

Do we have our lives in order?

The impact of hierarchical and holarchical organizing systems on our lives

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Life is structured or organized on different levels. We can observe it in our own individual life, in the way our own body is structured in different levels – from the subatomic world to the atoms, and on to the cells, the tissues, the organs and the entire organism – our body. And our body is again part of the larger body of the natural environment, the surrounding landscape, which again is part of the planet we live on (or, more precisely, we live *in*): Mother Earth. And of course, this system of layered ordering expands even further into the universe.

It is important we never forget that we haven't created this way of organizing life in different levels ourselves: nature organized it itself in this way, including our own body. The body that we inhabit at this very moment is a living entity that was created for us. All we have contributed to its growth and sustenance is the process of eating, drinking and moving on a regular basis. As the food and water to make this possible comes from our natural environment, it is obvious that our body is part of the larger body of the living landscape, and that health is an issue that involves the care of both.

We humans have also created layered organizing systems by ourselves, perhaps inspired by this, already existing, natural way of organizing life on different levels. But our artificially created systems have turned out to be very different from the natural ones. When we human created layered orders as part of building our society, we have tended to create them in the form of *hierarchies*. We do not always realize that this is not the only way that our life has been ordered and organized in levels.

Holarchies

In fact, life itself keeps confronting us all the time with the fact that nature has always been structured in levels in a very different way. In the 1960s the Hungarian-British writer Arthur Koestler has already noticed that natural layered organizing systems are very different from the humanly created hierarchies. To distinguish those from the hierarchies he has first suggested, in his book *The Ghost in the Machine* from 1967, the terms *holon* and *holarchy* for the natural system in which life is organized on different levels.¹ His terms are not yet used widely, but they give a good explanation of the way living nature is organized in different levels. According to Koestler, nature, and all living things within it, are structured on different levels through the principle of the holon – an entity that is both a whole in itself and also a part of a larger whole. In addition, this larger whole – at a ‘higher’ level – is also a holon that is both a whole in itself and a part of an even larger whole. Holons aim not only ‘up’ but also ‘down’, and therefore always include many holons at a ‘lower’ level. In this way, a layered structure has been designed, a holarchy, which is always web-like in nature – such as the structure of our own body. I put the terms ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ in brackets above, because – unlike in hierarchies – there are actually no higher or lower levels in the holarchies, only more or less inclusive contexts.

As indicated at the start, in our own body, like in the body of any other living animal or plant, this weblike, holarchical structure extends from the smallest level in the subatomic world – through the levels of atoms, cells, tissues and organs – to the level of the entire organism. For example, the cells are all wholes in themselves, but are also an inseparable part of a tissue, these tissues in turn are part of an organ, and all the organs together are part of the larger holon of the organism. The health of the organism depends on the health of all the holons that are included in it, from the smallest to the largest level. And our bodily health also depends on the even larger context of the environment in which the body is embedded: the holarchical structures extend further into the surrounding natural environment.

Important in these holarchical structures is that the boundaries of the atoms, cells, organs and organisms are always *open* boundaries, at least in

their default position. And this applies not just to the boundaries between the levels, but also between the holons on the same level. The membranes of the cells, for instance, are initially open to the larger level of the organ, but also to the other cells. This creates a wonderful living web of mutual relationships. And that open, receptive state is also essential for the growth process. The membranes only close off when the cells need protection against dangers, which in the natural world are not the rule but the exception. When they do close off for protection, all the energy is going to be spend on this protection, and therefore the growth process, without the necessary energy and power to generate it, comes to a halt. The American biologist Bruce Lipton has pointed this out, in his book *The Biology of Belief*.² I return to this below.

The size of this kind of layered, web-like natural reality, which seems to extend into infinity, is hard to imagine. The relatively new discoveries about the web of interconnection in the fungal world of the mycelium, existing everywhere in the earth underneath our feet, show that the power of nature has the tendency to express and manifest itself materially through these kinds of layered, web-like structures.³ But beyond these material manifestations, these interconnected webs also exist invisibly everywhere around us. The general idea is that everything is always part of something larger – and that nothing in the natural world ever exists on its own. An important characteristic of holarchies is that they are shaped *organically*, are the result of a *growth process*, and that they are *alive* and that within them everything is always involved in *movement* and *change*. They are shaped from *within*, and also *bottom-up*, from the smallest holon to the largest holon. In this way, they are also manifestations of *self-organization*. The natural, holarchically structured, world is also mainly a *cyclical* world, which manifests itself in our earthly context by the ongoing cycles of night and day, and of winter and summer. The organic growth processes take place within this cyclical framework. That is why in this natural, organic world is shaped largely in *round* and *curved* ways, both in time and in place.

This holarchical way of organizing life has not just manifested in the tangible, visible material world, but beyond this world there also exists an intangible, invisible dimension of nature. Researchers, like Ervin Laszlo, Rupert Sheldrake and Lynn McTaggart, have shown that the material world is driven, and all livings beings in it are inextricably connected with each

other, by powerful, invisible fields. They have explained their findings about the scientific ‘field theories’ in many books and articles, which meanwhile have reached many people all over the world. But unfortunately, these theories have not yet become part of mainstream science.⁴

We must not forget, that the holarchical way of organizing life has left its imprint in the human field of our *consciousness* as well – as it is, for instance, expressed in our lives psychologically, sociologically and spiritually. Our consciousness also constantly goes through cyclical processes, of which primarily the process of sleeping and waking is continually moving us through changes in consciousness. In our consciousness we store experiences and ideas, and as a conscious individual we experience ourselves both as a whole in itself and as a part of larger human communities, and these communities again form whole in themselves but are also part of the larger Earth Community that includes not just human being but the lives of all living being on this planet.

When it comes to the connection between the invisible and visible sides of nature, the theory by the physicist David Bohm about the existence of two kinds of order in our life is also relevant here. He has argued that the tangible, material world we experience through our senses is only one half of the whole of life. The material world that we sense all around us he called *the explicate order*. It is merely a manifestation from another, more profound and deeper kind of reality – another order that exists everywhere beyond this material world, beyond space and time. He called this order *the implicate order*, which we unfortunately cannot experience directly, but which nonetheless is a reality that truly exists.⁵

Interesting in the context of the theme of this article, is that the explicate order is the manifestation that we experience as the natural world – around us in the landscape, but also in our own body. This is a manifestation of organic growth and therefore also of a holarchical order. It is also important to note that, according to Bohm, life is essentially always ordered and that order need not be imposed from without. As we all know, however, ‘law and order’ systems, based on written legal rules, have always assumed that initially there is a state of disorder in our society, on which order needs to be imposed from without. Below I will discuss the issue of ‘law and order’ more deeply, and argue that these legal systems are constructed as part of a hierarchically organized society.

The Internet

It is probably no coincidence that the discovery of the weblike patterns of interconnection that have always existed everywhere in the natural world happened more or less simultaneously with the planetary construction of the Internet. The idea of the *World Wide Web* can even be considered a human attempt to copy these existing natural weblike relationships, and even using the power of their invisible frequencies to connect us to the many datacenters of the Cloud. But, importantly, we should not forget that the Internet did not grow organically from within, but was constructed *mechanically* from *without* by large corporations, which themselves were (and still are) internally organized in a hierarchical way, and are part of market economy that is driven by mutual competition.

Therefore, the image of the Internet as an invisible, round and web-like structure on a planetary scale is in fact a false image. We are connected to it through the *rectangular* screens of our laptop or mobile telephone, and safe data in files that we organize hierarchically in folder, and a lot of subfolders. It should also not have surprised us that the hierarchical relationships of the corporations that are involved with their construction and that try to control them, increasingly began to disturb and even take away the initial openness. We could also have expected that the open nature of a World Wide Web would not align well with billions of surfers who have entered the field with an unbalanced, egocentric, sense of separation – who mentally are restless and eager to compete and fight the imagined, invisible enemies that they seem come across everywhere in cyberspace. Apparently, the Internet offers a platform to many people to express their built-up frustrations and hatred by projecting these negative feelings onto others through anonymous messages. As is well known, it is also widely used to spread fake news and conspiracy theories.

To function well, the Internet actually needs surfers who have balanced, peaceful open minds that mirror its open weblike structure – in fact, people with a renewed, more mature kind of consciousness that fortunately happens to be manifesting itself all across the planet as well. In many countries people can communicate freely with each other through all kinds of digital mediums. Adventurous researchers and thinkers can exchange new ideas directly with other people all across the planet through Zoom

interviews, discussions and meetings. And they do this often without any surveillance by or prior permission of powerful controlling institutions. This was not possible before the Internet came into being. We should not underestimate the beneficial effect that this planetary, digital communication is having on dealing structurally with the various crises that humanity is facing at the moment on a planetary scale.

So, next to some bad news, there is also a lot of good news. Apparently, we only gradually start realizing that the entity we have managed to build demands an inner transformation of ourselves to be able to function well.

Hierarchies

The short history of the Internet is a good illustration of the much longer history of the development of our own consciousness. Although the field of our own consciousness is very much part of nature, it is in this field that the holarchical way of organizing things, a few thousand years ago increasingly got disturbed and was overruled by hierarchical way of organizing things. In a hierarchical order the artificially created boundaries between the different levels are meant to be closed off, to be able to keep the different levels apart. And an important difference is that a hierarchy is ordered *vertically* from the top to the bottom, *top-down*, different from the holarchical order that grows – as we have seen – more horizontally, in a weblike, bottom-up way.

The most striking difference is probably the different way in which holarchies and hierarchies come into being. Contrary to the natural orders that have grown organically from within, in a self-organized way, from the very beginning of life, we have tended to *construct* or *build* our artificial orders *mechanically* from *without*. In this regard, I already discussed the structure of Internet and the corporations involved with it. Hierarchies are not alive, but *dead* structures, that are meant to have a reasonable *permanent* structure. But because they are mechanically constructed, they are also not self-organized and need to be *maintained* externally all the time to undo wear and tear, and to implement innovations. The images connected to hierarchies are not circles, spheres and curves, but *rectangles*, *squares* and *straight lines*. These are, taken together, major differences that reaches so deeply in the way that these systems work, that it is justified to give both of them a different name. To emphasize the difference between organic

creation and growth, and mechanical construction and building, I think it is also better to not to use the term ‘creation’ in connection to hierarchies, but to talk instead in terms of ‘building’ or ‘constructing’ them. We have constructed hierarchies mechanically from without, from an imaginary position outside the construction. And usually we put ourselves – as constructors – at the top position of the hierarchy, to be able exert control from that position over the ‘lower positions’ in the hierarchy. They are constructed by minds that deal with other people and with life in general in a *power-over* way.

When did the first hierarchies emerge?

The artificial construction of hierarchies began when the identification of who we are as human beings started to shift from our centering in our *heart* to centering in our *head*, and in our head from the focus on the *right hemisphere* to the focus on the *left hemisphere*. This shift from right to left hemisphere, and the deep significance it has had on the development of the Western world, has been beautifully described by the English psychiatrist and researcher Iain McGilchrist.⁶ In the left hemisphere our self-consciousness and more particularly our egoic sense of who we are, our sense of separation, was born – a deep sense of being completely separated not only from the natural world that surrounds us, but also from all the other living beings in that natural world, including our fellow human beings, and even from our own body. We can roughly pinpoint the historical period when this sense of separation and the related hierarchical way of organizing life has begun – and has increasingly become part of Western culture. From about 4000 BC increasingly we have tended to construct organizations, from small to large, in a hierarchical way.

It is no coincidence that in this period both we collectively started to construct the first hierarchies and we started to experience the surrounding world increasingly through a sense that we are completely separated from it. These two phenomena are interrelated. The English psychologist Steve Taylor argued that in that period an ego explosion hit human society on a large collective scale, due to a permanent desertification of a large area which included North Africa and the Middle East – and that from there this ego explosion gradually spread westwards to influence the entire development of Western civilization.⁷ The Indo-European invasions into

Neolithic ‘Old Europe’ have probably contributed as well, as has been argued by archaeologist Marija Gimbutas.⁸ And the invention and spreading of the written word might have contributed as well to this sense of separation, as has been argued by researchers like Leonard Shlain and David Abram.⁹

Some researchers still think that the invention of agriculture, from 10000 BC onwards, when people increasingly began to settle down in specific locations, also directly triggered some collective shifts in human consciousness and some major changes in the way our human world was organized, which have continued to the present and are responsible for the various crises that we have to deal with today. According to those researchers, then a major shift happened from a deep sense of belonging to the land into the idea of private landownership and also a major shift from communities based on mutual egalitarian relationships to communities based on the construction of hierarchical relationships and thereby also inherent inequivalence between people. Taken together, this would have resulted in the emergence of patriarchal societies.¹⁰ But I think it has become clear that in the human communities the egalitarian relationships did not disappear immediately and the sense of belonging to the land did not die, when they gradually changed over from hunting/gathering to practicing horticulture and later to agriculture. It took another 6000 years before this collective shift really began to manifest itself. The sense of belonging to the land, coupled with the belief that people cannot own the land, has also persisted well into the Neolithic period, and even into our own time among some surviving indigenous populations.

We don’t have to choose which influence – an ego explosion, invading Indo-European tribes, the changeover to written language – has been the most important one. There have probably been other influences as well. In any case, it has become clear that about 4000 BC human development took a turn in a new direction, and went through a paradigm shift, that has influenced the development of Western world up to the present. In that period, gradually more and more people began to experience themselves as unique beings who felt that they lived their lives more or less independently from the surrounding natural world and its cyclical powers – who did not experience their individual lives to be an inextricable part of it and had begun to believe that they could even control it from without, (re)shape it

according to their own wishes. It was a process that started relatively small thousands of years ago, first in the first city states of ancient Sumer. In the millennia after this, the process gradually expanded further and further, giving shape to the entire organization of ever larger states and empires, and finally also to all the huge corporations that operate on a global scale today.

It is no surprise that the minds that have constructed the hierarchies to build the Western societies in a hierarchical way, have prominently belonged to men. As feminist research has pointed out for decades, the hierarchical way of organizing life has turned Western world largely into a patriarchal world, in which not only men ruled over women who were put in a subordinate position, but also the so-called ‘masculine’ values were valued much higher than the so-called feminine values. As Riane Eisler has argued, it corresponded with a shift from *partnership societies* to *dominator societies*.¹¹ It is clear that in the hierarchical, patriarchal way of organizing life that has been central to Western culture for thousands of years, not only the weblike structure of holarchies of all living beings and the surrounding natural world were largely ignored, but they were suppressed as well and given a demonic label. It got a negative association and became something threatening, something to keep as much distance from as possible. But this suppression and demonization was also extended toward at least half of humanity – the women – and to the values they were supposed to represent – the so-called ‘feminine’ values. They were also considered threatening and kept on a distance as much as possible – by the men in power.

The organizations that have ruled the Western world – all the way from the first city states in Sumer to the expansive empires of Greece and Rome to the formation of the nation states in the 19th century – for millennia have been constructed from within a patriarchal mindset of *power-over* – power over other people but also power over the natural world. Men, who considered themselves to be the rulers, constructed hierarchies with levels that were vertically layered from the top to the bottom, with strict divisions between the levels. They comprised the artificial hierarchical structures that have managed to survive into our current societies, in which all every ‘low’ level is considered less important than and also subordinate to the level that is imagined to be the ‘higher’ one.

It hardly needs pointing out that this way of organizing life has increasingly become problematic in our time. The hierarchical

organizational structures even have become serious obstacles, preventing us to deal structurally with the various crises that we are facing today. But it doesn't mean that we have to start living once again as hunter-gatherers.

'Law and Order' systems

It is no coincidence that the first 'Law and Order' systems, with written legal rules, date from the period when the first hierarchies were constructed, in the city states in Mesopotamia. As pointed out earlier, legal systems were founded on the assumption that the human society initially existed in a disordered state and needed the imposition of legal rules to transform this state of disorder into a state of order. And it was also assumed it needed rulers – first in the city states and later in the larger states and empires – to create these legal rules and put them down in written laws. Just as has been the case with the Biblical Ten Commandments, it was often assumed that the legal rules had a divine origin.

In any case, this ensured that any legal system was clearly a manifestation of hierarchical thinking, part of the larger hierarchical organization of the society in which these rules function. Inherent in these legal systems is the idea that we humans experience the world through an egocentric sense of separation – which means that human society is assumed to be existing and functioning separately from the surrounding natural world, and humans also experience themselves as independent beings, separated from their fellow humans. This sense of separation is, of course, closely associated with the idea that we live in a society that is basically disordered until we impose order on it. It hardly needs adding that this imposition of order did not limit itself to the context of the society for which it was meant, but that its influence and power was extended beyond it, to the natural world. In this process the fact was ignored that this natural world was already inherently ordered – in a holarchical way.

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Ignoring holarchies and the implicate order

As said, hierarchies were constructed by humans when they had started to believe that the human world existed independently, outside the context and influence of the surrounding natural world. One of the peculiar qualities of mechanically constructed hierarchies is that – by penetrating deeply into our daily lives – they can make us forget about the existence of natural

holarchies and about the fact what we owe our very lives to them. They can give us the impression that the human world is the only world that seems relevant and that it can expand limitlessly by following its own plans, without taking any count of the presence of the holarchies of the natural world. In fact, this is what happened from the moment that the first hierarchies were constructed. We should not forget, however, that the majority of the people managed to keep their awareness of their connection to and dependence on the surrounding natural world alive for a long time. But with the increasing sense of separation that was an inextricable part of the sense of identity of the patriarchal rulers, societies were built that did not take count of the fact that the basis of their existence depended on their inclusion in the natural world. In this way, unknowingly the rulers started to destruct the very basis which had made their existence possible: the closed off the wellspring of the holarchies of the natural world that fed them and even willfully destroyed it.

We can see that even today we tend to forget that our human society as a whole, and the individual life of each one of us, have always remained fully embedded in the surrounding natural world. Our major focus is on human affairs, and we change our focus to the natural environment because the manifestation of climate change forces us to do this. But do we fully realize that the larger context in which our society exists is organized in a completely different, holarchical way, and what this kind of reality means for the course that our society must take?

Next to ignoring the presence and power of holarchies, the presence and power of the implicate order was also ignored. Above I have already mentioned the scientific theory about the implicate and explicate order by David Bohm, In this regard, it is important to realize that the implicate order is not just a modern invention by Bohm. Within ancient spiritual traditions the existence of this invisible dimension, that preceded and also powered the manifested material world, had already been known for millennia. In an attempt to create a holistic scientific theory that included all current scientific knowledge, Bohm only rediscovered this dimension and integrated it in a scientific context – and also gave it a new name. But although this invisible dimension of the natural world had been known for millennia, and referred to in many religious writings, apparently its presence and power was not understood by the patriarchal rulers since the first city

states. Their focus was on having power and creating wealth in the tangible, material world. And thereby they ignored the invisible dimension and the order that was already present in it. Instead, from their experience of disorder, they felt that there is an important part of their power consisted in imposing order on the world in a top-down way.

In this respect, we may wonder to what extent our legal systems can contribute to creating a more just and sustainable world that extends itself beyond the boundaries of human societies. The hierarchical structures of the written law systems, and the institutes that have been involved with making and maintaining them, were exclusively meant to provide human society with rules to make living together possible. In our time, there are brave attempts to extend our legal systems to the more-than-human world (a term I borrowed from David Abram), for instance, by giving rights to animals and even to natural features of the landscape, like rivers, forests and mountains, by acknowledging 'Earth Rights'.¹² Understandably, because we have become much more conscious of the damage we have done to the natural environment, we want to do everything we can to stop this process. But we should not forget that the natural world is not structured in a hierarchal way, but in a holarchical way, and that the disorder that we feel confronted with is basically our own disorder: the natural world does not need to be reordered. Instead, we can learn from the more-than-human, natural world to bring more harmony and balance into our unbalanced human lives.

Distinctions between different kinds of hierarchies

Is it really true that hierarchies are only constructed and built by humans? One could, of course, argue that the existence of hierarchies has not been limited to the human world – that different hierarchical levels also exist in among other primates. Well-known are the stories about the alpha males that dominate the groups of chimpanzees and gorillas. Haven't we, during our evolutionary development, inherited some of their characteristics, like the tendency towards creating hierarchical relationships? In other words, are hierarchical relationships among humans not much older than a mere 6000 years, and perhaps going back to the roots of our species? There are several researchers who do not speak about the existence of holarchies, but instead distinguish different types of hierarchies

In this respect, first of all I think about the distinction the American philosopher Ken Wilber has made between *natural hierarchies* and *pathological hierarchies*. He has argued that life can never exist without hierarchical orderings. According to him, life itself is ordered by the principle of the natural hierarchy: the atom lives on in the cell, the cell lives on in the organ, and the organs live on in the body, etc. Evolution has ensured that the 'lower' forms of development live on in transcended form in the 'higher' forms of development. The transcended contexts can live on within the framework of the new, more encompassing contexts. The pathological hierarchies differ from this in the sense that in them there is no place for the 'lower' forms of development in the 'higher' ones: the 'higher' forms of development try to separate themselves from the 'lower' ones and to suppress those. What ought to have been transcended, is suppressed instead. In pathological hierarchies an opening to a next stage of development, to a 'higher' context, is blocked.¹³

It is interesting to mention to two other researchers who have made a distinction between different kinds of hierarchies. Rupert Sheldrake has made a distinction between a normal hierarchy and a *nested hierarchy*, and with the latter term he referred to the same phenomenon as Wilber's natural hierarchy: he used that term because it consists of more, inclusive compartments. According to Sheldrake, the principle of the nested hierarchy exists on the macro level, where the earth is embedded in the solar system, the solar system in the galaxy, and so on. But it also exists on the micro level, where subatomic particles are embedded in atoms, and cells in tissues, organs and organisms.¹⁴

Riane Eisler has yet suggested another name for what Wilber has called natural hierarchies: *actualization hierarchies*: 'These are the familiar hierarchies of systems within systems, for example, of molecules, cells and organs of the body: a progression toward a higher, more evolved, and more complex level of function.' She has distinguished these from the *domination hierarchies* 'By contrast, as we may see all around us, domination hierarchies characteristically inhibit the actualization hierarchy of higher functions, not only in the overall social system, but also in the individual human'.¹⁵ The acknowledgement that hierarchies also operate within the individual human is important, because with this Eisler shows that they are meaningful on the level of consciousness.

What Wilber called ‘a natural hierarchy’, Sheldrake called ‘a nested hierarchy’, and Eisler called ‘an actualization hierarchy’, Koestler referred to with his term ‘holarchy’. I prefer Koestler’s term, because it emphasizes the profound difference between holarchies and hierarchies. But what I like about Wilber’s and Eisler’s terminology, is their qualification ‘pathological’ and ‘domination’. In my view, however, all hierarchies have this pathological and domination quality of top-down suppressing and excluding the lower forms of development. When we use Wilber’s distinction to qualify the dominating behaviour among primates, then it must perhaps still be qualified as part of a natural hierarchy, because animals do not behave in a pathological way. After all, pathological behaviour is an exclusive form of human behaviour, resulting from a strong identification with our ego, which makes us experience the world through a sense of separation.

Generally, I wonder whether we must always connect our human behaviour to animal behaviour that we might inherited during the course of evolution. We should not forget that there is still a time gap of about 4 to 6 million years between the chimpanzees and us humans, and even longer between gorillas and humans. And then we have not even considered to what extent we have inherited characteristic of the bonobos, who never have had alpha males that dominated their social life.

In any case, research has shown that the relationships among our distant Paleolithic ancestors, who still lived their life as hunter-gatherers, were often very egalitarian, and that they had not yet created (pathological or domination) hierarchies. Cooperation with each other, instead of mutual competition, was still very much the norm among them. Perhaps the small sizes of their tribes – in which the people had continuous contact with each other and also depended directly on one another – offered a good opportunity to suppress dominating behaviour whenever it occurred. But somehow, they managed to maintain an egalitarian way of relating with one another for hundreds of thousands of years. When the human societies grew eventually larger from about 6000 years ago, starting in Sumer and gradually moving westwards, this all changed quite dramatically: increasingly, they became hierarchically organized. I think this change was truly a paradigm shift that was largely human. As said, it marked the changeover to patriarchal societies that were hierarchically organized.

Hierarchical/dualistic projections

It is important to note that the patriarchal rulers never could keep their power-over approach to life limited to their own organization, nation, or state. They always felt threatened by other powerful hierarchies that had risen around them as well. It was therefore not surprising that these rulers always spent a lot of their energy, attention and power on trying to diminish these threats. Patriarchal, hierarchically-oriented, rulers always liked to cross artificial boundaries they were closed off from them and that they were not supposed to cross. Hierarchical thinking feels a strong urge to project its power onto the other powerful organizations and foreign states that it considers a threat. And the best way to deal with this, from within this mindset, is to attack and invade – to conquer the threatening enemy, in the hope that by doing so the threat will also disappear.

This shows that *dualism* is closely associated with this mindset of hierarchical thinking, which has equally been with us for a few millennia now. Dualistic struggle with people who are considered to be enemies, can of course manifest itself on an individual level. But it only become a real dangerous problem when it starts to manifest itself on a collective level, when it occurs between groups of people who both stick the label of ‘the enemy’ on one another. As history has shown, this has regularly escalated into warfare, which, due to the ongoing technological development of weaponry to support it, has ‘managed’ to make ever larger numbers of victims.

But dualistic struggles not only manifested themselves horizontally, they also did vertically. In this hierarchical/dualistic projection process the ones who considered themselves to be the ‘good ones’ also put themselves automatically on the top position of the hierarchy, and the ones they considered ‘bad ones’ on a lower position. This also happened both on a collective and an individual level. Since the rise of patriarchy some 6,000 years ago, it has been men, and in particular a small class of these men, who have considered themselves the most civilized, as well as ethically and intellectually the smartest, of the human species. Due to these qualities, they considered themselves superior and did not hesitate to use force to put themselves in the top position of the ruling class. This meant that anybody who didn’t fit into this category of self-imposed superiority was considered inferior. This led to the exclusion not only the majority of men who had no

or little power, but with a few exceptions it excluded all of the women, and in many western nations it has also led to an exclusion of the people with a darker skin color. Only recently we have begun to expose these inequalities and injustices on a large scale through movements like feminism, #MeToo, and Black Lives Matter.

From balanced duality to unbalanced dualism

It is important to realize that dualistic struggles did not manifest out of nothing, they were unbalanced and reversed versions of the state of *balanced duality*, that we can witness all over the natural world of our planet through the expression of its incessant cyclical movements – from night to day to night to day, from winter to summer to winter to summer, and so on. This balanced duality is an inextricable part of the holarchical order. As said earlier, our own body is also ordered in an holarchical way, all the way from the atomic level to the whole organism. And in this organism we go through the ongoing cycles of sleeping/dreaming and waking, of being unconscious and being conscious, of feeling and thinking, of imagining/intuiting and sensing, of being open and being closed-off, and so on. These cycling processes initially all express a state of balanced duality, with both sides being equivalent to each other, beautifully and meaningfully visualized by the ancient Taoist symbol of Yin/Yang. This symbol shows that both sides are continually changing into each other but remain balanced and united on the higher level of the Tao, fully included in the circle. Although both sides are in balance, it is important to realize that the emphasis is on the Yin, the dark side, the feminine side.

In a hierarchical relationship this balance is disturbed and the emphasis is also reversed. One side is put in opposition to another and also raised above it, made more important. The state of balanced duality is transformed into a state of *unbalanced dualism*. On an individual level this means that our head is put in opposition to and above our heart, our human side against and above our animal side, or civilized side against and above our savage or primitive side, our reason against and above our feeling, our objective outlook against and above our subjective outlook, and so on. On a collective level hierarchical thinking has inspired us – through our sense of separation – to put ourselves as human beings above at the very top of all developments.

In Christianity – at least in its institutionalized form – all the focus was put on our human lives. Because, according to the Bible, we were considered to have been created exclusively in the image of God, we were put in a superior position to the rest of the natural world – the animals and plants – that were solely there to be of serve us in the form of food. Simultaneously, it also gave us the right to fully exploit the Earth and use all its resources for our own benefit. And as we know, we have made great use of that privilege.

In a religious sense, we considered ourselves to be the crown of creation. Later this superior position was continued in the context of materialist science. Within this context we considered ourselves the highest and most perfect expression of evolutionary development: the entire process of evolution was eventually meant to create its highest evolved form: ourselves. To support this superior position with evidence, we have tried to focus on our human uniqueness by pointing out that we are the only species that has made tools and that we have the largest brain. Interestingly, the focus of our own uniqueness has shifted in time. When it was made clear that some animals can make tools as well and Neanderthals appeared to have had a relatively larger brain than Homo Sapiens, other human qualities were suggested to prove our human superiority, like the power to create highly sophisticated languages and technologies.

But should the fact that a creature wants to prove its own uniqueness and superiority not have made us suspicious from the start? However superior we might consider ourselves to be, again and again we have shown ourselves quite helpless with transcending our greed and egocentric urge to struggle – to historically have been very poor peacemakers in the face of rising conflicts and warfare. Again and again we have shown to the world that we cannot easily leave our sense of separation, and the dualistic and hierarchical ways of thinking connected with it, behind us. We have often failed to reopen our minds to the basic interconnectedness of life, and the wonderful and intelligent holarchies that are a direct expression of it. The large number of small-minded, ego-driven surfers on the Internet, discussed earlier, are recent evidence of this failure.

It is sad to see that the exclusive projection on – imagined – threats by other people, organizations and foreign states has never come to an end, but have continued to manifest itself to this day. And because of the increase in

the world population and the intensive contacts we have with each other across the planet today, they could even have taken on much larger forms. We can see all around us that it has brought our civilization into a state of crisis in many respects. There is of course the ecological crisis, the reality of climate change. But we can also witness an increase in the tension and the polarization between human groups, from very small ones to very large ones. On a relatively small level, this is happening, for instance, in the context of gender, ethnicity and identity. But on the large level we can see that on global scale the tensions, conflicts and even warfare have increasingly been happening in and between states, and with the current state of technological development of weaponry in mind, we should be aware that we need to pay serious attention to this phenomenon. Together with the ecological crisis it is about to bring an end to civilization as we know it. And hierarchical thinking and organization plays an important role in this: it has turned out to be a major obstruction in bringing us any nearer to a solution.

Hierarchical power-over, top-down delusions

It is a fact that the importance of hierarchical ordering in our society is still widely accepted and endorsed. Politicians in politics, in particular when they are at the head of their political party, are expected to contribute to leading the country in the right direction and try to realize the change in the world that they have promised to the people that elected them. Prime-ministers and presidents are supposed to be in charge of their country. When a country goes to war, the decisions about the strategy are made at the top. When there are peace negotiations, also the people at the top - 'important' politicians or presidents - are invited and consulted to come to an agreement. Managers at the top of corporations are considered to most important people in their organization: they are expected to represent the view of the entire organization, decide about the future development of the corporation, and act as its major spokesperson. Trainers of sport teams, like trainers of soccer teams - from a local to national level -, are held responsible for the success of their team, and their contribution is considered more important than the contribution of players in the field. The trainers are congratulated for their successes and heavily criticized for their

losses. People often expect a change in the success of a team just by changing the trainer, while the players remain the same.

It must be clear that in our modern world we have given too much power to the people at the top of any organization. Our trust and belief in their power is not just unrealistic – like in the case of trainers of soccer teams. It is also very dangerous, like in the case of a president deciding that his country is at war with another country, and telling the inhabitants of his country that unfortunately they have to do the fighting for him against ‘the enemy’. In these cases, it is shown how far artificial hierarchies have deviated from natural holarchies: in holarchies the holons at all the levels are equally important. The entire system would apart and perish without the essential support and contribution of the ‘lower’ holons.

The holarchical world has never left us

Actually, the same will eventually happen in any hierarchy as well, when the people ‘at the bottom’ really stop following and supporting the people ‘at the top’... That’s why dictatorial leaders in the long run really act against their own interest, when they give orders to armed police and military forces to crush demonstrations of the people protesting against unbearable injustices. Any leader would reopen his mind to the ‘power of the people’, when he it starts realizing that the holarchical world of nature has never been away – and that our human society, including we human beings who are living in it, has always remained fully embedded in the surrounding natural world. When we – which means all individual human beings, from ‘common folk to managers, politicians and dictatorial leaders – start feeling embedded in the natural world once again, the hierarchies would be losing the power they have over us. Then we would once again become aware that the natural world, the more-than-human world, is immeasurably larger and more powerful than our human society, and that the awareness of being fully included in its matrix also gives our life meaning.

Before the shift to a patriarchal culture, and to the hierarchically structured societies from about 4000 BCE – in short, before the period we still associate with the beginning of Western civilization – , we can assume that our distant ancestors have lived for hundred thousands of years in a world that felt holarchical to them, although of course they would not have

used that terminology. Feeling embedded in the matrix of the surrounding natural world, they experienced their lives to be part of the web of life. They considered their own lives and the natural world around them as a Sacred reality in which wholes were always part of bigger wholes and between all the different levels there was always a continuous reciprocal relationship, ‘a communion of subjects’ (in the words of the American theologian and cultural historian Thomas Berry). This must be distinguished from experiencing life and the surrounding world as ‘a collection of objects’, which has become the norm in our modern society.¹⁶ In our time we are getting more and more conscious of the fact that indigenous communities all over the world, have managed to keep our ancestor’s way of life and outlook alive until the present.

As pointed out earlier the holarchical way of organizing life is still very much present and alive within ourselves, not only on a biological level, in the way our body is structured organically in different levels, but also in the way our mind is shaped psychologically and spiritually. I needn’t repeat that here. But with regard to the holarchical levels in our own body, it is interesting to bring in here the findings of the American biologist Bruce Lipton about the cell membrane, that I referred to earlier. He has argued that in its default state this membrane is open to influences from the environment, and that this openness is essential for our growth process. According to him, the closing off of this membrane, in case of threats, also stops the growth process, as all the energy must be put in defending the cell. Interestingly, Lipton has pointed out that this reality is not just important on the cell level, but also for the organs of which the cells are a part and further for the larger organism, our body, and even our relationship with the environment in which we are all embedded.

It is obvious that Lipton’s findings are also meaningful for the boundaries between holons and larger holons. Initially the boundaries between each level should be open to make a continuous exchange between the levels possible, which is essential to keep ourselves alive and healthy on all the different levels. That same initial openness also extends to the world around us, to the living landscape, the more-than-human world that, in addition to us humans, also gives life to all the other animal and plant species. It is important to be aware of this when we go for a walk somewhere: in addition to the few changes that we humans have added to

the surrounding landscape, such as streets, houses, bridges, canals, etc. and which may seem dominant, nature remains the most powerful element. However urbanized the environment has become, with perhaps many skyscrapers blocking the view and with no tree anywhere to be seen, the larger natural holarchical order of the surrounding landscape still remains the larger context within which the relatively small artificial hierarchical organizations of our human societies operate.

Open natural boundaries and close-off artificial boundaries

The open state of boundaries, to make exchange and communication between the inner and outer world possible, is in fact a state that has manifested itself on different levels and different ways all across the natural world. That's why nature is essentially structured in a holarchical way. When the English psychologist Steve Taylor argues (in his book *DisConnected*) that being connected with the world around us and being an individual at the same time, I realize he is actually talking about the holarchical structure of the natural world, of which we are an inextricable part: 'Connection and individuality aren't mutually exclusive. You can be an individual without experiencing a sense of separation to the world. In fact, this is the ideal human state – to possess individual identity at the same time as feeling our essential oneness with the whole world, and with all other individual forms. In this state the self exists without boundaries, in a fluid dynamic relationship to other beings and the world, without losing its own form.'¹⁷ In this case, I wouldn't say that the self has no boundary at all, but that it has an open boundary, like the cell membrane – a natural boundary. It is interesting that the word *individuality* points to a holarchical reality. It points to the fact that we have a dual nature, but within our dual nature we are essentially undivided, in balance. In Taylor's words, we are essentially connected beings. In this sense, there is a difference between duality and dualism, as I have argued elsewhere – for instance, in my article *Seeing a light in the dark*.¹⁸ In dualism the division and struggle between the two opposites is prominently present. It is from the unbalanced state of dualism that we try to bring order from without by constructing or building hierarchies.

In hierarchies the boundaries between the different levels are not open and fluid: they are meant to be closed off, to keep the different levels as

much separate as possible. These boundaries are in fact meant to create the different levels, to make them appear as wholes in themselves that have not much business with the other levels. Anyway, boundaries that are functioning largely to keep the inner world in and the outer world out, that are closed-off to begin with and only are opened up for specific reasons or occasions, are not natural boundaries but artificial ones – boundaries that are consciously made by ourselves. The borders between nations function in that way, and also the doors of every building. And much less visibly, the boundaries between the different levels in hierarchies and also between the different hierarchical organizations, also functions in that way.

In line with what Bruce Lipton said about the closed cell membrane blocking our growth processes, we can say that hierarchical organizations and structures are not beneficial for the growth processes of these organizations and the people who work within their context. Of course, one can say that people have grown when they managed to climb the ladder to the top of a hierarchical organization. But this is not the kind of organic growth process that Lipton was referring to.

Blocking or developing your potential

We are all born to grow and develop our potential. We get the energy to realize this. To get a good idea how this manifests itself in our life, we can begin by having a look at the way life for all of us starts in this world: we have all begun our life when the male sperm and female egg fused and, in the period of nine months, we grew from a tiny fetus to a full-grown baby in our mother's womb.

As Joseph Chilton Pearce has pointed out, in his book *Magical Child*, the female womb is one of the ways in which a matrix helps us to grow. According to him, a matrix offers three things to new life: 'a source of possibility, a source of energy to explore this possibility, and a safe place where this exploration can take place'.¹⁹ He indicates that intelligence can only grow within the context of such a matrix, and emphasizes that the nature of this matrix is always *feminine*. *Matrix* is the Latin word for *womb*, from which also words like *matter* and *mother* are derived. Although the term *matrix* is related to *matter*, we should not equate a matrix with just its physical manifestation, like that of the female womb.

Pearce has argued that matrices are essential for all our growth processes, not just for the fetus in the womb, but after we are born. We always remain imbedded in invisible matrices, to help us further with our growth process, not only biologically, but also psychologically and spiritually. Every matrix is temporary and when we leave one, we enter another. The ongoing process of shifts between matrices is what Pearce refers to with the term *matrix shifts*. From the safe environment as fetuses in the womb we shift to the safe environment of the family, of the school, of friendships, of a sports club, of a political party, and so on. They all provide this safe space to grow, to develop our potential. And we should not forget that, beyond the human world, during our lifetime we are always embedded in the larger matrix of Mother Earth (and in the even larger matrices of the solar system, the galaxy and the universe).

This is of course the ideal situation, the situation of positive matrices. We have the potential to grow, the energy and the perfect context to realize this. Unfortunately, there are also negative matrices: sometimes we have to deal with bad authoritarian parents, with ‘wrong’ bullying ‘friends’, with criminal organizations and other negative influences. We are still embedded in their matrix context, but instead of helping us grow, they block our growth process.

This is where the ideas about holarchies and hierarchies discussed above come in. Positive matrices are natural in kind, present throughout the natural world. Their internal order functions as a holarchy. Negative matrices, on the other hand, are largely artificial in kind, largely shaped by ourselves. In this case, through our egocentric sense of separation, we have managed to give hierarchical relationships an important place in the context of the matrix and in doing so, in fact, abuse the natural process.

As stated earlier, holarchical relationships help us grow. They help us to develop our potential. They work like a positive matrix. But hierarchical relationships, and therefore also negative matrices, block our growth process, block the development of our potential. That is why authoritarian parents, ‘wrong’ bullying ‘friends’ and criminal organizations do not help us to really grow as people, to mature. But the energy that is blocked has to go somewhere: it has to express itself. It does so by manifesting itself in a fight-or-flight manner, through struggle and conflict.

Cyclical growth processes and linear developments

I pointed to a major difference between holarchies and hierarchies: to the fact that holarchies are given shape from within and hierarchies from without. That is why holarchies are alive and provide a context in which living beings can grow to maturity. That is why hierarchies are always artificial, mechanical constructions with no life of their own.

The natural growth processes are self-organized and manifest themselves in a cyclical way: these processes include continuous changes of dying and renewing. In this way, growth manifests itself like a spiral and has ‘built-in’ limitations. It can only keep manifesting itself when there are ongoing open exchanges and communications between the different levels of the holarchy. When we look at our individual life, we can see that these natural growth processes have not just manifested themselves biologically, by growing and sustaining the life of our body, but also by growing psychologically and spiritually during our entire life. At some point we have reached the limits of its own potentialities, but the dying process of the organism like our own body doesn’t mean that we have also reached the end of the growing process. There are enough indications – as shown by the many convincing reports of near-death experiences and even of reincarnations – that our life doesn’t stop when our body dies.²⁰

The artificially constructed hierarchies are connected to linear developments. We can see them expressed in market-economic thinking, technological improvements promising to make our lives better and better, and ideas about our culture moving increasingly away a barbaric and savage past towards an ever more civilized future. It has become clear that these linear developments are not sustainable in an ecological sense. Of course, the revolutionary ideas about a circular or donut economy that is going to replace the market economy have been suggested. They promise to transform the linear developments of the market economy, and all the damage it has done and still does to the ecosystem, into cyclical and sustainable growth processes. It is not yet clear to me, whether we are going to succeed in triggering these transformations in time on a planetary scale.

Being embedded in or being separated from the natural world

Even if we are not aware of it yet, it is still an indisputable fact that we are always embedded in the natural world, in the *larger context* of the living

landscape that surrounds us everywhere at all times – the larger body in which all of our much smaller, nearly eight billion human bodies are embedded. Being in touch with Mother Earth starts with being in touch with the natural environment in our direct vicinity, with the all-encompassing, holarchically ordered life of the surrounding landscape. She comes first, as our health and life depend on Her life and health. And our place and role in the hierarchical organizations of human society – like in the economy that provides us with money to buy food and material possessions, in the state with its political system that promises to take care of our lives – come second. Whether we are aware of this or not.

But, unfortunately, hierarchical organizations tend to put themselves first, and when they manage to do this – and they have, as we can witness everyday –, the presence of the surrounding natural world and the reality of being embedded in it, is shifted to the background and sometimes even ignored completely. We probably don't even realize that in this process the emphasis is shifted from holarchical relations with all living beings to hierarchical relations with other human beings. In the market economy the emphasis is on hierarchical relations between human beings, and the natural world is considered 'a collection of objects'. In a true ecology the emphasis is on the holarchical relations between all the living being within the matrix of Mother Earth, within the Earth Community – in which there is 'a communion of subjects'.

I have often wondered how it is possible that we can be fully engaged in a conflict with specific other people and focus that strongly on them that we seem to have forgotten that during our conflict we have remained embedded in a larger natural environment that continually kept supporting our life? Or how is it possible in warfare activities with an enemy, that the soldiers who spend most of their time outdoors in a context of a beautiful landscape do not seem to experience the overwhelming presence majesty of this landscape (whose matrix not only includes the earth underneath their feet, but also the expanse of the sky above them)? Apparently, the power of our sense of separation, and of the hierarchical organizations that limit their concerns to human life, is not simply healed by confronting us with the surrounding natural world, with the larger more-than-human world. It seems that our hierarchically focused egocentric mind in the left hemisphere, in these kinds of situations is very well able to keep our energy blocked and

stuck in our fight-or-flight response. As pointed out earlier, by feeling the constant urge to struggle with all sorts of imagined enemies, we keep wasting our valuable energy, our potential to grow and mature. And when this feeling of being stuck and wasting our energy happens collectively on a worldwide scale, as happens to be the case, we badly need to find a way to truly heal our sense of separation.

Paradigm shift: a change of stories

It should be obvious we can only fully experience the holarchical order of nature, feel completely embedded in the majestic presence of the surrounding landscape and be charged by the power inherent in it, when our minds are once again open to it. And it's a fact that this cannot be realized as long as we keep identifying ourselves with our sense of separation, with our egocentric consciousness. But that is what many people keep doing, on such a large scale, that it lies at the various crises that we are confronted with today.

But we should not forget that every crisis is also *a challenge*. Charles Eisenstein has argued that we need a change of stories. According to him, collectively we are stuck in the 'Story of Separation', and it is not beneficial for us anymore to help ourselves and on a larger scale our civilization further towards a meaningful and sustainable life in the future. And, as we have seen earlier, we may wonder if it has ever served us well. We need another story and Eisenstein has shown in his books and articles that we are gradually moving towards a 'New and Ancient Story' or a 'Story of Interbeing'. At this moment we are 'in between stories'.²¹ Other researchers, for instance Denise Breton and Christopher Largent, have pointed to shift from a 'control paradigm' or 'power-over paradigm' to a new 'paradigm of interconnection'.²² This shift is manifesting itself by a collective letting go of our power of control. Returning to the theme of this article, I think central in this paradigm shift is the dismantling of the patriarchal hierarchal power-over structure of many organizations and corporations – and the rediscovery of the much larger and much more beneficial power of the holarchical order, that exists all over the natural world. The American researcher David Korten called this shift 'The Great Turning', a shift from 'Empire to Earth Community'.²³

In ourselves we can experience this shift from a position of control toward surrender as a descent – a descent from our head to our heart and to the hara center as a reflection of who we are. As said, this descent is not easy. It is not a simple process of descending down the steps of a ladder. It can only be triggered by a process of *awakening experiences* – about which Steve Taylor has written some very interesting books and articles.²⁴ By the power of these awakening experiences we are gradually moving away from the paradigm of control and the ‘Story of Separation’, and we are reopening our minds more and more for the paradigm of interconnection, for the ‘New and Ancient Story’. The good news is that – despite the fact that we are shown a rather grim situation of the state of the world by the mainstream media – these awakening experiences appear to be happening increasingly to people all over the planet. In this development, we are witnessing nothing less than the birth of an expanded human consciousness. Hope for the future of our species lies in the realization of this worldwide shift.

Leiden, December 2023

Notes

¹ Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*, Hutchinson, 1967; Arthur Koestler, *Janus. A Summing Up*, Hutchinson, 1978.

² Bruce Lipton, *The Biology of Belief. Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter and Miracles*, Mountain of Love/Elite Books, 2005.

³ See for instance: Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life, How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures*, Vintage, 2021; Susan Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree. Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*, Vintage, 2021.

⁴ See for instance: Ervin Laszlo, *Science and the Reenchantment of the Cosmos*, Inner Traditions, 2006; Ervin Laszlo, *The Chaos Point. The World at the Crossroads*, Hampton Roads, 2006; Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past. The Habits of Nature*, Park Street Press, 1995; Lynn McTaggart, *The Field. The Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe*, HarperCollins, 2003.

⁵ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.

⁶ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary. The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western Mind*, Yale University, 2019.

⁷ Steve Taylor, *The Fall. The Insanity of The Ego in Human History and The Dawning of A New Era*, O Books, 2005. (A new, revised and expanded, editions was published in 2018)

⁸ Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess. The World of Old Europe*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991; Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

⁹ Leonard Shlain, *The Alphabet versus the Goddess. Male Words and Female Images*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1998; David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous. Perception and*

Language in a More-Than-Human World, Vintage Books, 1997; David Abram, *Becoming Animal. An Earthly Cosmology*, Pantheon Books, 2010.

¹⁰ For instance, Yuval Harari and Jared Diamond subscribe to this view, but apart from that it is still quite widespread: many other researchers think along these lines. Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind*, Penguin, 2014; Jared Diamond, *The World until Yesterday. What we can learn from traditional societies*, Viking Press, 2012

¹¹ Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade. Our History, Our Future*, Pandora, 1990.

¹² A few years ago I have written a few blogs on animals rights and Earth Rights:
<https://www.leidenlawblog.nl/articles/making-space-for-animals-and-their-rights>,
<https://www.leidenlawblog.nl/articles/respecting-the-rights-of-mother-earth>

¹³ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden. A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution*, Quest Books, 1996, p. XI-XV.

¹⁴ Rupert Sheldrake, Ralph Abraham, Terence McKenna, *Triologen op de rand van het Westers denken. Chaos, creativiteit en verbeelding op weg naar een visionaire toekomst*, Kosmos New Age, 1995, p. 113; Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past. The Habits of Nature*, Park Street Press, 1995, p. 95.

¹⁵ Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade. Our History, Our Future*, Pandora, 1990, p. 105-106.

¹⁶ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Books Club, 1990; Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, Random House, 2000.

¹⁷ Steve Taylor, *DisConnected. The Roots of Human Cruelty and How Connection Can Heal the World*, IFF Books, 2023, p. 245-246.

¹⁸ The article 'Seeing a light in the dark' can be read and downloaded from my website:
<https://eng.wimbonis.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Seeing-a-light-in-the-dark.pdf>

¹⁹ Joseph Chilton Pearce, *Magical Child. Rediscovering Nature's Plan for our Children*, Bantam Books, New York 1980, p. 18 and further.

²⁰ For instance: Nancy Rynes, *Awakenings from the Light. 12 Life Lessons from a Near-Death Experience*, Create Space, 2015; Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven. A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*, Simon & Schuster, 2013; Anita Moorjani, *Dying to be me. My Journey from Cancer, to Near Death, to True Healing*, Hay House, 2014; Christopher Bache, *Lifecycles. Reincarnation and the Web of Life*, LEXHAM PR, 1998.

²¹ Charles Eisenstein, *Ascent of Humanity. Civilization and the Human Sense of Self*, North Atlantic Books, 2013; Charles Eisenstein, *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible*, North Atlantic Books, 2013.

²² Denise Breton, Christopher Largent, *The Paradigm Conspiracy. How Our Systems of Government, Church, School & Culture Violate Our Human Potential*, Hazelden, Center City 1996, p. 2.

²³ David C. Korten, *The Great Turning. From Empire to Earth Community*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006.

²⁴ For instance: Steve Taylor, *The Leap. The psychology of spiritual awakening*, Hay House, 2017; Steve Taylor, *Waking from Sleep. Why awakening experiences occur and how to make them permanent*, Hay House, 2010.