

Tannhäuser, Terrorism, Revolution, and *Economism*

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Summary

This is a story of an opera and how it applies to modern-day topics such as terrorism and economic arrangements. It starts with a brief description of the opera, then addresses how it may apply to terrorism, and it ends with a very personal and dramatic story of what happened to the author in the last pause of the opera.

The opera

Yesterday, I had the privilege to see the opera *Tannhäuser* in the Metropolitan Opera in New York, an 1845 opera by Richard Wagner. It is based on two German legends, that of Tannhäuser and that of the minstrel's song contest at Wartburg in Thuringia, Germany.

At the beginning of the opera, we meet its hero, Heinrich, who is a minstrel (Minnesänger). We find him in the arms of the goddess Venus in the Venusberg (the Hörselberg near Eisenach in Thuringia). He enjoys limitless sexual pleasures. Yet, over time, he has gotten tired of those pleasures. He now longs for suffering, even death, and he wishes to worship Virgin Maria rather than enjoy lust with Venus. He begs Venus to let him return to his Earthly life.

Venus lets him go, albeit reluctantly. When he arrives back on the Earth's surface, his friends, the other minstrels, welcome him enthusiastically, and he even remembers his love to Elisabeth, the Landgrave's niece, who has anxiously waited for him, longing for him since he had disappeared.

Everything seems set for a happy end now. Heinrich simply has to win the next song contest at Wartburg to gain the hand of Elisabeth. The theme of the song contest is love, which should not pose any serious problem to him, one might assume. Yet, now comes Heinrich's big blunder: he gets carried away and sings to Venus! He goes as far as admitting that he had been in the Venusberg!

Shocked and horrified, everybody turns away from him. The reason is that the Venusberg is regarded as part of the Devil's kingdom, of Hell. Heinrich is about to be stabbed to death by his comrades for having given himself over to dark side. He survives only due to Elisabeth, who courageously speaks up for him and suggests, that he might be allowed to join the pilgrims to Rome and be absolved of his sins.

The end of the opera is tragic: both Elisabeth and Heinrich end up dead, she of broken heart, and he of being too late in understanding what is good for him.

So far the opera.

Tannhäuser, terrorism, and revolutions

This opera helped me think about the book on terrorism I am working on. I see several motivations among young men and women who travel to Syria, for instance, to join the so-called Islamic State (IS). I see four main categories or sub-categories.

First, there are those young men, who are attracted by the promise of access to women. To use Tannhäuser, you could say that this is the attraction of Venus. Some may indeed believe in the promise of 72 virgins in paradise as reward for martyrdom, yet, there is also the possibility to marry four wives in the here-and-now. Ebrahim B. can serve as an example. He is a young man from Wolfsburg in Germany, the city of Volkswagen, where young men, including Ebrahim, were an integrated part of society without any apparent grievances to suffer from.¹ He is the first German IS-returnee to openly talk about his experiences in front of a camera. He now distances himself from the IS. Ebrahim B. explains that he joined IS, among others, because he was delighted by the promise that he could marry four wives. He smiles tellingly, when he admits: ‘Who does not want to have that ...?’ Having easy access to four sexual objects, to be free to use them whenever he may wish so, what an exciting promise! In other words, Ebrahim seems to be a true child of Western market ideology also in terms of his chances on the market of women: here an average boy from Wolfsburg saw the chance to dramatically increase his market value by transforming himself into a sexy sought-after holy warrior!

Now to the second, third, and fourth kinds of motivation. While working as a clinical psychologist in Egypt (1984–1991), young Palestinian clients came to me because they were depressed. They felt they should help their suffering families in Palestine, instead of dutifully studying in Cairo and preparing for a happy life.² Women wished to give birth to sons who could become martyrs, while the men wanted to become fighters themselves. None of these young people was driven by any ‘will to power’ or ‘inherent hatred’ of enemies, nor motivated by religious fervour, nor did they mistake violent resistance for yet another form of fun, and they were not expecting sexual gratifications either, not before death nor afterwards. They were only overwhelmed by despair. They suffered from too much empathy. They deeply empathised with their people’s pain from humiliation – a *noble, sincere, and valuable* co-suffering. Clearly, these bright young people were vulnerable to being recruited by humiliation-entrepreneurs who would instrumentalise their empathy for acts of destruction. I did my best to explain to them the advantages of the path of a Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela.

In other words, my Palestinian clients could stand for all of those who seek more in life than simple self-gratification, who are not satisfied with eternal sexual pleasures in the arms of Venus, so to speak. Many find modern-day consumerism appalling, either because they have experienced its emptiness, or because consumerism’s promises are out of their reach. The first may feel humiliated by the falsity of the promise, the second by being excluded from the promise.

Among those who seek higher meaning, we could identify two sub-groups, those who cling to some form of dogmatic belief – the Bible’s Pharisees would be an example. The second group strives for truly immersing themselves into the experience of higher meaning – mystics can be found in all religions as well as among those who would call themselves atheists. Meister Eckhart, the Sufis, those who feel deeply connected with nature and the wider universe, are examples. Elisabeth, in Tannhäuser, could be described as a mystic, preventing the Pharisees around her from killing Heinrich.

As to mystics, let me point at Ahmed Aboutaleb, Holland’s first Muslim immigrant mayor – he is the mayor of Rotterdam. He explains: ‘Jihadist is the completely wrong word. I am a

jihadist. I'm doing the right thing for the city the entire day. I'm a jihadist... There are 68 definitions of jihad, if you remove a spike from the street or a piece of glass... to prevent a bicycle being harmed by the spike, you are a jihadist. Government leaders, analysts and all those in a position of influence 'need to explain to people what we are talking about... Parents and educators all have a key role to play too'.³

Interspirituality is perhaps the most modern term pointing at what I simplified call a mystic orientation here. Kurt Johnson is co-author of *The Coming Interspiritual Age*, and he received the 'God's Partner' Award at Riverside Church in New York City on 8 June 2013.⁴ About 2000 people were in attendance (I received the invitation but was in South Africa at that point), when he gave his acceptance speech, where he explains how the emerging universal spirituality was first named *interspirituality* in 1999 by Wayne Teasdale.⁵

Internet developer, epistemologist, and cognitive scientist Bruce Schuman addresses the same topic from the point of view of *convergence*.⁶ Schuman observes the emergence of new integrating models that facilitate cooperation across subject areas that are traditionally seen as divergent or even inconsistent. He sees a nascent and perhaps universal vision of the whole emerging, the whole understood as a kind of 'recursive fractal template' that ranges from the individual human being, to small social groups and families, to larger communities, to regional and national and global levels of scale, all of which embody wholeness.⁷

Do some important values exist independently of human experience, or do we work for planetary sustainability for our own sake alone? This is a question posed by Stephen Purdey, international relations specialist at the Waterloo Institute for Complexity and Innovation at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. He believes that we will be held to a higher standard and that what we do and how we do it will leave a lasting mark on the evolutionary trajectory of the universe itself: 'I'm inclined to heed William Ophuls' reference to "a sentient universe charged with moral meaning," an expression which implies a grander and more sensible stage for human agency'.⁸

William Ophuls has been praised as most 'original thinker about the implications of our global ecological crisis for freedom, democracy, and political order'.⁹ This is what William Ophuls contributes to this kind of thinking:

Applying the methods of the so-called hard sciences to human affairs, the rationalists demonstrated (to their satisfaction) that there was no epistemological stance from which to derive natural law or moral principle. Instead of a sentient universe charged with moral meaning, science found only a machine – dead matter to be exploited by economists and engineers to make us wealthier and more powerful, not better. And what does a machine governed by mathematical formulas and physical laws have to teach us about how we should live? Nothing.¹⁰

The Holy connects all religions and it has been written about by Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), an eminent German Lutheran theologian and scholar of comparative religion.¹¹ Incidentally, Rudolf Otto's life path is connected to that of my mother, only that their paths took opposite directions: Otto was born in Peine near Hanover and became a professor at the University of Breslau, the capital of Silesia, where my mother was born, from where she was forcibly displaced after World War II, in the context of mass displacements, ending up near Hanover.

Also those who cling to dogmatic belief systems could be divided into two sub-groups. On one side we have those who identify with dogma, and then those, who simply use dogma to manipulate others into ulterior strategies of domination. When we look at revolutions, for

instance, true believers often launch them – they might be what I call mystics or true believers in dogma – yet, those idealists are usually among the first to be liquidated by their successors, those who use the power vacuum to establish their own type of domination, either under the banner of the revolution’s rhetoric, or under the banner of regaining stability. Tahrir Square in Cairo is a recent example, where all those four categories of people were active – the French and Russian revolutions come to mind as well. They begin with idealism, and end in authoritarian rule, with the idealists either dead, exiled, or behind bars.

In sum, we have the ‘Venus people’ on one side, those who are satisfied with short-term self-indulging incentives, be they worldly or other-worldly, and then the ‘Maria people’, who aim for higher meaning, where we have the Pharisees and the mystics, to say it simplified, while the fourth group are those who instrumentalise the rest for their ulterior strategies of domination.

Peace can come from the ‘mystics’, the Mandelas and Gandhis, yet, only if they stand up together when the dominators arrive on the scene. What has to be saved is unity in diversity, by protecting it from sliding into uniformity, uniformity without diversity on one side, or division without unity on the other side. Unity in diversity can only prevail in a context where relationships are given primacy, relationships of respect for equality in dignity for all.

To stay in the story of Tannhäuser, Elisabeth and Venus could form an alliance and embrace all of humankind with Gandhi’s *satyāgraha*, also the theme of my third book, where I call it Big Love.¹² It is a love that transcends dogmatic notions of sin that only serve dominators. Gandhi’s *satyāgraha* (nonviolent action) is a term that is assembled from *agraha* (firmness/force) and *satya* (truth-love).¹³

I came to appreciate the phrase *unity in diversity* first in 1999, when cross-cultural psychologist Michael Harris Bond, who teaches in Hong Kong, came to Europe to the Sommerakademie Friedens- und Konfliktforschung, in Clemenswerth, in July 11–16, 1999.¹⁴ Bond finds that the Baha’i faith, for which unity in diversity is central, is perhaps the most compatible with cross-cultural communication.¹⁵

Later, when I lived in Japan (2004–2007), I met scholar of intercultural communication Adair Linn Nagata, who brought me to Muneo Yoshikawa’s work.¹⁶ Interculturalist Muneo Yoshikawa developed the *nondualistic double swing* model, whereby unity is created out of the realization of differences, and which shows how individuals, cultures, and intercultural concepts can blend in constructive ways.¹⁷ This model can be graphically visualized as the infinity symbol, or Möbius strip (∞). For this model, Yoshikawa brought together Western and Eastern thought. He drew on Martin Buber’s idea of ‘dialogical unity – the act of meeting between two different beings without eliminating the otherness or uniqueness of each’ – and on *Soku*, the Buddhist nondualistic logic of ‘Not-One, Not-Two’, described as the twofold movement between the self and the other that allows for both unity and uniqueness.¹⁸ Yoshikawa calls the unity that is created out of such a realization of differences *identity in unity*: the dialogical unity does not eliminate the tension between basic potential unity and apparent duality. The third source of Yoshikawa’s model is a dialectical approach that emphasizes the processual, relational, and contradictory nature of intercultural communication.¹⁹

Unity in diversity is not the only way to describe a concept of ‘unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation’²⁰ *E pluribus unum* is another expression.²¹ What is important is to emphasize that it is insufficient to base unity on mere tolerance of differences, be they physical, cultural, linguistic, social, religious, political, ideological and/or psychological, and to manifest a unity that is more complex in its understanding that difference enriches human interactions.

Linda Hartling sympathises with the phrase *variety* in the place of *diversity*. The reason is her experience with early forms of ‘diversity training’ that led to more division rather than to building a dignifying future for all people.²² Her path went from considering the notion of celebrating diversity to exploring the concepts of tolerance and co-existence, and from there to unity in diversity. However, she wonders, if today the word diversity is unintentionally perceived as an obstacle that must be endured, rather than a social benefit. She wonders if *unity in variety* would be a useful phrase for honouring that humans and cultural expressions come in many mutually beneficial varieties. Variety, to her, is a term that may be more connective than the term diversity.

John Bunzl is a businessman and writer who speaks up for seriously thinking about global governance.²³ Like me, he frequently encounters the fear that unity means uniformity, in other words, that unity can only be had at the prize of sacrificing diversity. It seems that people, particularly in the West, are not used to thinking in terms of *nondualism*, while, in fact, diversity can only flourish, if embedded into global structures that nurture them. At present, it is precisely the lack of such global institutions that creates global uniformity.

Bunzl writes: ‘Each (healthy) body has cells containing only ONE type of DNA. Every healthy nation has only ONE government. The paradox that has yet to be understood... it seems, is that the unity of a single entity of governance, if appropriately designed, actually ENHANCES diversity’.²⁴

Bunzl draws on evolutionary biologist John Stewart, who explains:

...the unification of the living processes of the planet into a single organisation [Bunzl: i.e. a form of binding global governance] will not impose uniformity on them. To the contrary, the formation of managed organisations paves the way for a massive increase in diversity by allowing specialisation and a complex division of labour to emerge. This is what has occurred within cells, within multicellular organisms, and within societies of organisms. In the same way, the planetary organisation will produce unity within difference. The formation of a planetary organisation will facilitate a huge increase in the variety and diversity of living processes, including in human behaviour, and will unify this diversity into a coherent whole’.²⁵

John Stewart uses evolutionary theory to draw generalizations for a visionary political ideology. He sees two trends in the evolution of life on Earth: one toward diversification and the other toward integration, both driven by selection. Living entities at one level have integrated into cooperative groups and thus formed larger-scale entities at the next level. For example, simple cells came together to form eukaryote cells, which, in turn, gave rise to multi-cellular organisms, from which cooperative groups of animal and human societies arose. Stewart believes that there is a directionality that goes toward the emergence of a global entity. Stewart sees the living processes of the planet, its matter, energy, and technology coalescing into a global cooperative organization. He concludes: ‘Such an integration of the results of previous diversifications would enable the global entity to exploit the widest possible range of resources across the varied circumstances of the planet’.²⁶

Bruce Schuman and his notions of *convergence* and *interspirituality* have been mentioned earlier.²⁷ Schuman reminds of the motto of the United States of America, namely, ‘Out of Many, One’, or *E Pluribus Unum*. The network organization of American governance is designed as an expression of the concept of *holon*, a phrase originally defined by Arthur Koestler as ‘a part that is also a whole’.²⁸ Schuman explains:

If we want to argue that almost any scientific field or subject area may embody its own ‘implicit religion’, as a common foundational framework we might turn towards the emerging field of ‘interspirituality’ – a generalizing outgrowth of the international interfaith movement that is helping to organize a universal vision of common ethics and spirit that can be shared across all borders. Interspirituality might be conceptualized so as to emerge as the common ground in a comprehensively inclusive alliance that spans science, humanism (including agnosticism and atheism), religion, and spirituality, through fundamental underlying principles such as ‘wholeness’ or ‘the whole’. Interpreted in these terms, a scientifically sound theory of holism (a theory of parts and wholes) might hope to bridge the high tensions fragmenting the full spectrum of human thinking (‘science versus religion’), and help nurture the emergence of a universal ethic and theory of justice grounded in global wholeness.²⁹

Schuman asks: ‘Could a moral and ethical alliance emerge from the many levels of implicit and explicit religion, codified in something like these terms, consistent with the deepest traditional intuitions of spirituality and religion, yet reinforced and authenticated by the disciplines of science and correlated by citizen participation? Could global activists hope to entrain a kind of universal wholeness across levels of scale, always grounded and centered in a universal guiding ethic of wholeness, at every level of social organization?’³⁰

Schuman is impressed by what happened on 24 August 2015, when Facebook reported that more than one billion unique internet users signed into Facebook on the same day. Schuman sees the technical capacity in place for reinforcing democracy with a new potential for direct citizen participation. A diversity of efforts is needed, he suggests, since old simple models of wholeness and the traditional top-down ‘command and control’ kind of centralization have proven to create more problems than solutions. ‘Instead of massive centralization to preserve system integrity, it seems what we need is a new kind of “omnicentric democracy” – a democracy “with center everywhere” – a democracy with a kind of identical fractal center repeated at all levels of social organization’.

Understood in this way, Schuman sees democracy becoming an expression of personal and individual self-control and homeostatic balance, repeating in analogous form at all levels of social organization and scale. As resonant ‘parts’ within a single comprehensive ‘whole’, individuals and local groups could pursue local freedom and adaptability. This model of wholeness interconnecting everything could be grounded in the best of human traditions, Schuman suggests, in a form that does not enforce ‘one size fits all’ solutions.

Tannhäuser and *economism*, or a four-step story of an angry opera break

Now, I would like to tell the story of what happened in the second pause of the opera. Two women sat near me, one young musician, and one elderly academician, both very kind and well-intentioned. Before the opera began, the latter informed all neighbours that she was sitting on a cheap place because she was to see Tannhäuser for the fourth time, and soon, she would see Turandot, for which she had an expensive ticket. In other words, she took great pains in making clear that she was not a poor person, but had justifiable reasons for sitting on a cheap place. Basically, without being aware of it, she signalled that she would normally not mingle with us other poor creatures on the cheap places.

In the second break, the two kind women asked me who I was. I replied, as kindly and well-meaning as they had approached me, that I was in New York every November and December, and that this was my first opera of several I would enjoy in this period.

They asked me whether I was in New York for work or for pleasure. I responded that, in my case, everything is *one* life, rather than work being separated from pleasure. To my great astonishment and shock, these few words were reason for the elderly woman to become rather angry with me. Disdainfully she declared that only rich people could afford to ‘do what they wanted’. She said ‘Ok, if you can afford it...’ with a disgusted expression in her face, looking condescendingly down on me. I gathered that she was angry because she suspected that I had perhaps inherited enough money ‘to do what I wanted’, without really deserving it, while she did not have such luck.

This was step one of the story. Now comes step two.

I responded by saying, very briefly, in no more than one sentence, that I was not rich, on the contrary, that I attempted to live with as little money as possible. One way to achieve this, for me, would be by abstaining from accumulating material possessions. I thought that this could make the two women happier, yet, the opposite was the result. Now, the younger woman stepped in, basically accusing me of either being unsophisticated or a free rider. She said: ‘It depends on what you want: if I want to go to an expensive restaurant this evening, I have to have money, or I have to know the chef’. She implied that I either did not know what makes life meaningful (expensive restaurants, for example, or, to stay with Tannhäuser, the Venusberg’s pleasures), or that I was a free rider by abusing friends, like, in her example, the chef. Both women were so angry, that I had no chance to explain that, clearly, they were right, also to my view, if one’s preferences were confined by present-day’s consumer culture.

I had just read an article by Richard Norgaard on *economism*, the quasi-religious belief in the market logic, and I felt that these two women, indeed, were true believers in money.³¹ Norgaard is professor emeritus of ecological economics in the Energy and Resources Group at the University of California, Berkeley.

Earlier, Linda Hartling had made me aware of Russell Conwell, the Baptist minister and Temple University founder, gave the famous speech ‘Acres of Diamonds’, first in 1913, where he fused Christianity and capitalism: ‘To make money honestly is to preach the Gospel’, and to get rich ‘is our Christian and godly duty’.³² The term *economism* points at how economic activity has been deified above all else with pseudo-religious trappings during the past decades, while essentially being amoral. As I observe all around the world, it has indeed become the new belief system not just in the Anglo-Saxon realm; from there, it has conquered the world.³³

Sudhir Chella Rajan, expert on climate and migration, writes, also in November 2015:

...economism seems to have been erected to obscure the social, in part to hide the extraction of surplus value from the reproduction of virtually all forms of capital – cultural, economic, social, and symbolic—in Pierre Bourdieu’s categorization. That is to say, most of us literally practice our ideology by feeling complacent about our own middle-class routines involving work, play, child-rearing, and leisure while focusing almost entirely on what happens to the ‘economy’, as if it had an independent systemic pattern of its own that is entirely divorced from our own participation in the workings of power. But as a matter of fact, my use of the automobile, my job in a university, my membership in a church, or my mortgage payments and use of financial services such as banking or insurance are each tied to formal

infrastructure that embodies exploitative relations of varying degrees toward ecosystems, cultures, and human bodies.³⁴

I was also reminded of 5 November 2011, when I listened to Juliet Schor, who was giving one of the Thirty-First Annual E. F. Schumacher Lectures in New York City.³⁵ Juliet Schor was part of the Harvard Business School faculty in 1984, when it was taken over by Martin Feldstein, who had served in the Reagan administration. When she came to Harvard, she expected to teach the ‘radical economics’ part of the introductory economics class ‘Social Analysis 10: Principles of Economics’, commonly referred to as ‘Ec 10’ by Harvard students. But, as she reported, it was abolished by Feldstein. From 1984 onward, young economy students no longer learned about the broad spectrum of economic systems and thoughts.³⁶ Schor spoke of the captured state, which needs to be re-captured.³⁷ Some Harvard students have since demanded alternative economics to be taught again.³⁸

Now comes step three:

Intending to make clear that I did not suffer from any self-inflicted refusal to be part of ‘civilized’ life or any inability to enjoy life, nor that I was a free rider, I said, very briefly, with all friendliness I had, that I give every second of my life to help bring more dignity into the world, and that this mission is profoundly fulfilling for me (a bit like Elisabeth in Tannhäuser). Once more, rather than making the ladies happier, my words incensed them. Both attacked me head-on, saying that I was an imposter and a liar. Why? Obviously, they said, I was sitting in the opera for my own pleasure: nothing to do with dignity for the world!

I managed to say, in between their angry words, that I was writing a book on the link between terrorism and humiliation, and – just to name one aspect – opera is like a time travel into the world of honour that also those who are attracted by the Islamic State, for instance, are fascinated by. Clashes of worldviews, peace and war, love and hatred, loyalty and treason – all this is put on stage in an opera.

I did not have time to say that also I needed nurturing for my own dignity, otherwise I would collapse under the responsibility of my mission, and that attending these operas was basically the only equivalent in my life to what they would call ‘vacation’ or ‘leisure time’. I did not have time to say that, because now the elderly lady exploded.

Here comes step four of the story.

The elderly woman shouted out: ‘Oh, you write books! You see! This is how you earn your money!’ She thought that she had caught me lying and that I had lucrative work after all.

I was able to quickly remark that nobody earns any income to speak of by writing academic books, rather the contrary. She sighed: ‘Yes, that is true!’ She remarked that she had written an academic book on women and had earned a mere 500 dollars with that, despite the fact that one class had used her book as a textbook.

I thought perhaps at least here I had a chance to express my good will and say something to those ladies that would show them that I only wished them well and had no intention whatsoever to bring them into such outrage. I remarked that she could be very proud of having given such a valuable gift to this class of students. Yet, again, this only triggered more anger. It became clear that she felt that gratitude, if it was not manifested in money, was worthless – a humiliation!

Both women moved away from me when the opera restarted, and spent the rest of the opera in other seats. It seemed that they had no desire to sit together with a traitor, free rider, imposter,

and liar. For them – at least as it appeared to me – economism was their true religion, a creed that they defended with their entire being, with all the emotional fervour they could muster.

These two ladies reminded me of an indignant email I received one year ago from another well-intentioned woman, for whom I feel a lot of sympathy since I met her in the Confucius Temple of Beijing in China in February 2005. In my work, I commend people for their good intentions and simply call on them to deepen them. However, like this woman, some feel that by doing so I discredit their good intentions, even though, clearly, nothing can be further from the truth of my motivations.

The kind lady explained in her email that, indeed, she felt that my way of speaking devalued her personal path and life choices. She wanted to make money, she wrote, so that she could engage in the activities she enjoys. By holding a job, she is far from endangering the common good; on the contrary, through her work, she improves all aspects of life, helps create new jobs, and increases the standard of living for her fellow human beings. Whatever she buys at the supermarket allows her to live, the roof over her head saves her from homelessness, while the water company, the electricity supplier, or the washing machine manufacturer enable her to keep herself and her clothes clean.

She began her email by stating that money is a necessity. She laid out a belief that many hold to be true, namely, that money was ‘only created to make the bartering more convenient’. Indeed, she is not alone. Even Adam Smith thought that the use of money arose because exchanging cows and chicken, for instance, became too difficult, and money was invented to facilitate such exchanges of goods.³⁹ However, as anthropologist David Graeber explains, historically, this has never been true. What indigenous communities manifested was *reciprocity*: ‘I share with you my harvest today, and whenever you are able to, you will share with me’.⁴⁰

It is important to understand that mutuality and reciprocity are different from exchange. The first two are embedded into what anthropologist Alan Page Fiske calls communal sharing, while the latter is part of equality matching or market pricing. Fiske found that people, most of the time and in all cultures, use just four elementary and universal forms or models for organizing most aspects of sociality. Interaction can be structured according to (1) what people have in common, according to (2) ordered differences, (3) additive imbalances, or (4) ratios.⁴¹ When people emphasise what they have in common, it is Fiske’s model of communal sharing they give priority to. Family life is often informed by communal sharing. Trust, love, care, and intimacy can prosper in this context. This is the arena for the dignity of a *Homo amans*, the loving being.⁴² The African philosophy of *Ubuntu* has its place here. ‘Communal Sharing relationships are formed among people who are considered and who consider themselves equal (in one or more aspects). The participants in this relationship feel togetherness; they are bounded; they have something in common (interest, origin, blood, etc.), and refer to themselves as ‘we’’.⁴³ When people set out to create ordered differences, it is the model of authority ranking they use. Authority ranking involves asymmetry among people who are ordered along vertical hierarchical social dimensions – it can be a good parent, or it can be a brutal dictator who follows a *Homo dominans* path. Equality matching is the model for arranging interactions in terms of additive imbalances and implies a model of balance such as taking turns, for instance, in car pools or babysitting cooperatives. The market pricing model views relationships as defined by proportions or rates, and this is the arena of *Homo economicus*.

From my point of view, the kind lady writing the email was yet another well-meaning person who overlooked – either chose to overlook, or was unable to do otherwise – that she, like all of us, is part of a larger context, a context which might tell a different story, a story we might need

to heed. Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, may illustrate this story. Maria Antoinette is famous for having said ‘Let them eat cake’ when she was told that beggars were starving because they had no bread. Even though the story is invented, it could still be taken as a short-hand description of elite ignorance and how it may lead to death (the French aristocracy lost their heads under the guillotine). Or, Emma Johanna Henny ‘Emmy’ Göring, could serve as another example. She was a German actress and the second wife of Luftwaffe Commander-in-Chief Hermann Göring. Since she served as Adolf Hitler’s hostess at many state functions, she was known as ‘First Lady of the Third Reich’. After the war, Emmy Göring was adamant that she had simply lived a normal life, that she only did her very best, and that she had no knowledge whatsoever of the Nazi atrocities that were committed around her under the command of the country’s power elite, of which she was a part. ‘Zweckdummheit’ or ‘purposeful stupidity’ is the description used for this stance in a documentary that portrays her life.⁴⁴

Personally, I refrain from using such phrases for people who embed their personal goodness within the confines of a world that reaches as far as they can see, and who are unable to widen their horizon. As I said earlier, I deeply appreciate good intentions wherever I find them. I simply call on all of us to lift our eyes to see the wider horizon and larger context. Also I myself am only a learner in this effort and are more than aware of my short-comings in reaching these goals. Clearly, we all suffer from varying degrees of ‘Zweckdummheit’ even if we strive to overcome it, simply because nobody can step outside of this world and see everything. Yet, still, my mission in life is to try my best, in due humility.

Earlier, I mentioned Richard Norgaard, and his reflections on economism. Mary Mellor is a social science professor at Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, in the United Kingdom, and chair of its Sustainable Cities Research Institute. Mellor analyses economics from an ecofeminist perspective and observes that, while the market is seen as rational and efficient, as the realm of the ‘serious’ breadwinner so to speak, the social and public sectors are demonised as irrational and wasteful, analogue to the dependent family. Economy, from her perspective, is an ideology of ‘handbag economics’ that feminises the nonmarket sector through its ‘state as household’ analogy.⁴⁵

For Norgaard, the path into a more dignified future is renewed attention to care: ‘Our species has survived through our ability to care for one another... Care – so humanly natural, socially good, and encouraged by the religions of the world – cannot be replaced by the market. If we are to balance our pursuit of self-interest with the needs of future generations, care is essential’.⁴⁶ Norgaard criticises that, though care does exist in market-based relations, the problem is that there is no obligation to care. Indeed, in the diction of the two women whom I had met in the opera, care would be elective, it would be chosen in case one expected some utility from it.

For Mellor, the path into a dignified future is ‘deliberative and participatory sufficiency provisioning’. She wishes to rescue money from the market so that money can be regarded as a public resource.⁴⁷ She writes: ‘To socialise and democratise money would remove from capitalist markets their engine of growth and the realisation of profit. It would make currently unpaid communal and domestic work the starting point for “economy”. There is also need to reclaim the notion of “public” from its demonisation. Embracing it as a caring and feeling concept – turning “handbag economics” against itself, would be a start.’⁴⁸

What would the women I met in the opera and in Beijing say, if they had the opportunity to meet Richard Norgaard and Mary Mellor? Would they react as angrily to them as to me? Or would they listen and reflect?

This was the story of Tannhäuser!

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Endnotes

¹ See also *Islamist im Staatsauftrag*, documentary, October 9, 2015, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF, Second German Television, a German public-service television broadcaster based in Mainz, Rhineland-Palatinate), www.zdf.de/zdfinfo/islamist-im-staatsauftrag-40414950.html. This documentary features Irfan Peci, once one of the main Salafist propagandists in Germany, before he was imprisoned and persuaded to become one of the main informants of the intelligence agency.

² Lindner, 2006, pp. 113–114.

³ 'Child Immigrant Turned Rotterdam Mayor Aids Refugees', by Jo Biddle, *Agence France Press (AFP)*, October 20, 2015, news.yahoo.com/child-immigrant-turned-rotterdam-mayor-aids-refugees-063943009.html. I thank PL de Silva for making me aware of this article.

⁴ Johnson and Ord, 2013.

⁵ 'Speech and Charge to Interfaith Seminary Graduates', by Kurt Johnson, Riverside Church, New York City, NY, June 8, 2013, with about 2000 people in attendance:

Thank you. Thank you so much. The work toward an emerging world interspiritual movement has gone on actively for a least a decade and, of course, was pioneered by major voices across all the worlds traditions long before Brother Wayne Teasdale named the emerging universal spirituality "interspirituality" in 1999, right on the cusp of this millennium.

So I really accept this recognition on behalf of all of them, and particularly Bro. Wayne and many emerging leaders, a number of whom are in our audience today. So a profound thank you. It's a privilege to be a part of One Spirit because One Spirit has been a pivotal part of this emerging movement.

When Br. Wayne named the emerging universal spirituality 'interspirituality' he declared:

‘We are at the dawn of a new consciousness, a radically fresh approach to our life as the human family in a fragile world. The necessary shifts in consciousness require a new approach to spirituality that transcends past religious cultures of fragmentation and isolation. This revolution will be the task of the Interspiritual Age. We need to understand, to really grasp at an elemental level that the definitive revolution is the spiritual awakening of humankind’.

‘The real religion of humankind can be said to be spirituality itself, because mystical spirituality is the origin of all the world religions. If this is so, and I believe it is, he said, we might also say that interspirituality – the sharing of ultimate experiences across all the traditions – is the religion of the third millennium. Interspirituality is the foundation that can prepare the way for a planet-wide enlightened culture, and a continuing community among the religions that is substantial, vital, and creative’.

So we find ourselves poised in a critical way and at a critical time in history, and all of you, especially graduates of the worlds interfaith seminary, like One Spirit, are actually the vanguard, like it or not. That is really your charge.

The challenge we face is a simple but profound one – will the religions of the world be an asset for the world’s future or a liability? Will they be part of the problem or part of the solution? This is why interspirituality, with the turning of all its emphases to higher consciousness and especially the unconditional world of the heart is so pivotally important.

Right now worldwide 75% of young people in the West say they are ‘spiritual but not religious’. Globally, only 35% of persons living in this or that cultural realm actually practice the religion of that cultural sphere. This leaves a HUGE open vacuum into which to introduce what will be the global gestalt, the global vision, the global spirituality of the future. Worldwide, when polled in terms of ideals and values nearly 90% of our world citizens agree with the vision of a heart-centered world. That is the mission you all share, and it is a profound one.

So, my charge to you is become deeply informed about the emerging interspirituality. Read *The Mystic Heart* and *The Coming Interspiritual Age* and other books inspiring the interspiritual vision. Go to www.thecominginterspiritualage.com, see the photos and learn about the more than 50 historical pioneers who have championed this vision across all of the world’s spiritual traditions for at least a Century.

Then vision your place in it. You have to be bold and also creative. You have to a part of visioning the ideas, tone, and culture of what a future interspiritual world will look like. One Spirit is making new strides – especially through its visioning for alumni -- about how we – all of you graduating today and those alumni and friends who have joined us all here today – can be a part of this unfolding. So let us invite each other into that.

So, I leave you, again with the words of Bro. Wayne Teasdale penned just as this New Millennium began. It is really your charge:

‘This revolution will be the task of the Interspiritual Age. We need to understand, to really grasp at an elemental level, that the definitive revolution is the spiritual awakening of humankind’. So, let us continue.

Thank you so much again and may you all be blessed with tremendous energy and vision for the future.

And, of course, lots and lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of Love.

⁶ Bruce Schuman in his contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of ‘A Great Transition? Where We Stand’, 4 November 2015, in response to Norgaard, 2015, see also Norgaard, 2015. See the background of Bruce Schuman briefly explained on <http://theinterfaithobserver.org/who-we-are/single-gallery/10646566>:

Bruce Schuman is an internet programmer and developer with an academic background in epistemology and cognitive science. In 1993, his ‘Bridge Across Consciousness’ project brought scholars and believers together and began identifying the common ground in world spirituality and religion. In 1995, his ‘United Communities of Spirit’ project extended that work to the web and includes the complete text of ‘World Scripture’. His Interspirit network system currently supports the Interfaith Center at the Presidio and has provided support for North American Interfaith Network, United Religions Initiative, and the Parliament of World Religions. His ‘Global Resonance’ and ‘Shared Purpose’ networks are exploring emerging concepts in collaboration and intercultural understanding.

⁷ Schuman points also at the following publication: Committee on Key Challenge Areas for Convergence and Health, 2014.

⁸ Stephen Purdey in his contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of ‘A Great Transition? Where We Stand’, 6 November 2015, in response to Norgaard, 2015, see also Norgaard, 2015.

⁹ Thomas Homer-Dixon, University of Waterloo, author of *The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*, quoted on www.ophuls.org/William_Ophuls/Home.html.

¹⁰ Ophuls, 2011, pp. 21-22.

¹¹ Otto, 1917, 1950.

¹² Lindner and Desmond Tutu (Foreword), 2010.

¹³ I thank Linda M. Hartling for sharing her impressions of meeting Gandhi's grandson Arun M. Gandhi at the 'Messages of Peace' Conference, September 20, 2009 at Marylhurst University in Oregon, USA. Gandhi described the crucial lessons he learned from his grandfather about the lifelong practice of nonviolent action. He also offered a rare glimpse into how the women in his grandfather's life shaped the development of nonviolent principles and practices. 'You cannot change people's hearts by law', Grandfather said. 'You can only change hearts by love', Gandhi, 2003, p. 91. See also arungandhi.org.

¹⁴ Bond, 1998, Bond, et al., 1999. It is an honour to have Michael Harris Bond as an esteemed member in the global advisory board of our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies network, see www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/board.php. See also Lindner, 2009.

¹⁵ See Shoghi, 1991 on unity in diversity, or Lalonde, 1994.

¹⁶ It is an honour to have Adair Nagata as an esteemed member in the global advisory board of our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies network, see www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/board.php.

¹⁷ Yoshikawa, 1980, Yoshikawa and Kincaid, 1987.

¹⁸ Nakayama, 1973, pp. 24–29, as explained by Dow, 2005. For the notion of soku, see furthermore, among others, Masaaki, 1998.

¹⁹ Martin, et al., 2002.

²⁰ Lalonde, 1994.

²¹ Grabbe, et al., 2011, Oakman, 2010, Piccone, et al., 1990, Putnam, 2007.

²² Linda Hartling, in a personal communication, November 6, 2015.

²³ John Bunzl is the founder of the Simultaneous Policy (Simpol) campaign. See his background on www.johnbunzl.com/#about.

²⁴ John Bunzl in his contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of 'A Great Transition? Where We Stand', 3 November 2015, in response to Norgaard, 2015, see also Norgaard, 2015.

²⁵ Stewart, 2000, p. 311. See also the review of this book by David Hales, Centre for Policy Modelling, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK, <http://jasss.soc.surrey.ac.uk/5/1/reviews/hales.html>.

²⁶ Stewart, 2014, Abstract:

Two great trends are evident in the evolution of life on Earth: towards increasing diversification and towards increasing integration. Diversification has spread living processes across the planet, progressively increasing the range of environments and free energy sources exploited by life. Integration has proceeded through a stepwise process in which living entities at one level are integrated into cooperative groups that become larger-scale entities at the next level, and so on, producing cooperative organizations of increasing scale (for example, cooperative groups of simple cells gave rise to the more complex eukaryote cells, groups of these gave rise to multi-cellular organisms, and cooperative groups of these organisms produced animal societies). The trend towards increasing integration has continued during human evolution with the progressive increase in the scale of human groups and societies. The trends towards increasing diversification and integration are both driven by selection. An understanding of the trajectory and causal drivers of the trends suggests that they are likely to culminate in the emergence of a global entity. This entity would emerge from the integration of the living processes, matter, energy and technology of the planet into a global cooperative organization. Such an integration of the results of previous diversifications would enable the global entity to exploit the widest possible range of resources across the varied circumstances of the planet. This paper demonstrates that it's case for directionality meets the tests and criticisms that have proven fatal to previous claims for directionality in evolution.

²⁷ Bruce Schuman in his contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of 'A Great Transition? Where We Stand', 4 November 2015, in response to Norgaard, 2015, see also Norgaard, 2015. See the background of Bruce Schuman briefly explained on <http://theinterfaithobserver.org/who-we-are/single-gallery/10646566>:

Bruce Schuman is an internet programmer and developer with an academic background in epistemology and cognitive science. In 1993, his 'Bridge Across Consciousness' project brought scholars and believers together and began identifying the common ground in world spirituality and religion. In 1995, his 'United Communities of Spirit' project extended that work to the web and includes the complete text of 'World Scripture'. His Interspirit

network system currently supports the Interfaith Center at the Presidio and has provided support for North American Interfaith Network, United Religions Initiative, and the Parliament of World Religions. His 'Global Resonance' and 'Shared Purpose' networks are exploring emerging concepts in collaboration and intercultural understanding.

²⁸ 'The Holon', by Arthur Koestler, in *Some General Properties of Self-Regulating Open Hierarchic Order* (SOHO), 1969, www.panarchy.org/koestler/holon.1969.html. A note informs that the idea of the "holon" was introduced by Arthur Koestler, 1967, in *The Ghost in the Machine* and was presented again at the 1968 Alpbach Symposium in a paper titled: 'Beyond Atomism and Holism - The Concept of the Holon': 'The "holon" represents a very interesting way to overcome the dichotomy between parts and wholes and to account for both the self-assertive and the integrative tendencies of an organism'.

²⁹ Bruce Schuman in his contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of 'A Great Transition? Where We Stand', 4 November 2015, in response to Norgaard, 2015, see also Norgaard, 2015.

³⁰ Bruce Schuman in his contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of 'A Great Transition? Where We Stand', 4 November 2015, in response to Norgaard, 2015, see also Norgaard, 2015.

³¹ Norgaard, 2015, see also Norgaard, 2015.

³² 'Acres of Diamonds', was delivered by Russell Conwell over 5000 times at various times and places from 1900-1925, see audio and text on www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/rconwellacresofdiamonds.htm. His view of poverty was somewhat in resonance with defenders of the Indian caste system:

Some men say, 'Don't you sympathize with the poor people?' of course I do, or else I would not have been lecturing these years. I wont give in but what I sympathize with the poor, but the number of poor who are to be with is very small. To sympathize with a man whom God has punished for his sins, thus to help him when God would still continue a just punishment, is to do wrong, no doubt about it, and we do that more than we help those who are deserving. While we should sympathize with God's poor-that is, those who cannot help themselves-let us remember that is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings, or by the shortcomings of some one else. It is all wrong to be poor, anyhow. Let us give in to that argument and pass that to one side.

³³ Lindner, 2015. See also Norgaard, 2011, 2015, Nelson, 2010 or a new journal of *Implicit Religion*, a journal of the Centre for the Study of Implicit Religion and Contemporary Spirituality at Middlesex University, UK, <http://socrel.oxfordjournals.org/content/61/2/local/advertising.pdf>.

³⁴ Sudhir Chella Rajan, expert on climate and migration, in his contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of "The Church of Economism and Its Discontents," on 21 November 2015, in response to Norgaard, 2015.

³⁵ For the Thirty-First Annual E. F. Schumacher Lectures on November 5, 2011, in New York City, see www.neweconomicsinstitute.org. Juliet Schor was one of the speakers, in addition to speakers such as Gar Alperovitz, and "Voices of Today's Youth: Occupy Wall Street and Youth for a New Economy," a panel comprised of Occupy Wall Street participants and other student activists.

³⁶ Environmental scientist Giorgos Kallis asked in 2014: 'The economic crisis has supposedly started a soul-searching process in the economics profession. Five years into the crisis and economists still offer more of the same in response. "Create new bubbles". "Cut red-tape". "Liberalize finance in the rest of the world". Why do economists keep getting it so wrong? Innovation feeds on diversity, but diversity is scarce in economics', in 'How Economics Became a Science: A Forgotten Episode in the Discipline's History Reveals How Diversity Was Killed in Economics', by Giorgos Kallis, *Adbuster*, 2 April 2014, www.adbusters.org/magazine/112/battle-soul-economics.html. Kallis points at a PhD thesis written by Jorge Fernandes Mata, 2006, on how radical economists were purged from US campuses following the student movement against the war in Vietnam. Kallis explains the story in his contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of "The Church of Economism and Its Discontents," on 3 November 2015, in response to Norgaard, 2015:

This is an incredible story of faculty battles with documented intervention and harassment from the FBI. And it included the purge of today famous, then deemed too radical, economists like Sam Bowles or Herbert Gintis from Harvard leading, directly or indirectly, to the departure of even more moderate progressives, such as Leontief, Galbraith, or Hirschmann. This ideological purge of alternative voices from economics departments was part and parcel of the neo-liberal transformation of Reagan and Thatcher that followed, and it explains why the belief system of economism is so entrenched today and so hard to change. We know today (and this is no conspiracy,

but well documented academic knowledge) that neo-liberalism did not just happen; it was partly planned by think-tanks, economic and political interests. Controlling academia, and especially the powerful field of economics, was part of the project.

³⁷ Juliet Schor is the Co-founder of the Center for a New American Dream, www.newdream.org, and author of several books, see Schor, 2010, Schor, 1993, 1999, 2004, Schor and Thompson, 2014. An animation provides a vision of what a post-consumer society could look like, with people working fewer hours and pursuing re-skilling, homesteading, and small-scale enterprises that can help reduce the overall size and impact of the consumer economy, see www.julietschor.org/2011/08/video-new-dream-mini-views-visualizing-a-plenitude-economy/.

³⁸ "Harvard Students Demand Alternative Economics," by Dan DiMaggio, *Dollars & Sense Magazine*, July/August 2003 issue, www.dollarsandsense.org/archives/2003/0703dimaggio.html.

³⁹ I recommend *Capitalism*, a documentary series by Ilan Ziv in six episodes, each 52 minutes, www.tamouzmedia.com/in-production.htm. This film draws attention to Adam Smith's book on moral sentiments, Smith, 1759.

⁴⁰ See some of Graeber's publications here: Graeber, 2001, 2011, Hudson, 2012.

⁴¹ Fiske, 2004.

⁴² Scheler, 1923.

⁴³ Szirtes, 2012, p. 139.

⁴⁴ *Emmy Göring - Die First Lady der Nazis*, documentary, Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk (MDR, Central German Broadcasting, the public broadcaster for the federal states of Thuringia, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt), 2015, see www.welt.de/kultur/medien/article145257174/Die-Zweckdummheit-von-Hermann-Goerings-Frau-Emmy.html.

⁴⁵ Mellor, 2010, 2015.

⁴⁶ Norgaard, 2015.

⁴⁷ Mellor, 2010, 2015.

⁴⁸ Mary Mellor in her contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of 'A Great Transition? Where We Stand', 10 November 2015, in response to Norgaard, 2015, see also Norgaard, 2015.