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THE CAGE AND THE LABYRINTH: ESCAPING THE ADDICTION TO GROWTH*

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Abstract

The impasse we encounter as we try to define the contours of a post-growth economy is the product of an interaction between behavioral changes at the level of the individual, wired to develop an "acquisitive mentality", and the responses to such changes at societal level, which reinforce that mentality and encourage acquisitiveness as a survival strategy for the individual in an environment that puts competition above cooperation. Moreover, although a small but growing part of opinion ackowledges the limits to growth, the means through which to steer society in a different direction remain vague and contested. These two constraints impede our ability to move away from the inherited system. The collective action problem posed by the need to move beyond growth, however, can also be seen as a promise. For we can only escape the cage by recognizing that the transition calls for a plurality of solutions, because there are a number of ways to unlock the system. We are in a cage, perhaps; but we are not in a labyrinth that would only allow for one escape route: it is building on the double predicament that we can imagine governance tools through which the post-growth can emerge.

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Introduction

The objective of growth, defined as the increase of GDP per capita, has been central to the macroeconomic policies of industrialized countries since this measure was initially introduced in the 1940s (Daly, 1996). Beyond the mere convenience of this measure of progress, there are three reasons why it has been so successful. The two first reasons are strictly economic in nature. First, the more wealth creation expands, the more we can hope to create jobs and thus compensate, in part at least, the destruction of existing occupations, in the least advanced sectors of the economy, that follow from the increases in labor productivity associated with technological advances and the improvement of human capital. Secondly, growth makes the burden of the public debt, which has significantly risen since the oil crisis of 1973 and the subsequent economic crisis, more sustainable. This is of course for reasons of public accounting: the debt weighs less heavily on the public budget if the budget grows, in proportion of the increase in wealth creation. But in addition, economic growth allows the State to increase its revenues through various forms of taxation : the State needs citizens who recognize its legitimacy, but it also requires taxpayers who can be made to contribute to the financing of public goods.

Finally, a third reason why GDP growh per capita has been so popular as the dominant measure of progress, is more strictly political in nature : the promise of growth in wealth creation is the promise of gradual increases in material prosperity, allowing the average person to consume more, without such increases having to depend on the State adopting strong redistributive policies. The so-called "fordist" compromise, a central component of the reigning order of the post-World War II era, was based on this idea: by the magic of economic growth, each generation could hope to attain a standard of living higher than that of the earlier generation, even within the lowest income quintiles of the population, without such a result having to depend on social policies designed to achieve a significant reduction of income inequalities. The quest for growth, in other terms, functioned in effect in the mainstream discourse as a substitute for more vigorous efforts towards social justice.

These justifications for growth, however, are grounded in turn on representations that run deeper, although they are rarely made explicit. These representations concern both the trajectory of the individual and that of society as a whole. From the point of view of the individual, what is implicit in the myth of growth (Meda, 2013) is that the flourishing of each member of society depends on the constant expansion of the possibilities of material consumption (Layard, 2005; Dolan et al., 2008; Scitovsky, 1976). It is this belief that makes it appear so imperative to strive for an increase in incomes combined with a reduction of the real price of consumer items, the latter being achieved thanks to the standardisation of production and the competition between producers. It is this belief too, or this myth, that explains why the social status of the individual is made to depend on his or her access to some remunerative form of employment. Work is both a source of income, opening up the possibility of consumption, and a means of integration within society: it is through work that one can hope to achieve some form of social recognition. From the point of view of society as a whole, behind the myth of growth lurks the idea of an uninterrupted form of progress, following a timeline that leads us towards the "always more".

Happiness of the individual through consumption, and progress of society by the continued improvement of standards of living: it is these representations, or these myths, that are the main obstacles to the imagination of alternatives. *Autonomy* therefore emerges as a condition for such alternatives to emerge, and it is because they may favour such autonomy that the establishment of new modes of governance is key to the establishment of conditions that may lead to a shift to a society that would not have growth as its ultimate horizon -- ultimate, and in practice almost

exclusive. Autonomy, indeed, is the ability for the individual as well as for the community to choose the norms by which they shall be guided (Castoriadis, 1975). Its exercise requires that we create the conditions for a sufficient reflexivity, allowing both the individual and society to define their long-term goals, and to make choices that shall allow them to make progress towards realizing those objectives. Ultimately, autonomy is about escaping the economicism characteristic of our advanced capitalist societies, i.e. the tendency to give priority to objectives of an economic nature, at the expense of other objectives such as, at the individual level, the "good life" (the *eudaimonia* in classic Greece), and at the societal level, resilience to future shocks or the creation of conditions that would favor the flourishing of the members of the community. Individual and collective autonomy should allow to redefine the significance of economic prosperity, understood as the extension of the possibilities of material consumption, and of its rank in our order of priorities : instead of being an end in itself, economic prosperity should become a means in the service of ends that we should choose freely (Cassiers et al., 2011; Thiry, 2017).

In order to make progress towards identifying the mechanisms that could make such a transformation possible, we must first understand the nature of the trap that has closed upon us. Where does this lack of imagination come from, which leads individuals and communities to become unable to think a horizon other than that of a never ending quest for more growth , and to see any competing objective as of comparatively minor weight ? This chapter suggests that the situation we inherit from is the result of an interaction between changes in the behaviour of the individual and the responses to such changes that have co-evolved at societal level. It briefly discusses the terms of this interaction, which defines the cage in which we are imprisoned. It then addresses a second characteristic of our predicament : even as, within a small fraction of the opinion, the impasses resulting from the blind and never-ending pursuit of economic growth are gradually being acknowledged, the means to move away from these impasses remain vague and contested. We are prisoners of an inherited system, and although a growing number of people understand the need to escape from the religion of growth, they disagree as to the exit strategies that should be pursued -- indeed, they disagree even on the very suggestion that a "strategy" is what we currently require. This should not be seen as a problem ; rather, it should be considered a promise. We can only hope to escape the cage by accepting that the transition supposes a plurality of solutions, and by encouraging the search for many escape routes that should be explored simultaneously. We are in a cage, perhaps, but we are not prisoners of a labyrinth that would only allow for one exit route : it is starting from this dual characteristic of the present situation that we can reflect on the governance mechanisms that should be established to prepare the post-growh society.

1. The Cage

From the point of view of the individual's behaviour, it is from the middle of the 18th century that we can date the emergence of what R. Tawney would call the acquisitive mentality (Tawney, 1920; Laval, 2007). At its origin, before its broader diffusion -- diffusion both across larger parts of the population (beyond the class of merchants) and beyond the sphere of commerce alone (to gradually colonize other spheres of life) --, this acquisitive mentality took the form of the domination of a specifically instrumental mode of rationality, of an accounting type, in which the individual seeks to compute the costs and benefits of each of his or her individual actions and to maximize gains while minimizing losses. It is by the rise of this calculating rationality that Max Weber defines the emergence of the spirit of capitalism (Weber, 1992).

Of course, technological advances, the rational administration of justice by specialized public servants guaranteeing a stable legal framework and thus favoring the predictability of economic life, the emergence of the limited liability corporation, as well as the religious legitimation provided by the theory of predestination, all played a role in this development (Berman, 1983). These various factors would not have produced the consequences they did in fact entail, however, if they have not been supported and relied upon by a class of economic actors obsessively seeking to maximize their gains and developing a permanent search for new forms of profit-making. It is this that characterizes the birth of the spirit of capitalism as such: not only the material gains obtained through "freedom" of exchange (which is at the heart of capitalism as an economic system that prioritizes market exchanges over the central command of the State), but also the infinite quest of material gain as an objective to which the whole life plans of the individual are dedicated (wherein lies the specifically psychological dimension of the capitalist economy).

1.1. The spirit of capitalism: the shaping of society by the individual

It is well known how, in the *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber describes the trap has closed upon us (Weber, 1999 (1904-1905)). Once a small number of actors dedicate themselves to profit maximisation, all the other actors are forced to adapt, by a process of *economic selection* that Weber explicitly analogizes to the process of natural selection described (though not labelled as such) by Charles Darwin half a century earlier : if the other economic actors did not also adopt the same kind of behavior, they would risk being eliminated, not because of their lesser "intrinsic worth", but because they would be less competitive on the market. It is thus that, according to Weber, capitalism, "which has ensured its supremacy in economic life, educates and produces for itself, through economic selection, the economic subjects -- the entrepreneurs and the workers -- which it requires" (Weber, 1999 (1904-1905): 94). The result of this process is that capitalism, now that it is victorious -- having vanquished all the competing models of organizing economic life -- can dispense with the religious justification that may have originally favored its ascendancy : with the division of labor, its "mechanical basis" has been radically transformed, creating the conditions of a mutual interdependance and of a generalized competition, to the point that there is no evident escape route left (Weber, 1999 (1904-1905): 301). We have lost the key of the prison that we have built around us.

We are caught in a double trap. The first is that the individual, left to him- or herself, cannot escape from the capitalist economic order: in order for such an escape to be possible, a collective action is required. "Today, the capitalist economic order is a huge *cosmos* in which the individual is trapped from birth : this *cosmos* is for him a given, a straightjacket which that individual cannot transform, at least on his own, and within which he is forced to live" (Weber, 1999 (1904-1905): 93-94). This is because it is only by dedicating oneself entirely to the accumulation of wealth that one can survive in the face of competition, in a world dominated by the spirit of capitalism : "Those who do not adapt their life patterns to the conditions of capitalist success drown or fail to emerge victorious" (Weber, 1999 (1904-1905): 117).

The second trap results from the addiction to work, and to the quest for "always more", which the immersion in such an economic order leads to. Weber remarks how it is deeply "irrational, from the point of view of individual happiness, to lead a life in which man exists for his work rather than the opposite", noting that if we asked these "natures eager for action" -- we, who are motivated by the search for material gain -- about the "'meaning' of their quest, which never allows them to be satisfied with what they own, [...] they would typically answer [...] that their business and the constant dedication to work have become 'indisensable ingredients of their life'" (Weber, 1999

(1904-1905): 115). Ultimately therefore, what the individual is most handicapped by in capitalism, is a failure of the imagination : an inability to conceive of another way to give meaning to his existence, and to occupy his life. That however is not all. For the individual's addiction to work also reflects the expectations of the other members of the community, who rather than treating it as a pathology or a betraying a lack of culture, value positively the accumulation of wealth. As noted by Weber, in terms that echo his contemporaries Veblen or Tawney (Veblen , 1994 (1899); Tawney, 1920): "when the imagination of all a people is drawn towards a purely quantitative form of value, [...] this romanticism of the numbers exerts a magical and irresistable fascination on those of the merchants who are 'poets'" (Weber, 1999 (1904-1905): 115).

1.2. The society of generalized competition: the shaping of the individual by society

Such is the failure of the imagination : it is the inability for the individual to seek forms of happiness which have their source elsewhere than in the promise of wealth accumulation, which is sought after both for its presumed intrinsic value and because it distinguishes the successful as those who have proven to be capable of surviving the economic competition. As such, it is a failure of the individual. But a number of mechanisms established at societal level ensure that we, as individuals, are essentially programmed to fail. It is a troubling paradox that the first of these mechanisms, and probably the most decisive, is an idea which is at the heart of modernity, and one of its most stellar and uncontested achievements : the recognition that we are all equals. Indeed, as the ranking of individuals in the social order depends less, at least in principle, on the circumstances of their birth, we gradually have had to move to other marks of distinction, and material success has largely played this substituting role. One was classified by the pedigree of one's origins ; one now is ranked by how much wealth one was able to accumulate, especially where such wealth is not inherited but is the result of one's efforts or of one's wisdom in making investments. "X is worth Y millions according to Forbes": ordinary language, here as elsewhere, is an almost explicit admission of the changed mores of the times. This means of ranking individuals, however, is a major obstacle to the emergence of life choices that move us away from our obsession with growth.

Other mechanisms concern the economic institutions, and the incentives they provide respectively for entrepreneurs, workers and consumers. Entrepreneurs are encouraged to permanently innovate and to improve the efficiency of production, by the generalized competition that is imposed on them -- further strengthened by the lowering of obstacles to regional and international trade --; never mind if such efficiency gains are often illusory, when they are based on the ability to impose on the collectivity social costs (the so-called negative externalities, in Pigovian terms) that are not incorporated in the costs of production. Workers are incentivized to permanently improve their qualifications : idleness is suspect, and since wage losses are compensated by unemployment benefits or by social aid, the members of the active population who are unemployed are encouraged to project themselves as potential economic agents -- capable, through certain efforts, to provide for themselves. Therefore, although there is less employment available than in the past, we continue to define full-time and life-long employment as the necessary horizon of our individual trajectories, without in any way encouraging individuals to think about other useful ways to occupy the time freed up by the impressive gains of labor productivity : the so-called "activation" of social benefits is the most striking symptom of this collective blindspot (De Schutter, 2015). Consumers, finally, are subjected to the relentless propagandizing from the advertising industry, which somehow manages to convince the members of the public that they have large numbers of unsatisfied wants they were unaware of, and that any of their desires should be treated as urgent needs ; consumers which in turn rank themselves according to lifestyles, more or less lavish, that they ostensibly can afford.

The inherited system thus defines itself by the fact that what individuals understand as being in their interest and economic institutions are mutually reinforcing. On the one hand therefore, the institutions can plausibly (and not without justification) present themselves as legitimized by the choices of the individual : just like the political choices of our democratic societies can be said to be grounded in the preferences expressed by the voters, the economic system responds, it may claim, to the sovereignty of the consumer (Galbraith, 1973). On the other hand, the individual, as an economic agent, may believe, in good faith, that she has no choice: trapped, as producer of goods or services, in a system which favors generalized competition, and forced, as consumer, to support the comparison with others, she may well consider herself unable, on her own, to question the dominant production-consumption model. Of course, as citizen-voter, the individual does not face the same constraints: she may in principle opt for a different model, on the basis of a conception of the "good life" that is less dependent on market imperatives. But that individual still is faced with a limited set of political options to choose from, none of which (with few exceptions) proposes a genuine alternative to the quest for growth. Moreover, in the beauty contest for votes that political parties compete in in the hope of seducing the average voter, the programme that promises a constant improvement of material living conditions and the creation of a legal and economic order that favors an increase of consumption has one major advantage on its competitors: on its face at least, far from imposing on society one particular conception of the good life, such a programme allows each member of society to define his or her own ends, and economic prosperity, measured in monetary terms (as an increase in the wealth available), may be seen as simply a means towards fulfilling such ends, *whatever they may be*. Although it shapes our deepest perceptions of our representations of "success" and "happiness", the obsessive quest for growth can present itself as respecting the plurality of conceptions of the "good life": its ability to thus obfuscate the extent to which it restricts imagination is its most important ideological success.

1.3. Democracy: escaping the cage

This therefore is a very peculiar cage indeed. We have built it generation after generation: we therefore should be able to dismantle it, in order to escape from it. This however cannot be done by any single individual on his (or her) own: what is required is a collective action to be initiated, at societal scale. Moreover, and perhaps even more troubling, the citizen-voters and the economic agents seem, by their daily choices, to be satisfied with the statu quo. It is understandable therefore that some, faced with such a predicament, call for authoritarian solutions at worst -- this is the case for instance of Hans Jonas (Jonas, 1979) --, or at best, for scenarios that tend to impoverish democracy by giving a greater weight to experts or to enlightened technocrats. Dominique Bourg and Terry Whiteside, in this spirit, offer a vision of what might be called a "checks" democracy, by the establishment of a "higher chamber" specifically tasked with taking into account the interests of future generations (Bourg and Whiteside, 2010).

Yet it is the opposite that is now required. Not the return of the Philosopher-Kings, but to anchor the State in society and society in the State. Not the emptying out of democracy in the name of the ecological emergency and of the "false consciousness" of the masses, whose minds are so hopelessly colonized by the dominant ideology, but the exact opposite: the radicalization of democracy, so that each individual may be allowed to better fulfil his or her *instituting* role: his or her role as norm creator, by the exercise of individual autonomy. Indeed, escaping the cage means for each individual the ability to challenge the social norms in the web of which he or she is caught: individual autonomy

is only plausible if combined with collective autonomy, that is, with a questioning of the inherited norms and the conceptions of "success" or "happiness" that such norms embody.[i]

This is the first reason why the governance of transition in a post-growth society requires the creation of spaces in which the re-creation of norms by the individual should again become a real possibility. The classic forms of representative democracy and of responsible consumption shall not suffice. In our complex societies, characterized both by multilevel governance and by the lengthening of production chains -- the result of a deepening of the division of labor --, individuals can only bring about limited changes through the ballot and the wallet -- as voters and as consumers, taking part in elections and acting as responsible purchasers of goods and services. The systems we inherit from are relatively inert: their various components (socio-technical, socio-economic and socio-cultural) have co-evolved, and now appear to be mutually reinforcing, resulting in significant obstacles to change (Geels, 2011). Moreover, the responses from both the political system and markets -- if they respond at all -- both are relatively poor and come relatively late (for political systems, see Gilens, 2012; and Gilens and Page, 2014). There is a risk therefore that, if we content ourselves with these two instruments of control, we lose the race against time which has now commenced: the ecosystems are being degraded, and the social links eroded, faster than the system can react.

Moreover, the signals coming from the ballot box or from the purchasing choices of consumers tend to be ambiguous, and they can easily be reinterpreted by the actors to whom they are addressed: such reinterpretation typically takes the form of a de-radicalisation, or sometimes of a simple co-optation, as illustrated by the praise for various forms of "green growth" or the destiny of "fair trade". The evolution of the democratic system of representation is telling in this regard. In the standard understanding of representative democracy, the citizen-voter is the principal, and his or her representative is the agent: the principal (the voter) delegates certain powers to the agent (the elected representative) so as to ensure that the voter's preferences are fulfilled. In practice however, the relationship is inverted: the representative ignores the wishes of the agent, and the world of political representatives is perceived as composed of elites, in the hands of technocrats or, even worse, captured by lobbies, instead of responding to the wishes of the population as a whole. Public choice theory provides in this regard a description of politics that is not without foundation (Buchanan and Tullock, 1958 (1999); Stigler, 1971), and should call for a reaction precisely from those, the believers in the strength of democracy, who are suspicious of its normative prescriptions.

2. The mystique of the labyrinth

There are escape routes. But it is the plural that matters. To escape, we first need to avoid seeing ourselves as if trapped in a labyrinth, in which there would be one single "correct" path to be followed. Instead of this fantasy of the One Right Solution, we should espouse the idea of the experimentalist search in many directions at the same time. And, instead of the uniformity of solutions, which the classical tools used by the State generally presupposes, we should welcome the idea of a patient quest for innovations that open the range of the possibles.

2.1. Decentralizing the search for solutions

The revitalisation of local democracy stimulates the search for new solutions: veto points are fewer at that level, and the possibilities of synergies between different policy areas are greater (McKibben, 2007). Local democracy thus could favor overcoming the division between the "decision-makers" and the "decision-receivers", bringing the decision closer to the preoccupations of those in the name of whom it is adopted. Similarly, the strengthening of "civil society" (i.e., of the full range of associations in which individuals seek, on a voluntary basis, to build a collective action) allows each individual to build social links on the basis of shared convictions and of a common will for change, and thus to take part in collective actions. The point is not of course to favor a return to the communatarianisms of the past, in which the circumstances of birth led to replace the individual in his communities of origin, defining his role in the division of social labor as well as the solidarity mechanisms he or she could rely on through the "proximate protection" -- from family members, from the community of neighbors, or from the profession he or she belonged to. The point is, rather, to allow each member of society an opportunity to co-construct with others certain alternatives, and thereby to invent new ways of life -- new ways of moving, of eating, or of working --, escaping from the standardisation of modern society.

This utopia is already part of our daily experience. At the scale of the neighborhood, of the school, or of the town, ordinary citizens permanently innovate. They invent new ways of sharing, rescuing a certain idea of the "commons" that was once thought to be definitely relegated to the past, after the loss of traditional forms of solidarity and the establishment of a hyperindividualistic society in which the position of each individual seems to be defined by his or her consumption. They put in place tools that allow a relocalization of economic relationships, breathing new life in local exchange systems and encouraging a reliance on local currencies to maximize the impacts on the local economy of market exchanges. In the areas of energy, of transport, or of food, they encourage new ways of producing and of consuming. They score twice: they try to reduce their ecological footprint -- often succeeding in doing so[ii] -- at the same time that they seek to strengthen the links between individuals, thus combating social exclusion (Dervojeda et al., 2013; AEIDL, 2013).

In the setting up of these so-called "citizens' initiatives", the process matters as much as the end result. These initiatives aim, of course, at the "energy descent" (a concept initially coined by economists Odum and Odum in 2001 (Odum and Odum, 2001: 4)), and at building more resilient local communities, better equipped to resist to shocks, whether economic or natural, by nurturing a diversity of local resources. But they also sek to affirm, at the micropolitical level of cultural practices and of social relationships, requirements of democracy and participation that elevate each individual, really, as the co-author of his or her environment. Autonomy should mean not only the capacity to shape alternatives, but also the ability to question the dominant representation of the motivations of actors.

Our societies seem to be unwilling to acknowledge the existence of individual motivations other than those that are purely economic in nature. Mainstream social science has proven its ability to reinterpret all individual behavior as animated by a hidden logic, which is that of individual utility maximization and of the economic calculus -- such a calculus being at times described as corresponding to rationality itself, as in the economic science of Robbins or Becker or, more subtly, as in the work of Daniel Kahneman, who ends up defining such calculus as the only reasoning that is not victim of "bias" (Robbins, 1932: 15; Becker, 1992; Kahneman, 2011) --. The full range of mechanisms that seek to guide society in a particular direction seem to be founded on this rather brute anthropology, this caricature of the human actor that economics textbooks capture as the "homo economicus": ultimately, it is this caricature, this "rational fool" in Sen's apt phrase (Sen, 1977), that provides the foundations for both legal regulations and economic incentives. Yet, even a

superficial glance at history or at societies different than our own would convince us that this motivation is just one episode, one moment in the evolution of human societies. It may be dominant here and now; it is neither eternally valid nor valid in all societies even today, and even in our societies, it does not rule entirely unchallenged.[iii]

2.2. The Learning State

The revitalization of local democracy and the strengthening of civil society and thus of the potential for citizens-led initiatives go hand in hand: such initiatives shall only be able to emerge, and be sustained, if they can be supported by hybrid governance mechanisms involving ordinary citizens, private economic actors, and public authorities, in the design and the implementation of alternatives. However, just like we should avoid falling into the trap of thinking that society is made of a single cloth, so that change could only conceived of as radical and as bringing about a complete replacement of one system by another, we should guard ourseves from the exact opposite illusion: local alternatives shall only have lasting impacts, and gradually spread across society, if they are supported (and their dissemination encouraged) by levels of governance that are not solely local.

At these higher levels of governance, what is needed therefore is a change in the dominant culture of governance. Since Plato's *Republic*, which placed its fate in the hands of the Philosopher-Kings and theis expert wisdom, the task of Politics has traditionally been thought of as having to think for society, and to impose on society certain solutions, as it were, "from above". In such a scheme, it is almost inevitable that local diversity and the specificity of the contexts in which regulatory and policy frameworks are implemented shall be negated -- eradicated if possible, or at least perceived as a problem to be overcome: after all, if a solution is deemed desirable because it is the most rational, or seen as the one that best serves the general interest, why should it not be generalized across society? It is this very scheme that we must now put into question, and it is this task of Politics that should now give way to another. For Politics should not be homogeneizing per necessity. Instead, it could recast itself as serving local initiatives, thus allowing them to flourish by removing the constraints that are obstacles to their growth and dissemination. The role of higher levels of governance, in this view, should be to manage the externalities; to design the framework within which the local initiative develops so as to allow it to grow, by support what might be called "enabling mechanisms" -- mechanisms which allow to support the diversity of social innovations by adapting the legal and economic institutions which facilitate their establishment and their further development --; and finally, to accelerate collective learning, encouraging each local entity to gain from the experiments led by other local entities, both as a source of inspiration and as a means to enhance accountability.

2.3. Social innovations and collective learning

Local experimentation therefore is advantageous also for another reason, which has just been alluded to: it can be a searching device, and accelerate collective learning. The transition to a society that ranks other objectives (such as well-being, or real freedom understood as the expansion of its members' capabilities) above economic growth, shall not be effected all at once ; nor shall it be achieved by relying only on the limited range of instruments -- regulatory reforms or economic incentives -- that the State may use. Social psychology has highlighted the limited impact of such instruments, which impose on individuals injunctions that rely on "extrinsic" motivations (Ryan and Deci, 2000a and 2000b; Moller et al., 2006), and thus treat individuals like objects rather than as subjects of their own history (Arendt, 1958). Individuals on whom rules are imposed, to whom subsidies are promised, or who are threatened with having to pay taxes, will act in order to comply

with the rule, to capture the subsidy, or to avoid paying the tax -- but they will otherwise pursue their own life objectives, deviating as little as possible from such objectives that they have set for themselves. In contrast, behavioural changes that rely on the *intrinsic* motivations of the individual shall be resilient: because they are based on the individual's identity or self-image or on the values that the individual treats as his/her own, such changes will persist in time, even though the context (and the external incentives it provides) may have evolved. This is true, in particular, as regards pro-environmental behavior (Lauvergne et al., 2010). Moreover, as individuals seek to design solutions, in the immediate environment in which they operate, that may be responses to the ecological crisis (new ways of producing and of consuming, new lifestyles, new economic models), a form of democratic experimentalism emerges : a collective search commences, from which solutions may grow that can gradually result in new social norms solidifying, which shall be diffused from individual to individual before being generalized across society and replace existing routines.

This process is made possible by two properties of such social innovations. First, if such innovations are assessed by their ability to reduce our ecological footprint, and supported where their contribution is seen as promising, by the establishment of enabling mechanisms at higher levels of governance, such solutions also may be seen as public goods: they are a new source of knowledge about the escape routes from the current ecological impasse, which society as a whole may benefit from. Social innovators are searchers, and the knowledge base they contribute to build is a positive externality, a byproduct of their solitary quest for solutions.

Secondly, social innovations that have been successfully experimented in some settings have an empowering effect on others: others, operating in other settings or in other jurisdictions, can more easily demand from decision-makers that they take such experiments into account, and that they create the legal and economic institutions that may favour their emergence. Of course, proposing to create "spontaneous", "citizens-led" social innovations by operating from above, is about as contradictory as proposing to fasten the growth of a tree by pulling on its branches: ultimately, if there is no appetite for the social innovation in question, encouraging its diffusion shall lead, at best, to temporary changes on a limited scale. However, the establishment of "enabling mechanisms" for such innovations, together with a deliberate attempt to learn from what has worked elsewhere, can stimulate reflexivity within a given community. Innovations that have succeeded elsewhere are discussed. Routines are disrupted. The community is put in motion, as its members start to question the dominant lifestyles and to realize that other ways of relating to one another and to Nature may be more desirable than the agonistic and atomistic understanding of the Self that economic science has imposed on us. New questions arise also about the responsibility of the decision-makers in the process of change: are they doing enough to favour the emergence of social innovations? Each member of the community is forced to ask him- or herself: is there any role I should play in these social innovations that are now creating a wider range of alternatives for me to choose from?

2.4. Social learning and reflexivity

By this networking of local experiments, a form of learning commences as the established routines within each community are interrogated, in the light of the experience of the other communities. This represents a gain in reflexivity for each entity. Following Kuhn and others (Kuhn, 1962; Argyris, 1974; Argyris and Schön, 1978), we may distinguish here different levels of learning. To learn, is first to correct mistakes or to fill in blindspots in the paradigm under which one is working. The working hypothesis remains unchanged: experience leads to amend the hypothesis on certain points, without the hypothesis being more fundamentally questioned. Kuhn would say that "normal" science may continue. Argyris would add: first-order learning has occurred, which consists not in revising one's

framework of analysis or in redefining one's objectives, but in opting for different means, better suited perhaps to achieve the objective that one is pursuing. It may occur however that a deeper revision is required. In the light of the experience gained, the dominant paradigm cannot be maintained: a paradigm change is required, which Kuhn calls a scientific "revolution". This is second-order learning. In this type of learning however, while the working hypothesis may have to be amended -- or while we may have to opt for different objectives --, we still do not question our very identity, that is, the representation we have of our interest. But we can move further, to a form of learning that leads to question that representation itself, in other terms, to redefine one's very identity -- whom we are, and what we want. This requires a genealogical demarche, in which we ask where the received understandings of "progress" or of "success" originate from at the level of the individual or of society: it is not just that the means are inadequate for the attainement of certain ends, and it not just that the ends are inadequately defined -- rather, it is our deeper beliefs about what is desirable that are challenged, our representation of ourselves that is transformed (Swieringa and Wierdsma, 1992; Peschl, 2008).

In order to move towards a society that escapes the trap of growth, it is such a third-order learning that is required. The capitalist and productivist system on the one hand, the individual who is both its co-author and its addressee on the other, mutually support each other. Just like the *homo economicus* is not simply a "product" of capitalist culture, capitalist culture is not just a "creation" of the *homo economicus*: "There is always homology and deep correspondance between the structure of the personality and the content of the culture, and there is no reason to predetermine the one by the other" (Castoriadis, 1975: 41). In response to this circularity and to the phenomenon of mutual reinforcement that it leads to, the transition calls for a gain in reflexivity: we need to revisit the fundamental question of how each individual defines his or her understanding of the "good life", and at the societal level, the question of the trajectory that we wish to pursue collectively.

To provide a narrative that people may relate to, may constitute an important role of governments. Indeed, this is one key function of planning, not in the meaning of five-year plans deciding on the allocation of resources and setting binding targets as in the Soviet era, but in the meaning of providing a general orientation, offering to economic actors as well as to citizens un relatively stable and predictable framework, a broad vision for the future, allowing each member of society to see him- or herself as contributing to change at the collective level (Dupuy, 2012). The challenge here is to provide a narrative that stimulates social innovation, but that does not restrict the imagination of the actors. Although good practices may be identified and highlighted, and although they may constitute a source of inspiration, generalization of such practices immediately makes us run the risk of homogenization and standardisation, which would mean the end of progress, as the permanent search for new solutions would come to an end (Lévi-Strauss, 1952 (2007)).

Conclusion

At the individual level, the requirement of autonomy is a requirement that each actor defines his or her own understanding of happiness, without such understanding being imposed by the injunctions of the consumer society. At the societal level, it is the ability for each society to define its own historical trajectory. The "always more" seems more plausible than ever as producers gain in efficiency under the pressure of competition, as workers constantly improve their productivity in part because of the incentives of financial rewards, and as consumers consume. But the immature idea of an infinite progress, of unlimited growth on a limited planet on which we depend both for the resources we extract from it and for the waste we dump on it -- this idea now must face the wall of ecological boundaries. Escaping the cage that we have built around us is more urgent than ever. We

can succeed. We shall succeed, however, only if we recognize the potential of social innovations that prepare the transition, and if we favor their emergence and theis dissemination. Only then, shall the lock finally be broken.

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[i] It is for this reason that the proposal to align production and consumption on the needs of the community concerned, rather than on the expectations of the shareholders of the providers of goods or services or on the quest for GDP growth which so obsesses the State, is so deeply subversive politically. For such a proposal supposes that those who produce and those who consume meet, to decide for themselves, in particular, which are the limits that should not be crossed (Gorz, 1980: 178). It is only through such democratic processes, allowing truly autonomous choices to be made (communities deciding what they want, collectively), that we can hope to remain within the limits of the planetary boundaries that scientists have defined (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015).

[ii] There are exceptions. An important literature now questions the idea that reducing the geographical distance between producers and consumers, for instance by establishing so-called "short food chains", has a positive impact on the environment (Schmidt, 2009; Foodmetres, 2014). Similarly, the "sharing economy" may lead to certain forms of hyperconsumption and accelerate the obsolescence of the tools or items that are shared, as well as leading to an increase in the number of short distances travelled by these objects (Demailly and Novel, 2014).

[iii] As noted by Castoriadis, the types of motivation (and the corresponding values that polarize and orientation the lives of human beings) are social creations: "each culture institutes values of its own and tame individuals in accordance with such values" (Castoriadis, 1975: 37) (translation by the author).