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Life plagued by human madness: we must change our paradigms, objectives and values.

Of recent, a series of concerning reports and findings that have corroborated each other : over the last two years, we had opportunities to write here about the plundering of natural resources [\[read\]](#), about unlimited financial speculation on the consequences of our inconsistency [\[read\]](#), about polluted seas [\[read\]](#), about degraded and contaminated soils [\[read\]](#), about the poisoning of people [\[read\]](#)... And now, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) offers compelling proofs that life is regressing on Earth [\[read\]](#).



Not only is the number of species decreasing, but this decrease is accelerating and, globally, the number of living organisms is shrinking even for those species that are not yet directly under the threat of extinction. In the words of the IPBES president, Sir Robert Watson: *“The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide.”*

With time, the very survival of humanity is at stake.

This is an extremely serious statement of which all of us need to be conscious. Platform experts are not merely observing and describing the regression of life on the Earth: they

explain it and point to the irresponsible behaviour of humankind. Main causes of the plague affecting life on the Earth are, according to these scientists, *“in descending order: (1) changes in land and sea use; (2) direct exploitation of organisms; (3) climate change; (4) pollution and (5) invasive alien species”*.

The media release of 6 May 2019 sums up in a few key points the most important results obtained by the team of 145 experts of 50 countries and the review of about 15,000 scientific and government sources. This exhaustive report however has a major limitation as it is focused on the analysis of surface biodiversity and does not consider the biodiversity present in soils, an aspect that has been traditionally neglected by researchers. It is an important lacuna, as soil biodiversity is the basis on which all the surface life rests and as it plays a central role in the recycling of nutrients, the decomposition of organic matter and the decontamination of our environment. And this is no small matter as the soil biomass is estimated to represent close to half of total biomass. This aspect of life is still poorly known despite work conducted on fungi by Kew Gardens in the UK and its publication of the first State of the World's Fungi 2018 that estimated that there are as many as 5 million species of fungi.

Results obtained by the IPBES give a true picture of surface biodiversity and they provide in particular the proof that nature conservation policies implemented over recent years are not up to the mark.

The IPBES assessment also tells us that the situation is not yet quite desperate, provided humankind gets mobilised and modifies radically its behaviour by bringing *“a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values”*. It also warns us that *“we can expect opposition from those with interests vested in the status quo”*.

This conclusion is consistent with what has been expressed on hungerexplained.org and shows that life (and humanity) will only survive if we change radically our view of the world and of our position in it. This deserves to sit back from our hectic everyday life and think about what such a change should imply.

The anthropocentric view of the world according which our position is at the centre of the world dates back to the origins of western culture. Damia, the global human rights activist, one of the characters of Octuor, the novel published recently by Vêrone édition, sums up in a few words the evolution followed by humankind as a result of the near-generalisation of the ideology on which the western world is based: *“The world in which we live is similar to the valley in front of us that is progressively overcome by darkness. The path it has followed in History has made it incapable of seeing the true essence of our universe and the position which should fall to humankind”*. The answer that she gets from Gyalso, her interlocutor, a pro-environment business man and philosopher, hints at the path to be followed: *“to orient humankind on a track that is neither that of a frenzied individualism or an antagonism between humans and the rest of the universe, neither that of a conservative archaism that would freeze humankind in the past.”* (Vol.1, p. 329)

For this, humans will have to stop seeing themselves as *“a singular entity in the universe”* (Tome 2, p. 42). In the words of Gyalso: *“We deceive ourselves when we believe that what surrounds us was created for us”*, that we are *“different from the rest of nature, superior to what surrounds us and, consequently, ...that we have the right to dominate it and use it for our selfish purpose”* (Vol. 2, p. 323). Humankind must stop believing that it was called by a divinity it has created in its image to *“rule over the fish in the sea and the*

birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1:26), and it must remember that *"in the book of Genesis, it is presented as being shape from mineral, emerging from clay"* (Vol. 2, p. 95).

Luckily, some of us have become conscious of the danger we represent for life and for ourselves because of the behaviour we adopted with time. Somewhere, says Gyalso, close to the Himalayas, *"there is, in the mountain, a cave where, they say, it is possible to see Earth's most destructive species. One day - I was still young -, I went to this cave, armed with my courage and with a big club, to be safe, as I wanted to see this ferocious animal. I moved in semi-darkness towards a small room that seemed illuminated. I entered with caution and found myself in front of a huge mirror where I could see my image, armed with my ridiculous club. I searched around me, there was nothing, nobody; I was alone in the cave and it took me some time to realise the following : I am the most destructive species in the world, it is us, the humankind, each of us who are prisoners of our passions, our ignorance and our blindness"* (Vol. 2, p. 324).

The place mentioned by Gyalso is real; the author of these lines visited it a few years ago.



It is therefore the *"sad cortege of sad passions"* of Spinoza that need, according to Gyalso, to be reversed *"in order to recover a virtue that will allow us to access to the fullness of life and translate our awareness of the need to change the world in the acceptance, for each of us, of the need to change individually... by freeing ourselves from our illusions and, by accepting our real position in nature, to help the slow movement of life and of evolution of which we are just a stage and not the ultimate goal"* (Vol. 2, p. 325/326).

This is a trying cultural revolution that will probably have made several of you jump up when reading these lines! But this is probably what can be understood by the IPBES

recommendation of “*a fundamental, system-wide reorganization... including paradigms, goals and values*”.

This vital challenge, we must be face now. The IPBES assessment does not suggest how we may be able to succeed. For the time being, at least, the solution is yet only a fiction. It will be up to us to imagine how to make it real. For sure, the cosmetic mini measures put forward by most political movements during the campaign for the forthcoming European elections to follow the “green fashion” and that remain consistent with existing paradigms, will not do the job and are not up to the mark of this fundamental issue.

To know more:

- IPBES, Media release: Nature’s Dangerous Decline ‘Unprecedented’; Species Extinction Rates ‘Accelerating’, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), 2019.
- IPBES, website with access to a series of assessment reports.
- Maetz, M., Octuor, roman (Tomes 1 et 2, 717 pages), Vêrone éditions, Paris, 2018/2019 (in French).

Selection of recent articles on hungerexplained.org related to the topic:

- The United Nations warn us: we must stop plundering natural resources, 2019.
- How far will financial speculation go? After prices, pandemics - What next...? 2019.
- To manage sustainably our water resources, we need to change our food consumption, 2019.
- Land degradation: a serious consequence of human activities with dramatic implications on food, health and well-being of the world population, 2018.
- Fisheries and aquaculture in troubled waters, 2018.
- Seafood and tobacco blamed for being responsible for the high level of metal contamination of pregnant women in France, 2017.
- Intergenerational equity is possible, provided there is a fundamental change in the principles that govern the world, 2015.