



ValuesQuest

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Abstract

Values guide our way through the possibilities and problems of life and they are the main drivers behind our societal instruments like economy, education and governance, which shape the world we live in. There is a growing sentiment that something is far from right in the way we live today, that the values guiding the course our society is taking are not the ones which can lead us into a better world, quite the opposite. Values evidently are fundamental for humans but, at the same time, it seems nearly impossible to address them, as value debates seem intangible and essentially personal or cultural.

The Club of Rome has a tradition of addressing the root causes of the challenges facing humankind. It does so with a systemic, holistic and long-term approach. Because of the centrality of values to the future of humanity and of an understanding of why we are where we are today, the Club of Rome has initiated a programme called ValuesQuest to explore these issues and to map out a path forward. It is addressing the need for values to inform and shape our ways of life in the expectation that these will enable a more humane and just society to develop, one more attuned to the needs of others and the needs of the planet. This discussion paper provides a background to the ValuesQuest programme.

ValuesQuest intends to explore and articulate the origins of values and to make us understand the importance of addressing values and of understanding the role of our narrative and of stories in transmitting and changing value systems. It aims to focus, sharpen and clarify an already existing debate by contributing a philosophical and historical underpinning to the discussion.

What we perceive as reality is often our own story or the story of the wider community we belong to. These underlying stories communicate our values which guide our thinking and shape our perceptions. In exploring stories the project will dig deep into the various dominant cultures of the world to discover the origins of those stories and their impact today. It will also investigate the ways in which stories, and therefore values, change and develop.

ValuesQuest will take a critical look at where we have gone wrong and how we can remedy the situation and arrive at the values needed for 8 or 9 billion to live peacefully on a finite planet. To change the world for the better we need to address values and the narratives they are embedded in. We need to unmask the underlying stories and adopt narratives which can lead us towards a more sustainable, peaceful and equitable world. We need to stop drifting and start acting on values.

This paper “ValuesQuest – The search for values, which will make a world of difference” is trying to provide a framing and to stimulate a more concrete, focused and broad debate about the issue of values.

1. Why Values Matter

Discussions about today’s problems and challenges facing humankind or an individual, be they climate change, unemployment, the financial crisis, destruction of nature, poverty, crime or the way people interrelate and live together turn rather quickly into a debate about values. Values evidently are fundamental for humans, but at the same time it seems nearly impossible to address them in any other than in a philosophical way.

“Values are the main drivers behind our societal instruments, which shape the world we live in... It is our choice if we want a world where billions live in poverty and where climate change risks the future already of our grandchildren, where excessive individualism and narcissism reign instead of solidarity, caring and sharing.”

There is the general feeling, that bankers and others in the financial and political worlds ought to live more by values, but besides this aspect, values are a topic which many find awkward if not downright intimidating. Possibly this is because it often leads to people preaching about their own values or the lack of values in those they disagree with. It also quite swiftly turns into a rather vindictive sense that we ought to tell people what values they should have.

Yet values are actually how we guide our way through the possibilities and problems of life.

Values are the main drivers behind our societal instruments, which shape the world we live in. Our theory and practice of economy do not rest on natural laws but on the underlying values. To have an unequal society instead of an equal one is our choice, it is not given by nature. It is our choice to build a world, which can nurture and feed generations for hundreds of years. There is no natural law, which compels us to overuse and deplete resources. It is our choice if we want a world where billions live in poverty and where climate change risks the future already of our grandchildren, where excessive individualism and narcissism reign instead of solidarity, caring and sharing. It is our value choice which determines if we live in a world of opportunities for all or in a world where only a few benefit from the riches of planet earth.

Values are also often so subliminal, we never realised we had them until they fell away or some crisis made us question what values we had lived by. Often the question about values ends up with earnest groups proposing codes of ethics and these can often seem to hark back to a world of certainty and authority, which many feel they have left far behind.

Values are so important and fundamental that we have to find a way of addressing them, whether we consider the subject fuzzy or not. There is no way around it.

It is a timely undertaking as there is a growing sentiment that something is far from right in the way we live today, that the values guiding the course our society is taking are not the ones which can lead us into a better world. Quite the opposite: Some of the values we live by for many decades lead humanity straight into a world of separation, isolation, depletion and systemic crisis.

We feel confused about the role of values; about what values we should try and live by and whether these values should be universal or particular – cultural or universal.

Where can we look for values and whose values should have a precedent? Is it time to stop expecting that one set of values should be the norm and accept that pluralism will shape everything? Indeed, where do values arise from and what of the great value systems – religious, cultural, legal – which have been so instrumental in shaping the best – and sometimes the worst – of our world?

How are new values formed and what generates them? The collapse of old values? New challenges? Or do times of reflection lead to the quest for new values?

How can we transform the values guiding our society so that we arrive at underlying value systems, which create and maintain a sustainable, equitable and fair global society?

It is because of the centrality of values to the future of humanity and to an understanding of why we are where we are today that the Club of Rome has initiated a programme called ValuesQuest to explore these issues and to map out a path forward. In doing so, the Club is moving beyond its usual constituency and entering into partnership with a broad range of interested parties including the creative arts world and the worlds of spirituality and faith. In doing so it has created a partnership with the World Academy of Art and Science and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation as well as working with groups such as the Institute of Arts and Ideas.

ValuesQuest plans to address the need for values to inform and shape our ways of life in the expectation that these will enable a more humane and just society to develop, one more attuned to the needs of others and the needs of the planet.

It intends to make people of all walks of life understand the importance of addressing values. It aims to focus, sharpen and clarify an already existing debate by contributing a philosophical and historical underpinning to the discussion. To do this, ValuesQuest will explore and articulate the origins of values, not only stories.

In exploring stories the project will dig deep into the various dominant cultures of the world to discover the origins of those stories and their impact today. It will also investigate the ways in which stories and therefore values change and develop.

ValuesQuest will take a critical look at where we have gone wrong and how we can remedy the situation and arrive at the values needed for 8 or 9 billion to live peacefully on a finite planet.

This Discussion Paper – “The search for values which will make a world of difference” – is intended to stimulate a more concrete debate about the issue of values.

2. Are there Universal Values?

This question might never be answered, but it is likely that the answer lies somewhere between “yes” and “no” with a strong leaning towards “yes”.

Just about anyone, when asked what sort of world they want, will highlight something along the lines of the following: They will value honesty over dishonesty; kindness and compassion over cruelty and thoughtless behaviour; a decent life for themselves, their family and their children; decent health and education affordable for all; a safer and cleaner environment within which to live; a level of prosperity that takes them out of poverty; a sense of belonging to a community; a strong sense of a purpose in life, and let’s be frank, possessions as well from a well stocked larder to whatever new equipment is thought to be desirable.

No matter their race, nationality, creed, gender, occupation or level of education, it seems that people are broadly in agreement in their perception of what a desirable future should look like. A world characterized by honesty, dignity, empathy, decency and gratitude. It is the simple joys of life that make life valuable; it is the shared relations with other people, be they family, friends, neighbours, that make life rewarding.

Alongside this we need to place the fact that such a world would probably be a bit boring and therefore people would look for adventure and for thrills. Humanity is driven not just by equality but also by greed and by ambition and, at least according to Freud, by sex.

Ethos and Ethics

The prevailing trend in contemporary discussions of values is to term them as ‘ethical issues’ or to try and create new ethical standards or codes. In this paper we do not use that term very often because we believe that values actually arise from an ethos (character) of a culture or community, not as a result of codifying (ethics) those values (rules of conduct). In other words, values arise from the ethos and can later be codified into ethics but without an understanding of the wider ethos from which they have emerged, any discussion of values will fall well short of being true to the way human societies develop. Put succinctly, business ethics for example is a list of rules and regulations which people might be inclined to follow if they have the right ethos. Ethics is the rulebook while ethos is the character.

Therefore, any thoughts about a better future must take into serious account our ability to deviate or wander from the path of straightforward good intentions. To some this is the problem of sin as expressed two thousand years ago in the following mantra “The good that I would do I do not do and the things I should not do, I do!”* To others it is human nature corrupted by either capitalism or by greed. Whatever reason one gives, the ability of human beings to undo what is best for them in the long run by short-termism is a problem, which has bedevilled us since time immemorial. Not acknowledging this means that utopian dreams often crash to earth or lead to extremism in attempts to ‘reform’ human nature.

This is why the ethos from which values arise is so crucial. Values need to be so deep within a culture that no one recognises that they are values. They just are the right and proper

* The Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 7 verse 19.

things to do. The goals outlined above are universal – but so are the problems associated with human behaviour.

3. Stories are the Main Transmission Belt for Values

Values are transmitted through many different mediums, through families, through traditions, by cultures in so many ways – from festivals, to how the young are taught. As the human species is a storytelling species, one of the main ways this is done is through stories. Values might be dormant for periods of time, deeply buried in stories we are no longer aware of. They are often rekindled through intense experience, be it a human tragedy like the death of a beloved one, an earthquake or civil strife or through an enlightening and heartwarming experience such as the birth of a child or a wave of empathy sweeping through a community.

The stories from which values emerge are instrumental – that is to say effective in making or changing behaviour. Stories are in reality far more effective than financial strategies, international agreements or any of the other paraphernalia of contemporary decision-making. The reason for this is simply that underlying them all will be an unknown or unacknowledged story, or more likely set of stories, which create the values, which guide the thinking, which create the plans.

Story and Narrative

In this paper we are going to use two terms – story and narrative. The Oxford English Dictionary puts the two terms together in the following way. ‘Story – a recital of events, that have or are alleged to have happened; a series of events that are or might be narrated.’ This is how we will use the two terms. Stories are the incidents, which together compose a narrative. Or to put it another way, the narrative is the overarching purpose of the stories being told. For example, the stories about Achilles or about Helen of Troy are part of the narrative we know as the Iliad which narrates the struggle between the Greeks and the Trojans and which narrates the consequences of betrayal and the demands of loyalty.

To understand where we come from, it is crucial to explore the traditional stories which have shaped us and our values and which have brought us to where we are today. For us to know what we have forgotten but which shapes us we have to go back into history and especially to the overarching stories, which have created the world’s ancient and dominant cultures – China, India, Europe, the Middle East, shamanic cultures and such like. And we need to look at the vast changes that have taken place within these overarching stories and their use over time, especially since the rise of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment which have more fundamentally changed how these stories shape us today than almost anything else in modern history.

With a deeper understanding of the stories, which have shaped us, we can explore how our own stories are a mixture of these overarching stories as well as the newer ones, for example, science, Marxism, capitalism or even nationalism – itself an invention of The Enlightenment.

4. The Evolution of Worldviews

Our narrative is a construct which has different layers. These layers together determine how we, as an individual or as a group, view and understand the world.

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What is remarkable about the human race is that we know we have moved beyond just being conditioned by our biological and biochemical makeup. Despite the modern fashion, especially amongst reductionist thinkers such as Baudrillard and Foucault and those who would model us on computers to reduce us to nothing more than the product of physical evolution or more fashionably to see us as programmed like a computer, we have consciousness of our own being. In an effort to make ourselves more important than the rest of nature, much of the Enlightenment and scientific thought has assumed or even insisted that we are unique in life on earth in having this capacity. For example, some in the scientific community will argue for animal experimentation on the grounds that animals don't really suffer—any expressions of anguish are simply instinct not real distress. However, the view is that human welfare is more important – indeed of over-riding importance and thus animals are of so much less significance. The growth in concern about animal welfare is a recognition that other creatures have consciousness and is part of a return to an ethos that we are part of nature, not apart from nature. We are participants, not observers.

Such awareness of our own consciousness means we can stand outside the biologically given elements of our nature and make decisions to be different, to think differently from our parents and to make choices based on free will. There are of course constraints, but these are recognised as such and thus their power is much diminished. Storytelling is perhaps the main way in which we overcome the conditionality of our existence.

Throughout the history of humanity we could have gone in many different directions. Personal history as well as the history of groups, nations or of the human race are also a history of bifurcations, where we choose one particular direction and decide against the other ones. This alone should stand as a major argument against the determinist view of human nature and behaviour and is powerfully argued for in the writings of Philip B. Smith and Manfred Max-Neef who state that we can only understand where we are as individuals or as cultures by recognising that we could have been radically different if we as individuals or as cultures had followed another path. A path which was also available to us at any given time. In other words they recognise that we could be telling and living in very different worlds based upon decisions we made and/or which were made by our cultures at certain points in time. There is nothing inevitable about where we are today. We could have told and can choose a different story and therefore a different world. So in order to change course and to navigate humanity a better world we need to understand the assumptions which have led us on our current course and correct them properly.

For many in positions of power today the key to their understanding of reality will be that they see themselves as being shaped by the age of Enlightenment. Many of our core values

either originated or were clearly defined during this period: liberty; equality; human rights, and an economy that serves the community best. Indeed, for many, the Declaration of Human Rights stands as the epitome of human values. They would even argue that the debate about values ended with the creation of this Declaration, but the subsequent use and abuse of it, its common perception compared with the perception of its founders, mean it is as compromised a document as any other great moral teaching. Useful, but not absolute. Interesting and helpful, but not perfect.

Paths not Navigated

“Life is an unending sequence of bifurcations: the decisions that I take implies all the decisions I did not take. Our life is inevitably a permanent choice of one possibility out of an infinity of ontological possibilities.”...

“We chose Machiavelli (“it is much safer to be feared than to be loved”) instead of Francis of Assisi (who “describes and feels a world where love not only is possible, but makes sense and has a universal meaning”). We chose the world of Newton and Galileo, where “the language of science is mathematics”, where “nothing is important in science that cannot be measured”, where “we and nature, the observer and the observed, are separate entities.” We could have chosen Goethe, for whom “science is as much an inner path of spiritual development as it is a discipline aimed at accumulating knowledge of the physical world.”

“What holds for individual lives holds for communities and whole societies as well. Our so-called Western (Judaeo-Christian) civilization is the result of its own bifurcations. We in the West are what we are, but we could also have been something we are not.”¹

Smith and Max Neef list several bifurcations, where humanity chose one particular path and left the other one not navigated: We chose Machiavelli (“it is much safer to be feared than to be loved”) instead of Francis of Assisi (who “describes and feels a world where love not only is possible, but makes sense and has a universal meaning”). We chose the world of Newton and Galileo, where “the language of science is mathematics”, where “nothing is important in science that cannot be measured”, where “we and nature, the observer and the observed, are separate entities.” We could have chosen Goethe, for whom “science is as much an inner path of spiritual development as it is a discipline aimed at accumulating knowledge of the physical world”.²

The age of Enlightenment was a crucial period in the development of modern human civilisation and much of the freedom and wealth we enjoy can be traced back to the origin of these values. However, these values were, at the time that they were perceived, linked to responsibility for the community. “Liberty” was the right of every human being to live

according to his/her beliefs and opinion, as long as it did not harm or negatively impact on others. Indeed, Voltaire put it even more forcefully by saying that even if he completely disagreed with someone's point of view, he would nevertheless be prepared to fight for the right of that point of view to be expressed. Today, liberty has turned for many into a concept of "freedom", which can mean all and everything from freedom from dictatorial regimes to the freedom to consume excessively and to behave anti-socially. "Freedom" in our modern sense resembles "liberty" stripped of the key ingredient "responsibility".[†] A similar dilemma hangs over the word "rights" which were perceived as being coterminous with responsibilities and duties but has also become divorced in many contexts from that other side of the coin.

5. Discovering We Live by a Story

We see the world as real because stories have told us that this is real. We believe that what we see is 'the real world'. Therefore it is almost impossible for us to see beyond this and to recognise that we live within a story which defines us. Our own story is invisible to us on the whole. It is so much part of our worldview that we do not realise it is a worldview. Therefore we do not realise that it might not be the only one or even the best or right one.

"Values arise from our stories, not from data."

In order to be able to address the issue of values for our society and for us as individuals we have to see and understand the stories we inhabit and realise the partiality of their reality. This is not just a quest for the usual suspects who believe they are in touch with the real world – economists and politicians – but equally for those in the creative and spiritual worlds. This is not to make people feel insecure or lost in life. It is to empower them as individuals, as groups and as human society to find the worldviews, the stories, the reality that is needed if we want to live in a sustainable, fair and equitable world where humanity lives within the possibilities of Nature and the possibilities of being truly human. It will threaten those who hold tight to their worldview because of anxiety, but others we know will embrace it because it opens up an even more extraordinary and fascinating world.

ValuesQuest will work with people from many different walks of life – writers, artists, thinkers, as well as those from the worlds of economics, science, politics and academia, aiming to create awareness that we truly are a narrative species, and that data is just a tool by which we sometimes seek to legitimate these stories and that the values arise from our stories, not from data.

With a sense of the stories that brought us to where we are today we can move towards the future. This is the quest for new, revised or revived stories by which we can see living a better life in a better world. In the quest for new stories to live by we need to explore the potential for reinvention within the great cultural strands of our current world. We also need to broaden "ValuesQuest" to involve new strands or strands that have never been given the prominence that they deserve. We need to look for these, as much as for what lies within the dominant cultures and their stories.

[†] For more on this subject read Graeme Maxton (2011), *The End of Progress*, John Wiley & Sons (Asia).

6. The Stories that Dominate Today

In our search for the worlds of difference and the values, which will arise, we need to understand the current range of stories and explore the possibility of new ones. Today we live in a complex and pluralistic reality composed of a mix of values originating from different periods of societal evolution, intertwined with different belief systems. And since the post War era, with the agenda, value and belief-shaping power of modern communications and public relations (PR).

What one might loosely call contemporary culture has achieved a schizophrenic attitude towards the role of story. At one level it has relegated “stories” to the fringes of our sense of our societies and ourselves. Within much of contemporary culture, especially what might be called ‘secular’ culture, the view is that stories are for children; for films; for holiday reading and for social occasions. They are not the stuff of reality. They are products of imagination and not facts. Therefore we have created an intellectual climate within which stories are not considered really significant.

However, at another level, contemporary and especially materialistic consumer culture has elevated the story to a new degree of power. This is the story as told by adverts of what a ‘happy’ and ‘successful life’ looks like. Stories of happy families; individuals; relationships – all mediated through the prism of material benefits. This is why the 30 second advert in the midst of a one hour programme on say the natural world will probably have cost more than the one hour programme cost. Advertisers know that a story has to be told well and quickly if our attention is to be gained. Likewise the world of social media has discovered that a story – be that on a YouTube clip or through a blog or twitter works only if it is a story.

The PR and advertising world has vague links to the worlds of beliefs and vague links to the world of the Enlightenment but views them all as equally antiquated – as basically interesting eras of a time long past. The PR consumerist worldview is now the dominant story, and as was noted earlier, amongst the most dominant of storytelling bodies in the world today. As a result much of the opinion shaping the world and its worldviews are post Enlightenment, post-secular and post-religious – but most definitely not post-materialistic. In other words, whether we believe our worldview is mostly shaped by faith traditions, Enlightenment philosophy, Marxism, existentialism or scientific worldviews, we are all in danger of being undermined by the rise of a new set of stories. This essentially dismisses all of the historical material by changing the very nature of what the story tells us about being human. It turns us into consumers, not contributors; into isolated individuals not communities. The classical attack on this worldview is John Berger’s “Ways of seeing” reference.

Manipulation of the mind

Systematic methods of manipulating people’s perceptions, worldviews and belief systems have probably been around as long as the human mind and special interests have been. One famous example is the First Emperor of China (220 BC) who sought to destroy records of any other way of living other than under his draconian dictatorship by burning all books.

Since the early decades of the 20th century we have seen the rise of what is now the most successful manipulative system in the world. It is the world of commercial advertising – the

frontline troops if you like of the consumerist and monolithic worldviews. It has subverted huge swathes of our cultures, employing the best actors, producers, psychologists, sociologists even anthropologists to be able to penetrate deeply into our conscious and sub-conscious minds.

Professional influencers do not contribute to making people happy (if we omit the tiny portion of social advertising), quite the contrary. Advertisements tell people that they are incomplete, ugly, problem laden, and in need of something they did not know they needed.

The central message of advertising is that we live in a material world insofar as our desires, fears and wants can be taken care of through the purchase of something. All value motives are linked to exchanges of money and underlying it is a supportive intellectual framework which tells you that evolution is all about merciless competition. We are being drawn into a world where what we are is “simply” the result of our genes, or of evolution in general. This feeds into a new form of subservience based not on some doctrine of the caste system or of a God-given place in society but on a deeply conservative and distorting quasi-scientific view.

Actually, the world is not about mortgages and interest rates. We need to return to realising we are talking about homes not just houses as financial assets. Life is about much, much more than this.

7. The Role of Language

“Two people divided by a common language”.

(Winston Churchill talking about Americans and the British)

Language plays a uniting and dividing role. Nowhere can this be seen more clearer than when people discuss values.

Specific words open doors, which once opened, reveal entire belief systems, cultivated and passed on through generations. “God” for instance, the most natural word for billions of people can send a shiver down the spine of a hardcore non-believer symbolizing a religious and dogmatic world he or she believes they had to struggle against to be a free thinker.

It is evident that humanity is in search of a new terminology which encompasses the not-entirely-materialistic world. It starts to become acceptable, for a person who wants to be seen as respectable in a group he or she is not familiar with, to use the term “spirituality” without running the danger to be seen as a ‘religious’ person with all the prejudices that this often summons up. This quest for a new terminology is an adventure and we will need to experiment to see what really works. The challenge to both sides of linking words normally separated by long centuries of debate, argument and even fear is one we should embrace.

Religion and Spirituality

The words religion and spiritual have very different origins and have increasingly become two very different ways of expressing in some ways very similar things. Religion comes from the Latin ‘religio’ meaning an obligation. Religion in other words is how beliefs are regulated and organised – which is sometimes spelt out even more clearly by reference

to ‘organised religion’. To many in the post Enlightenment world, the idea of obligation or ‘organised religion’ telling you what you may or may not believe and as a consequence, what you may or may not do, is anathema. Hence the rise in interest in spirituality. Spirituality comes from the Latin ‘spiritus’ meaning breathing and is found for example in the Christian theology of the Trinity in the term ‘Holy Spirit’ which is seen as the energising force actively at work in the universe. Spirit therefore has the notion of an active force which is sometimes described as literal beings – spirits – whose activities are not always conducive to human well being, as well as an increasing sense that the world is energized by spirits in every living thing from trees to mountains. More broadly spirituality now stands in opposition to religion as a more free will based version of belief in a divine or divine forces operating within the universe. Another phrase which is gaining ground is that of “Sacred” – used now in so many different contexts such as Sacred Land, Sacred Literature, even Sacred Activism. This is a term in transition from its old meaning of holy and religious to a more numinous notion of protected or special in some indefinable way. Its very vagueness helps to make it popular.

It has been the experience of the authors that when you ask people why they care or why they have given their lives to worthy causes rather than what they are doing or have done, you move from deliverables to stories and thus to values. They do not cite data, but the experiences they had, often with their parents, of walks through the country-side and references to religious or secular texts and wisdom.

The role of family in our story and thus our values is often underestimated perhaps because we find it sounds childish. This is also true for those who describe themselves as atheists, being often “hereditary atheists”, who cite that their atheism came from previous generations of commitment to vigorously not believing in God and disliking religion.

People talking about their experiences, which shaped their inner belief system and led them to spend their lives working for a better world, usually tend not to use a utilitarian, economic or materialistic language. Their language is more romantic, spiritual, visionary, dreamlike even. If we can see romance as being a value perhaps we can learn to love the world and its issues rather than always see them as a problem or challenge or as something “to fight for”.

Language is important in expressing our values and we need to explore what language we use that arises from our stories because sometimes that language might betray us or it might actually reveal what is truly important, but in ways we never intended.

8. How have Values Changed and Why?

Values emerge for four main reasons and to understand how and why they might emerge in the future it is useful to explore these reasons and to see how they have changed things in the past. Without this understanding, it is impossible to really think about moving forward.

First, they change in times of what some cultures call crisis, chaos and collapse but which others call transition, opportunity and *kairos* (καίρος). This ancient Greek word means a time for opportunity, a time when there is the space, and the chance to change which enables something new to emerge. Invasion, exile, uprisings, economic failure, boom and bust, wars of religion, ideological purges and then collapse, failure of harvests over a long period, cli-

mate change, collapse of Empires and dynasties – all these catapult communities and peoples into a crisis or time of transition not just of how to survive but of what to believe and therefore what values to preserve or change. The collapse of oppressive regimes, the failure of draconian powers, the rising up of people against invaders or those who deny them freedom – these are also moments of transition – which those in power often term as a crisis or chaos. It is important to note that because of the Judaeo-Christian story of the Apocalypse, which underpins the narrative framework of most activist movements worldwide, the term “chaos” or “crisis” is the default term used when we look at current issues such as the environment or the economic mess. We see these as harbingers of “The End” or at the very least we use this language to scare people into believing it could be “The End” and thus encourage them to follow us and our directives. Others would see this as opportunities – as times of *kairos* and therefore assume that something innovative, new, radical and alternative is worth pursuing.

Out of such collapses come new opportunities for change based around stories of a new sense of meaning and purpose for the dispossessed or oppressed. But as we see in the so called Arab Spring, they can also produce extreme forms of stories and ideologies or beliefs as they afford opportunities for single-minded groups to seize the initiative. People can be immensely creative in such times and they can also want certainty and certainties tend to be monolithic and then oppressive of any hint of diversity.

Second, stories and values change because someone decides to make a deliberate change in response to the perceived failure of an existing system. The actions of Martin Luther in 1517 in launching the Reformation is a classic example where one man decided to start a ball rolling which gathered speed because others joined for a variety of reasons. Europe was never the same again. It is doubtful that Luther meant to create an entirely new dimension of Christianity but he did even if it had roots back into an understanding of the Early Church that was both conventional and radical. The invention of the Company – for example the East India Company – is another example. No one thought this would change the world, but the owners did think some new way of doing business was needed and created something new to achieve this, even if it had roots in older structures such as guilds.

The rise of Marxism and the struggles of peoples around the world against Imperialism are other examples. In the case of Marxism, the story itself posits a historical narrative which dooms capitalism to failure and therefore justifies the inevitability of communism. It is a story which has largely now died but was immensely powerful precisely because it said “Here is the real story and it’s about you and how history is on your side against the powers that be.” The anti-imperialist movements have fundamentally changed the way of the world – at least at the geo-political level if not at the economic level – by breaking the power of the Imperialist stories and by re-engaging traditions, cultures and often faith worldviews which enabled people to feel emboldened to rise up. In many cases of course this also fused with the Marxist story.

Going further back, there are key historic examples: the editor of the Book of Genesis (c 400 BC) who in Chapter 1 and 2 rewrote the classic six days of Creation story known throughout the Ancient Middle East, making humanity an agent of free will rather than a puppet of the gods. Or the editor of the Chinese Classic of History, the *Shu Jing* (c700BC), deciding to write history with a built in right to revolt if the people felt the Mandate of

Heaven to rule had been removed from the ruling dynasty through corruption and Heaven's displeasure shown through natural disasters.

Third, change occurs during times of stability and security when it is possible to have time to reflect and then to move forward from the given towards the experimental and the new. The Enlightenment occurred during one such period. Europe had survived and left behind the Wars of Religion of the 17th Century, and as a result, by the early 18th Century some of the key monarchies were being tamed – England, Scotland and the Netherlands for example. In a long period of relative peace and with old systems being democratically changed it was possible to be speculative and adventurous with ideas. The post Second World War era was another such time and from this period of stability and security the Declaration of Human Rights was created. It was a period, at least in the Western world, when it was possible for the 1960s' revolution of pop music, art and revolutionary thought to emerge. It was also a period in which the culture felt sufficiently comfortable to enable and allow social mobility and it was as a result the period of the rise of meritocracy.

In the 1980s to 1990s prior to the collapse caused largely by the current economic worldview, and thus in a period of confidence, it is no accident that the academic and artistic worlds were caught up in the delights of postmodernism and deconstruction. You need to be confident to do that and to so radically challenge or even dismiss the predominant story or stories.

Fourth, change comes from technology, which is almost always unforeseen but which changes reality or at least changes how we relate to or narrate reality. The discovery of how to make, control, and use fire by our Stone Age ancestors radically changed life and our perception of ourselves and it is not without significance that all major cultures have a story of fire being a gift from the gods. In the case of the Greeks, from a god who pitied humanity and whose gift caused him to be punished by the gods forever. Those old Greek hierarchical gods could see how this technology which had been their exclusive right would open a new chapter in the relationship between them and humanity – and they did not like what they saw coming. The invention of paper money in China in the 7th Century AD enabled Chinese commerce to transform itself and ensured that a community of bankers would stretch from one end of the Empire to another over time controlling and influencing the way trade was carried out. The invention of the movable printing press in Europe in the 15th centuries launched the Reformation, the rise of capitalism and was the means by which the Renaissance reached out to the hearts, minds and aspirations of Europeans. We are only just glimpsing the possibilities of the Internet. Social media is a term of both optimism and concern depending upon its content and its target.

The danger with the technology approach is that this is now so deeply rooted in a mechanistic worldview that it is almost impossible to imagine any technology as having a narrative dimension. Instead it often becomes the most significant example of the market economy and thus of a story of which we are almost completely unaware but with which we are now grappling and against which it often feels as if we are losing.

This has been very well expressed by Garry Jacobs and Winston Nagan:

Humanity has a strange propensity to become enslaved to the instruments it creates for its advancement. Technology can dominate social existence and enslave as well as liberate.

Technology in the factory is making human labor dispensable and converting employment into a privilege rather than a fundamental right. So too, a blind faith in the wisdom of the impersonal marketplace can destroy social integrity and undermine human values. So completely have we accepted this voluntary bondage that we regard as legitimate almost any scientific quest and any technological invention regardless of its impact on humanity. We do not even hold scientists responsible for the consequences of the technologies they invent.³

9. Is this a Period of Value Change and if so then what does that Involve or Mean?

*“Inside this new love, die.
Your way begins on the other side. Become the sky.
Take an axe to the prison wall. Escape. Walk out
Like someone suddenly born into colour. Do it now.
You’re covered with thick cloud. Slide out the side. Die,
and be quiet. Quietness is the surest sign that you’ve died.
Your old life was a frantic running
From silence.
The speechless full moon comes out now.”*

(From the poems of the 13th century Persian Sufi poet Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks)

As all psychoanalysts know, change only happens to a person – and it can be argued to a culture – when the person involved realises that they have a problem, usually an addiction. A mainstream cultural addiction is excessive materialism. We buy in order to fill the unbearable void of the lack of any sense of something greater, a more significant narrative, and a belief in a higher purpose or power. Our values, as noted earlier, are now laid out for us by consumer driven groups. To defend ourselves against meaninglessness we build a fortress of finances, a bulwark of money, and a wall of indifference. To break through this, to escape as Rumi puts in the poem above, we have to admit our addiction to materialism and consumerism. Until that happens, until we see the story we have taken refuge in for the worthless thing it is, we can never change effectively. We can of course propose inquests into why business behaves badly; why banks are corrupt; why corporations are deceitful. But this will never change the core until we see the degree of addiction to the consumerist worldview which we live within and which we believe is reality.

The trouble with addiction is that it replaces relationships and we can see that, not just in the breakdown of relationships within families, communities, nations and cultures, but also in the breakdown of our relationship with nature. It helps explain why we are in such a mess, but does not of itself help us to escape. A major feature of a dysfunctional personality is that of separation. This is a feature of our contemporary world as we have explored above where the personal is separated from the professional; the rest of nature is separated from us; heart and mind are separated with the mind being given prime significance. Reintegration is what is needed whether that is the reintegration of our own personalities or reintegration of the personality of our culture. We have cast aside so much and taken on so little in our quest for ma-

terial satisfaction and this has even affected our alternative movements. For example, much of the environmental movement is about trying to keep everything the way it was. Indeed, this is made explicit in the term conservation. Yet we all know that the only permanent thing is change – and we have known this for millennia. The oldest book in the world in everyday use from antiquity to today is the 3000-year-old Chinese classic the I Jing (I Ching). The title means The Book of Changes.

We seem to be in a time of challenging change and yet also seem to be unable to significantly change. To some, we are on the edge of disaster and only through a total collapse can new life emerge. This death and resurrection model is so powerful in so many cultures. Only through descending deep within ourselves can we recognize the degree of our need to reject the old ways and find, through rising again, the potential for new ways. Or as the poet Geoffrey Hill says, “No bloodless myth will hold” because, for too long, we who are the privileged living in the developed or perhaps better described overdeveloped world have pretended that we live in a nice, fuzzy, vaguely kind world of good intentions. This despite the fact that even in our overdeveloped world there are huge swathes of poverty and deprivation. However, for a story to really work it has to deal with pain, failure, decline and death otherwise it is a fable rather than a story through which we can understand and therefore respond to the world. Through focusing on our own comfort we have allowed ourselves to hand over power to mechanisms which are dysfunctional and values which come from narcissism without a sense of being part of a greater story. Our own individual story has become the centre of the universe. It is from this that we now need to awaken.

To do this we need as individuals and as societies to realise our addiction to materialism and stop trying to ensure we can remain addicted. Forget believing that a bank reform or another climate COP in some exotic location means we are dealing with the heart of the problem. None of this is actually real unless we address our underlying belief systems and values and the stories that brought us to where we are today. In psychoanalytical terms this is part of the treatment called regression when we deal with what we bring to this moment of choice. But regression is only of use if it helps us to understand why we are where we are today and leads us to what is known as emergence. To do this we need to start telling stories of what life could be like, post this addiction and its twin, separation. One part of that phenomenon of separation is that we can forget the huge section of the world’s population who go to bed hungry.

So yes we probably are at a time of change. Yes we could change. Yes we could emerge from the spell of the past in its distorted form. But to do so requires honesty and self-examination, which is harder than many think. The danger is that we will opt instead for action before we have undertaken reflection.

10. The Challenges and Traps We Will Encounter On Our ValuesQuest

The quest for values is lined with challenges and traps and in exploring the guiding stories which shape us we also have to be conscious of the basic story formats and assumptions we all bring to this. The following are some of the key areas where what might seem reality or normal to some of us is in fact so culturally determined by our own stories as to be a problem for others from other story backgrounds. We live so deeply within our own stories that we have no idea that they are stories rather than reality *per se*. We use words, which we believe

we understand to mean just one thing, but others hear them as meaning something completely different.

The following are the most common pitfalls which those of us who have emerged from or are comfortable within a Western largely post-Judaean Christian influenced Enlightenment culture have to watch out for. While these seem to be about reality they are in fact so steeped in our own narrative history as to appear very odd to other worldviews and cultures. Worse than that, they often actually prevent us being able to respond creatively to what we usually call crises and others see as opportunities.

The Divide Between the Religious and Secular

The divide between the religious and secular (sometimes described as a divide between the spiritual/mystical and the thinking of the Enlightenment) marks perhaps a defining problem. By whose authority can a story be trusted? All overarching narratives – religious or scientific – work on the assumption that they have an authoritative basis for their story. In the spiritual and mystical worlds it is a belief that something transcendent has been revealed or experienced which places the material world within a much larger story of meaning and purpose. In the scientific world, it is the belief that this is based upon a rational study and therefore conclusion, from which truth can be established and verified. The struggle to deny the authority and therefore right to speak or argue with each other is a sad state of affairs, which has its roots primarily in the 19th Century.

The Gender Issues

Gender has become, in the last century, a pressing issue that all overarching stories have to address because until now they – be they religious, ideological or scientific communities – have been male dominated and essentially patriarchal. Replacing a patriarchal model with a matriarchal model is not the same as taking seriously the fact that almost all current stories have a hierarchical and patriarchal bias. The struggle to find a genuinely non-sexist approach to core narratives is a major one and the dangers of finding easy solutions which are not actually proper solutions is one to be guarded against.

Pluralism – the Diversity of Ideas

Everyone inhabits a range of stories yet we still often speak about values as if they have to come from just one worldview for them to be valid. The reverse of this is to have no critical examination of values arising from diverse traditions – which is often highlighted by gender issues. This is not pluralism but the worst kind of unthinking multi-culturalism or relativism. To take pluralism into account requires a breadth of understanding but also an ability to imagine a world where diversity is treasured rather than feared as the route to division. It also challenges those who believe that their value system is the only really important one – which today tends to be the story of secularism.

Dis-identifying Ourselves from our own Belief Systems

It is not easy, but essential, to look beyond the rim of our core narrative or narratives which have shaped us up until now and think beyond where our culture and values have

brought us. The other side of the challenge is to not lose the values and ethos our own narrative has created, which we wish to treasure, continue and build upon. The first step in order to reconcile these two challenges is for us to start to be able to move outside the stories, which have trapped us. Without this ability we can never begin to address the stories and their fears which have trapped us. This is often the role of storytellers – playwrights, novelists and poets who can transport us in terms of time, place and meaning as no other human agency can.

Understanding the Powerful Role of Dualism

We need to look at key dualisms which force us into opposing camps because in many cultures dualism is about completeness rather than about opposition and notions therefore of right or wrong. The classic example of dualism as opposition is the belief that there once was a perfect world but that through evil this perfection was shattered and that what we now need to do is restore this perfection by overcoming the evil forces which brought about this break – “The Fall” as it is known in Christian theology and mythology.

Most activist organisations seem to create their own version of “The Fall” in order to point out what went wrong which they are nowhere to fix. “The Fall” might be the Enlightenment and its mechanistic world view; the Industrial Revolution and its exploitative use of Nature colonialism of the 18th and 19th centuries with its destruction of indigenous cultures; or some other moment which is deemed to have altered humanity in some fundamental, yet negative, way. This means the world is automatically polarised and one section is in the eyes of the other, beyond redemption.

The Human Tendency to Undulate Between Apocalypse and Utopia

One aspect of the dualism model is that we tend to undulate between the extremes of Armageddon (the catastrophe) and Utopia (the paradise), between a world which collapses and a world of total bliss. Western culture and to a certain extent Indian and Chinese cultures have been deeply affected in times of crisis by polarised visions of the future.

Why Utopias Fail

The failure to recognize that human beings are not always nice has undermined grander schemes to create perfect, just, fair, equitable and egalitarian societies than any other single factor. The great promise of the French Revolution of 1789 turned swiftly into The Terror, then into the regime of Napoleon, and then back to monarchy. The utopia of Soviet Communism led to the Gulags while in China the dream of a just society led to over 60 million people dying of starvation in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. People just don't do as they are told even when it is in their best interests so we need to beware of any story, which assumes they will. Instead, we need to look at those stories, which assume wickedness, sin, malevolence or just straight cunning. This is why in the classic folk stories and myths of the world there is always a joker, a figure who goes against the grain. Taking seriously the inevitable failure of all grand schemes to reform humanity is an essential part of the role of stories. The Achilles' heel is not just a metaphor for an individual's inevitable weakness. It is a metaphor about what it means to be human.

11. ValuesQuest – The Search For Values

When your life looks back –

As it will, at itself, at you – what will it say?

(From, Come, Thief, poems by the American poet Jane Hirshfield)

“The truth is that the truth is often a paradox”

(From Chapter 78 of the ancient Chinese classic the Dao De Jing)

The Club of Rome is committed to addressing the root causes of the challenges facing humankind. It does so with a systemic, holistic and long-term approach. Values and the role they play in determining the future of humanity are vitally important.

ValuesQuest wishes to create space for dialogue within which diverse ideas can be explored.

The Club is independent and not beholden to special interests. It is able to provide a forum where a range of different views, ideas and hopes are expressed.

The Club gives high priority to its work on values. ValuesQuest represents a new programme for the Club as a serious, thoughtful, creative and exciting adventure.

The Club is also interested in engaging with new stakeholders, including with the worlds of creative arts and spirituality. The Club of Rome wishes to create an intellectual space or time of reflection.

The next major step of the ValuesQuest programme is to undertake a series of meetings at a major festival of arts and ideas and to ask leading writers, artists, thinkers, novelists and playwrights to offer their insights and experiences. The findings will feed into the overall Club of Rome work on values.

These will implement the further development of the ValuesQuest programme.

We invite you to review our website and join our debate on values as part of our ValuesQuest work programme.

For more information on ValuesQuest go to www.clubofrome.org

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Notes

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2. Id.,
3. Garry Jacobs and Winston Nagan, “The Global Values Discourse,” *Eruditio* 1, No.1 (2012): 136-149.