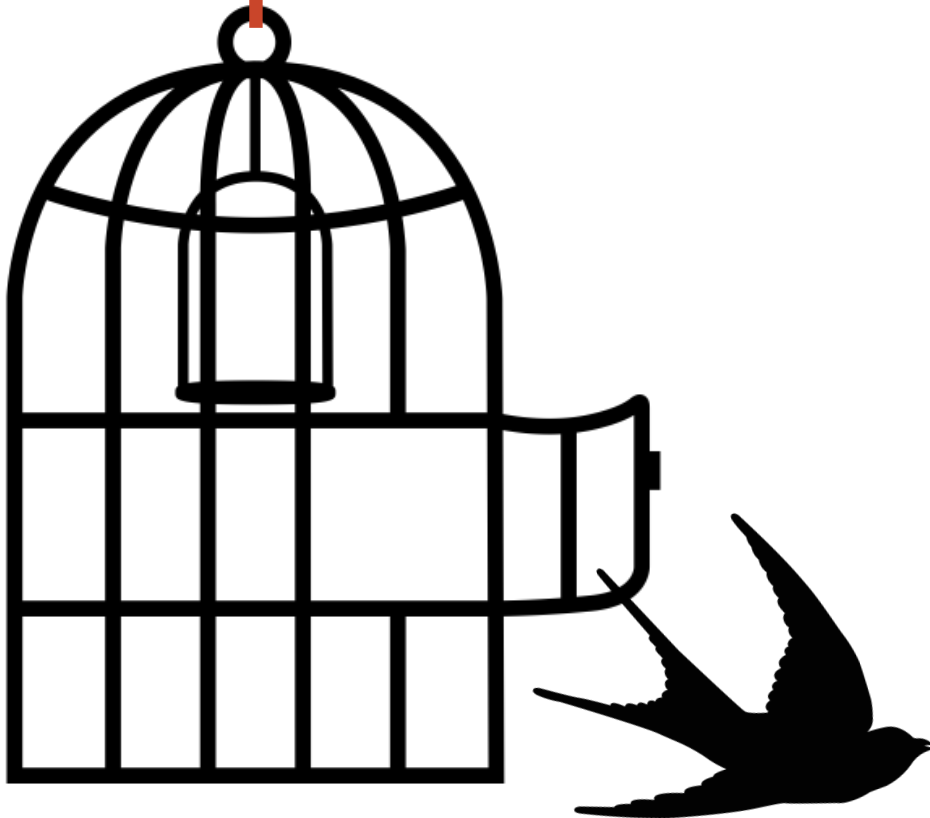


Liberation

Religion beyond
Belief

Book manuscript draft by Dino Karabeg



To Noah

Front page illustration:

Swallow by John Melven and
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Introduction

“Man is born free, and everywhere he’s in chains”,

Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in “The Social Contract”, in 1762, to make a case for democracy.

Did democracy set us free?

It is tempting to conclude that it did indeed—if we recall the times when humans could be bought and owned; or when Galilei was in house arrest, for claiming that the Earth was not standing still. We can think and speak and act and travel and pursue happiness as we please—within the limits of the social contract, of course.

But here is why we should be cautious: Rousseau wasn’t talking about physical chains. They are not everywhere but rare—compared to the cultural and institutional chains; which bind us ever so strongly because they are invisible. Slavery was outlawed when we conceived of it differently. Galilei was arrested to hinder a certain way of thinking from spreading—which, however, liberated itself; and changed not only the way our ancestors saw the world, but also their way of being in the world. And consequently the world itself.

Democracy, and so much more, resulted.

Could once again a different way to think lead to our liberation—
from the kind of ‘chains’ we don’t even know we bear?

Could a different way to be in the world again lead to a comprehensive improvement of our condition?



“In sociology, the **iron cage** is a concept introduced by Max Weber to describe the increased rationalization inherent in social life, particularly in Western capitalist societies. The ‘iron cage’ thus traps individuals in **systems** based purely on teleological efficiency, rational calculation and control.”

This excerpt from Wikipedia points to a pragmatic reason why **we must change the way we think**: It keeps us trapped in societal systems that make us unfree—observed a founder of scientific sociology.

And in “Physics and Philosophy”, a half-century after Weber and a half-century ago, a founder of quantum mechanics pointed to a fundamental reason. Listen to his language:

“[T]he nineteenth century developed an extremely rigid frame for natural science which formed not only science but also the general outlook of great masses of people. This frame was supported by the fundamental **concepts** of classical physics, space, time, **matter** and **causality**; the concept of **reality** applied to the things or events that we could perceive by our senses or that could be observed by means of the refined tools that technical science had provided. Matter was the primary reality. The progress of science was pictured as a crusade of **conquest** into the material world. **Utility** was the watchword of the time.

On the other hand, this frame was so **narrow and rigid** that it was difficult to find a place in it for many concepts of our language that had always belonged to its very substance, for instance, the concepts of mind, of the **human** soul or of **life**.”

Werner Heisenberg wrote “Physics and Philosophy” to point out that this “narrow and rigid” way to conceive of “reality”, which our general culture imbibed from the 19th century science, or the *narrow frame* as we are calling it, was detrimental to culture. And that the results of 20th century physics constituted its rigorous disproof. Heisenberg wrote “Physics and

Philosophy” anticipating that the most valuable consequence of atomic physics would be a **cultural transformation**—which would result from the **dissolution** of the *narrow frame*.

“The future will either be an inspired product of a great cultural revival, or there will be no **future**.”

This assessment of our situation, which the leader and co-founder of The Club of Rome made in 1980, based on a decade of this global think tank’s research into the future prospects of mankind, points to a reason why change is mandatory and urgent.

“It is absolutely **necessary** to find a way **to** change course”,

Aurelio Peccei concluded in his analysis. Subsequent research on climate **change** and other threatening trends proved him right. Sociologists now see us as living in a “risk society”—a society impregnated with awareness of existential risks; which we don’t know how to handle.

Could different **thinking** be “a way to change course”?



We proposed a different way to think.

I say “we” because I was fortunate to work with constellations of collaborators, who were often creative leaders in their fields. And because we built on insights of visionary thinkers, or *giants* as I’ll be calling them. And because I benefited from a tenured position in an academic department that tolerated my *transdisciplinary* transgression for an entire quarter of a century. And to express gratitude for other help I’ve received.

The proposed way of thinking distinguishes itself by *deliberate* use of information to illuminate a theme.

It might seem obvious to me that the Earth is flat; but there are people who have traveled around it; and others who have seen it from outer space. When I take their reported experiences into account—I cannot but change my mind.

We called the proposed way of thinking *knowledge federation*; and supported it by a straightforward principle:

Knowledge must be federated.

It is only when I've made my best effort to consider all potentially relevant evidence, that I can justifiably say “I *know*”.

To *federate knowledge* means to combine published insights and other relevant artifacts, and update our understanding and handling of a theme. Political federation combines smaller geopolitical units to give them visibility and power. *Knowledge federation* does that with information.

You might not think much of our proposal when I introduce it to you in this way; when you see how obvious and simple it is. But there is a catch:

Knowledge federation too is federated!

Instead of abandoning the way we look at the world to habit and unenlightened interest—we asked “What should *information* be like (we define this word to include also the way information is created and used) if it should answer to the contemporary vital needs of people and society? And we devised means for *federating* the answer, by taking advantage of pertinent knowledge and technology.

To pinpoint **the gist of our proposal**, we drew the image of a bus with candle headlights and called it the Modernity *ideogram* (*ideograms* are metaphorical images that depict ideas). We explained that the bus represented our society-and-culture; and its headlights the way we look at the world to comprehend and handle it. The point **is** that the technology en-

abled our society-and-culture to change or ‘move’ at a breath-taking speed; and that the way we look at the world remained as we’ve inherited it from the past.

We must *design* a fundamentally *different way to see* the world.

As different from our usual *information* as the lightbulb is different from the candle; by taking due advantage of information-related knowledge and technology—to answer to our society’s new vital and urgent need.

The *substance of our proposal* is a complete *prototype of new ‘headlights’*.

Prototypes are real-life models, already embedded in practical reality; with provisions to update the conventional practice.

We called the proposed *prototype* Knowledge Federation; and we called *knowledge federation* the corresponding way of looking at the world and knowledge-work *praxis* (informed practice). While *knowledge federation* comprises a broad spectrum of technical ideas and innovations, which amount to ‘the lightbulb vs. the candle’ difference, the key technique you have already seen: It is to *design* concepts. By assigning to them meanings as the mathematicians do, by making *conventions*: “When I say x I mean y ”. We call the concepts defined in this way *keywords*; and we distinguish them by writing them in light italic font.

Often but not always, *keywords* are adapted from the terminology of an academic discipline or a leading thinker. *Keywords* enable us to bring the ways of seeing that were developed in academic and other traditions, and the resulting insights, to general use; to ‘stand on the shoulders of *giants*’ and see differently; to combine what the *giants* saw and see further.



This book has a villain.

We call it *power structure* because it is a complex structure, comprising institutions or systems, the way we see the world and our own condition—exactly as Max Weber suggested when he warned us about the “iron cage”.

The *power structure* enables us to conceive of “the enemy” in a new way.

It empowers us to reconceive of political action; and begin a whole new phase of liberation. To update our comprehension of power and freedom—by recourse to state-of-the-art insights

Pierre Bourdieu wrote in 1977:

“Symbolic power is that *invisible* power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it.”

He explained:

“Symbolic *power* – as a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of conforming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action of the world and thus the world itself, and almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical or economic), by virtue of the specific effect of mobilization – is a power that can be exercised only if it is *recognized*, that is misrecognized as arbitrary. This means that *symbolic power* (...) is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it, i.e. in the very *structure of the field in which belief is produced and reproduced*.”

Power has morphed in “Information Age”; imprisonment and instruments of torture have been surpassed and rendered obsolete. By wielding “symbolic power”, the *power structure* can make us act contrary to our interests; even contrary to our values.

By being in control of what we see and believe, the *power structure* easily **circumvents** the checks and balances that the founders of our democracies could conceive of—who, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, saw us humans as rational decision makers; and forged our “social contract” and our institutions accordingly.

Have you noticed that the electoral process can degenerate and be a mockery of **democracy**?

This book’s purpose is to enkindle a revolution.



This book has a **mission**.

Where by “mission” I mean a practicable goal by which the chosen purpose is effectively pursued.

Its mission **is to vindicate religion**.

Impassioned reactions reach me as soon as I utter this word. Several of my friends objected: Why use a word that has so many negative connotations to so many people? Why not say “spirituality” or something similarly neutral?

While I acknowledged and shared their concerns, I have several reasons for keeping “religion”. One of them is that we must liberate ourselves from outdated ways of seeing and speaking. Could conceiving of “religion” differently be a good place to start?

Defining concepts by *convention* is similar to recycling: We give an old word a new purpose, and a new life; and avoid creating new words, and letting the old ones pollute our minds and culture. “Religion” is such a beautiful word to ‘recycle’! It is etymologically related to “ligament”; it suggests a connecting tissue, and a re-connection.

So let us define *religion* as what connects each of us to our purpose; and all of us together in a society.

When we define “religion” in this way, we see that the modernity does in fact have a *religion*. It is founded on *materialism* as system of belief—where we conceive of the world as consisting of inanimate matter driven by causal laws; where we undertake to comprehend and handle it in a similar way as we would comprehend and handle a mechanism; where we deny or ignore everything that cannot be understood in this way as “non-scientific” or “unreal”.

A central tenet of this *religion* is that the natural evolution is driven by “survival of the fittest”; and that the societal evolution should best be conceived accordingly. Hence we simplify the complex world by considering our “social contract” and our society’s institutions as the “reality” that defines the limits of thought and action; and we act within those limits as it may best serve what we perceive as “our own interests”—exactly as one would play a competitive game.

The “iron cage”—the modernity’s *power structure*—results.

Could we liberate ourselves by *federating religion*?

In “Physics and Philosophy” Heisenberg singled out religion as that part of our culture that had been most severely damaged **when we looked at the world through narrow frame**:

“It was especially difficult to find in this framework room for those parts of reality that had been the object of the

traditional religion and seemed now more or less only imaginary. Therefore, in those European countries in which one was wont to follow the ideas up to their extreme consequences, an open **hostility** of science **toward religion developed (...).**"

It has become modern to consider religion as a rigid and narrow way to look at the world, held against counterevidence. And to hold religion culpable of inhibiting progress, or metaphorically, of 'holding Galilei in house arrest'. And to consider science as our liberator. We'll come to see things differently.

It was the *power structure* that arrested Galilei.

And it's the *power structure* that '**holds Galilei in house arrest**' again.

We'll come to **see** the historical conflict between science and religion as a conflict between two *power structures*. And **liberated science** and *religion* as **keys to our liberation**.



This book has a hero.

It is Buddhadasa, Thailand's enlightened monk and Buddhism reformer.

Having renounced secular life in 1926 and spent a couple of years in monasteries in Bangkok, Buddhadasa thought This just cannot be it! Armed with a collection of authentic Pali scriptures and firm dedication, he withdrew to an abandoned forest monastery near his native village Chaya in Southern Thailand, to live and practice as Buddha did.

Having found out by experimenting, first on himself and then with a community of monks that grew around him, that **the essence** of Buddha's teaching **was** not at all as it was believed, but comprehensive liberation, including **liberation** from belief—in 1932 Buddhadasa founded a forest monastery called “Suan Mokkh” (The Garden of Liberation).

Having also found out, by reading the scriptures of other religions and engaging in dialogs with their adepts, that religions tend to have the same liberating essence as their point of origin, which tends to be similarly ignored; and that we modern people vitally needed that essence—Buddhadasa saw it as his duty to do whatever he could to share his insight with the world.

The Suan Mokkh forest monastery got a library, where monks and visitors could inform themselves about liberation; and a workshop, where monks could render their insights as paintings and sculptures. Spiritual Theatre was built to exhibit this work; and depict the way to liberation in whatever media were available to monks in a Thai forest in the 1950s.

Not long before he would pass away, in 1993, Buddhadasa established an international retreat center, where visitors from around the world could learn Buddha's method for liberation; and an international monastery where they could practice it, by living as the Suan Mokkh monks did; and as Buddha and his disciples lived and practiced.

In what follows I'll invite you to join me in *federating* Buddhadasa's insight.



I will do that in part by sharing brief and allegorical real-life social situation stories; which we call *vignettes*.

Here is one.

We were transported by automobile from the Suan Mokkh international monastery to the Walailak University in a neighboring province, where about one hundred students were waiting to hear Ajahn Medhi's speech. ("Ajahn" is the title given in Thailand to advanced and respected monks, who are qualified to teach others.) It was Sunday afternoon, and his speech was to conclude an intensive weekend course called "Know thyself".

My task was to put the ball in play.

Introducing myself briefly, I said that I was a professor from Norway "where the soil is now frozen and my students couldn't dream of walking barefoot as you do". And that I came to Suan Mokkh every year around Christmas time, to study and practice under Ajahn Medhi as teacher and abbot. I explained that a discovery was made at Suan Mokkh that could make a large difference in the world. And that I took it upon myself to learn and embody it, and help it reach out further.

Ajahn Buddhadasa, I elaborated, considered his discovery to be an antidote to the global onslaught of **materialism**. And I asked for a show of hands: "How many of you believe that materialism **can be stopped**?"

I looked at the students as I spoke. Aside from being barefoot and seated cross-legged on the floor, aligned in straight rows and columns, they looked just like the students in the USA or Norway or any other place where I had taught—with Western-branded T-shirts, cellular phones and all. A handful of them dutifully raised their arms. Even here, in Buddhadasa's own neighborhood and only a generation later, young people don't believe that his mission could be possible.

Ajahn Medhi then told them the very essence of Buddhadasa's insight, by recounting Buddhadasa's original interpretation of *paticcasamuppada* (dependent origination)—while pointing to a large Wheel of Life panel behind him and interpreting its imagery. Medhi is a handsome man in his fifties and an animated speaker.

But does his audience understand him?

I studied the students' expressions: Do they see the connection between what's being told and their own lives and interests? Do they understand the broader significance of Buddhadasa's discovery in the time we live in? Are they at all aware of the civilizational drama we are part of?

I was once again witnessing **the curse of knowledge**.

It **hinders** *all* communication: Since the person speaking *knows* what he intends to say, it appears to him that his words also *communicate* that; even when his audience is left in the dark.

I was reminded of Bela Banathy, the systems scientist who saw the cultural transformation that is our theme at hand as the second large phase of **our civilization's evolution**—the first being the advent of agriculture. Our distant ancestors learned to cultivate land; we must learn to cultivate culture.

In doing that, we must face an obstacle they didn't have:

While the fruits of cultivating land are available for anyone to see and taste, **the fruits of human cultivation are hidden** in the body of their owner.

Could this be the reason why the cultural evolution fell behind the development of technology by some ten thousand years?



As the water in the lake was drying out, some water animals developed a new gene—which enabled them to breathe on dry land.

This was, science has taught us, how the natural evolution progressed.

And as Richard Dawkins pointed out, this is also a useful way to understand the cultural and societal evolution. Only there we must talk about *memes* instead of genes.

We have already seen why socio-cultural re-evolution cannot be delayed:

‘Our lake is drying out’.

From the soil we extract minerals, and turn them into material objects; and ultimately into waste and pollution. By a conservative estimate, our “ecological footprint” is 70% larger than our planet can endure.

What *memes* will **enable** us to ‘breathe on dry land’?

Peccei considered “human quality” to be the key. On the morning of his dying day he dictated to his secretary from a hospital bed:

“**Human development** is the most important goal.”

It is in this context that Buddhadasa’s rediscovery must be seen. And our *federation* of it as well.

Could it be the key to a culture that pursues “human quality”, instead of material production?

By *federating* the Buddhadasa *meme*, we undertake to develop and *prototype* a general way to *federate* culture-transformative *memes*. And help foster a ‘cultural ecology’ where transformative *memes* can grow; where “human quality” can bloom.



Why did I choose “religion” as theme to put the ball in play for *knowledge federation*?

When Nietzsche exclaimed “Got ist tot!” (God is dead), he did not of course mean that God physically died. He was referring to the functions that religion performed in human cultures—which were sentenced to death when the *narrow frame undermined* religion. What were those functions?

To see one of them, think of Biblical Moses returning from Mount Sinai with Ten Commandments—which, it was believed, were carved in stone by God himself.

Religion provided our ancestors the *principles* to live by.

But modernity doesn’t believe in principles carved in stone!

Can *knowledge federation* reconstitute principles?

And if it can—what difference will that make?



We applied *knowledge federation* to five pivotal *categories*; “pivotal” because they determine our culture’s evolutionary “course”:

- innovation
- communication
- *foundation* (assumptions on which beliefs are founded)
- *method* (by which we create or verify what we believe in)
- values

In each case, the result of *federating* the relevant academic results and other data was an *insight* that overturns what we tend to consider as true without questioning; and a principle or a rule of thumb that **reverses** our habitual **handling**.

And when we used those five *insights* as a frame of reference, to illuminate other core themes such as democracy and education and science and religion—similar reversals of belief and handling resulted. We formulated ten *themes* to illustrate that. We drew a pentagram-like *ideogram*, whose five points represented the *insights*, and whose ten edges represented the *themes*. Seeking a way to “put an end to war” for instance, in the existing order of things must be seen as distinctly utopian; but not when this matter is considered in the context of the five *insights*—and the *power structure* dynamic is understood.

The updates that the five *insights* are pointing to turned out to be so closely related, that making any of them necessitates that we make them all. A general insight resulted:

Large and comprehensive change can be easy—even when the attempts to make **smaller** and obviously necessary **changes** **proved futile**.

A strategy for “changing course” followed—to focus on comprehensive change, of our cultural and societal order of things or *paradigm* as a whole; by changing the way we think to begin with.

The principles that followed from the five *insights*, and pointed to required changes in our way of being and acting, all turned out to be instances of a single general principle or rule of thumb:

Make things *whole*.

What things? *Wholeness* is all-inclusive! We cannot be *whole* unless our social, cultural and bio-physical environments are *whole* and vice versa.

Holotopia is an astonishingly attractive vision of an attainable future, which follows from the five *insights* and this principle. Holotopia is a *prototype* that includes an actionable **strategy** and project **to** make this vision come true; to “**change course**” by overturning the current *paradigm*.

How to apprehend *holotopia*? How to make peace with a change so large?

We bring up the image of Galilei in house arrest to evoke a historical parallel. The comprehensive change that is now ready to begin, which is made concrete by the five *insights* and actionable by the Holotopia *prototype*, is analogous to the one that was germinating in Galilei’s time:

- Industrial Revolution made work dramatically more effective
- Gutenberg Revolution revolutionized communication
- Enlightenment changed the *foundation* of beliefs
- Science changed the *method* by which beliefs were created
- Humanism transformed values

We resort to the *elephant* as metaphor when we want to make it clear that *holotopia* is a coherent whole—a whole new cultural and societal order of things or *paradigm*.

There’s been ‘an elephant in the room’ when the 20th century’s *giants* wrote or spoke—but we failed to see him because of disciplinary divisions; and because of our cognitive biases and lack of interest. We heard them talk about a ‘thick snake’, a ‘fan’, a ‘tree-trunk’ and a ‘rope’, often in Greek or Latin; they didn’t make sense and we ignored them. **How differently our knowledge fares when we understand that it** was the ‘trunk’, the ‘ear’, the ‘leg’ and the ‘tail’ of a huge and exotic ‘animal’ they were describing; an ‘animal’ that nobody has as yet seen!

The *elephant* **is** not a mere curiosity—it is a **roadmap** to “a great cultural revival”; **to a world worth living in**, a future worth striving for.

We use Antoni Gaudí's Sagrada Família as metaphor to highlight that *holotopia* is transgenerational. We will not complete it in our lifetime.

But **what a difference it will make to begin it!**

I hold back from telling you about the intoxicating future prospect that *holotopia* brings along, not to distract you from the sober task at hand we must attend to first:

Liberation.



It's hard to believe that *holotopia* is for real?

Let me put your mind to rest:

I don't expect you to believe what I say.

Or even to understand it all. With the second book of the Holotopia series we'll begin to elaborate *holotopia's* details. Here I only want to show you around; give you a rough idea of what's there, of *holotopia* as a whole. And if any of this might interest you, invite you to a conversation.

I am still learning and improvising this new role of mine, of *knowledge federation's* "evangelist"—which is what the advanced stage of our project now requires. By education and vocation I am a theoretical scientist. It has been a private joke to call myself an *academic fundamentalist*—by which I mean that I am above all interested in what is academically fundamental; and vehement about doing it right.

My reason for engaging in this line of work was that **I saw a way to correct a fundamental error**—which I'll call *reification*.

Reification is the reason why we are ‘riding into the future in a bus with candle headlights’.

Nobody in his right mind would *design* a bus with candle headlights! The reason why we did keep them is because we *reified* them as ‘headlights’. The reason why we didn’t realize they are dysfunctional is that we believed that they serve us an entirely *different* function—that they showed us “the reality objectively”, as it truly is.

“A new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive and move toward higher levels.”

Einstein’s fundamental observations are alone sufficient to disqualify not only *materialism* (the specific way to conceive of “reality”) but “reality” as the *foundation* for knowledge as such: Because it has been a persisting source of human illusions and errors; and because “the correspondence with reality” cannot be rationally or empirically verified.

To this fundamental insight we added another—that “the social construction of reality”, as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann called it in the title of their book, or *reification* as we do, *served* throughout history and to date *to legitimate* obsolete and *dysfunctional* societal *systems*; and hence as the way in which the *power structure* holds us in check.

We live in a unequalled moment in human history:

We are ready to liberate ourselves!

Once and for all! First from *reification*; then from the *power structure*. As the case was in Galilei’s time, fundamental insights empower us, they indeed *compel* us, to make those two re-evolutionary steps.

As the case was then, this update of the *foundation* of our beliefs opens a *wondrous* creative frontier to *academia*!

A spectrum of questions are to be asked and answered anew. The question of academic quality and rigor, for instance. And what “truth” means, if it doesn’t mean “correspondence with reality”. And “What is academically fundamental?”—if we no longer take it for granted that discovering the bits and pieces of the ‘universal mechanism’ must be the answer. And a whole host of similarly fundamental or pivotal questions down the line.

So here is what we did:

We developed a *prototype* answer to those questions.

That’s what the **Knowledge Federation** *prototype* really is about: It **manifests a creative frontier**; by prototyping the varieties of work it invites.

Truth by *convention* enabled us to construct a *rigorous* academic *foundation* for knowledge—entirely independent of “reality”. To liberate *information* from its historical bondage—and have it serve rational purposes; and benefit the people and society.

We used *truth by convention* to define *design epistemology* as a *convention*—and *assign* a new purpose to *information*. The *convention* we made was that *information* is to be considered as a core element in human systems, and adapted to the functions that must be served; in order to make systems functional or *whole*. To handle *information* as one would handle a pair of headlights.

The *design epistemology* specified also the criteria—which replace “correspondence with reality”; and tell what *information* needs to be like, to serve us as it *needs* to serve us.

On *design epistemology as foundation* we developed a *prototype* of a *methodology* called Polyscopic Modeling or *polyscopy*—which generalizes the scientific approach to knowledge; and enables us to create reliable and relied-on insights about *any* theme of interest—and on any desired level of generality.

Polyscopy offers a rigorous foundation for, and enables, academic *trans-disciplinarity*—which is, interestingly, analogous to the ending of feudalism and the beginning of constitutional democracy. The *methodology*—as a way to spell out the rules and subject *information* to the “social contract”—has a similar role to the one that the constitution has in a political system: It subjugates the power of information; it reclaims information from the *power structure*—and gives it back to the people.

We then developed *knowledge federation* as a general *praxis* by which a worldview that offers and reconciles multiple ways of seeing can be coherently maintained. And by which the academic and other insights can be brought together and used to create *prototypes*—and impact the society and culture directly.

What new functions will the university institution have, in a post-*materialistic* social and academic reality?

One of them will without doubt be the function that the founders of the original Academia undertook to fulfill—correcting the way people see the world; or metaphorically—rebuilding the society’s ‘headlights’.

The function of ‘headlights’ is to provide vision.

That’s why the *holotopia* vision is there. The role of the *Holotopia dialog*, which extends this book, is to organize us in collectively updating this vision; and in updating the *dialog* itself.

The *Holotopia dialog* is the ‘headlights’; and an academically conceived way to rebuild the ‘headlights’.

In the emerging *paradigm* this creation of the ‘headlights’ is “basic research”.

You may now comprehend exactly what goes on here: Although to the best of my knowledge everything I am telling you here is beyond reproach—as an *academic fundamentalist* I am not making that claim or

depending on it. The function of this book is to *ignite* the *dialog*. By putting in front of you some uncommon ways to look at things—and offering a way to reassess them together. The creative challenges we are working with are “How to turn socio-technical ‘candles’ into ‘lightbulbs?’” And “How to restore its core capability to *academia*—the capability to *evolve* the way we see the world?”

Academic rigor here is not in telling you how the reality is or will or should be; or in rigorously adhering to a disciplinary procedure. We are simply *acting* as academic researchers should act—in an academic and social reality where the “university” is not *reified* as biology and sociology and other traditional disciplines; but re-conceived to serve as “central intelligence agency to modern civil society”—as John Ziman phrased it.



You see—this can in no time become forbiddingly complex; and “philosophical”.

We’ll keep it simple. “Show don’t tell!” commands the slogan of Stanford University’s d-school. *That’s* what I’m about to do—*illustrate knowledge federation* and *holotopia*; by focusing on a single important detail—religion. And showing how correcting the way we look at the world, through *knowledge federation*, can help us thoroughly reverse the way we comprehend and handle that theme, *holotopia*-style.

Here is, roughly, what we are about to see.

We got it all wrong!

We were told that the religions originated when our distant ancestors could not explain the natural phenomena correctly. We are about to see that religions reflect a natural law—which we ignored, because our way of looking at the world was too narrow. We’ll come to comprehend *reli-*

gion as a way to bring “the pursuit of happiness” (which will be re-conceived as the pursuit of *wholeness*) to a whole new level—whose very existence we ignore.

I know this may be beyond belief.

So let me right away illustrate it by sewing together or *federating* some points of evidence. There will be four of them. You will easily connect them by a single line of thought; it will be the same line of thought that holds this book together.

Point One: Fundamental insights reached in the sciences compel us to change the way we think.

I’ll let Richard Feynman point to it, by quoting from his 1965 monograph “The Character of Physical Law”:

“It is necessary for the very existence of science that minds exist which do not allow that nature must satisfy some preconceived conditions.”

Feynman elaborated:

“If science is to progress, what we need is the ability to experiment, honesty in reporting results – the results must be reported without somebody saying what they would like the results to have been – and finally – an important thing – the intelligence to interpret the results. An important point about this *intelligence* is that it *should not be sure ahead of time what must be.*”

These passages followed after an argument closely similar to the one Heisenberg advanced in “Physics and Philosophy”: When science advanced to the point of being able to observe small quanta of matter, their behavior surprised them; it turned out to defy not only mechanistic explanation—but also the common sense! Shouldn’t we continue to trust our good old way of looking at the world and ignore the data? We must

not do that, remarked Feynman; and Heisenberg did too. It is our way of thinking that needs to change. away the results of the experiments? The progress of science requires a fundamental shift: Instead of looking at the world through a “reality picture”—be it *materialistic* or any other—and rejecting whatever fails to fit in, **we must give priority to experience.**

Point Two: This different thinking, and the corresponding comprehension of *science*, empower us to broaden *science* and apply it to all questions of interest; and to “the understanding necessary for a good human life” (which was, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, Plato’s main interest, and hence the point of origin of the academic tradition) in particular. And when we do that—life-changing and culture-changing insights will result.

Aldous Huxley’s 1945 “Perennial Philosophy” will illustrate this.

The Huxley family gave several leading British scientists. But Aldous had a different interest and a different kind of science in mind. In “Perennial Philosophy”, he presented evidence—so strong that we may consider it conclusive—to support a far-reaching conclusion:

Something large and essential is amiss in our knowledge about ourselves!

Huxley called it “perennial philosophy”; and introduced it by making this *methodological* point:

“But the nature of *perennial philosophy* is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit. Why should this be so? We do not know. It is just one of those facts which we have to accept, whether we like them or not and however implausible and unlikely they may seem. [...] It is by making physical experiments that we can discover the intimate nature of matter and its potentialities. And it is only by making psychological and moral exper-

iments that we can discover the intimate nature of mind and its potentialities.”

When the reported experiences of those who have “chosen to fulfil certain conditions” are considered together, Huxley showed—across geopolitical regions, historical periods and cultural traditions—a *pattern* is seen beyond reasonable doubt: They all saw the world similarly—as one interconnected living whole; and they saw themselves as its inseparable parts.

The all saw the world, and themselves, in the manner that (as I have said but not yet shown) leads to *holotopia*.

A certain cause (ethical pursuit) led to a certain effect (a worldview, and a way of being in the world).

In India, the “**perennial philosophy**” has been called “dharma” or “dhamma”; in China it was called “Tao” (Way). In classical philosophy it was called “logos”. Gandhi called it “Truth”, and his biography “my experiments with truth”; evidently, he conceived of his life as experiments with “truth”—in pursuit of “Truth”. In all cases, the basic idea was the same—there **is** a *praxis*, leading to an ethos and **a way of being**, which aligns our mind with the larger order of things; and enables us to see it and adapt to it.

Please notice this *epistemological* point: Huxley was talking about a causal law (let’s reuse this word); certain ethical *praxis* leads to a certain transformation of perception and emotion. But this causal law was not interesting to traditional science—because it is not amenable to the kind of explanation that the sciences required; and because it is not the kind of theme that would interest scientists. **Huxley** was not talking about a law that **explained** how the nature works—but about the kind of law that shows **why** “a great **cultural revival**” **is possible**.

It is this kind of laws that we **in** modern **Western culture** still ignore.

Point Three: The pursuit of “perennial philosophy” leads to bounties of love and joy.

Through numerous examples, across vast ranges of time and space, Huxley demonstrated that a certain way of life, a certain ethical *praxis*, leads to an incomparably more fulfilling human experience than what is otherwise available.

It is *this* general insight that was lacking there at the Walailak University, in the situation I described. The students had in front of them a teacher who embodied the experience I am talking about; who had studied and practiced the way to reach it. Yet I doubt that the students—who were as I mentioned already steeped in *materialism*—had even a faintest idea of its nature and value.

“*Nibbanam paramam vadanti buddha*” (all awakened ones say nibbana is supreme).

At Suan Mokkh, every day at 5:30 AM, after the morning meditation, we chant this line from “Ovadapatimokha Gatha” (Verses from the Chief of Exhortations), with translation.

“Nibbana” (Pali word for “nirvana”) is the experience that the practice of Buddha’s “dharma” or “perennial philosophy” leads to. The scripture suggests that “all the awakened ones”—that is, everyone who followed the way to “nibbana” and tasted it—testified that it was the best thing they experienced.

And we don’t need to go as far as India or Thailand to find similar evidence. See how C.F. Andrews portrayed the mood of the original Christian community, in “Sermon on the Mount”:

“[The early disciples of Jesus found out] that the Way of Life, which Jesus had marked out for them in His teaching, was revolutionary in its moral principles. It turned the world upside down (Acts 17. 6). (...) They found in this new ‘Way of Life’ such a su-

perabundance of joy, even in the midst of suffering, that they could hardly contain it. Their radiance was unmistakable. When the Jewish rulers saw their boldness, they ‘marveled and took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus’ (Acts 4. 13). (...) It was this exuberance of joy and love which was so novel and arresting. It was a ‘Way of Life’ about which men had no previous experience. Indeed, at first those who saw it could not in the least understand it; and some mocking said, ‘These men are full of new wine’ (Acts 2. 13).”

A closely similar message reaches us from the biography of Muhammad that Martin Lings wrote, also based on earliest sources.

Point Four: To be able to take advantage of insights of this kind, we need to update communication.

I will illustrate this by pointing to the Britannica’s series of articles about moral philosophy; which features a large number of historical authors and opinions, beginning with Socrates. What did Machiavelli, or Ayn Rand, have to contribute to our “understanding necessary for a good human life”? While inspecting those articles one might easily conclude that all *conceivable* points of view are represented.

Yet I felt that something essential was missing.

Science was missing: Accounts of *experience* of “those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit”! All the reported ideas about moral philosophy were founded on speculation or on “common sense” (which of course was all but common) alone.

“All professions are conspiracies against the laity”,

George Bernard Shaw famously wrote. Ironically, moral philosophy is no exception. As academic disciplines tend to, moral philosophy conspires against the laity in two ways:

- by excluding the outliers—such as Aldous Huxley; and Buddhadasa
- by confining its outreach to moral philosophers—instead of synthesizing insights that would help us all see and follow a “course”



In **this book's** ten chapters I **will present a case for liberating ourselves from** the *religion of materialism*.

My goal is not to tell you how the world is or to change your mind—but to incite you to reflect about these matters; and **to invite you to reflect** about them together in our *dialog*.

In the first five chapters the focus will be on personal liberation; I will draft a roadmap to inner *wholeness*. In the second five chapters the focus will be social-and-cultural or outer *wholeness*. We'll come to see the two as two aspects of an indivisible whole.

Chapters One to Three will look at freedom and *wholeness* from the point of view of We'll see that vast and little known inhibitions to freedom are hidden inside us.

In Chapter One, where the liberation of the body will be our theme, we will explore the freedom of movement or *motility*. And offer an insight you might find surprising: **We** (civilized) humans **have 'a prison within'**, constituted of embodied muscular tension and the habit of involuntarily tensing up. The liberation from it opens up to a realm of effortlessness and power—known to some martial artists and students of therapy schools; but unknown to our culture as a whole.

In Chapter Two we will see that **our motility** of the **mind** or creativity **has been** similarly **confined**. And that constricting our thinking to certain fixed patterns is largely what our education is about. We shall see that

the liberation of our mind leads to a creativity that is beyond belief when we let *materialism* define what we consider possible; and that *this* kind of creativity we vitally need to be able to “change course”.

In Chapter Three we will look at the *motility* of our emotions. **What** at all **are we able to feel**? We shall see that while our emotional ‘weather’ may seem to be changing as a function of daily events, it is in the change of our emotional ‘climate’ that possibilities beyond belief reside.

In Chapter Four I will show that the mentioned and other kinds of inner liberation are all instances of a single principle; and results of a single kind of *praxis*. A simple general model can be deduced from a variety of human development practices and traditions including meditation, yoga and Alexander Technique—to inform and update our values, priorities and lifestyle. And to give us a whole new notion of “enlightenment”.

In Chapter Five I will place Buddhadasa’s insight into this frame of reference. We will see what the Buddhists call “suffering” is a profusion of emotions that permeate our emotional and social lives—which we consider as just the “normal” part of life. We shall see that this “suffering” follows from the way in which we “pursue happiness”.

Chapter Six will begin the second part of the book by condensing what’s been told in the first part to a single point: **The key** to inner liberation, through the pursuit of “perennial philosophy”, **is to liberate ourselves from egotism**—the value that *materialism* as *religion* brought us; the value that *defines* the modernity’s *religion*.

In Chapters Seven I will show how *egotism* as value leads to dysfunctional and damaging societal systems; how the *power structure* emerges when we let the systems evolve by “survival of the fittest”. We shall see that when we collaborate and self-organize to co-create systems—distinctly *holotopian* improvements in the effectiveness of our work and in our condition will be reached.

Chapter Eight will help us understand how *egotism* as value warps culture; how cultural devolution completes the nascence of *power structure* by shaping values and awareness.

Chapter Nine will point to liberation of *science* as the key to comprehensive liberation. We do not need to occupy Wall Street; our future does not depend on convincing the political leaders to impose climate quotas; the “way to change course” is in the hands of publicly sponsored intellectuals—whose social function is to correct the way we think.

Chapter Ten will show that while necessary, the liberation of *science* will not be sufficient; we must liberate, and develop, of the *praxis* of *religion*—to help us *embody* the *holotopia*'s values; and *imbue* them in *culture*.

The *dialog* will be offered instead of a conclusion—to complete this book, by beginning to transform the way we communicate; and the way we are together. To turn this book into **an act of liberation**—whereby *logos* will become what binds each of us to our purpose; and all of us together in a community.

This ‘coin’ with which we’ll ‘purchase our **freedom**’ **has two sides**.

One of them is to let us see and experience the reality of our resistance to change—by which the *power structure* holds us captive.

Its other side is to help us liberate ourselves from the “reality” that our everyday and the media compose—and co-create an entirely new one.



In the first five chapters I will *federate* also some of my own experiences.

I have five reasons for doing that.

The first is that this book is not a statement of fact but an invitation to a *dialog*. The *dialog* is a real and virtual place where we've suspended our beliefs; in order to genuinely share and co-create. I will seed the *dialog* by sharing what I've thought and experienced as genuinely as I am able.

The second reason is that I've had the unusual fortune to benefit from the instruction of several extraordinary adepts in Oriental human development arts; in diverse traditions. Sharing the related experiences will allow me to bring the indispensable insights of my teachers to our *dialog*; so that we may 'stand on their shoulders and see further'.

The third reason is that, through practice, I have become what I half-jokingly call "a cultural mutant". Allow me this exaggeration: Imagine me as an extraterrestrial or a time traveler; and be ready to hear what our everyday might look like when seen from an entirely uncommon cultural perspective.

The fourth reason is that a combined pursuit of *fundamental* questions and "perennial philosophy" led me to a thoroughly renewed approach to academic research. I am now ready to share with academic colleagues a refreshingly novel—yet uncompromisingly rigorous—way to pursue our profession.

The fifth reason is that my personal process may serve as a model or *prototype* for the larger impending cultural re-evolution.

My great grandfather was a mufti. My grandfather translated the Koran into our language. Both men benefited from highest education in religion-based law and philosophy internationally. My father was a liberal lawyer, the youngest of five children and the only one who *abandoned* religion. So I grew up in an atheist family, in a country where religion was considered the opium for the masses. While I felt attracted to the philosophical conversations of the Karabegs, I felt distanced from them as a little atheist.

Religion is now the core in which my life is centered.

My *religion* does not, however, contradict the worldview I have as a *scientist*, on the contrary: It was my conscientious pursuit of *science* that *brought me to religion*.