golden calf.²⁵ It does not describe the worship of foreign gods. No, they clearly say: “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt (v. 4).” The God Yahweh, who liberated the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, is being redefined into a distorted

image. They want to manipulate God as an image to serve their own purposes. This is why images are prohibited in Ancient Israel, and why God's name is unspeakable. The opposite of the golden calf are the tables of stone containing the commandments. They relate to the kind of social order in which the gift of liberation can be preserved. Its key elements are: Nobody should be exploited and enslaved, and nobody should greedily desire the other's property, which is necessary for a life in dignity, in order to accumulate wealth beyond needs. All should have enough. The same is true for Jesus: "You cannot serve God and Mammon"—the god of gathering treasures.

This short biblical recollection demonstrates two things in relation to the critique of religion:

1. God must not be projected into an image for manipulation purposes.
2. The criterion for the authenticity of faith in God is the struggle for the rights of the poor. This also applies to the rights of peoples resisting imperial conquest.

However, even several biblical texts themselves are ambivalent and can be misused for imperial, patriarchal, and other power purposes. Therefore, we find an ongoing (self-)critical evaluation in the Bible itself. It finds its classical form in Jesus's sequence of sayings in the sermon on the mountain: "You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you" (Matt 5:21ff.). The message of God's domination-free order ("kin-dom of God")²⁶ has to be reinterpreted over and over again in each context in order to save the texts from being co-opted by powers. There is no pure text. Each text leads us into the conflict between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the dominating world order. But there is one clear criterion to judge each text and use of the text: "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is the weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world [i.e., the plebeians in the Roman Empire, the proletariat in modernity, etc.], things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are . . ." (1 Cor 1:27ff.). Reading the texts in this critical perspective can never fail. This is the biblical yardstick for critique of religion—a never-ending task, an ongoing process.

(3) Critique of Religion in Buddhism and Islam

There is a remarkable book edited by Miguel de la Torre with contributions by liberation representatives of all faiths.²⁷ In his introduction he postulates the struggle "between the world's disenfranchised and the materialistic religiosity of the world's elite" (6). The latter is embedded in neoliberalism.

“Neoliberalism as a religious movement is an economic doctrine that can only be accepted by faith” (4). He argues that “neoliberalism as spirit is more successful in winning converts than any other faith tradition presently in existence” (4). It has church-like institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (WB),²⁸ and priests, that is, the mainstream economists²⁹ or religious ideologues like Michael Novak.³⁰ Against this background of perverted religion in the interest of economic and political power; representatives of different faiths look at the distortion in their particular religions and try to retrieve their authentic liberation-oriented meaning.

The aforementioned article of the Buddhist Tavivat Puntarigvivat starts by raising questions about the official Buddhist *sangha* in Thailand. It is hierarchically structured and controlled by the government. Yet his main critique concerns the many Buddhists who just seek personal liberation by meditation without giving sufficient attention to social liberation in the midst of suffering that is caused by systemic exploitation and oppression. He intends “to offer a challenge to Buddhist ethical values by interpreting liberation as necessarily involving social as well as personal liberation” (132). So here we have a critique of religion as far as it assimilates to the individualized culture of capitalism by offering comfort only at the personal level. Over against this neoliberalized faith he states:

A comprehensive perspective on socio-political suffering and liberation from the existing exploitative system of global capitalism will manifest itself via a consciousness-raising process in regards to socio-political suffering and its structure and the emergence of Buddhist-based communities struggling for social justice in solidarity with women, the poor, and the oppressed. These are steps, in the Thai experience, toward a Buddhist liberation theology. (p.154)

This is exactly what Muslim liberation theology says. According to the Declaration of Progressive Islam,³¹ the key question for determining whether a religion and its respective protagonists are true to their sources is the locus, the place, where they position themselves. This document clearly states that this place has to be where the marginalized in a given society are. Irfan A. Omar, the author of the Muslim contribution to the “Hope for Liberation in World Religions,” formulates the same insight by opposing two types of theology: a traditional mainstream, rigid, legalistic, other-worldly theology, called “metaphysical,” on the one hand, and a prophetic, pastoral and existential theology, called “liberation theology,” on the other. The second one he sees prefigured in Sufism. It fits into the critique of religion when he says, “If theology remains metaphysical in all circumstances, then it simply becomes a tool in the hands of the privileged, implicitly supporting the status quo” (96).

In all the religions we have looked at, there is a consciousness that the powerful can instrumentalize faith. Modernity radicalized and systematized this insight.

(4) Critique of Religion by Karl Marx

Karl Marx undertook the most consistent critique of religion in modernity. In his article on the actualization of a Marxist critique of religion, Jan Rehmann points to the progress of Marx compared to that of Ludwig Feuerbach.³² The latter, using a general anthropological argument, had tried to prove that religion is a human projection. Marx criticized this approach in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. There he denies that sensations, passions, and especially love of individual human beings can be understood as ontological principles.³³ He argues that money can destroy love and even make it purchasable. This means that humans have always to be seen in their social context.³⁴ Therefore, in his fourth thesis against Feuerbach, Marx postulates that, in relation to the critique of religion, the secular basis (*weltliche Grundlage*) of the projection must be understood differently: “This [basis of the projection itself] must be understood in its contradictions and practically revolutionized.”³⁵ In *Capital*, he sees the “only materialistic and, therefore, scientific method” to look at the history of religion in the following light: each time “to develop the heavenly forms out of the respective real life situations.”³⁶

Using this method, Marx comes to a differentiated understanding of religion—building on a passage in Paul’s Letter to the Romans (8:20ff):

The religious misery is an *expression* of the real misery and at the same time a *protest* against the real misery. Religion is the groaning of the laboring creature, the soul in a heartless world as much as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.³⁷

Rehmann interprets these sentences as a description of Marx’s real experiences in the context of the contemporary theology and church, drawing the following conclusion:

If this interpretation is true, we have to reformulate Marx’ apodictic definition into a conditional sentence: Religion operates as opium, *if* it is not connected with critical analysis of society. Vice versa this means: also *religiously* inspired movements are able to overcome the illusionary and at the same time paralyzing character of religious opium, when they succeed to link the “groaning of the laboring creature” with solid critique of capitalism and a “revolutionary pragmatic politics” (Rosa Luxemburg). (p. 2).

As a positive example he points to liberation theology.

On the basis of the biblical critique of religion, as outlined above, we can even go one step further. It is precisely the faithfulness to Yahweh that inspires the prophets and the Torah to protest against the Ancient Oriental normality and create alternative law that liberates people for freedom and solidarity. These critical positions—the first in human history—tackle the class societies developing in the context of larger exchange societies on the basis of division of labor, and are themselves “religiously” based. This observation does not only raise historical questions. It has often been stated that Marx’s thought is based on Judeo-Christian tradition. He was converted to “socialism” by the Jew Moses Hess,³⁸ and quoted Luther’s critique of early capitalism as often as he quoted Aristotle. In [chapter 10](#) we raised the question of whether the whole humanism of modernity is built on the faith that “God became human” by reference to a key passage in Marx’s “Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Law.” The critique of religion, he states, concludes with the doctrine that the human being is the highest being for the human being, that is, with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions, under which the human being is a humiliated, an enslaved, an abandoned, and a despised being.³⁹ Consequently, the critique of religion uttered by the Bible and Marx is not only compatible, but the latter should be seen as founding his own view on a biblical basis.

We also saw that Marx does not follow up this issue, instead assuming that religion will simply die out as soon as the social conditions are such that the human being is no longer humiliated and enslaved. We regard this as a false conclusion of Marx. Marx assumed that after the critique of the heavenly gods had been completed, he could just proceed to criticizing the earthly gods. He accordingly transferred his attention to the fetishism of money and capital as commodities.⁴⁰ However, in reality the earthly gods, against whom Marx levels his critique, continue—and today even more than in earlier times—to be accompanied by heavenly gods, so that the necessity for a critique of religion obviously continues. We have referred to Ronald Reagan and the two presidents Bush who, without the fundamentalism of the religious Right in the United States, could have gained neither the votes nor the legitimacy for their neoliberal, imperialistic policies. The same is true for the general strategy of globalization.

There are two opposing spiritualities, the spirituality of the human in relation to corporality on the one hand, and the spirituality of oppression, built on abstractions like the spirituality of money, on the other. One could even inquire whether the void in Marx’s thinking concerning the God question might not have been the reason why, in historical socialism, political, economic, and ideological power was again concentrated in an elite—with the climax of Stalinism. Obviously the critical Marxian paradigm can only be kept alive when the question “Which god reigns?” or “Who or what functions as god in a society?” (Veerkamp) starts each time

from “the respective real life conditions” of people.⁴¹ Evidently societies are always determined by binding obligations or commitments—the only question being whether the reference point of these commitments (which some call “God”) has liberating or oppressive effects.

This question, too, has a subjective side. The Brazilian liberation theologian Frei Betto, after the breakdown of state socialism, raised the question about the cause of this failure. One of the key factors, in his eyes, is that this kind of socialism defined the human being exclusively as reason and will. The aesthetic dimension was missing. People have the desire to transcend themselves and the status quo. Socialism only responded to hunger but not to the desire for beauty.⁴² This could also be called the need for spirituality—not the bourgeois individualistic spirituality of salvation egotism, but that which David Jenkins and M. M. Thomas call “spirituality for combat”⁴³ or to which Bonhoeffer alluded in the formula “prayer and practicing justice.” Because the historical state socialism had a vacuum at this point, capitalism could and can fill it with surrogates.⁴⁴

The Buddhist economist Karl-Heinz Brodbeck analyzes this issue even more radically.⁴⁵ He criticizes the fetishism theory insofar as Marx, misled by reductionist materialism, does not see that the money-property-economy not only changes the structures of society but also the subjects. They are not only controlled from behind, but have internalized the calculating money rationality. In this way their desire to transcend themselves has been transformed into egocentric greed for more money. This is why those controlling the money sector—today the financial markets—can dominate the technical, need-related, and productive spheres in society. The king needs the subjects to acknowledge him. If we want to change the system, we have, at the same time, to motivate people to be transformed in their consciousness, transcending the spirituality of money. And this does not just concern the “superstructure,” but is a constitutive element in the social process for change.

This process calls for all humanist forces, be they religious or secular. We have seen again and again that they are not only compatible but necessary for the transformation, considering that we face not only objective social situations but also the captivity of subjects in the liberation struggle. The compatibility should be used for practical cooperation. For, according to Marx, transformative praxis is the basis for critical theory, and, according to the prophetic-critical Judeo-Christian tradition, the key is always the doing of justice, always in specific contexts. All contexts today are linked to the crisis of humanity and earth produced by western modernity. This is why we quote Marx’ statement:

Capitalist production develops only that kind of technology and combination of the process of production that at the same time undermines the fountains of all wealth: the earth and the worker.⁴⁶

In view of the global truth of this analysis, there is only one conclusion to be drawn: that all humanistic forces must cooperate for the salvation of our planet. However, all these forces, including faith communities and secular humanists, have to self-critically assess their own entanglement in the ambiguities of modernity. The issue is not only the overcoming of capitalism as an economic system in the narrow sense, but also of modernity—at least as far as its destructive aspects are concerned, which are founded in the totalization of capital accumulation and the connected understanding of the human being as “master and owner of nature,” reducing reason to the means-end-rationality. All this—summarized by the ecumenical coinage “life-killing civilization”—leads us to seek a “life-giving civilization which affirms relationships, coexistence, harmony with creation, and solidarity with those who struggle for justice.”⁴⁷ In this book we have already referred to indigenous cultures and (eco-)feminist perspectives that raise up their particular suffering from the dominance of the calculating (male) money subject in modernity.

Summarizing, we can say that a review of the critique of religion shows the way forward. In order to rediscover the authentic impulse of the Axial Age as well as find allies in the world of today, we have to focus on one single criterion: those who are suffering from life-killing civilization and struggling for liberation. Even nature has to be seen as “longing for liberation” (Romans 8). Placing ourselves at the side of suffering and oppressed creatures, we learn to look at history and the present systems from “underneath.” It was suffering and injustices that prompted the prophets and the Buddha to develop their ways to overcome suffering and injustice. One of the first Christian theologians in modernity to use this expression was Bonhoeffer. In one of his early lectures on ecclesiology he stated that the most important question for the church is where it stands, either looking for privileges or trying to discern where the Messiah Jesus reveals himself: in the least of the human beings (cf. Matthews 25:32ff.). This notion was taken up by Christian liberation theology on all continents. So we need a kind of hermeneutics from below for interreligious encounter and universal humanistic alliance building.⁴⁸ This implies that there cannot be interreligious dialogue in abstract or neutral terms. This would miss the point from the beginning. What is required from the very sources of the Axial religions is interreligious solidarity with the poor, including endangered creation, in the struggle for life in just relations against imperial structures at all levels. And this calls, in the first place, for critique of religion.

2. Signs of Hope in the Religions and Social Movements for a New Axial Age

If it is true that the spread of the property-money-interest economy, coupled with imperial political structures, led to increased material suffering

and negative sociopsychological developments of people and societies and triggered the multicultural and multireligious responses of the Axial Age, could it not be that a similar awakening is not only necessary but also possible today? The situation is even much more dramatic today than after the eighth century BCE. It is not only single societies that are suffering. As a consequence of the globalization of the capitalist imperial system, every society, even humanity and earth as a whole, is faced with the question of survival. If we want to discover signs of hope for a new Axial Age, we therefore need to look for interreligious contributions to local, national, regional, and global struggles for a new culture of life in just relations.

Methodologically this cannot be done by only showing a convergence of values or ethics. Rather we need to take the liberation theology approach of see-judge-act, building our theoretical judgments on concrete analysis in the midst of transformational praxis.⁴⁹ Recently Paul Knitter made an interesting proposal to initiate dialogues between religionists and practitioners/teachers of economics on the basis that the “free market economy” (we would call it capitalism, which destroys free markets through monopolies and oligopolies) has turned out to be a religion.⁵⁰ The different religious traditions have specific contributions to offer in the dialogue, very aptly formulated by Knitter:

- “The Monotheistic Abrahamic Traditions: There will be no economic flourishing without justice for all.
- The Indic Traditions: There will be no economic flourishing without inner peace and compassion.
- The Sinitic Traditions: There will be no economic flourishing without a constant balancing of difference.”

He proposes a double approach for the dialogue: “Gather multi-faith prophetic voices from the top down” (inviting recognized “experts” from the world of religion and the world of economics) and “Gather multi-faith prophetic voices from the bottom up” (including social activists and engaged economists). In our view, both may be beneficial, but we see one problem. Putting these two approaches on the same level obscures the fact that dialogue is only dialogue if the partners meet at the same level, on an equal footing. Johan Galtung, in his conflict theory, has brought out the difference between asymmetrical and symmetrical conflicts. In symmetrical conflicts—in his period between the West and the Soviet Union—dialogue is the way to solve the conflict. In asymmetrical conflicts—as between the global North and the global South or between US-backed Israel and the Palestinians—the more powerful like to speak about dialogue and reconciliation but mean keeping up their dominance under the cover of negotiating. Therefore, while showing readiness for dialogue, the oppressed and

those in solidarity with them have to (nonviolently) struggle to redress the asymmetry. In our case—religions and economics—this is clear with regard to the “bottom-up” approach. It operates on the basis of equality. However, before engaging in dialogue, “top-down” religions have to ask the power question and make sure that their dialogue is not being misused by the powerful. There is also a theological reason why we should not put religions and capitalism as religion at eye level under the umbrella of dialogue: Capitalism is religion in the form of idolatry and fetishism, as we have shown in [chapter 1](#). This does not mean that representatives of religions should not speak with capitalists as persons. Jesus himself spoke with individual rich men of his time. However, his strategic option for inducing change was to work from below, building up alternative communities in the spirit of the kingdom of God and networking among them, knowing that the dominant class will never give up power voluntarily through dialogue.⁵¹

We think that Mahatma Gandhi is an outstanding example of the methodology we propose.⁵² First of all, he stands for merging the best of several religious traditions. He reinterpreted the Hindu, Jewish-Christian, and Buddhist traditions by linking them to a clear political strategy, characterized by a “politics of truth” (*satyagraha*) and an “economy of enough for all.”

“To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”⁵³

Gandhi was not interested in political achievements for the sake of the interests of any actual religious community—this was precisely the tendency he opposed among Hindu and Muslim groups. Instead he worked toward reconciliation. Furthermore, he combated the colonial power’s self-interested pacification policy. For him what was at stake was his peoples’ self-determination in dignity and self-respect. “Politics separated from religion stinks, religion detached from politics is meaningless. Politics means any activity for the welfare of the people.”⁵⁴ This activity can take the form of resistance or the form of the development and accomplishment of a constructive program. Its nonviolent realization gives the political act a religious character. Thus nonviolence (*ahimsa*) is not about passive acceptance, but “actively confrontational nonviolence.” “A nonviolent revolution is not a program of ‘seizure of power,’ it is a program of transformation of relationships, ending in a peaceful transfer of power.”⁵⁵

“Within the concept of *satyagraha*, renunciation of violence means that the action may in no case eliminate the reaction of the other party by means

of destroying the person or by hindrance of his/her resolve. And this holds true on both sides. Advocacy for others may not drift toward the exclusion of the represented person, nor may opposition against the adversary lead to his/her elimination as a person. Nor may unsolicited help, representation, or protection of someone against his will be forced upon him, nor may resolution through amendments to his adversary's behavior be cut off from him. However, the others are not asked whether anything should happen, whatsoever. They are brought into a position in which they must decide to act, if they want to bring their will to bear. They are in a tight spot."⁵⁶ This means that the approach to the adversary is not "dialogue," but nonviolent struggle (*ahimsa*), that is, struggle in a form that is not denying the integrity and dignity of the other as person.

Looking at the issue in more detail, let us start with signs of hope in the religions of the Abraham tradition—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In our methodology this includes their alliance-building with secular—even atheistic—humanist movements. We are aware that the notion of Abrahamic tradition can also be misused for self-elevation. We understand Abraham as a bridge-builder. The global challenge requires all forces of life in this tradition to cooperate.

(1) Judaism

The most dramatic situation where the Abrahamic traditions are challenged is Palestine and Israel. Here the state of Israel, as an outpost of and supported by the imperial West, is systemically violating human rights and international law. Since the 1967 war, it has not only occupied Palestinian land, but taken it out of use through building Israeli settlements and an illegal wall around the West Bank. This has created an apartheid situation with daily suffering by the Palestinians. The situation and its history are extremely complex, and cannot be analyzed here. We are just looking at the response of faith communities. Is there an interreligious solidarity in cooperation with humanist forces? Yes, there is. In the West, the main mass media project the image of a democratic Israel, protecting itself against Muslim terrorists. They are silent about the interreligious, non-violent struggle of the people. The reality is shown, for example, e.g. by the Israeli linguist Tanya Reinhart.⁵⁷ She cites the village of Bil'in in the West Bank, since 2005 struggling against land-grabbing to build the wall. One can learn about the struggle from a very imaginative website and get involved in solidarity actions.⁵⁸ Every Friday, week after week they demonstrate peacefully against the building of the wall—together with Israeli and international solidarity activists of all religious backgrounds. The army responds to the demonstrations with tear gas, rubber bullets, and nocturnal raids. Many people have been injured, several fatally. Hundreds were detained.

But the people have struggled on with Gandhian methods in solidarity. A great victory was celebrated in July 2011. One of the actions had been a lawsuit against the state of Israel in the Supreme Court of Israel because of the wall stealing a big portion of the land. The people won the case. The contested stretch of wall had to be dismantled, and 800 dunums (some 200 acres), half of their land, returned to the village.

In 2009, Christians in Palestine, leaders, and the members of congregations issued a very important Kairos Palestine Document: “A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering.”⁵⁹ It builds on the South African Kairos Document of 1985,⁶⁰ calling the churches worldwide to solidarity with the antiapartheid struggle. Kairos Palestine is clearly calling for interreligious solidarity for justice. The basis is the common faith of the Abrahamic religions that the humans have been created in the image of God, and, therefore, they have equal dignity and have to be treated with equal respect:

3.3.1 Among the signs of hope are the local centres of theology, with a religious and social character. They are numerous in our different Churches. The ecumenical spirit, even if still hesitant, shows itself more and more in the meetings of our different Church families .

3.3.2 We can add to this the numerous meetings for interreligious dialogue, Christian-Muslim dialogue, which includes the religious leaders and a part of the people. Admittedly, dialogue is a long process and is perfected through a daily effort as we undergo the same sufferings and have the same expectations. There is also dialogue among the three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as different dialogue meetings on the academic or social level. They all try to breach the walls imposed by the occupation and oppose the distorted perception of human beings in the heart of their brothers or sisters.

3.3.3 One of the most important signs of hope is the steadfastness of the generations, the belief in the justice of their cause and the continuity of memory, which does not forget the “Nakba” (catastrophe)⁶¹ and its significance. Likewise significant is the developing awareness among many Churches throughout the world and their desire to know the truth about what is going on here . . .

8. Finally, we address an appeal to the religious and spiritual leaders, Jewish and Muslim, with whom we share the same vision that every human being is created by God and has been given equal dignity. Hence the obligation for each of us to defend the oppressed and the dignity God has bestowed on them. Let us together try to rise up above the political positions that have failed so far and continue to lead us on the path of failure and suffering.

Internationally, an interreligious common front is emerging against the injustices in Palestine and beyond. One of the outstanding examples is the journal of Rabbi Michael Lerner in the USA, called *TIKKUN*

Magazine—To heal, repair and transform the world.”⁶² It is Jewish, but at the same time interfaith. Lerner is also the leading light of the Network of Progressive Spirituals (NPS).⁶³ Both initiatives resist the Israel Lobby,⁶⁴ which is lobbying for unconditional support of the empire for the State of Israel, as well as imperial capitalism. The Vision and Mission Statement of NPS starts as follows:⁶⁵

The Network of Spiritual Progressives welcomes secular humanists, atheists and people who are “spiritual but not religious” as well as people from every religious community who share the values of love, generosity, creativity, wonder and a commitment to respect one another. Spirituality is personal but not a private matter; it is about how we treat each other and how we live our lives.

OUR VALUES AND VISION

We recognize that *our well being* depends on the well-being of everyone else on the planet and the well-being of the Earth. We seek a world in which all of life is shaped by peace, fairness, environmental sanity, love, care for one another, care for the Earth, generosity, compassion, respect for diversity and differences, and celebration of the miraculous universe shape.

To realize such a world, we seek a *New Bottom Line* so that institutions, corporations, social practices, government policies, our educational system, our legal system, our medical system and even our personal behavior is *judged efficient, rational and productive to the extent that each one maximizes love, caring, kindness, generosity, ethical and ecologically sensitive behavior* and enhances both our capacity to respond to others as embodiments of the sacred and to the universe with awe, wonder, and radical amazement at the grandeur and mystery of all being.

We understand that getting these kinds of changes requires a deep understanding of the individualism, materialism and ethos of “looking out for number one” that is daily infused into people by our need to adjust our consciousness to the dynamics of the world of work where we make a living for ourselves and families, and by the cheerleaders for the established order who shape our educational and media institutions. Yet we also know that there is a *deep yearning* in most people for a world of love and real human connection, a yearning for a meaning to life that transcends material well-being and ties us to the ongoing unfolding of spirit and consciousness and to the inherent interdependence and love that permeates and inspires all being.

This text captures well the spirituality of a new Axial Age. It is verified by the praxis of both the network and the magazine, resisting US imperial politics in the belly of the beast and inspiring people to work for alternatives at all levels. Lerner invited Ulrich Duchrow to publish and introduce the declaration of the Ecumenical Network in Germany, “Life with Justice and Peace,”⁶⁶ in the twenty-fifth anniversary Issue of *Tikkun* (winter 2011).

The reason he gave: “All religions should engage in processes on globalization like the ecumenical movement and come to similar, clear positions.” The magazine also opposes the “fatal embrace” between imperial Jewish and Christian Zionists.⁶⁷ So it is quite aware of the ambivalence of religion. It seems that the critical, progressive parts among the Jews, at least in the United States, are becoming the majority. They see the whole deadlock in Palestine/Israel as being created by the wrong assumption that those who are *for* the Palestinians must be *against* Israel and vice versa. The very opposite is true. With its policy of sheer violence, Israel is destroying its own future. David Grossman’s novel *Woman Flees Tidings* shows how the violence is hitting back on souls and the society as a whole. As Israel is destroying its own future, those who are for the people of Israel must be for justice toward the Palestinian people and vice versa. The future of both can only be achieved together. This understanding is not yet prevalent among German Jews and Christians because of the crimes of the Germans during the Nazi period. Trauma and guilt feelings prevail. But the Christians and churches have started to wake up, thanks to the Kairos Palestine Document. Even the boycott of goods from the occupied territories is gaining ground as a nonviolent means of raising awareness.

After September 11, 2001, Islamophobia has dramatically increased everywhere in the West.⁶⁸ Particularly in Europe, it takes the former role of anti-Semitism (which unfortunately is still present). The climax so far has been the terrible massacre committed by the Norwegian Anders Behring Breivik on July 22, 2011, in which 69 young Social Democrats died because they stood for a multicultural society. He gives his motive as saving Europe from Islamization. But many armchair intellectuals had delivered him the arguments, and many politicians even of the center parties nurture Islamophobia. In this situation, countless Christian-Muslim initiatives are emerging in order to counter this trend. Some of them try to organize grass-roots encounters throughout a region, like the “Protestant Initiative Christianity and Islam” with their campaign “More Dialogue Now!” in Westphalia, Germany.⁶⁹ But there is also Jewish-Muslim solidarity. Muslim American imams visited the concentration camps of the Nazis and afterward issued a statement on this experience. They maintain:

We stand united as Muslim American faith and community leaders and recognize that we have a shared responsibility to continue to work together with leaders of all faiths and their communities to fight the dehumanization of all peoples based on their religion, race or ethnicity. With the disturbing rise of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of hatred, rhetoric and bigotry, now more than ever, people of faith must stand together for truth.

Together, we pledge to make real the commitment of “never again” and to stand united against injustice wherever it may be found in the world today.⁷⁰

(2) *The Christian Ecumenical Movement*

Since the 1960s, the Christian ecumenical movement has engaged in inter-religious dialogue and this, increasingly, with an emphasis on globalization and empire critique.⁷¹ Since the end of the 1990s, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have engaged in a “committed process of recognition, education, and confession regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction.”⁷² All documents in this process contain calls for cooperation with people of other faiths and social movements. Let us look at some of the important decisions.

In 2003, the LWF at its 10th Assembly came to the conclusion:

“As a communion, we must engage the false ideology of neoliberal economic globalization by confronting, converting, and changing this reality and its effects. This false ideology is grounded on the assumption that the market, built on private property, unrestrained competition and the centrality of contracts, is the absolute law governing human life, society, and the natural environment. This is idolatry and leads to the systematic exclusion of those who own no property, the destruction of cultural diversity, the dismantling of fragile democracies, and the destruction of the earth. . . . As a Lutheran communion we call for the development of an economy that serves life. . . . *Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to . . . build and strengthen ecumenical partnerships, multifaith cooperation, and participate in civil society alliances (i.e., the World Social Forum).*”⁷³

The LWF followed up this very clear and comprehensive decision with a remarkable study process on “Being the Church in the Midst of Empire.”⁷⁴

In 2004, at its 24th General Council in Accra, Ghana, WARC formulated a confession in the tradition of the Barmen Theological Declaration against Nazism (1934).⁷⁵ It is the clearest document in the ecumenical movement so far. It declares:

We believe that God is sovereign over all creation. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24.1).

Therefore, we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism . . . We reject any claim of economic, political, and military empire which subverts God’s sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God’s just rule. . . . (emphasis in original)

The General Council commits the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to work together with other communions, the ecumenical community, the community of other faiths, civil movements and people’s movements for a just economy and the integrity of creation and calls upon our member churches to do the same.

The Orthodox Churches have likewise joined the struggle for justice. They made a strong contribution back in the 1980s in the framework of the ecumenical conciliar process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.⁷⁶ In the course of the financial crisis, the primates issued a message against the dominating political economic system and its individualistic destructive implications. Some of the articles read as follows:⁷⁷

5. Under such circumstances, the contemporary witness of Orthodoxy for the ever-increasing problems of humanity and of the world becomes imperative, not only in order to point out their causes, but also in order to directly confront the tragic consequences that follow. The various nationalistic, ethnic, ideological and religious contrasts continuously nurture dangerous confusion, not only in regard to the unquestionable ontological unity of the human race, but also in regard to man's relationship to sacred creation. The sacredness of the human person is constrained to partial claims for the "individual," whereas his relationship toward the rest of sacred creation is subjected to his arbitrary use or abuse of it.

These divisions of the world introduce an unjust inequality in the participation of individuals, or even peoples in the goods of Creation; they deprive billions of people of basic goods and lead to the misery for the human person; they cause mass population migration, kindle nationalistic, religious and social discrimination and conflict, threatening traditional internal societal coherence. These consequences are still more abhorrent because they are inextricably linked with the destruction of the natural environment and the entire ecosystem. . . .

8. The gap between rich and poor is growing dramatically due to the financial crisis, usually the result of manic profiteering by economic factors and corrupt financial activity, which, by lacking an anthropological dimension and sensitivity, does not ultimately serve the real needs of mankind. A viable economy is that which combines efficacy with justice and social solidarity.

The WCC, the communion of Protestant and Orthodox churches, in its AGAPE (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth) document for the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006⁷⁸ writes:

An economy of life reminds us of the main characteristics of God's household of life:

The bounty of the gracious economy of God (*oikonomia tou theou*) offers and sustains abundance for all;

God's gracious economy requires that we manage the abundance of life in a just, participatory and sustainable manner;

The economy of God is an economy of life that promotes sharing, globalized solidarity, the dignity of persons, and love and care for the integrity of creation;

God's economy is an economy for the whole *oikoumene*—the whole earth community;

God's justice and preferential option for the poor are the marks of God's economy. . . . In the context of neoliberal globalization, churches are called to make an explicit and public commitment of faith in word and deed . . . being in solidarity with the suffering people and the earth, and in resistance to powers of injustice and destruction.

There have been a number of follow-up consultations on these assemblies. The first took place in Wonju, Korea (April 9–13, 2005), entitled “Life-Giving Agriculture Global Forum,”⁷⁹ and the second in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (May 15–19, 2006), called Living out the Accra Confession: Implications for Our Spirituality and Mission.⁸⁰ It was followed by the third on “An Ecumenical Faith Stance against Global Empire for a Liberated Earth Community” in Manila, the Philippines (July 13–15, 2006).⁸¹ The fourth one, held in Changseong, Korea, from August 12–17, 2007, was on: “Bringing Together Ubuntu and Sangsaeng: A Journey towards Life-Giving Civilization, Transforming Theology and the Ecumenism of the 21st Century.”⁸² On November 5–9, 2007, an All-African Consultation on Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The preamble concludes: “We, therefore:

- Denounce neoliberal economic globalisation;
- Remind the countries of the North of the wealth that was built and sustained on the continued extraction and plunder of Africa's resources as well as the exploitation of African people;
- Reclaim African communities' sovereignty over decision-making processes, productive means and resources; and
- Affirm that African people are creditors of a tremendous economic, socio-cultural, and ecological debt.”⁸³

Christians from Africa were the ones who had put the question of declaring the present global economy a *status confessionis* on the agenda. In 1995, they declared: “It is our painful conclusion that the African reality of poverty caused by an unjust economic world order has gone beyond an ethical problem and become a theological one. It now constitutes a *status confessionis*. The gospel to the poor is at stake in the very mechanism of the global economy today.”

With the recent consultation (2007), they again expressed their resistance to the growing tendency in the ecumenical movement to give in to many churches of the North which are trying to diffuse the issues by advocating reforms within the dominating system. The dramatic reality of the majority of the world's population and the earth challenges

us, from the perspective of God's love, to persist in biblical prophetic faithfulness, resisting economic and imperial injustice, and to work for alternatives.

In all the ecumenical documents, churches are made aware of the fact that the ideological battle in word and deed can only be waged successfully by building alliances with social movements and trade unions, with all people of good will in any of the faith communities.⁸⁴ A sign of this was the venue chosen for the 9th Assembly of the WCC in 2006: Porto Alegre, the birthplace of the World Social Forum (WSF). With this choice, the ecumenical movement said: We have abandoned the marriage with thrones and capital. We are with the people, struggling together for the implementation of a different world with justice and peace.

(3) Islam

Also at the global level, 138 Muslim leaders issued "A Common Word between Us and You" to the Christian world, in order to overcome the playing off of Christianity against Islam in the West.⁸⁵ It begins and ends by stating the necessity for peace and justice between the two faiths, the foundation of which already exists:

Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.

The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity. Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of humanity respectively. Together they make up more than 55% of the world's population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world's inhabitants. Thus our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake.

And to those who nevertheless relish conflict and destruction for their own sake or reckon that ultimately they stand to gain through them, we say that

our very eternal souls are all also at stake if we fail to sincerely make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony. God says in the Holy Qur'an: *Lo! God enjoineeth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness. He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed (Al Nahl, 16:90)*. Jesus Christ said: *Blessed are the peace-makers . . . (Matthew 5:9)*, and also: *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? (Matthew 16:26)*. (emphasis in original)

So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.

Of course, a word like this, although unprecedented and important in the present world situation, will not change the course of affairs by itself. It needs to be translated into concrete strategies and actions at local and national levels. Therefore, it is important to identify struggles here. One example can already be seen during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Muslim liberation theologian Farid Esack describes eloquently how Christians and Muslims struggled side by side in the United Democratic Front (UDF).⁸⁶ This prompted a new study of the Koran and eventually led to the founding of the Progressive Muslim Network. It is very clear in asking for interfaith cooperation for justice.⁸⁷

This Declaration contains some fundamental statements:

1. True Islam cannot be approached in a neutral way but only in solidarity with those people who suffer from injustice and struggle for just relationships because all of humankind is in a state of returning to God in the context of all creation. This implies several basic dimensions: God, as the center, is transcending language, class, gender and culture.
2. All people are carriers of God's spirit, yet there is a preferential option for the marginalized. This is why we have to join hands with liberating forces in all religions putting justice for all people and creation in the center.
3. Praxis is the Way to truth. The 'struggle to experience a personally and socially meaningful Islam is rooted in praxis geared towards creating a more humane society as part of a sustainable eco-system in the service of the Transcendent'. Therefore, we have to oppose the Pax Americana in the service of the globalized capitalist market, consumerism, 'racism, sexism, homophobia and all other forms of socio-economic injustices', 'Intolerance and fascist tendencies.'

These are perspectives central to all religions of the Axial Age. But today, Islam is the most tenacious form of resistance against western life-killing

civilization. In order to diffuse this, the media only mention the violent forms of this resistance, which the Muslim liberation theologians reject in such a way that this rejection cannot be instrumentalized by the West. In building up interreligious solidarity for justice, the Muslim movements mentioned will therefore be primary coalition partners.

Since 2002, a year after September 11 and the declaration of the US “war on terror,” a new movement has formed, particularly geared to building up interfaith solidarity between Christians and Muslims targeted by empire: “Peace for Life—A People’s Forum and Movement for Global Peace with Justice.” It introduces itself as “*people of faith from countries of the global South—Asia-Pacific, Middle East, Latin America, Africa—along with those from North America and Europe, coming together as Peace for Life—a global faith-based movement resisting militarized globalization and creating life-enhancing alternatives.*”⁸⁸ Further, it states: “By ‘empire’ we mean the combined economic, military, political, and cultural domination by a powerful state, assisted by satellite states and aided by local elites of dominated countries, to advance its own interests on a global scale. U.S. dominance (US\$400+ billion military spending per year and bases in over 150 countries) conjointly with transnational corporate power makes up the heart of today’s empire.” The movement was founded in the Philippines, where also the secretariat is situated. It operates in countries where imperial capitalism is particularly at work and is creating socioeconomic injustice, human rights violations, and all kinds of violence under the guise of religion. People’s Forums have been organized in the Philippines and Columbia, Missions were sent to Nepal and Palestine, a “World without Empire” conference took place in New York, a Peace Charter was developed in Korea, and workshops were held in the events of the WSF. Within this framework, groups and networks from all over the world reflect on strategies and concrete actions against empire and for developing a new culture of life on an interfaith basis.

(4) Buddhism

Finally, let us take a short look beyond the Abrahamic traditions. Buddhism has in its turn developed important international initiatives on resistance and alternatives. We have already mentioned the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, founded by the Thai author and activist Sulak Sivaraksa.⁸⁹ Since 2004, the International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU) has organized meetings in Bangkok and Ayutthaya (Thailand) under the auspices of the United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV), trying to foster the collaboration of Buddhist leaders and scholars on burning issues. Looking at the documentation

of these congresses, one is impressed at the depth and breadth of the deliberations. There is no comparable program visible in ecumenical Christianity, although the efforts of the WCC, the WARC, and the LWF for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation since 1983 point in the same direction. In 2008, the subject of the IABU/UNDV gathering was “Buddhism and Ethics”; in 2009, “Buddhist Approach to Economic Crisis/Environmental Crisis/Political Conflict”; in 2010, “Global Recovery: The Buddhist Perspective”; in 2011, “Buddhist Virtues in Social and Economic Development.”⁹⁰

During the last few decades Buddhism has not only produced substantial theoretical reflections but also encouraged alternative praxis. In one case, a whole Buddhist country, Bhutan, has embarked on developing a gross national happiness (GNH) index (instead of gross national product, GNP) as a vision for its policies.⁹¹ The four pillars of GNH are the promotion of sustainable development, the preservation and promotion of cultural (Buddhist) values, conservation of the natural environment, and the establishment of good governance. “Through collaboration with an international group of scholars and empirical researchers, the Center for Bhutan Studies further defined these four pillars with greater specificity into eight general contributors to happiness—physical, mental and spiritual health; time-balance; social and community vitality; cultural vitality; education; living standards; good governance; and ecological vitality.”⁹²

The main effect of Buddhist economics, however, can be observed at the community level. Many examples of this are given by Sulak Sivaraksi and the UNDV Conference in the volume on the “Buddhist Approach to Economic Crisis” mentioned above. I want to quote one concrete example presented by Wallapa Kuntiranont (Thailand) to the interreligious “Colloquium 2000”:⁹³

Ta Sawang Sub-district in Surin Province: A Buddhist Approach to Rural Poverty

Abbot Nan Sutasilo or Luang Por [Father] Nan of Samakkhii Temple, from Ta Sawang, Sub-district in Surin Province, in northeast Thailand, was one of the first ‘development monks’. He used to think that development meant a road and electricity for his village. He quickly found out how wrong he was.

The abbot changed his views, and then real changes began to take place in the small village of Ta Sawang Sub-district. After finding out that the real enemy was in fact man’s own endless desires, he took a group of villagers to meditate in the graveyard in order to give them a new life. A clear and calm mind helps you to see through illusions and to see situations as they are. Without ‘spiritual immunity’, it is difficult for the villagers to fight the influx of consumerism which buries the villagers deeper in debt.

The abbot teaches the villagers to apply the objectivity, patience and self-discipline gained from meditation to analyse the chronic disease of their poverty. After helping them to identify the causes, he then helped them think about means to ease their debts, based on self-reliance. The abbot set up a fertiliser bank, using donations to the temple so that villagers would not have to borrow money from banks. He strongly confirms that the monks have been indebted to the people, since they give us food and do take care of us.

The village's rice bank was soon set up to ease the hunger created by drought. In a spirit of sharing and self-reliance, the better-off villagers donate rice to the bank so that the poor can borrow at low interest. The abbot also initiated "friendship farming" by which villagers donate their labour to plant rice on a communal piece of land, which was also donated. The rice from this joint effort goes to the rice bank in order to help more villagers.

What is probably more important than the rice harvest from friendship farming is the return of the brotherhood spirit within the community, the reestablishment of tradition, qualities that were lost after the breakdown of village life, which was caused by economic pressures.

His effective application of the Buddhist faith also accounts for his success in generating enough village savings to start new projects. For example, the villagers are required to make a religious promise that they will decrease their purchase of unnecessary products. From personal savings the project later grew into a village savings group. The funds are being used to set up a medical cooperative and, very importantly, to help pay off the villagers' loan before they lose their land to the banks." (emphasis in original)

There is an excellent article by Tavivat Puntarigvivat in a book on liberation theology in world religions that gives an overview of all community-related examples of Buddhist inspired community work in Thailand.⁹⁴ In an analogy to Christian-based communities in Latin America, he calls them "Buddhist-based communities." They are geared to relative economic self-reliance, political decentralization, and local cultural independence—especially from capitalist consumerism. The basic philosophy behind these initiatives links self-reliance with spirituality. Normally, they have been inspired by engaged Buddhist monks (*bhikkhu*) and nuns (*bhikkhuni*). One has been coping with the effects of periodical floods that have been destroying the rice fields with salt water. Accordingly, they diversified the crops with coconut trees, palm trees, and herds for traditional medicine. Another group organized people for the struggle against the destruction of the rain forest by companies with the hidden but powerful support of government bureaucracy and business. Another community has produced cultural products. A whole network of those initiatives is found in the Santi Asoke communities. They connect Buddhist economics with new insights into ecological, sustainable economy—all trying to detach themselves from transnational capitalism and thus to overcome poverty. Others form rice banks and buffalo banks in order to get rid of the usury of the banking

system and money lenders. The Buddha-Kasetra communities are developing alternative economy around school projects that provide poor children with education. In this way girls are saved from the poverty-prostitution cycle.

There is also a very impressive initiative by nuns to make the educational system for boys, which is offered through monasteries, also available for girls. In the cases of the boys, they become monks for some years to get a good education and then can decide to go on as monks or disrobe to get a job and start a family. This has not been common for girls, who are in terrible danger: through poverty, their parents often let them go into prostitution in order to send money back home. The revival of the Bhikkhuni Sangha could be an effective way of saving more girls from poverty and prostitution.

Tavivat Puntarigvivat, however, sees that the root cause is the impoverishment of the people and the consumerism, which destroys cultural values and which is inherent in global capitalism. So he calls for the rereading of the original Buddhist texts and experiences in order to add structural transformation to the traditional personal transformation. This is why he takes over the concept of liberation theology, though it does not make real sense in nontheistic Buddhism. Yet he recognizes the same need in Buddhism as in individualized Christianity.

Social Movements

If it is true that the hope for a global paradigm shift lies in the alliance-building between all alternative forces, one of the major spaces to make this happen is the WSF.⁹⁵ Its self-introduction states:

The World Social Forum is an open meeting place where social movements, networks, NGOs and other civil society organizations opposed to neoliberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically, formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action. Since the first world encounter in 2001, it has taken the form of a permanent world process seeking and building alternatives to neoliberal policies. This definition is in its Charter of Principles, the WSF's guiding document.

This is the main place where faith-based organizations can share and network with social movements, NGOs, and unions. There are also national and regional branches of the Forum that are creating and nurturing local alliances. Thus the WSF is also a catalyst for networking at all levels.

Important organizations support these processes, for example, the World Forum for Alternatives, led by Samir Amin and François Houtart.⁹⁶

They prepare important research material, such as “From ‘Common Goods’ to the ‘Common Good of Humanity’” (2011), a text challenging the United Nations to develop and decide upon a Charter on the Common Good of Humanity.⁹⁷ It contains the most recent analysis of the dominating system and a design for a new paradigm.

Of course, a new culture will only gain hegemony when the majority of people are ready not only to think but also to act in new categories. However, it is evident that many changes have already taken place since neoliberalism started to gain hegemony in the late 1970s. Crises and catastrophes have paved the way, even leading already to political changes—first in Latin America. But reality will also catch up with people in the West. The key is to avoid a new fascism that capitalizes on the fears created by the crisis. Therefore social movements and faith communities have a critical role to play.

This is not only true on the national and international levels. In every local community, critical people of different and/or no faith, ready to engage for justice and peace, can together start identifying the burning issues caused by the capitalist imperial system and building up solidarity for life in just relations. They also can find cells of renewal in other places and network with them. Sometimes they will have to face resistance from their own faith communities. So they have to start with the critique of religion. But the power of the spirit will sustain them as they struggle for the life of earth and people around them.

Conclusion

Readers may ask: why link the religions and philosophies of the Axial Age with today's struggles to make "another world possible"? Our answer is clear and, hopefully, convincing: Humanity is facing a global crisis, not only caused by a destructive political economic system but by a whole destructive civilization in all dimensions. Therefore, it needs a global comprehensive response not only in terms of alternative structures but of a new way of being or rather, becoming human. This includes the necessity of psychological and spiritual liberation and transformation. Social movements so far have concentrated on struggling for alternatives in the political economy. This action could be decisively strengthened if the broadly blocked sources of genuine faiths could be freed again to become a life-giving stream. Throughout history, these sources have not only dried up in many ways—they have also been misdirected into the hands of the powerful, who use them to legitimate unjust structures and actions.

The conditions for liberating the religions from their perversion are promising in the present situation. Everywhere in the world, faith-based movements are emerging to struggle for a new culture of life in just relations. They join the growing social movements. The intention of this book is to strengthen these initiatives by the following arguments: The roots of western civilization, based on the money-property order and responsible for the dominating destructive system, lie in the same period as the roots of the Axial Age religions and philosophies like Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. This leads us to the conclusion that the latter emerge in response to the former. Consequently the Axial prophets and sages have a lot to say to the structural as well as to the personal alternatives we are struggling for—transcending the domination of money in structures and spirituality. On this basis the religions can discover not only their compatibility but their common goal. Instead of fighting each other, they can join together in the hands-on struggles for life in just relationships, each of them with their special strength. With this kind of basic insight, we can critique modernity at its very roots and also gain inspiration for real alternative visions and

practices. Spirituality linked to critical social analysis and action is empowering the hitherto powerless. Imagine what power would be released if at least growing minorities of the faith communities joined the struggle from below for the liberation of humankind toward life in just relationships. The movement slogan is: "Another world is possible." This book wants to add:

"Another Axial Age is possible."

Notes

Foreword

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Introduction

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1 The Emergence and Development of Division of Labor, Money, Private Property, Empire and Male Domination in Ancient and Modern Civilizations

1. F. J. Hinkelammert and H. M. Mora, *Coordinación social del trabajo, mercado y reproducción de la vida humana* (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 2001), 176ff.
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6. Hans G. Kippenberg, *Seminar Die Entstehung der antiken Klassengesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977).
7. The quotes from Brodbeck are our translations and refer to the German edition. Emphasis in original.
8. Duchrow and Hinkelammert, *Property for People*, chapter 3.
9. See Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization*, 22f. with further literature.
10. See Hans Christoph Binswanger, *Eigentum und Eigentumspolitik. Ein Beitrag zur Totalrevision der Schweizerischen Bundesverfassung* (Zurich: Schulthess, 1978), 21: "Property (and thereby 'having') was not understood legally as a relation between different persons (because one has, the other has not), but as a relation between a person and an legal object. Thereby property is legally not a having of a person in conjunction with a non-having of another, but only the having as such." See also Niklas Luhmann, *Rechtssystem und Rechtsdogmatik* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1974), 66 (translated from the German): "The unity of 'having' and 'not having' is not reflected on in language or law. It is only construed as an owner's right of exclusion. . . . The sociologically most relevant problem, the fact that any growth in ownership automatically means a disproportionate increase in the non-ownership of the other, is not relevant in legal terms."
11. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Rinehart, 1944). Cf. also Duchrow and Hinkelammert, *Property for People*, chap. 2.
12. Cf. Hinkelammert and Mora, *Coordinación social del trabajo*, 187.
13. Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization*, 40f.
14. Hinkelammert and Mora, *Coordinación social del trabajo*, 188ff.
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25. Johan Galtung, *The European Community: A Superpower in the Making* (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1973).
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28. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.
29. Duchrow and Hinkelammert, *Property for People*, chap. 2.
30. Ulrich Duchrow, and Gerhard Liedke, *Shalom: Biblical Perspectives on Creation, Justice and Peace* (Geneva: WCC, 1989), 65ff.
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2 The Sociopsychological Effects of the Money Civilization on the Different Classes

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9. Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations*, 250.
10. Paul Parin, *Der Widerspruch im Subjekt* (Frankfurt/M.: Syndikat, 1978), 38.
11. Sigmund Freud, "Einleitung zu Psychoanalyse der Kriegsneurosen," vol. 12, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer, 1919), 321–324; Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies*; and particularly the historical synthesis in Peter Riedesser and A. Verderber, "Maschinengewehre hinter der Front": *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Militärpsychiatrie* (Frankfurt/M.: Mabuse, 1996).
12. Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
13. Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Markusen, *The Genocidal Mentality: Nazi Holocaust and Nuclear Threat* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).
14. It is most interesting to see that traumatic experiences, linked to the waves of pestilence, were decisive factors for the shaping of the mentality in modernity around the middle of the fourteenth century. Egotism and violence increased,

- as analyzed by Karl Georg Zinn, in *Kanonen und Pest: Über die Ursprünge der Neuzeit im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989).
15. Donald W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (London: Hogarth Press, 1965); Martha W. Chescheir and Karen M. Schulz, "The Development of a Capacity for Concern in Antisocial Children: Winnicott's Concept of Human Relatedness, *Clinical Social Work Journal* 17, no. 1 (1989): 24–39.
 16. World Health Organization (WHO). "Programmes and Projects, Depression," Who.int. 2012. Available at http://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/definition/en/.
 17. Deutsche Angestelltenkasse (DAK), "Gesundheitsreport 2005," 39ff. Available at [http://www.presse.dak.de/ps.nsf/Show/38A5A5A6BBF15309C1256FE0005578E2/\\$File/DAK_Gesundheitsreport2005-neu1.pdf](http://www.presse.dak.de/ps.nsf/Show/38A5A5A6BBF15309C1256FE0005578E2/$File/DAK_Gesundheitsreport2005-neu1.pdf).
 18. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, August 13, 2010, 12.
 19. Statistisches Bundesamt, "Hohe Kosten durch Demenz und Depressionen, in News Aktuell," August 11, 2010. Available at http://www.presseportal.de/pm/32102/1662580/statistisches_bundesamt. Cf. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, August 12, 2010, 4.
 20. See e.g., Günter G. Voß, *Soziale Mechanismen im Betrieb: Theoretische und empirische Analysen zur Entgrenzung und Subjektivität von Arbeit* (Mering: Hampp, 2007).
 21. *Ibid.*, chap. 11.
 22. Dorothee von Ekesparre, "'Das ist der halbe Tod': Psychosoziale und gesundheitliche Folgen von Arbeitslosigkeit," in *Psychoanalyse und Arbeit: Psychoanalytische Blätter*, ed. M. Hirsch (Göttingen: 2000), 51–75, 60.
 23. Fischer and Riedesser, *Lehrbuch*, 320.
 24. Oskar Negt, *Arbeit und menschliche Würde* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2001), 275.
 25. R. D. Hinshelwood, "Social Possession of Identity," in *Crises of the Self*, ed. B. Richards (London: Free Association Books, 1989), 75–84.
 26. John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta Books, 1998).
 27. Fischer and Riedesser, *Lehrbuch*, 323.
 28. Aristotle, *Politica*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1957), 1256a-1260b (our translation).
 29. Peter Jüngst, "*Raubtierkapitalismus*?" *Globalisierung, psycho-soziale Destabilisierung und territoriale Konflikte* (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2004).
 30. John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1964), 159: "Speculators may do no harm as bubbles on a steady stream of enterprise. But the problem is serious when enterprise becomes the bubble on a whirlpool of speculation."
 31. Duchrow and Hinkelammert, *op.cit.*, chap. 2.
 32. Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (London: Macmillan, 1978).
 33. Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).
 34. Horst Eberhard Richter, *All Mighty: A Study of the God Complex in Western Man* (New York: Hunter House, 1984).

35. Sybil Wagener, *Feindbilder: Wie kollektiver Hass entsteht* (Berlin: Quadriga, 1999).
36. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, vol. 23, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (1867; repr., Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1969), 100.
37. Duchrow and Hinkelammert, *Property for People*, 43.
38. Lifton and Markusen, *The Genocidal Mentality*.
39. Daniel P. Goleman, Suzy Welch, and Jack Welch, *What Makes a Leader?: A Leading with Emotional Intelligence Conversation with Jack and Suzy Welch* (Conversation Series) (New York: Macmillan Audio, 2006).
40. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2005.
41. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, August 2010, 10.
42. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, January 22, 2008, 16.
43. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 3, 1849–1914 (Munich: Beck, 1995).
44. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany* (Brooklyn and London: Verso, 1998).
45. For the details of the following, cf. Michael Vester et al., *Soziale Milieus im gesellschaftlichen Strukturwandel: Zwischen Integration und Ausgrenzung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 58ff., and Wolfgang Vögele, Helmut Bremer, and Michael Vester, eds., *Soziale Milieus und Kirche* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2002), 311ff.
46. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1989); id., *Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream* (New York: Metropolitan, 2005).
47. Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 37.
48. Matthew Rothschild, “Chomsky Warns of Risk of Fascism in America,” *The Progressive*, April 12, 2010. Available at <http://www.progressive.org/wx041210.html>.
49. Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1942).

3 The Judeo-Christian Tradition in the Axial Age

1. After completion of our manuscript we became aware of three important books: Ton Veerkamp, *Die Welt anders: Politische Geschichte der Großen Erzählung* (Hamburg: Argument/InkriT, 2011); Laurel Dykstra and Ched Myers, eds., *Liberating Biblical Study: Scholarship, Art, and Action in Honor of the Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011); and Antonio Fernández González, *The Reign of God and the End of Empires* (forthcoming in 2012), which show how relevant the biblical narrative of an alternative society is for today’s struggle against the empire of capitalism.
2. Ulrich Duchrow, Reinhold Bianchi, René Krüger, and Vincenzo Petracca, *Solidarisch Mensch werden: Psychische und soziale Destruktion im Neoliberalismus—Wege zu ihrer Überwindung* (Hamburg and Oberursel: VSA in Kooperation mit Publik-Forum, 2006), chap. 10.
3. Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (London: Routledge Revivals, 2010). Cf. also Shmuel Eisenstadt, “The Axial Age: The Emergence of

- Transcendental Visions and the Rise of Clerics,” *European Journal of Sociology* 23, no. 2 (1982): 294–314.
4. Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* (New York: Anchor Books/Random House, 2006). As far as I can see, she does not indicate that she takes her title from the pivotal study of Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Rinehart, 1944).
 5. Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (London: Penguin Books, 2009).
 6. After finalizing our manuscript we discovered David Graeber’s outstanding book, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, Brooklyn, N.Y.: Melville House Publishing, 2011. It confirms our interpretation of the Axial Age claiming that the philosophies and religions respond to the developments of the political economy of that period. Graeber even shows that the new period of money economy, in which also coins came into use beginning around 600 BC, is directly related to the new level of military violence during that period. He calls it the military-coinage-slavery complex governing the Axial Age. Unfortunately, at this stage of the publishing process we cannot engage in a detailed conversation with his findings.
 7. In regard to the liberating interpretation of Confucianism and Taoism, we refer readers to the work of Paul Chung. Cf. Paul Chung, Kim Kyoung-jae, and Veli-Matti Karkkainen, eds., *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series 70 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007); id., *Constructing Irregular Theology: Bamboo and Minjung in East Asian Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).
 8. Rainer Keßler, *Staat und Gesellschaft im vorexilischen Juda* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).
 9. Ibid., 70, our translation.
 10. Frank Crüsemann, *Die Tora: Theologie und Sozialgeschichte des alttestamentlichen Gesetzes* (Munich: Kaiser, 1992); similarly, Rainer Albertz, *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit*, 2nd ed. (1992; repr. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).
 11. Ton Veerkamp, *Autonomie und Egalität: Ökonomie, Politik und Ideologie in der Schrift* (Berlin: Alektor, 1993).
 12. Crüsemann, *ibid.*
 13. The most probable context of the concept of the Jubilee year is a compromise between the exiled upper class coming back to the land after 50 years and those who had remained in Judah and occupied the land given to them by the Babylonians.
 14. Ton Veerkamp, *Die Welt anders. Politische Geschichte der Großen Erzählung*. Hamburg: Argument/InkriT, 2011. (Published after the completion of the manuscript of this book. Therefore, we can only refer to it briefly, although it touches on many of the issues of our study.)
 15. Ton Veerkamp, *Die Welt anders*, 115ff.
 16. Walter Wink, *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002).
 17. Ibid., 28.

18. Ibid, 30.
19. Sigurd Bergmann, *Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature, Series Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), shows that Gregory links the relationality of the triune God to the relational character of God's creation.
20. See also Ton Veerkamp, "Der Abschied des Messias: Eine Auslegung des Johannesevangeliums," part I, in *Texte & Kontexte: Exegetische Zeitschrift* 29, nos. 109–111, 113–115 (2006): 43f.
21. There is a broad consensus among scholars that the translations reading "son of man" have to be corrected in most of the cases. "Son of" is a Semitic way of expressing belonging to a group, a species. So the expression "son of man" in the original texts has to be translated as "the human one" or "human being," not as a title or for a special individual.
22. Wink., op. cit., 14. See also Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana: Anspruch und Wirklichkeit* (Munich: Kaiser, 1986), 83.
23. The same approach can be found in Gandhi and the Zapatistas in Mexico.
24. Matthew Fox, *A Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village: Humpty Dumpty and Us* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), reads the whole Bible from the perspective of compassion as a cosmic principle and remedy for our distorted global civilization.
25. See part 2 below in more detail.
26. Julio de Santa Ana, Konrad Raiser, and Ulrich Duchrow, *The Political Economy of the Holy Spirit* (Geneva: WCC, 1990).
27. Martin Buber, *Schriften zur Bibel*, vol. 2 of *Gesammelte Werke* (Munich and Heidelberg: Kösel/Lambert Schneider, 1964), 715.
28. Franz Hinkelammert, *La maldición que pesa sobre la ley: Las raíces del pensamiento crítico en Pablo de Tarso* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Arledín, 2010) (German ed. published by Edition Exodus, Luzern, 2011).
29. Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).
30. For the following, cf. Hinkelammert, *La maldición*, 35ff.
31. For the following argumentation cf. *ibid*, 71ff
32. Ulrich Duchrow, *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung: Traditionsgeschichte und systematische Struktur der Zweireichelehre* rev. ed. (1970; repr., Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1983), 61ff. That Paul knew about the arguments of the Politeia through the mediation of Hellenist Jews like Philo can be seen in Romans chapter 7.
33. John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2004).
34. Hinkelammert, *La maldición*, 92.
35. *Ibid.*, 95.
36. Desmond Tutu, *God has a Dream.: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).
37. Veerkamp, *Die Welt anders*, 253ff.
38. See also Richard A. Horsley, *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 2004); *id.*, *Message and the Kingdom: How Jesus*

- and Paul Ignited a Revolution and Transformed the Ancient World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002).
39. See below, chap. 8.
 40. “Thermidor” means the turning of the French Revolution into a betraying counterrevolution. Cf. Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).
 41. U. Duchrow, G. Eisenbürger, and J. Hippler, eds., *Total War against the Poor: Confidential Documents of the 17th Conference of American Armies, Mar del Plata, Argentina, 1987* (New York: New York Circus Publications, 1990).
 42. M. M. Thomas and David Jenkins, as quoted in Santa Ana, Raiser, and Duchrow, *The Political Economy of the Holy Spirit*, 57.

4 Buddhism in the Axial Age

1. Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).
2. Uma Chakravarti, “Can Dalit/Buddhist Culture Be an Anti-Capitalist Resource?,” unpublished paper, 2005.
3. Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, “Buddhist Economics,” chap. 4 in *Small is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).
4. Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).
5. After his death in 1977, friends published a collection of essays on this particular subject: Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Good Work* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).
6. See e.g., Marcos Arruda, ed., *Transnational Corporations, Technology and Human Development* (Geneva: WCC/CCPD, 1980).
7. International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), Inebnetwork.org, 2012, <http://www.inebnetwork.org>. Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Ashok Vihar, Phase-IV (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation) [A Division of BRPC (India) Ltd.], 2005.
8. Sulak Sivaraksa, *The Wisdom of Sustainability: Buddhist Economics for the 21st century* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2009), 69.
9. David R. Loy, *A Buddhist History of the West: Studies in Lack* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002); id., *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2003).
10. Horst Eberhard Richter, *Der Gotteskomplex* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1979).
11. A popular dialogue between a Buddhist and a Christian on compassionate engagement for justice is presented in: Konstantin Wecker and Bernhard Glassman, *Es geht ums tun und nicht ums Siegen: Engagement zwischen Wut und Zärtlichkeit* (Munich: Kösel, 2011).
12. Paul S. Chung, *Martin Luther and Buddhism: Aesthetics of Suffering*, 2nd ed. (2002; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).
13. Ernst Tugendhat, “Über west-östliche Mystik und höhere Traurigkeit: Dankesrede zur Verleihung des Meister-Eckhart-Preises,” *Le Monde diplomatique*, January 12, 2006, 8f.

14. Karl-Heinz Brodbeck, *Buddhistische Wirtschaftsethik: Eine vergleichende Einführung* (Aachen: Shaker, 2002).
15. Apichai Puntasen, *Buddhist Economics: Evolution, Theories and Its Application to Various Economic Subjects* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University: Center for Buddhist Studies, 2008; id., “The World’s Crises and the Response to the Crises by Buddhist Economics,” in *Buddhist Approach to Economic Crisis*, edited by The International Buddhist Conference on the UN Day of Vesak Celebrations 4–6 May 2552/2009. (Ayutthaya, Thailand: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2009), 1–27. Puntasen uses the Buddhist concepts in Pali, not in Sanskrit as most Westerners are used to.
16. This and the following quotes are taken from Puntasen, “The World’s Crises,” 1ff.
17. Puntasen, *Buddhist Economics*, 3. (emphasis in original)
18. Puntasen, “The World’s Crises,” 9.
19. Puntasen, “The World’s Crises,” 10.
20. Nico Paech, “Die Legende vom nachhaltigen Wachstum: Ein Plädoyer für den Verzicht,” *Le Monde diplomatique*, September 2010.
21. Puntasen, “The World’s Crises,” 10.
22. Puntasen, *ibid.*, 11.
23. Puntasen, *ibid.*, 12.
24. Puntasen, *ibid.*, 13f.
25. Puntasen, *Buddhist Economics*, 16f.
26. Cf. Puntasen, “The World’s Crises,” 14f.
27. Cf. *ibid.*, 16ff”
28. See below, chap. 8.
29. Puntasen, *Buddhist Economics*, 76.
30. *Ibid.*, 26.
31. Brodbeck, *Herrschaft des Geldes*, 1137 f.

5 Islam, a Renewal of Axial Age Spirituality

1. For the following, see Farid Esack, *The Qur’an: A User’s Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 33ff.
2. Cf. *ibid.*, 47ff.
3. *Ibid.* 172ff.
4. Quoted from Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations* (Lancaster, UK: Gazelle Book Services TB, 2007), 114.
5. *Ibid.* 118.
6. Hans Küng, *Der Islam: Geschichte, Gegenwart, Zukunft* (Munich and /Zurich: Piper, 2004), 178ff.
7. *Ibid.*, 726f.; Wikipedia, “Islamic Banking,” last modified August 12, 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_banking; Aly Khorshid, *Encyclopedia of Islamic Finance* (London: Euromoney Books, 2009).
8. Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar, eds., *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 148ff.
9. Ulrich Duchrow, ed., *Colloquium 2000: Faith Communities and Social Movements Facing Globalization* (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2002), 24.

10. See Irfan A. Omar, "Islam," in *The Hope of Liberation in World Religion*, ed. Miguel A. De La Torre (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 91ff.
11. *Ibid.*, 104.
12. "Progressive Islam: A View from October, 2001," December 6, 2004, Ihsan.net (Arabic term meaning "perfection" or "excellence"), <http://ihsan-net.blogspot.com/2004/12/progressive-islam-view-from-october.html?showComment=1102556700000>.

6 Classical Greek Philosophy

1. Aristotle, *Politica*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1957), 1256a–1260b (our translation).
2. On the whole question, see U. Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action*, 2nd ed. (1995; repr., Utrecht: International Books with Kairos Europa, 1998), 20ff.
3. *Ibid.*, 69.
4. On the role of craftsmen and artists and the origin of division of labor in the early empires and city kingdoms, see F. J. Hinkelammert and H. M. Mora, *Coordinación social del trabajo, mercado y reproducción de la vida humana* (San José/Costa Rica: DEI, 2001), 178ff.
5. Th. Maissen, "Eigentümer oder Bürger? Haushalt, Wirtschaft und Politik im antiken Athen und bei Aristoteles," in *Eigentumsrechte verpflichten. Individuum, Gesellschaft und die Institution Eigentum*, ed. M. Held and H. G. Nutzinger (Frankfurt: Campus, 1998), 70.
6. See Stefan Breuer, *Imperien der Alten Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1987), 138f.
7. Maissen, *Eigentümer*, 81.
8. *Ibid.*, 67.
9. Georg Picht, *Wahrheit, Vernunft, Verantwortung: Philosophische Studien* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1969), 87ff.
10. Bruno Snell, *Sokrates im Gespräch: Vier Dialoge* (Hamburg: Fischer, 1954).
11. Plato, "Politeia," in *Platonis Opera*, ed. I. Burnet (Oxford: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1957), 514ff. (our translation). See the detailed interpretation of this text in: Ulrich Duchrow, *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung: Traditionsgeschichte und systematische Struktur der Zweireichelehre*, 2nd ed. (1970; repr., Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1983), 61ff.
12. See comments in Ton Veerkamp, *Autonomie und Egalität: Ökonomie, Politik und Ideologie in der Schrift* (Berlin: Alektor-Verlag, 1993), 325.
13. Karl-Heinz Brodbeck, *Die Herrschaft des Geldes. Geschichte und Systematik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), 412ff.

7 The Basic Characteristics of Modernity

1. This part contains texts already published in German by Franz Hinkelammert, *Das Subjekt und das Gesetz: Die Wiederkehr des verdrängten Subjekts* (Münster: Edition ITP-Kompass, 2007). Chapter 7 is unpublished. Both were translated by Patricia Davie.

2. A detailed analysis of John Locke's thinking can be found in Ulrich Duchrow, and Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Property for People*, chap. 3.
3. Cf. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire: The New World Order* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2000).
4. This reaches its extreme in the twentieth century in the ideas of Gary Becker, *Human Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Becker even calculates the utility afforded him by his mother and children. For this pinnacle of rationality he was even awarded the Nobel Prize. Indeed, anyone seeking to understand our era must grasp the fact that this is the pinnacle of our rationality.
5. Cf. Franz Hinkelammert, *La maldición que pesa sobre la ley: Las raíces del pensamiento crítico en Pablo de Tarso* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Arlekin, 2010). In German: *Der Fluch, der auf dem Gesetz lastet: Paulus von Tarsus und das kritische Denken* (Luzern: Exodus, 2011). See chap. 3, "Sobre los marcos categoriales de la interpretación del mundo en Pablo y Agustín."
6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vortrag über Ethik und andere kleine Schriften*, ed. Joachim Schulte (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 12.
7. In a novel by Umberto Eco, the consequences of such a worldview are described in a shocking way. Cf. Umberto Eco, *The Prague Cemetery* (London: Random House, 2011).
8. Translation of quotation from W. Schirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1985, 25).
9. Franz Hinkelammert, *Democracia y totalitarismo* (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1990). See part 2, chap. 1: "La metodología de Max Weber y la derivación de estructuras de valores en nombre de la ciencia."
10. Paul says this too: "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law."
11. Put together (in German) by Mascha Madörin from Omega advertisement texts, *Weltwoche*, December 7, 1989, 49.
12. Renaud Lambert, "Latin America," *Le Monde diplomatique*, February 18, 2011. [Monde-diplomatique.fr](http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/), <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/>. Our thanks go to Anne Stickel for sending us this article.

8 The Irrationality of the Rationalized

1. Referring to the Latin American economic organization SELA (Systema Económica Latinoamericana), the title of an article read: "The SELA emphasizes regional progress. Latin America ready for globalization." In the article it said: "The secretary of SELA, Salvador Arriola, confirms that Latin America is equipped both to face great challenges in the future and to contribute to a successful and enduring globalization. Speaking to the XXth council of the SELA, which will meet in the Mexican Ministry for Finance from 1–3 June with 27 countries represented, he pointed out that the region faces the challenge of maintaining a competitive hold on the world market He once again emphasized the importance of competition for maintaining a place within economic globalization, and it was for this reason that the watchword for the meeting was 'Solidarity in order to Compete'. Within the framework

- of the SELA there is a forum for industrial policy, where different experiences in the region are discussed ‘to ensure that Latin America does not stray from the competitive path’, said the secretary of the organization” (*La Nación*, San José, Costa Rica, June 1, 1994). Thus technical efficiency is declared to be the highest value.
2. However, this kind of book differs considerably from a handbook on the techniques involved in shoemaking. A shoemaker is in a position to offer us the best guide to shoemaking. He can tell us which methods are appropriate and which are not. But anyone who publishes a handbook on suicide methods cannot speak from his own experience of success. He can only speak at best of his failed attempts. Unlike the shoemaker, then, the suicide cannot teach us how to commit suicide because the experience cannot be repeated and scrutinized. Anyone who wishes to publish a guide to suicide techniques can only refer to the experiences of others who, however, are not in a position to confirm his utterances. Suicide is not an aim that we can reach by a process of trial and error. Suicide means ending one’s life, which removes the requirement to have aims in the first place. Thus life is not an aim in itself but the ability to have aims. Means-end rationality, therefore, cannot be applied to decisions concerning life and death. Nevertheless these decisions are based on material judgments. Anyone who reduces science to means-end rationality must drive out of his consciousness any idea that such judgments are necessary. This is why explanations of means-end rationality conspicuously always begin with the proviso of perfect knowledge. They are thus arguing from the point of view of a “transcendental subject.” Putnam speaks of the “eye of God.” This proviso disposes of any connection with the question of life and death. Milton Friedman develops his reasoning in the following way: “Let us first consider the behavior of a consuming entity under conditions of absolute certainty. Let us suppose that he knows with certainty the exact amount that he can receive in every moment: he knows the prices of the consumer goods that are offered for sale in every epoch and the rate of interest at which money can be lent or borrowed” (Milton Friedman, *A Theory of the Consumption Function* [Madrid: Alianza, 1973], 22). The illusion of absolute certainty leaves death out of the equation. Later (p. 30) he introduces the term “effect of uncertainty.”
 3. “If you are content with your life, then live! If you are not content, then you have the freedom to go from whence you came. You have been bled often enough to relieve a headache. They bleed you in order to reduce your body weight. It is not necessary to inflict a gaping wound on the chest: with the aid of a tiny little knife you can open the way to great and eternal freedom—the price for peace and freedom from care is only a short-lived pain.” So writes Seneca to Lucilius (70th letter). In death we are all free: “One should not believe that only great men have the power to break the barriers of earthly bondage. Neither should one think that only a Cato—who, the sword having failed, used his own hand to open the way to freedom for his soul—is capable of accomplishing the deed. Even people of the lowest station have, with wild enthusiasm, sought refuge in the security of death. As they did not die as they would have wanted and it

was left to them to choose their instrument of death, they seized anything that was to hand and violently turned objects that are in themselves harmless and innocent into weapons” (ibid.). With Seneca there is a certain need to escape into death, and a voluntary death becomes a triumph over death itself: “At no other point in life does a person’s state of mind carry more significance than in his death. Driven by an inner urge, a person may choose to end his life, whether he seizes sword, rope, or a poison that will course through his veins. Well now! He should break the shackles of bondage asunder! Everyone needs the justification of others in life, but in death only his own: the best death is the one that pleases us” (Seneca to Lucilius, 70th letter).

John Locke states this in similar fashion, suggesting his own technique for suicide: “If, however, a person forfeits his own life truly through his own fault, because of some deed that deserves death, then the one to whom he has forfeited his life may (when he has him under his control) put off his execution and take him into his own service, whereby he is committing no injustice to him. For should the person believe that the trial of being a slave outweighs the value of his life, he has it within his power to resist the will of his master and bring about his desired death” (John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (part 2, §23).

These pieces of advice on the art of suicide are material judgments but not means-end rational judgments. The norm here is not the antithesis of truth and falsehood but of life and death.

4. Wittgenstein thought about suicide in this sense, but later completely rejected these considerations: “If suicide is allowed, then everything is allowed. If anything is not allowed, then suicide is not allowed. This sheds some light on the essence of ethics, for suicide is, so to speak, the elementary sin. And to investigate it is just like investigating mercury-vapor in order to understand the nature of vapors. Otherwise suicide in itself is neither good nor evil!” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus: Tagebücher 1914-1916; Philosophische Untersuchungen. Werkausgabe*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1984), 89-187, diary entry for January 10, 1917). If he had really taken this seriously, he would never have been able to develop his later thought in the way that he did.
5. Max Weber, “Basic Sociological Terms,” §1 in *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). (emphasis in original)
6. According to the old catechism, the meaning of life consisted in doing God’s will in order to get to heaven. This meaning is attached to life from the outside in just the same way as the meaning derived from the theory of rational action that forms the basis of neoclassic economic theory. According to this theory, the meaning of life consists in maximizing the means-end relation and being efficient. According to this theory, it is better to die than live with a production according to practical values that is not determined by competition and efficiency. The large sections of the population that are excluded in today’s world bear witness to the catastrophic effects of such a definition of the meaning of life.
7. “It is in fact the convention that, when speaking of economics, one thinks of meeting everyday needs, so-called material needs—however in a particularly confined sense. Prayers and requiem masses *could* in fact equally be the object

- of economics . . .” (Weber, “Types of Communal and Societal Groupings,” §1 in *Economy and Society*).
8. Exceptions to this are those authors who are hardly considered in the methodology of the sciences, especially Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein. They repeatedly reflect on the methodology contained in their arguments. Einstein’s methodological reflections are, however, not important to the authors we have mentioned. And they make Freud, together with Marx, into an object of ridicule.
 9. Jean-François Lyotard, *Das postmoderne Wissen: Ein Bericht* (Graz and Vienna: Böhlau, 1986), 181 [Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984)]. Hans Albert says the same in a different way: “It must also take heed of those particular needs and ideals which, in certain circumstances, may only be heeded to the detriment of their freedom—that is, by limiting their freedom to make autonomous decisions. Today we are hardly still so presumptuous as to expect the legislature to be responsible for the happiness of its subjects. But we can at least expect it to make voluntary order as attractive as possible for its citizens, by striving to accentuate and elucidate the value of freedom” (Hans Albert, *Traktat über rationale Praxis* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1978], 157f.).
 10. Max Weber, “Die ‘Objektivität’ sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis”, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* [(Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 146–214, 213f.
 11. *Ibid.*, 171.
 12. Max Weber, “Soziologische Grundbegriffe,” §4 in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, ed. J. Winckelmann, 5th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 15.
 13. Neoclassical economists, however, believe it does. Samuelson says: “Nobody expects the competitive wage of a person to be the same as a horse’s wage.” Paul A. Samuelson: *Volkswirtschaftslehre: Eine Einführung*, vol. 2, 11th ed. (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1981), 261.
This is means-end fantasy. I have never heard of a horse receiving a wage, let alone a competitive wage. Is the earth receiving a wage if we add fertilizer? Is a slave receiving a wage if he gets something to eat? The convoluted meanings of our scientists have only one purpose: to brainwash their students, who are to learn that reality is money and that concrete reality an illusion, at best a source of frictional loss. They then see reality *sub specie competenciae perfectae*, whereas before reality was seen as *sub specie aeternitatis*.
 14. This statement spells an awful shock for science that turns means-end rationality into an absolute quantity. According to Max Planck, reality is what can be measured. To reduce reality to what can be measured undermines every kind of reproductive rationality and makes a viable future society impossible.
 15. Cf. Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*: Finding himself in a desperate situation, the salesman commits suicide so that his family will benefit from the life insurance policy he took out earlier. The action gives the appearance of being meaningful because the salesman does not commit suicide with the intention of benefiting from the insurance policy himself. The apparent meaning rests on the sacrifice of life. He sacrifices himself so that his family may live. But the family rejects this sacrifice because they love him and not the money, even if

this means continuing to live in difficult circumstances. The sacrifice becomes nonsensical owing to the fact that the salesman cuts himself off from his subjectivity. He turns himself into an object. The maxim: "Saw off the branch the other is sitting on and not your branch!" would be equally nonsensical. In the Christian tradition there is another act that is sometimes described as sacrifice, and that is martyrdom. Martyrdom means witness. It is completely different from sacrifice. The martyr is killed because he understands himself as subject, and in so doing strengthens the subjectivity of other people. This is why neither the death of Archbishop Óscar Romero nor those of the Jesuit community in San Salvador should be regarded as sacrifices, but instead as acts of witness. The martyr holds fast to his witness even when he knows that he is to be killed. Those who kill him are committing the crime of human sacrifice: "It is better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed" (John 18:14). Thus martyrdom itself is subjectivity, while murder represents the most violent form of denial of subjectivity. It is true that the Christian tradition is ambiguous with regard to martyrdom, and it is frequently reduced to sacrifice. But every human sacrifice is a crime.

16. Popper talks about "laws like the one according to which man cannot live without food . . .," cf. Karl R. Popper, *Das Elend des Historizismus* [The poverty of historicism], 4th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), 50–51n15. Popper sees this as a falsifiable claim, and yet to falsify this claim would mean to bring about one's own death or the death of others. The falsification could thus be defined as murder or suicide. We are dealing here with the life-and-death norm of truth, not with falsification or verification. Knowledge does not come about without a living, acting person, and this person is a subject. The learning process of this subject rests on irreversible processes; therefore, it cannot be described in terms of a hypothesis that is based on reversibility in the sense of trial and error. The acting person as subject cannot have the experience mentioned in Popper's sentence twice. Should the result of the experiment turn out to be negative, he will no longer be in a position to learn from it.
17. Charles P. Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).
18. Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics and Crashes*, 33.
19. *Ibid.*, 178–179.
20. In the Mexico crisis there was such a case of stock market panic. It was only when people started acting in solidarity that there were attempts to save the stock exchange, but their sole aim was to be able to continue the very system in which the crazy appears rational and the rational appears crazy. It appears that one of the conditions for financial help from the United States government was the suppression of uprisings in Chiapas. The genocide continues, founded on this craziness.
21. Hilary Putnam, *El lenguaje y la filosofía: Cuadernos de Crítica* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1984).
22. Cristina Lafont, *Sprache und Welterschließung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), 223.
23. Regarding the transformation of the subjects' mutual recognition as dependent natural beings into the choice in favor of the victims of circumstances, cf. Enrique Dussel, *Ética comunitaria* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1986); Enrique Dussel, "Die Lebensgemeinschaft und 'Die Interpellation des Armen,'" in *Ethik und*

Befreiung, ed. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (Aachen: Augustinus-Buchhandlung, 1990); Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics), trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

9 In the Face of Globalization

1. Cf. in more detail our earlier book *Property for People, Not for Profit*, chap. 3.
2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital*, vol. 1, chap. 15, Marxists.org, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/quotes/index.htm>.
3. Cf. Stanford Encyclopedia, *Emmanuel Levinas*, Plato.Stanford.edu, *first published July 23, 2006; substantive revision August 3, 2011*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas>.
4. Emmanuel Levinas, *Wenn Gott ins Denken einfällt: Diskurse über die Betroffenheit von Transzendenz* (Freiburg and Munich: Alber, 1982), 115.
5. We are surrounded by absences. A joke from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) demonstrates this rather well. A shopper comes into a shop and asks for oranges. The shopkeeper replies: what we don't have are potatoes; facing them there are no oranges. We constantly experience that something is not there, the absence of which, however, has consequences. Facing the system is the subject, who is absent: whose absence is a pressure. Marx describes market relations in terms of presence and absence: "Therefore the social relations of their private lives appear to the latter (the producers) as those which they are, i.e., not as immediate social relations of people in their work themselves, but rather as factual relations of persons and social relations of facts." Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, vol. 23, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital*, in *Werke*, vol. 23 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1977), 87. Here, too, that which is not, namely "immediate social relations of people in their work themselves," is not thought of as a part of what is. It is the other side of what is and therefore an absence that is present and pressing.
6. In his diaries, Ludwig Wittgenstein senses the problem this kind of subject poses: "The thinking subject is surely mere illusion. But the willing subject exists." (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus, Tagebücher 1914-1916, Philosophische Untersuchungen. Werkausgabe*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 89-187. (diary entry August 5, 1916). He goes on: "And the subject is not part of the world but a boundary of the world." (diary entry August 2, 1916). "A presupposition of its existence" (diary entry August, 2, 1916).

But then he distances himself from this in the *Tractatus* by developing an example: "My theses gain clarity through a process whereby a person who understands what I am saying, having gone through and beyond the theses, recognises them as nonsensical. (In other words, he must throw away the ladder once he has used it to climb up.)" (*Tractatus* 6.54, in *ibid.*, 85)

The subject is a boundary of the world because it transcends all positive presence in the world; nevertheless, all positive presence is dependent on the subject for its existence. Wittgenstein too disregards the autodestructive tendencies that arise when the world and the system are treated as an inert system.

Wittgenstein sees the world as something that is guaranteed independently of what a person does. In this sense he too assumes a metaphysical guarantee for the existence of the world that he can never justify. Our experience today, however, tells us that this metaphysical guarantee does not exist. Everything depends on whether humans behave as a subject toward the world, should the world exist, and in turn an ethic results from this that is fundamental to human survival.

10 A Critical Theory and a Critique of Mythical Reason

1. “Der Mensch ist frei geschaffen, ist frei, und würd’ er in Ketten geboren,” in Friedrich Schiller: Werke und Briefe, vol. 1, ed. Georg Kurscheidt (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), 23.
2. Karl Marx, “The Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature,” preface, Marxists.org, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1841/dr-theses/foreword.htm>.
3. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *German Ideology*, Marxists.org, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm#a1>.
4. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, introduction, Marxists.org, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>. In the following interpretation, we use inclusive language for the German original *Mensch*, here translated as “man.”
5. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chap. 15, Marxists.org, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch15.htm#S10>.
6. Cf. the proposal for a new United Nations Charter for the Common Good of Humanity, François Houtart, From “Common Goods” to the Common Good of Humanity, Rosalux-europa.info, November 2011 (Brussels: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation), http://rosalux-europa.info/userfiles/file/common_good_of_humanity.pdf, and the “Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative,” accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.gcgi.info/>.

11 The Vision of Life in Just Relations

1. Enrique Dussel, *Hacia una filosofía política crítica* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001), 356.
2. Leonardo Boff, *Die Erde ist uns anvertraut: Eine ökologische Spiritualität* (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 2010), gives an impressive interdisciplinary overview of this development. An early example of the search for a new understanding of science in general is Jerome R. Ravetz, *Scientific Knowledge and Its Social Problems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
3. Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes’ Irrtum: Fühlen Denken und das menschliche Gehirn*, 3rd ed. (1995; repr. Munich and Leipzig: List Verlag, 1997).
4. Joachim Bauer, *Warum ich fühle, was du fühlst: Intuitive Kommunikation und das Geheimnis der Spiegelneuronen*, 6th ed. (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2005).

5. David Korten, *The Post-Corporate World: Life after Capitalism* (West Hartford, CT and San Francisco: Kumarian Press/Berret-Koehler, 2000), 87ff.
6. Leonardo Boff, *Die Erde ist uns anvertraut. Eine ökologische Spiritualität* (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 2010), 53ff.
7. J. E. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1982); id., *Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); id., *Gaia: Practical Medicine for the Planet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
8. Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *What Is Life? The Eternal Enigma* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995); Lynn Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
9. At this point, it seems to us, Lovelock may be too optimistic in terms of the earth's capacity to cope with most of the man-made devastation on earth.
10. The German philosopher Axel Honneth has put mutual recognition into the center of his social and political philosophy, See Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); id., *Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
11. Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization*, 82ff.
12. Ibid., 91.
13. Christian Felber, *Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie: Das Wirtschaftsmodell der Zukunft* (Vienna: Deuticke, 2010). See also Kamran Mofid, "About the Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative," 2011, Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative, accessed August 3, 2012, www.gcgi.info/about.
14. Marcos Arruda, *Humanizar o infra-humano—A formação do ser humano integral: Homo evolutivo, práxis e economia solidária'* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2003); id. *Tornar real o possível—A Formação do ser humano integral: Economia solidária, desenvolvimento e o futuro do trabalho* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2006).
15. INAISE, International Association for Investors, "About us," Inaise.org, accessed August 14, 2012, <http://www.inaise.org/node/15>.
16. Felber, *Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie*, 150ff., updated by email of September 5, 2011.
17. "Wikipedia, Mondragon Corporation," last modified on August 3, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mondragon_Corporation. Cf. also Felber, *Gemeinwohlökonomie*, 110ff.
18. David Korten, *The Post-Corporate World: Life after Capitalism* (West Hartford, CT, and San Francisco: Kumarian Press/Berret-Koehler, 2000), 103ff.
19. Cf. Silke Helfrich and Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, *Wem gehört die Welt? Zur Wiederentdeckung der Gemeingüter* (Munich: oekom, 2009); Amy R. Potette, Marco Janssen, and Elinor Ostrom, *Working Together: Collective Action, the Commons, and Multiple Methods in Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Elinor Ostrom, *The Drama of the Commons* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2002); Geneviève Azam, *Le temps du monde fini: vers l'après-capitalisme* (Paris: LLL Editions Les Liens qui Libèrent, 2010) (Azam is vice-president of Attac France. Her book represents a very similar approach to ours).

20. "Strengthen the Commons—Now!"—A manifesto, ed. Silke Helfrich. The thesis paper was developed in collective authorship in the context of the interdisciplinary political salons of the Heinrich Böll Foundation's "Time for commons," 2008–2009, http://www.boell.de/downloads/Almmedemanifest_engl_screen.pdf.
21. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Werke*, vol. 6, *Ethik* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1992), 131f.: "Die Kirche bekennt sich schuldig aller 10 Gebote . . . sie hat die Fürsorge Gottes nicht so glaubhaft zu machen vermocht, dass alles menschliche *Wirtschaften* von ihr aus seine Aufgabe in Empfang genommen hätte."
22. Cf. Sigurd Bergmann, "Energie als Ware oder Gabe? / Energy—Gift or Commodity?," in *Energy Talks Ossiach: Liberalisierung: Quo Vadis?*, ed. Sympos Veranstaltungsmanagement (Vienna : Energiesysteme der Zukunft, 2009), 36–40.
23. Duchrow and Hinkelammert, *Property for People*, chap. 7.
24. Binswanger, *Eigentum und Eigentumspolitik: Ein Beitrag zur Totalrevision der Schweizerischen Bundesverfassung* (Zurich: Schulthess, 1978), 58ff.
25. Wolfgang Belitz, ed., *Hoppmann: Eine unternehmerische Alternative. Mit demokratischer Beteiligung und sozialer Gerechtigkeit zum wirtschaftlichen Erfolg* (Lengerich: Pabst, 2011).
26. Richard Douthwaite, *Short Circuit: Strengthening Local Economies for Security in an Unstable World* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1996), 61ff.
27. Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action*, 2nd ed. (1995; repr. Utrecht, the Netherlands: International Books with Kairos Europa, 1998).
28. AttacAustria, "Geld ist ein öffentliches Gut—Für ein alternatives Finanzsystem!," 2nd draft 2010, Attac.de, <http://www.Attac.de/aktuell/krisen/bankentribunal/programm0/forum-der-alternativen/alternatives-finanzsystem/>.
29. Enrique Dussel, "Six Theses toward a Critique of Political Reason: The Citizen as Political Agent," *Radical Philosophy Review* 2, no. 2 (1999): 79ff. Cf. also his *Hacia una filosofía política crítica* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).
30. Felber, *Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie*, 109.
31. About Tax Justice Network, 2002–2005, Taxjustice.net (website developed by weave.ch), http://www.taxjustice.net/cms/front_content.php?idcatart=2&lang=1.
32. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 3, 2011, 3.
33. Wikipedia, "The Coming Insurrection," last modified on August 4, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Coming_Insurrection.
34. This section is mainly a brief summary in English translation of Duchrow et al., *Solidarisch Mensch werden*, chapter 8.
35. Translated from Horst Eberhard Richter, *Der Gotteskomplex*, 263.
36. Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Markusen, *The Genocidal Mentality: Nazi Holocaust and Nuclear Threat* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1991).
37. Ton Veerkamp, "Der Abschied des Messias: Eine Auslegung des Johannesevangeliums," part 1, *Texte & Kontexte: Exegetische Zeitschrift*, 29 (2006): 44ff.
38. Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).
39. Researchers who have presented valuable responses to this question are Jung Mo Sung and Jörg Rieger. See Jung Mo Sung, *Desejo Mercado e religião* (Petrópolis,

- Brazil: Vozes, 1998); Jörg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).
40. Fromm, *To Have or to Be?*, 137.
 41. Cf. Ignacio Dobles Oropeza and Leandro Zúñiga, *Militantes: La vivencia de lo político en la segunda ola del marxismo en Costa Rica* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 2005).
 42. Forum Barcelona 2004, “*La memoria compartida*,” organized by Fórum Universal de las Culturas Barcelona 2004 in cooperation with Servicio Paz y Justicia en América latina (SERPAJ), barcelona2004.org, <http://www.barcelona2004.org/www.barcelona2004.org/esp/eventos/dialogos/docs/ppmemoriaesp5.pdf>.
 43. “...para reflexionar sobre el poder económico, la militarización, cultura, memoria histórica y la denominada propuesta ‘Otro mundo es posible,’” “Pérez Esquivel llama a la reflexión para unidad de América Latina,” *Agence France-Presse* (San José), February 9, 2004, Eluniverso.com (official website of the newspaper *El Universo*, Guayaquil, Ecuador), accessed August 14, 2012, <http://www.eluniverso.com/2004/02/09/0001/14/9104EF7D4FC942CCABBFE5FC608DEC.html>.
 44. Scientific Council ATTAC-Germany, “Manifesto on the Crisis of the Euro: The Public Debt Crisis Can Only Be Overcome through Fundamental Reforms of the Global Financial System as well as the EU,” Attac.org, March 2011, accessed August 15, 2012, <http://www.Attac.org/sites/default/files/ATTAC%20Scientific%20Council%20Germany%20Mainfesto%20on%20the%20crisis%20of%20the%20Euro%20march%202011.pdf>.
 45. Jörg Rieger, “Der Mittelweg, der den Tod bringt: Eine Analyse der kirchlichen und politischen Mitte in den USA,” *Junge Kirche* 66, no. 4 (2005), 51ff.
 46. Ecumenical Network in Germany (ÖniD), “Proposed Declaration for the Second Version of the Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace,” Kairoseuropa.de, October 24, 2009, accessed August 15, 2012, <http://www.kairoseuropa.de/english/Proposed%20Declaration%20on%20Just%20Peace.pdf>.
 47. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany* (Brooklyn and London: Verso, 1998).
 48. “Initiative Appell Vermögender für eine Vermögensabgabe” http://www.appell-vermoegensabgabe.de/index.php?show=presse_von&multi=1&more=1&PID=2. Accessed August 15, 2012.
 49. Ton Veerkamp, *Autonomie und Egalität: Ökonomie, Politik und Ideologie in der Schrift* (Berlin: Alektor-Verlag, 1993), 281ff.
 50. José Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*, rev. ed. (1971; repr., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974).
 51. Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster/Baker Academic, 2003).
 52. Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), accessed August 15, 2012, <http://www.eatwot.org/>.
 53. José María Vigil et al., *Por los muchos caminos de Dios: Desafíos del pluralismo religioso a la teología de la liberación*, 4 vols. *Colección TIEMPO AXIA* (Quito,

- Ecuador: Centro Bíblico Verbo Divino, 2003–2006). Cf. also José Maria Vigil, *Theology of Religious Pluralism*, vol. 2 (Münster: Lit, 2008); id., *Toward a Planetary Theology* (Münster: Lit, 2010).
54. Cf. World Forum on Theology and Liberation (WFTL), Porto Alegre, accessed August 15, 2012, <http://www.wftl.org/default.php?lang=en-us&t=padrao&p=capa&m=padrao>.
 55. Juan José Tamayo and Luiz Carlos Susin, eds., *Teología para otro mundo posible* (Madrid: PPC, 2006), containing the contributions during the Forum meeting in 2003 on the occasion of the 3rd WSF.
 56. Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide* (Oxford: oneworld, 2005), 147; Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966).
 57. Esack, *The Qur'an*, 178f.
 58. Besides de la Torre, op.cit., see Varghese Manimala, *Toward Mutual Fecundation and Fulfilment of Religions: An Invitation to Transcendence and Dialogue with a Cosmotheantric Vision* (Delhi: Media House/ISPCK, 2009).
 59. Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic* (London: SCM Press, 1993).
 60. Aloysius Pieris, *A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism*. (Sri Lanka: Nhanduti Editora, 2009).
 61. Cf. Frank Crüsemann, "Der Gott Israels und die Religionen der Umwelt," in *Wahrheitsansprüche der Weltreligionen: Konturen gegenwärtiger Religionstheologie*, ed. Chr. Danz and F. Hermanni (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlagshaus, 2006), and Jürgen Ebach, "Fremde Religionen," in *Sozialgeschichtliches Wörterbuch zur Bibel*, ed. Frank Crüsemann et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 162–167.
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45. Karl-Heinz Brodbeck, *Die Herrschaft des Geldes*, 2009.
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47. In 2007, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Council for World Mission (CWM) organized a consultation in Korea on the theme: "Transforming Theology and Life-Giving Civilization *Bringing together Ubuntu and Sangsaeng: A Journey towards Life-Giving Civilization, Transforming Theology and the Ecumenism of the 21st century*," August 17, 2007, Africafiles.org, ccessed August 15, 2012, <http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=15918>.
48. See again, Miguel de la Torre, ed., *The Hope for liberation in World Religions*. See also Jörg Rieger, ed., *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford Univerity Press, 2003). Hans Küng's Global Ethic project, while producing valuable materials, does not seem quite clear regarding this hermeneutics.
49. The ground for analysis and judgment was laid in part 1 of this study. In this final part we shall concentrate on concrete practical conclusions and examples.
50. Paul Knitter, "Prophets and Profits: Interreligious Dialogue and Economic Development," in *The World Market and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille and Glenn Willis (Eugene, OR : Wipf & Stock, 2011).

51. Paul Knitter, in his book *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), chap. 4, deals extensively with the problem of dialogue in the context of asymmetric power relations, but relates dialogue to the different traditional religions, not to capitalist protagonists. Here we fully agree that dialogue is the only way, because objectively there are no power asymmetries between religions—unless they are (misused) for political or economic ends. In that case, the religions are particularly called to dialogue in order to unleash the forces of justice and peace, encapsulated in their authentic sources of faith and wisdom.
52. Paul Chung, Ulrich Duchrow, and Craig Nesson, *Liberating Lutheran Theology: Freedom for Justice and Solidarity in a Global Context* (Minneapolis and Geneva: Fortress/World Council of Churches, 2011), chap. 10; Dieter Conrad, *Gandhi und der Begriff des Politischen: Staat, Religion und Gewalt* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006).
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