

**Power, Empowerment and Disempowerment: some
understanding of power dynamics with a bio-psycho-social
approach**

Alberto Zucconi

Istituto dell'Approccio Centrato sulla Persona (IACP)

World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS)

World University Consortium (WUC)

How our **Selves** are presently structured?

What kind of **construction of experience** we have?

What kind of **narratives** we create?

What kind of **consequences** we bring upon ourselves and the planet?

How we use our **power**?

So, what is life? It is a material process, sifting and surfing over matter like a strange, slow wave. It is a controlled artistic chaos, a set of chemical reactions so staggeringly complex that more than eighty million years ago it produced the mammalian brain that now, in human form, composes love letters and uses silicon computers to calculate the temperature of matter at the origin of the universe.

Life, moreover, appears to be on the verge of perceiving for the first time its strange but true place in an inexorably evolving cosmos.

Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan

We have lived for thousands of years with the *Genesis* story: a man and a woman are created by an all-powerful God, and then (in a development that owes a lot to the Prometheus myth) thrown out of the garden for seeking knowledge.

Now - slowly - we awaken to a new creation story, in which we find that we are still in the garden. In fact we are an inseparable part of it, one with the process that created the beasts and flowers.

**And, in the most surprising development of all,
we are also the gardeners.**

Walter Truett Anderson

*We are in the garden
called planet Earth but
our garden is in a mess!*

*We cannot solve the
problems of today at the
level of thinking at which
they were first created*

Albert Einstein

**80 year ago the discoveries in the
“hard sciences” sprung from the
work of Einstein, Bohr,
Heisenberg and others generated
a new, integrated view of the
universe based on relationships**

Every thing is based on
relationships

In the 1960s Lynn Margulis discovered that eukaryotic cells (the kind found in nearly all animals, plants and fungi) contain smaller entities, the mitochondria, that were once separate organisms, bacteria which invaded ancestral one-celled creatures and stayed on, the parasitic relationship evolving into a symbiotic one.

The mitochondria regulate the metabolism of the cell and process energy. These symbiotic cells evolved, creating the incredible variety of life forms we see today. Each of us carries millions if not billions of mitochondria, unsuspected microscopic cousins.

Power is Energy

Every organism uses power/energy

Every person has some power and uses it

Individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations, communities cannot exist without the use of power

Power is a life source *But....*

Power impacts

Power can be used by one organism to destroy, cripple or stunt another.

The way I use my power, the way other people use their power has a deep impact on me and on all the system's stakeholders.

Power dynamics have been studied in every society and every epoch since power is a pivotal issue in human affairs and in every life form.

To predict phenomena and create
tools to govern them we have to keep
relationships at the centre

but

What kind of relationships?

Differing values, concepts of reality, of human nature, generate different relationships, priorities, goals & actions based on strategies of:

Empowerment

- Democratic Relationship
- Equal rights & opportunities
- Promotes responsibility
- Bio-psycho-social Paradigm
- Health Promotion
- Patient Centered Medicine
- Biofeedback , neurofeedback
- Transparency, shared knowledge
- People Centered
- Capacity for deep contact, Empathy
& Respect for all the life forms
- Microcredit

Disempowerment

- Authoritarian Relationship
- Oppression
- Promotes passivity
- Mechanistic- reductionist Paradigm
- Reductionist Medicine
- Disease Centered Medicine
- Electroshock
- Manipulation of Information
- Racism, sexism, bigotry etc.
- Alienation from self, others, depletion of natural
& human resources
- Profit to all cost, Subprime caper

Disease mongering :

is the selling of sickness that widens the boundaries of illness in order to grow markets for those who sell and deliver treatments.

It is a process that turns healthy people into patients, causes iatrogenic harm, and wastes precious resources

Moynihan R, Henry D (2006) The fight against disease mongering: Generating knowledge for action.
PLoS Med 3: e191. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0030191

Technological innovation has produced many new ways for people to access information. However, this information may be used for a purpose, for instance to promote or brand diseases or pharmaceuticals.

What role is there for ethical standards or regulation?.

Testing trials and publicity. Drug testing is being intertwined with disease marketing. The various phases of randomized controlled trials are increasingly linked to particular phases in marketing.

Companies use disease awareness campaigns as a tool to promote prescription medicines to the public

Exploring the existing evidence on the impact of disease awareness campaigns on the consumption of medicines, on public health and on consumers. And address the consumer right to know who is providing the information and for which purposes.

Can systems be redesigned in order to better reward trustworthy communication and avoid unwanted side-effects of disease mongering?

What can insurance companies do to facilitate necessary attention for diseases or reduce unnecessary promotion of diseases?

Improving health by reducing harm from inappropriate, misleading or unethical marketing of health products or services, especially misleading pharmaceutical promotion



On 30 November 2009 **Health Action International (HAI)** undertook a global “snapshot” of **the price of ciprofloxacin, a commonly used off-patent antibiotic.**

Data were collected from 93 countries, where the price for a 7 day treatment course of ciprofloxacin ranged between **US \$ 0.42** and **US \$ 131.**

The findings confirm that prices can vary widely both between countries and within countries.

Although the patent on ciprofloxacin expired a number of years ago, the price difference between the lowest priced generic and the originator brand (the ‘brand premium’) is significant in many countries.

For example, Colombia showed the largest brand premium, with the originator brand priced at 60 times the lowest priced generic.

Colombia also had the highest treatment cost for originator brand ciprofloxacin in the private sector: **a patient in Colombia pays more than 200 times the price** they would pay in five Asian countries where the price of generics was lowest – a difference of almost **20,000%.**

**Are we going to witness a new
wave of human evolution or be
flooded by self destructive
learned helplessness??**

Some forms of “medicalisation” may now be better described as “disease mongering” —

extending the boundaries of treatable illness to expand markets for new products

Alliances of pharmaceutical manufacturers, doctors, and patients groups use the media

to frame conditions as being widespread and severe Disease mongering can include turning ordinary ailments into medical problems, seeing mild symptoms as serious, treating personal problems as medical, seeing risks as diseases, and framing prevalence estimates to maximise potential markets Corporate funded information about disease should be replaced by independent information.

Ray Moynihan, Iona Heath, David Henry (2002) **Selling sickness: the pharmaceutical industry and disease mongering**
BMJ 2002; 324 : 886 doi: 10.1136/bmj.324.7342.886

Empowerment generates Responsibility

Respons-ability = the ability to respond
more **effectively**

**To be more deeply in touch and
to behave more congruently**

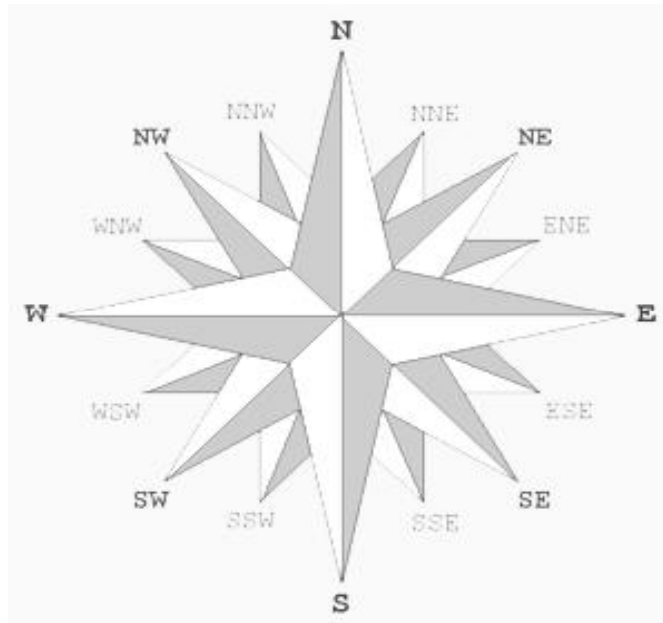
Are we effectively protecting and promoting health & well being of individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations, communities etc. ?

Do we have an **human ecology approach** and do we establish empowering relationships?

Profound differences and results are created by different narratives.

Do we work to support narratives of hope and liberation or narratives of compliance with the status quo?

A compass for the *Antropocene Era* scientists and professionals is needed



...at the basis of anything that a scientist undertakes is, first of all, an ethical and moral value judgment that he makes.

Carl Rogers

**Today in the Antropocene Era another
requirement is urgently needed:**

Values* plus *Capacity of Contact

**An effective capacity of contact
with myself, others the world**

In line with Damasio's consciousness genesis

"The nonconscious neural signaling of an individual organism begets the *proto-self* which permits *core self* and *core consciousness*, which allow for an *autobiographical self*, which permits *extended consciousness*. At the end of the chain *extended consciousness* permits *conscience*."

Antonio R. Damasio (1999) THE FEELING OF WHAT HAPPENS p. 230

Today in order to assure also a tomorrow our science and our conscience, our feeling, our thinking, our actions need to be grounded in the awareness of the inextricable bond we have with each other and with everything else

A few years ago the term *Anthropocene* has been introduced by the Nobel laureate and World Academy of Art and Science member Paul Crutzen, underlining that there's really no separation any more between human activities and what we used to call nature.

In the [Anthropocene Era](#) the concept of [has to be refined](#): I propose that a healthy human being in line with the World Health Organization focus not just of preventing illness but promoting health:

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. ... Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy life-styles to well-being”.

[World Health Organization, Ottawa Charter \(1986\)](#)

We are the only species that creates artificial intelligence, and fills the skies with artificial satellites. We are the species that impacts all other life on Earth, and has begun to know it, and to contemplate the possibility that we have placed it in grave jeopardy.

Walt Truett Anderson, 2011

We are the only species that creates artificial intelligence, and fills the skies with artificial satellites. We are the species that impacts all other life on Earth, and has begun to know it, and to contemplate the possibility that we have placed it in grave jeopardy.

Walt Truett Anderson

It's not too hard, most of the time, to **sleepwalk along through life** without being disturbed by the cumulative **knowledge of our own enormous weight on the planet**, knowledge now coming at us from all directions. But once in a while, especially when we look hard at evidence of global climate change – spreading deserts, raging storms, suffering wildlife – we find that aspect of *Earth-humanity-evolving-accelerating* painful to contemplate.

Walt Truett Anderson, 2011

**WE live in a period of globalization
and of growing complexity**

**To meet our present and future
challenges we need new and
effective ways to cope.**

**New capacities of our ways of
knowing are required.**

We need to foster a new *psychological literacy* for billions of people, a sort of *psychological compass*, a needed systemic way of being to navigate in the rippling currents of change.

It is as if man had been suddenly appointed director of the biggest business of all, **the business of evolution** – appointed without being asked if he wanted it, and without proper warning and preparation. What is more, **he can't refuse the job.**

Whether he wants it or not, whether he is conscious of what he is doing or not, he is in point of fact determining the future direction of evolution on this earth.

This is his inescapable destiny, and the sooner he realizes it and starts believing in it, the better for all concerned....

Julian Huxley

Rethinking disasters: why death and destruction is not nature's fault but human failure

The global picture: low resilience, more harm

Countries with low levels of human development are significantly more vulnerable to the impacts of natural hazards. Consequently, they run a higher risk of such hazards turning into full-blown catastrophes. Although on average the 50 poorest countries are exposed to only 11 per cent of the world's natural hazards, they suffer 53 per cent of deaths from disasters each year.

In contrast, countries with high levels of human development, despite their exposure to 15 per cent of all hazards, account for only 1.5 per cent of the death toll.

The evidence is unequivocal.

Countries with low levels of human development have limited resources for resilience against, and recovery from, the impact of disasters.

Oxfam International 2008

In failing to tackle climate change, rich countries are effectively violating the human rights of millions of the world's poorest people.

Excessive greenhouse-gas emissions are leading to floods, droughts, hurricanes, sea-level rise, and seasonal unpredictability.

These impacts are undermining millions of people's rights to life, security, food, water, health, shelter and culture.

Such human-rights violations could never truly be remedied in courts of law.

Human-rights principles must be put at the heart of international climate change policy making, in order to stop this damage to humanity's future.

“Within an international community based upon the rule of law and universal values of equality, human rights, and dignity, it is surely wrong for small, vulnerable communities to suffer because of the actions of other more powerful resource-rich countries, actions over which they have no control, and little or no protection.”

Past President Gayoom, Republic of the Maldives

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drawn up in 1948, its authors could not have imagined the complex global interconnectedness that climate change would lead to today.

But now it is clear that the devastating international impacts of greenhouse-gas emissions give countries undeniable international responsibility for the human-rights consequences of their policies.

Human-rights laws and institutions need to evolve fast to rise to this unprecedented challenge.

Creative human-rights lawyers could push to have courts recognize future injury.

Raworth, K. (2008), Oxfam Report on Climate Wrongs and Human Rights: Putting people at the heart of climate-change policy

The growing evidence of climate wrongs

Climate change is set to undermine human rights on a massive scale. International human-rights law states that, ‘In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.’ But – as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has documented in detail – excessive greenhouse-gas emissions, primarily from rich countries, are depriving millions of people of the very water, food, soil, and land on which they subsist

Raworth, K. (2008), Oxfam Report on Climate Wrongs and Human Rights: Putting people at the heart of climate change policy

...“Research in the social sciences will lead us to better understand how we can change our attitudes and thus insure a healthy future for our planet.

The goal to raise the awareness of all people is key to making lasting changes to help our environment.”...

Neal Pargman

**We need to respect and protect
human rights**

&

**at the same time promote
human resilience to unavoidable
impacts**

Empowerement

States and institutions must ensure that communities participate in, and have ownership of, the design and implementation of coping initiatives in order to safeguard their rights

When people are confronted with a challenge for which they do not know how to cope, **cognitive dissonance** is often elicited as a defense.

In psychological emergencies--whether personal or cultural-- psychological and physiological arousal increases.

There is an internal push to resolve the crisis and return to a state of equilibrium as quickly as possible. Individuals and communities develop culture-specific strategies to contain this anxiety and prevent psychological instability.

Support in the form of

- Socio cultural
- Environmental
- Scientific
- Economic
- Psychological resources

Well adjusted people are more resilient in crisis than those who are more vulnerable and disconnected

We need a new and effective way of coping with our changed realities.

A way to become aware on how we construe our experiences of what we call reality: the relationship with ourselves, the others , the world.

We need to foster at every level of society awareness of the social construction of reality, of our powers and responsibilities for the present a future of humankind & the whole planet.

We need to promote a new socially compelling, forward-looking vision of evolution that brings together the worlds of science and spirit, evolutionary theory and developmental psychology.

An updated recipe for resilience, on how to think, feel and act outside the present obsolete mechanistic box, to become aware of the fact that **we live in complex web of relationships and that **to be blind to the world of relationships brings us dire consequences****

It is as if man had been suddenly appointed director of the biggest business of all, the business of evolution – appointed without being asked if he wanted it, and without proper warning and preparation. What is more, he can't refuse the job. Whether he wants it or not, whether he is conscious of what he is doing or not, he is in point of fact determining the future direction of evolution on this earth. This is his inescapable destiny, and the sooner he realizes it and starts believing in it, the better for all concerned.....

Julian Huxley

Now and then there is a sudden and rapid passage to a totally new and more comprehensive type of order or organization, with quite new emergent properties, and involving quite new methods of further evolution.

Julian Huxley

The planet we inhabit is undergoing a huge transition, and so is our knowledge about it. We are engaged in a learning process now, contemplating (or trying to avoid contemplating) a transition quite unlike anything that has happened in the course of human evolution. It has two parts:

- 1. an acceleration of human impacts on Earth's life systems.**
- 2. a corresponding increase in the reach and power of the information systems that bring us news about the first.**

Most of us now have some information – and opinions, however scantily formed – about the impacts. Few of us have much idea of where that information comes from. So a big part of our learning process will be getting acquainted with Earth's own bio-electronic information network. We will learn that it doesn't just bring information about human modifications of Earth; **it is itself another modification, one of the biggest of all time.**

Walter Truett Anderson (2008) Past President World Academy of Art and Science

In the age of globalization and of growing complexity **to meet the challenges of our present and future new and effective ways to facilitate the capacity of integration of our ways of knowing are required.** We need to foster a new psychological literacy for billions of people; that which I call the **psychological compass**, a needed systemic way of being in relationship with ourselves, others and the planet to navigate in the rippling currents of change.

SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS USE EFFECTIVE TOOLS

PROMOTING AWARENESS

is MULTILEVEL circular continuous action of

psycho-socio-cultural change of

- **the individual**
- **the organization**
- **the community**
- **the society*and vice versa*.....**

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS USE EFFECTIVE TOOLS

ASSESSMENT:

NEED to have effective diagnostic tools, for the correct understanding of the realities we want to approach:

- **individual**
- **family**
- **organization**
- **community**
- **planet**

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS USE EFFECTIVE TOOLS

Action Plan

Must be implemented by effective facilitators that have:

- **Cognitive competence** (*to know*)
- **Skills** (*to do*)
- **Attitudes** (*to be*)

In order to be :

Person centered

Group centered

Organization centered

Culture centered

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS USE EFFECTIVE TOOLS

Why ?

An **effective facilitator of change** is able to be **Person - centered** and **People-centered** in order to foster **empowerment** at **all levels**.

Empowerment *facilitates the development of the potentialities of all the parts involved*