

WAKE UP NEO: SOME QUESTIONS REGARDING OUR EXISTENCE

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Abstract: Besides offering some answers, the well-known film *Matrix* raises a lot of questions concerning our general existential involvement. Produced proximate the new millennium by the Wachowski brothers, the film came at the right moment for the higher levels of human consciousness development. Consequently, we saw the advent of an entire stream of philosophical essays on the film. Unfortunately, they are merely descriptive, trying to retell the story based on university-level rephrasing. They do not hit the bull's eye, remaining incapable of getting to the core of the investigated subject. Disturbing in such studies is that they are so conventional and typical as if afraid to push further the boundaries of the philosophical research, as if almost everything one has to say is already repressed (like in children growing up with authoritarian parents that amend, correct, or rebuke everything they say).

Keywords: *matrix, philosophy, existence, persona, personality, self-development.*

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we look at some of those perspectives to see what can we do to surpass the impediment and to better our 'weak' and 'thin' philosophical reflection. It is our opinion that, in a time where people are so disoriented and lose hope year after year, philosophy ought to regain its 'strong', not forcefully metaphysical, side of thinking. As such, once it has revealed the inconsistencies and intricacies of the *matrix* of everyday life, philosophy should look back once more to its origins to gather strength and meaningfulness for our existence – to be a beacon that guides us.

The essays we have in mind, from *Philosophers Explore the Matrix* (Grau, C. 2005), are basically on a level specific to a disciple doing everything under the watchful eye and constant supervision of his master or teacher. Psychologically speaking (psychoanalytically in particular), we feel and detect the irrepressible dominance of an inflated, authoritarian, and powerful Superego, eating away from the modest reserves of the

weak Ego of an inexperienced youngling (for the tense and problematic relationship between Ego and Superego see also Freud, 2000, pp. 231-240, or Roudinesco et Plon, 1997, pp. 1038-1040). But philosophy is based on a very special procedure, one that is capable to relax and take one step back to have a clear view of what is going on in front of oneself. A philosopher cannot stay, at least not for long, under the shadow of the Superego, or beneath the protective umbrella of the master, or the invisible but constrictive and coercive influence of the expectations and standards typified in all the text books or every academic requirement on ‘how to’ do, write, think, or express oneself. Although the life of a student can be relatively nice, it is, none the less, just a phase in the greater circle of life – on which the *Matrix* film actually delves. It is not only Neo (the main character in the film) that has to start a new life but us too (influenced by the heroic message the story presents) who have to explore some alternatives in our lives about our existential (re)orientation and engagement.

What we should do is wake up – hence the title of our paper – as Neo himself; we remember that at the beginning of the film we see him asleep in front of his computers, tired and exhausted of his search and of his all-too-normal cubicle life. His existence is, as we see in the awakening scene, very far from reality, rather immersed in an endless virtual world; he lives more in the virtually of computers than in the *real* reality, except when he is following his social or professional involvement. Thus, “wake up Neo” is a call for everyone, more or less asleep, floating in the dream-world “encumbered forever by desire and ambition” (Gilmour/Samson 1994), involved and absorbed in the stringent realities of petty, standardized, and boring lives that are more and more cubicle-like. Such a wake-up call is for all those who still consider themselves rather disciples than masters, who have not yet established a friendly relationship with their Superego in order for their Ego to occupy its own central place. If the Ego is somehow marginalized, outsized by a strong Superego, the whole person has a problem, one of identity and identification as well as one of power and strength. The first step in attaining this is, of course, by waking up from a dreamlike state where one’s Ego is just semi-conscious, not yet fully aware of how far he has been led astray by ambitions, desires or hallucinations coupled with lots of external suggestions, alienating ideologies, or multileveled and insistent subliminal influences.

Of course, such an awakening, essentially atypical and in most cases exceptional, raises some very unusual question marks which invite to some normally unheard interrogations. The awakening we are

speaking of is essentially from our general existential slumber in which the conventionalities and intricacies of contemporary socio-professional life invite us to live. It is, at the same time, an awakening towards our own time i.e., the time of our Ego and not the timescale given to us *via* the *persona* – our social role or our conventional mask we show to the world. Because the timeframe of modern (postmodern) life is mainly conceived for the *persona* we present to the world (Jung 1997, 513-520), by enhancing a conventional, collective, and credited life pattern and wearing a convenient and decent mask or a suitable, conventional, and hypocritical face, it remains consequently little if any time for nurturing and developing our own Ego. We are not referring here, as it easily could be misunderstood, to those innumerable and insufferable turgid and narcissistic Egos which tend to be the norm for our more or less millennial citizens; we rather emphasize and point out to what the psychotherapist Murray Bowen called the *nucleus of Ego* or the *solid self* that exists at the base of our personality (as its hard core or ‘taproot’).

There is another time table and a different schedule running, one constructed brick by brick, slowly and methodically in the long evolutionary process of humanization. The perspective of this interior edifice is very different from what the hasty and agitated modern life has accustomed us to. We must return to the sources of our own time, because the time was stolen from us in the manner illustrated by Michael Ende’s story *Momo* (Ende 1996, 64-80). From such a perspective, ‘our’ time is just an expression, but it is not ours any more, it is just *quasi* our time, one which was estranged and taken from us, to be used and capitalised by others. Our contemporary feeling of alienation, already emphasized by the great existentialists of the last century, is not only psychological, but it has something to do with the subliminal and very subjective perception of time as a fundamental existential dimension characteristic to humans. We do not actually live in our very own time because others – the “Grey Men” M. Ende so well presents – do their ominous job by stealing time in our world too. Of course, it is simplistic to say just ‘others’, without specifying who, and remain only in the vague of an anonymous plurality. Although M. Ende describes them as “the Grey Men”, they remain hidden behind their anonymity and perfect uniformity (comparable to the Agents in *Matrix*). Perfectly objectified, mere instruments of a matrix that invades any city, grey men actually represent a system that wants to be in control of one of the most precious commodities we have, namely time.

WHAT IS OURS AND WHAT IS NOT?

*Tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito.*¹

Vergilius, *Aeneis*.

Once thrown in the whirlpool of modern life, we are not in control over our own time (or the left-overs of it, usually called free-time) because others, meaning exterior factors, influences, and mainly commercial interests, are also interested in using it as they see fit. How is such a thing possible? How is it that our time is not ours anymore? How is it that we are in a constant and inexorable hurry, running through everyday existence, day in day out, at the same accelerated rush and relentless speed? We think that such an elaborate operation was made possible by dislodging us from our very own Ego and moving us towards the superficial and ambiguous entity C. G. Jung called *persona* (Jung 1990, 40-55). The time is not our time any more but it is definitely *persona's* time, the *persona* that we are living by. We, as humans, were displaced from our own time and removed from the possibility of having any time to decide, as the wizard Gandalf says: "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us." (Tolkien 1995, 50).

More often than not, we pledge on the altar of this parade-face and 'personality' of ours. In the meantime, the red carpet is laid for exposing our every whim, nice tattoo, new piercing, or whatever is trendy on the internet – the universalised social media where almost everybody is on, desperately searching for thumbs up, hilarious emojis, or at least some meagre virtual attention. Egos, meaning solid and genuinely mature Egos capable of building a well-structured personality, cannot be easily manipulated and are hard to control or exploit socially or commercially. *Personas*, on the contrary, being just superficial and very thin and inconsistent (more like a very thin, almost transparent slice of Swiss cheese), are easy to influence and manipulate. The difference is similarly as that between the introvert and extravert tendencies, while the Ego is rather Self-centred (without being egotistical), judging everything according to its own criteria; the *persona*, as our extravert and social face, while a composite mishmash, is already on the lookout for exterior influences, suggestions, new ideas or (yet) unheard-of trends. While *persona*-centred, our Ego is asleep as Neo in the first scenes of the film. Sleeping in front of the computer that is searching for something out there in the world – to eventually find something he cannot manage to get

1 (lat.) You should not give in to evils, but proceed ever more boldly against them.

in the real everyday world of corporate life he is condemned to live. That something must be pursued in the virtual reality because it is not an item from this world; it is not a physical or material object, it has to be searched for somewhere else, in another dimension of existence or level of reality, probably a subtler, more like a virtual one.

There is, probably in everyone, a need, or a longing for something bigger than ourselves, something that could change our life and make an indelible and unforgettable impression on us. Immanence itself does not seem to be enough no matter how much we fill our lives with material goods or superficial experiences of brief and evanescent satisfactions. Beyond everyday immanence there is a call; some can hear it, some don't pay attention anymore, others have no time for such 'triviality', and some repress it just because they have always more important things to do or just because are afraid of it. In essence, addressing such a 'beyond everydayness' is a matter of time and energy, attention, awareness, focusing and, of course, prioritizing. If someone has all those at hand, one can pay at least some attention to the parallel process going on in the collective unconscious, on that noetic level where the great lines, directions and priorities of existence are drawn and revealed. That would be, without any doubt, the call of transcendence, the great 'beyond' that tries to get in contact with us by intermediating a bridge between the abstract and the concrete of our everyday lives.

But, if we are constantly on the run, always looking in the mirror our *persona* holds in front of us, obsessively checking the phone for new messages from friends, or for the latest news, we will be arrested in that pervasive immanence of social media which perfectly illustrates the most hysterical aspect of the *persona*. It seems that not even C.G. Jung himself imagined such an alienating result of what is already a bizarre 'halfling', a mere impersonation of a mutilated person. The omnipresence of social pressure is continuously stealing our time (as the Grey Men do in *Momo*) and not only that, but our energy as well. Because the process is universal and because everyone has accepted it as such, without questioning it – "that's life, get used to it" – it doesn't seem to be or feel strange, abnormal, or even a little bit suspect; as such we are obviously not at odds with our own alienation. Ubiquity seems to be the answer, if everybody does the same thing (more or less, of course) and has adopted a standardised way of life, it means automatically that that's that and, consequently, there is nothing more to say or to question (only to comment with no action or results). By universalising the corporate way of life, the matrix can close itself around us like a golden cage. In time this cage becomes so vast, as to accommodate everybody, and

broadened further by products produced on an industrial scale, that its bars receding further and further become invisible – out of sight, out of mind ... Then everyone will agree that: that's life...

It is said that we should be involved, to keep ourselves updated, to participate in the socio-media life, and to stay connected as much as possible, as we see in the futuristic parody presented by Dave Eggers in *The Circle* (Eggers 2014) and the homonymous film. Because we want to be good citizens and up to date with everything that goes on, we “press the green button” towards our dependency and our alienation. Displaced from our own existence, robbed of our own time, and thrown into the carousel of hyper-activity and relentless restlessness, we find ourselves submerged by the commandments of social media, advertising, and every other manifestation of what is ominously named ‘social pressure’. Like Lord Sauron, the Great Eye from *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 1995), on top of his tower, following every move of his servants and armies, or the Big Brother and his unique Party in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell 1990), the eyes of surveillance and control are always watching us. All those surveillance mechanisms can address, at least for the moment, only our superficial part, namely the socially engaged and exposed *persona*; for the time being our more intimate parts of personality are left on their own, more or less free to do whatever they want or chose. It is only the Ego, the solid, nuclear Self, that can escape the influences coming from outside us, while our *persona*, given her intrinsic extravert nature, would contradict itself as our social face if not always turned inside-out. As such, she has no chance to escape the constant and incontrovertible pressure of social influence and prevalent compelling effect the matrix we are in exerts on us.

WAKE UP NEO, GO TO SLEEP MR. ANDERSON

*Der Mensch hat doch fürwahr noch eine Seele
und ist nicht nur politisches Mastvieh.²*

C.G. Jung, *Ges. Werke X*.

In the film *Matrix*, we have the same character (depicted by Keanu Reeves) appearing under two names; this is not a minor or collateral and insignificant aspect. In our understanding and interpretation, ‘Mr. Anderson’ stands for the *persona* that wakes up every morning and goes to work in its cubicle, one that lives the life prescribed by the ominous and incon-

² After all, man has a soul and is not only a political beef cattle.

trovertible social pressure. Mr. Anderson is a good and caring man, that even helps his landlady with the trash. On the other hand, we have Neo, named such by Morpheus and his team. By adopting this new name, the hero of the film has finally the chance to establish a contact with his own Ego, to his Self respectively, in fact to his innermost longing for something bigger, greater, or higher than life, something beyond the banality and monotonous everydayness. It seems that only from a perspective exterior to the usual social and professional involvement, one can raise essential questions, and Neo has a lot of them, as we see in further scenes in the film. As a *persona*, namely just the son of somebody – Ander-son – our guy is practically a nobody, just a chap among other thousands, expendable as everybody else (as we see in the scene when he is late again and his boss, from a seated, yet very authoritarian position, talks to him as to a naughty child which is not capable to wake up in the morning). Being just the son of somebody, Mr. Anderson is in the perfect position for brain-washing and to be placed into his rightful, subordinate place, the place where anybody is or should be, namely the place of the perfect nobody that is reserved for every *persona*. Although we usually say ‘our’ *persona*, it is just a psychic entity, more like a fragment of our total person, one that is attached to us like a glistening and colourful balloon, presented on the bright sky of the social world, one that we are holding in ‘our’ hands by a very thin, almost invisible thread; or, just a face and a mask, always smiling as a Noh mask, the *persona* is a mere socially agreeable guise conceived for the stage of life. Every Mr. Anderson is submerged in the collective tribe in permanent comparison with the Joneses. Always looking around, looking at the other Joneses, or Andersons, or Browns or Smiths, the shallowness of the *persona* is obvious in every social gathering, meeting, or apparition while the Ego is asleep in a deep trance or a dreamlike state – not very conscious, but not totally unconscious either, rather somewhere in-between borrowing qualities from both levels of awareness.

‘Wake up Neo’ means, in such a context, a chance given to the Ego to finally get on its own feet. In other words, it is the possibility of disposing of the superficiality of the *persona*, and the tempting identification with it, to arrive at the more substantial Ego. Because a mere collective entity, the *persona*, cannot be independent and even less autonomous (which would be a contradiction in terms) and consequently, it is our existential mission to place those collective influences aside or at least between brackets in order for our Self to be freed from the con-

straints of the matrix expressed in stereotypes, expectations, rules, or social norms. There is, more or less, a recuperation of one's own whole personality involved in such a radical operation; a psychological move or reorientation from the impersonal and collective towards the personal and Self-centredness. In other words, Mr. Anderson³ is not actually a person and even less a personality, only a *sui generis persona*, a mere social figure that appears and manifests itself in the collective shop window.

As long as one doesn't get rid of 'Mr. Anderson' (or 'Madam Anderson', for that matter) as their own social inscription in anonymity, one has no chance to be a self-standing and autonomous personality, namely one ruled by its very own law – the Greek *nomos* means 'law' and *autos* stands for 'self'. Such a process is not about (as it would be easy to guesstimate) isolating or singularizing oneself by cutting of all the social interactions and contacts, but rather a reinvesting or, even better, a reinventing of oneself with all the energy recuperated from the previous dissipative investment in the sustaining and constant recreation of an evanescent illusion called *persona*. The normal relation between the Ego and the *persona* is very well illustrated by a very delicate balance and superficial equilibrium. As the *persona* is invested (and hyper-inflated – as nowadays is sadly the case) and almost exclusively emphasized, the Ego is deprived of its psychic nourishment and, consequently, it is reduced to a starvation or mere subsistence diet. If it finally wakes up, the im-balance will bounce to the other side, and what was up will come down and vice versa. Consequently, the *persona* will be underinvested and deprived of most of its previous 'good and plentiful life', its abundant energy provision and constant attention and care. Only by doing such a re-investment and re-sourcing of the Ego, the *persona* will be dis-invested for the benefit of the Self, its own life, destiny, and projects. Energy, and psychic energy is no exception to the rule, must flow, it is up to us in which direction we direct or invest it. It can be an inflationary orientation, as in the never-ending story of hyper-investing the *persona* (in a world filled to the brim by 'to have' and its direct and incontrovertible consequence: "to have more"), or it could be towards personal growth, self-development and the creating of

3 In the name Anderson, or *son of Ander*, we can see the very close German word associations of *Ander* which is very close to *anders* – otherwise, not this way – and to *andere* – others – all formulas for the same other, being or thing, unnamed and perfectly impersonal; as such we see a subtle enhancement of the anonymity the *persona* represents anyhow.

an autonomous and independent personality (namely the exploration of the 'alternative' universe, the world of "to be" as Erich Fromm would have state it – Fromm, 1997). After all, it is a process of psychological repolarization involved, a switching from the more or less conscious or rather semi-conscious involvement in the collectiveness of the apparently and superficially personal sphere, towards the more Ego-centred or Self-centred, independent, and autonomous centre of one's own conscious state while leaving aside the egoistic or narcissistic aspects of a socially ingrained pseudo-personality, one that is expected from us as our contributions to the social network, the so-called matrix.

It is usually this social (media) network that forms, enhances, maintains, and entertains the forming of the *persona*, of every 'Mr. Anderson' or 'Mr. Jones'. And it is the same very complicated relational network of innumerable interconnections that consumes the time of all involved. Mere nodes in a net, foam bubbles in a vast and undifferentiated mass, bombarded by a constant and relentless stream of information, news, or irrelevant scraps of gossip, all those hostages of the superficial forms of the *persona* have no access to a personal time because of the pressure exerted on them by the demands of an anonymous collective entity. Such a life is akin to the life in a call-centre where you must answer quickly and politely any question, or an existence in the inferno of the stock exchange where everybody shouts louder than the neighbour to get the attention of all the others. This is the life our *persona* exposes us to, because this is how normality was defined by society and its constant and relentless pressure. If something is done by lots and lots of people it becomes automatically (and without any ethical, moral, or axiological judgement) normality – an unquestionable normality and normativity, one that is subliminally understood and unconditionally accepted by everybody. In such a universally approved normality there is no time for something else but the unconditional involvement in the matrix through the total surrender to the collective norms and expectations. There is no time left for questioning the system, the matrix, the personal involvement in a crazy world, the sense of life, or whether this is the genuine destiny of human kind. In such a context it is just the *persona* that has to be connected to every news or scrap of information that bubbles up on social media, a very clever deceiving devise settled by the matrix to consume every second of our time.

The social configuration of the daily *nine-to-five* life does not leave us neither the time nor the respite to hold on or to stop, at least for brief

moments, to reflect on existential issues or other fundamental questions concerning our own life. The matrix is so well organized that it has hardly any gaps or glitches where one could retreat and reflect about one's own destiny. As such, the invention of the watch (that meanwhile has become ubiquitous) was a great leap forward in subduing humans to a regular, robot-like programme. Consequently, there was no time left for the Ego or the Self – for Neo, in the film – as the only personal part of our total psyche. The watch, the programming timetable, and time itself – transformed and translated as being in fact money in the most famous and infamous capitalist motto – became instruments to implement the socially convenient *persona* which, once super-invested, can supersede or dislodge the Ego from its dominant and central position. The exaggerated accent on time, punctuality, and strict schedules, or time-frames (initiated by the education system with small steps at first and continued until it becomes a second nature) is an incontrovertible illustration of the constant fight against the personal factor, the war on the affirmation or development of the Self of any person. The relentless haste in which everything is done nowadays is reflected by the superficiality of the contributions rendered by the authors of *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*. Almost everyone has written their reflections after seeing only the first film of the series; it is as if somebody requested the essays (quickly and hurry up boys, of course) in order to publish them while the iron is hot and *Matrix* is still floating in the public media and the collective consciousness.

The Ego, the Self, and the return home to our inner world of calmness and peace are the greatest enemies of the capitalist world; these are the arch adversaries of the matrix of rat-race, the supreme opponent the system wants get rid of or annihilate if possible. The independent and autonomous Ego is the foe of the social face of *persona*: if Neo wakes up, Mr. Anderson disappears as a mere inconsistent shadow, reduced to a meagre memory. But, on the other hand, when Neo is asleep, Mr. Anderson reigns supreme in his daily dull life, comfortably nested in his own cubicle somewhere in the multilevel building of a corporation. We should remember in this context, that the English 'cubicle' comes from the Latin *cubicle*, *cubiculum*, meaning 'sleeping room', namely the room where the Ego is left to sleep in order for the *persona* to reign supreme. The cubicle is, after all, the highest scene for the manifestations of the caricature of our selves professionalized as expected, while reduced to the only dimension the corporate life prescribes and considers as acceptable. As such, only a Mr. Anderson can execute orders from his superiors, only he is ca-

pable to repress all the personal values and personalized beliefs in order to be a brave and conscientious citizen, one that doesn't ask questions about why is life as it is? Or, why must we accept it as it is? Or, who am I in this carrousel named 'life'? Or, should I continue to do the same thing and follow the same patterns all my life, endlessly and without questioning? Or, for how long should I follow in the footsteps of others, even if they are parents, friends, neighbours, or colleagues? For how long do I have to execute orders, indications, or suggestions coming from outside, from others, from the system? Why, in other words, am I not free to live my life, my personal life and not the life others live or insistently prescribe as worth living? How did they – the system or the matrix – do it? How, in other words, did they catch me too in their game and why, after all, am I a slave or hostage in an oppressive and abusive system? After all, what about the big dreams of our enthusiastic youth? What about the inner call for freedom, personal fulfilment or continuous development and interior ripening? Where are those wonderful ideals and great aspirations every adolescent dreamt about and was certain that he or she will accomplish in their life? Where are the dreams they were so sure they would materialize in the so promising future?

After all, at that wonderful and idealistic age we believed that, come a day, we will materialize those aspirations, that life will be there for us to appropriate and to carry out the most sublime dreams and aspirations (as the film *Fandango* tries to emphasize). Are all those ideals, aspirations, and extraordinary expectations of any adolescent mere fantasies caused by a hormonally submerged brain, fantasies that cannot yet be controlled at that age – rather some kind of day-dreams which baffle young and inexperienced minds? Is it true that once we become adults we learn somehow to control and sweep under the carpet our sweet, maybe naïve, but so unrealistic aspirations? Is that the main lesson every adult has to learn if they want to be inscribed in what is called the 'normality' of everyday life? Why should we accept one model, the only one in existence, offered on the silver plate of globalized consumerism? And why, on the other hand, are we shown those quest-films with heroes capable of escaping the matrix and designing their own life as they wish by following their innermost and genuine beliefs? That is a poor consolation for the dull 'normality' of our daily rat-race; after the film, we are back again in our stressful and relentless nine-to-five existence. From such a perspective, those fantasy films are just some short respites, small pauses to catch our breath and return again under the murky waters of daily routine.

NORMAL LIFE OR HEROIC LIFE? A MERE STANDARDIZED COPY OR THE ORIGINAL?

Quisque est faber suae fortune.

There are other films following the same intentionality as *Matrix*, usually coming in longer or shorter series, as for example *Harry Potter*, *The Hobbit* and *The Fellowship of the Ring* or *Star Wars* (only episodes 1-6), to name just a few. Why have those fantasy or SF's, mainly 'quest-films', such an appeal? In all those films or series (or the books that inspired them, in some cases), it is mainly about the search or the quest for something else, something besides the normality and usualness of everyday life. The heroes involved in those stories want more from life than the social and political system has on offer, they are essentially searching for the transcendence because the dull immanence of everydayness is not enough and cannot fulfil their innermost spiritual needs. Consequently, the hero escapes conventionality, he leaves behind home and all the habitual dependencies that characterize common day life, in order to go and search for the 'great beyond', as Joseph Campbell emphasized in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1993, pp. 245-246). Such heroic stories we see in the films have at least two levels of interpretation. The one would be for the ordinary mind, which takes them more or less literally and, consequently and inevitably, compares them with the harsh reality of everyday life. Such simplistic comparison will not hold any water, meaning it is inherently perverse and hypocritical; the end result is always a total disqualification, once everybody can see its absurdity. But, as J. Campbell tries to emphasize (Campbell, 1992, p. 255), besides literal or historical interpretations, there are more elaborated and sophisticated psychological or even spiritual – symbolic and anagogic – levels of understanding offered by the vast mental possibilities inherent to the higher specimens of our species. If we follow this direction of deeper thinking and profound understanding, we can see how the so called *philosophia perennis*, that transcends the usual limited apprehension or the modest levels of interpretation we usually encounter, actually works. After all, the above-mentioned films (or heroic stories, for that matter) are appealing not only to the mind or to the rational part of our total possibilities of apprehension. They have a pluralistic message addressed to our soul and spirit, to our feelings and emotions, and, last but not least, to our destiny as human beings. There is not only a strictly mental or psychological cord that vibrates in us when watching such films, but also an existential one that touches the

inherent core of the anthropos we all try to represent. In other words, there is not just the brain or some isolated insular cognitive aspects that are involved but our whole being, namely our body, our soul, and our spirit. After all, humans are not just a neurological apparatus, they are also defined by a hyper-complex and multileveled psychology (conscious and unconscious, emotional and intellectual, passionate and volitional, etc.), which is inscribed in an anthropological organism (ontogenetically and phylogenetically determined of course, but not at all inexorably fixed and limited), one that has to live, interact, find its own place in the world or work, collaborate and maintain itself in a very complicated social network.

Everyday life is very tiring and consuming, not giving very much back from what it constantly demands. Instead, it is always on the taking, exploiting, and eating up our limited resources in order to fulfil the commands and needs of the *persona*. This process literally eats from the Ego, feeding on the limited resources it has at his disposal, in order to grow a social mask, one that is acceptable and can be integrated in the norms dictated by the social psychology. The falsehood of the *persona* and all that concerns our social acceptance and involvement, can be so perverted that not even the owners of the social mask realize how much their existence has been contorted, falsified, redirected, and twisted. As we tried to exemplify above, the articles about the Matrix film were written in the very specific dull and submissive tone of college level thesis, very correct, full of citations and lots of references, always in the shadow of the great names of philosophy and, consequently, with hardly any original or personal idea or concept to come forward. Academically speaking they are correct and irreproachable of course, but from a strictly philosophical position, they miss the point of what is considered philosophical reflection and thinking – this involves, as its first and most important step, a distancing from the discussed theme, not circling around like chasing one's tail, while reconsidering and retelling the arguments all the great names in the field have already used and occasionally abused. That is not quite philosophical reflection, but rather the same kind of hair-splitting circumambulation the much-criticized medieval scholars did concerning their Holly Book – the very reason why they ultimately and rightfully got under the name of 'scholastics'. Philosophical papers that stay too near to the 'holly' texts of philosophy, namely the great names of the field, are no more than mere scholasticism which is so trapped in the world of words that it is not capable to see the real world and all its wonderful subtleties, even if expressly presented in film or book form.

We, on the other hand, shall not do mere comments endlessly com-

mentating what others, more important and recognized ones, have commented, and, by doing just that, return into the scholastic model and spirit of the Middle Ages. Too much political correctness and excessive academic accurateness is, paradoxically, against the main line of what philosophy should be. More than that, all those impersonal and nothing-telling articles stuffed only with words, are, by their academically correctness, suffocating philosophy. As Paul Brunton explains, "Philosophy is identical with action and not with inertia." (Brunton, 1988, p. 48), further telling us that otherwise it is just about abusing words, because the "love of wisdom" should look for "the application of wisdom." (*ibid.* p. 48). Or, that's exactly the case in nowadays philosophy where there are "too many words" (as the emperor tells Mozart in the film *Amadeus*. P. Schaffer, 1984). What good would it be to find the truth, or at least a great idea, or to discover a new, maybe revolutionary concept? Could it be just to write it down and publish it in order to build up one's own publications list? Is that where philosophical reflection was degraded to? Or, should we rather consider Brunton's view that says: "A philosophy which is not strong enough to vivify personal life is no more than a dry, dusty intellectualism ..."? (op. cit., p. 46). Where there is just theory and no action, we have only a fraction of what, *per definitionem*, philosophy ultimately tries to achieve. From the beginning, more than two and a half millennia ago, philosophy was searching for *aletheia* (gr. for truth); should we now totally forget that truth has inherent potency and power, as well as intentionality which lies in "... making clear the art of fine living." (op. cit., p. 46). But we cannot forget that twentieth century philosophy was defined by the Vienna school as logical positivism modelled on the patterns of science. As long as science cannot be separated from technology, and the two are considered as twin sisters of a complex system, philosophy should have emulated the same format it wanted to imitate so much, at least beginning with the first half of the last century. But what did we saw as evolving from the dryness of logical positivism? It was something even further from reality, from life tuning or vivifying – analytical philosophy or linguistic analyses as it was properly named, the new direction arrogantly declared its exclusive preoccupation and unique focusing on words and their proper meanings and adequate use. After all, philosophy should not be downgraded to mere 'language-games' which insist on relieving us from the grips of centuries old metaphysical errors. But if we would follow the analytical approach, which tries to clean philosophy from the ashes left by old metaphysics, to its very end and finally have a clean slate in front of us, we could realize that by doing right this, philosophy and philosophers could finally

reach their true, original, and genuine meaning, namely letting go of theory (or at least being able to place it anytime between brackets) and going full heartedly towards everyday life as there is so much to do in this wonderful and endless field of existence.

In this point we must agree with Brian Magee who concludes that the world itself and life as it is directly experienced "... are completely at odds with what language-oriented philosophers and literary critics customary say or seem to assume," simply because "... both are largely inexpressible in language." (Magee, 1998, p. 99). In this sense, what linguistic philosophy tries to do is veiling exactly what everyone of us, with a little introspection, can experience: the inner reality of our psyche doesn't work only with words and phrases, there are other *modus operandi* we are capable of in order to orient ourselves in and experience life more directly than intermediated by mere words. It is not that words are worthless, but we have to recognize that by putting something into words transforms it into a new and different entity, namely one of "... the second order, something derived, watered down, abstracted, generalized, publicly sharable." (*ibid.*, p. 98). And such is the general impression the articles we are talking about gives us. Although the *Matrix* film is already very far from reality (being a mere fiction), the philosophers who explore what the film has to say, are in a linguistic fiction of their own, one that is situated on a third fictional level (if we consider the film on the second level). Of course, anybody may say that our very own script on *Philosophers Explore The Matrix* is a fourth order analyses built on three previous attempts. But we see it rather as a hermeneutical process which tries to restore the original sense, the deeper meanings revealed by the film which presents us with a metaphor about the hidden aspects of life itself. Moreover, the whole enterprise is not only about what life is, should or could be, but more so of how life can be seen, understood and, last but not least, lived once it is freed from patterns, stereotypes, ready-made ideas, or socially fabricated and politically enhanced norms. As Neo says at the end of the first film, where he proposes to free people from rules and control for a world "without borders and boundaries... a world where anything is possible.", once freed everyone can go wherever one pleases because it is "a choice I leave to you." (*Matrix*, 1999). First and foremost, it is a radical change of perspective one should carry out, appropriate, integrate, and transpose in life. As such, theory is not only a detached, God-like perspective – gr. *theos* – hanging upon us from some clouds in the sky above, but rather the start for behavioural changes made possible by genuine and novel perspectives and insights. If, at the mental level, there are no more boundaries or common and usual borders, we have at

last the chance to be free in our own thinking and can, consequently, rewrite, through self-education, all the education we received from childhood on. In other words, it is to be acknowledged that education, although good to a point, is not everything we need in life. It might suffice for becoming an adult, but it is by far insufficient for maturity, self-development, continuous growth, and expansion of our human potential – a process that should continue throughout our entire life and be sustained only by relentless self-education. It is this freedom, the freedom to evolve, that initiates and creates the world “where anything is possible”, made possible by the radical change of perspective, by the adopting of a new paradigm, which will put aside the ‘old acquisitions’ acquired through education (which, we must face it, was appropriate for a child destined to be inscribed in the only society that adults had to offer, namely their own).

It is understandable that in philosophy, as in every other cultural domain, it is all about growth, even qualitative growth, where possible, and about preserving or ‘canning’ knowledge in the accepted and largely standardized patterns of academic studies, for future generations. Such structures, which in time inevitably become rigid and suffocating, were initiated and are maintained, in order to preserve existing structures in a most perfect and amazing circularity. Dazzling as it is, the conservative patterns of university structures comprise another hidden curriculum, concerning the praised academic *cursus honorum*, or how to climb the academic meritocratic ladder. Although academia and university are, more or less, nurseries of talent and genius, genuine philosophical ideas have to get out into the wild of nature, to grow roots into the ground, to warm under the sun, and to be influenced and inspired by the wind to sway, to flow, or to fly and to be flexible – not to get arthritic in some traditional and petrified patterns, even if those are the norm dictated by established and recognized expectations.

Everywhere we look we see patterns; there is no difference if we think of everyday life, the rat-race (or corporate life) or the university level. Standardization is ubiquitous, not only in bureaucratic norms, but also in the mental background of every individual. Influences and dictums of political correctness are appropriated and interiorized, or introjected (as psychologists would say) as being our very own genuine thoughts; there is a circularity and subliminal correspondence that continually feeds back (with slight alternations or variations, of course) what was already in the system and so we are the usually oblivious agents of that process. But remaining exclusively on the politically or academically correctness, one will not say what one has to say as one wants to say it. One will not leave the expected

patterns behind, patterns that protect, house, and shelter us under the well-known and largely accepted structures emplaced by tradition and custom. But by doing just that, those petrified structures of academia keep us under the relentless pressure of authority, under the watchful eye of imperatives like the impersonal ‘as it has to be done’ or the more personal and less direct ‘we usually do it like this’. In other words, one will not grow up to become a full adult who has one’s own opinions or thoughts which can be expressed loudly and clearly without always looking around for the watchful and relentless eye of authority (usually a mere travestied Superego).

Such reflections raise the following question: should we reform the matrix, or should we accept it as it is? This is, or could be, a question for the average person as well as for academics, even academic philosophers. As we know from psychology, the first step towards healing and overcoming problems is awareness; firstly, it is the awareness that we have a problem (one that we tried in vain to solve with the arsenal of means we usually have at our disposal) and secondly, that we could and probably should attack this problem somehow or in some way that we don’t yet know. If our problem is the direct consequence of the constant authoritarian pressure of the various manifestations of the Superegos our society abounds in, then the price for that is a genuine psychological infantilization recognizable in pretty every adult. They usually consider themselves as being adults only if they adhere and submit to the corpus of collective patterns of life they see around. They take them for granted only because there are no other patterns, there is no other life-paradigm and everybody has seemingly agreed that that’s that. As the title of the discussed film says, it is just *The Matrix*, there are no ‘matrix-es’, no alternatives, no loose ends to explore, and no open possibilities to adventure for. There is just *The Matrix* in which we were thrown into and there is no obvious escape from it – only tiny glitches or very small doors and narrow windows, hardly visible, hidden and secret, like the *déjà-vu* sequence with the cat that appears in the middle of the first film of the series, signalling Neo that something is wrong.

SOCIAL ORDER AND CONFORMITY, THE PORTRAIT OF MR. RHINEHEART

Quod licet Iovi, non licet bovi.

As we know from hermeneutics, interpretation has more possible levels of reading and understanding for the same text. In such a context there is no wonder that the film *Matrix* can be interpreted from various

viewpoints situated on more or less profound or superficial levels which depend rather on the author of the interpretation than on the film itself. Although with great public and box office success and hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue, the films we are talking about are not innocent at all. Consequently, on a subtler level the *Matrix* film, as well as the other films mentioned previously, are an overt, direct, and unmitigated attack on the established social order, comparable to a hit and run attack that doesn't spare anything our normal and usual mentality takes for granted. It seems to be important that such 'attacks', although virulent on the implicit level, should be, on the surface, well-packaged and nicely presented with lots of special effects and incredible fighting scenes or embellished with dreams of fantastic and unbelievable adventures. As such, *Matrix* is not a mild film, innocent as so many others, which leave no traces or marks in our souls or in our spirit. Such a film is not alluding to things, but naming them directly and unequivocally by pointing out at what the essence of the actual capitalist enslavement order is (the unbelievable fighting scenes and the incredible special effects are, given such a hermeneutic context, nothing more than the commercial wrapping of a produce with hidden properties that must be sold to make profit).

More than that, *Matrix* is pointing towards the main issues our established world order has to hide from us in order to function and go on (ideally forever). This kind of revelatory film is not just another sort of entertainment, something easy going and just for the fun of it as the great majority of contemporary culture, in its inherent tendency, represents. This film, as well as *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, or *The Lord of the Ring* cycles, are eye-openers and mind-boggling cultural items that cannot be swept under the carpet of oblivion or be treated with ignorance although, as we acknowledge from the commentaries in *Philosophers Explore the Matrix* book, some 'philosophers' are trying to do just that. But more to the point, what are they, and all those on similar levels of understanding, actually doing? Presented with a fantasy or SF film, they come up with additional phantasies of their own (usually introduced with the consecrated formula among philosophers "suppose that..."), or ideas borrowed from other philosophers (the "mind in the vat" experience, in the first chapter for instance), or they go on with some redundant hair-splitting and idea-fabricating word accumulations that go nowhere but fill up page after page in a supposedly reasonable philosophy book. What do such authors actually do? What is the subliminal message that can be read or understood in those commentaries, analyses, or papers once we apply hermeneutics to them? Is there, maybe, a hidden intention to

mask the real and shocking impact those films can have on people's minds (because they were in fact conceived as such)?

Although everyone who has seen the mentioned films was impacted and affected by their profound and disturbing message, the all-pervasive repairing mechanisms of our Egos (that do not sleep or rest) have rapidly come up with their cosmetic kit and first aid tool box to fix the problem (philosophy books are doing, evidently, pretty much the same thing, but with authority). The dent such a film produces in our psyche can be quite serious; accordingly, and in re-action to that, homeostatic processes are called up for action to repair 'the damage' to the inner equilibrium and re-establish the normal *status quo*. Such repairing mechanisms are usually at work already while watching the film. Although they work rather on the unconscious level, they do a very intense activity by rearranging the shocking and the unexpected, by renaming the new and the unconventional, by reshaping the exceptional and all the spearheads that attack our very own habitual mental equilibrium, in order to give us back and restore the necessary ease and comfort of conventionality that our mind needs to function undisturbed by the shocks of the unusual. Once this level is (re)attained, we feel free to discuss and debate the film with our friends just to see the same operations we perceived, if we paid enough attention to 'the voices in our head'. What's interesting in such debates is that they are, willingly or unintentionally, more on the diffusing side of hermeneutics, where ambiguity, vagueness, unconstructive contradictions, or derailing from the main track, leads discussions astray, drowning them in the marshes of irrelevance and confusion – where there are "too many notes". And, as too many notes can be confusing, so can too many words or too many ideas especially if they try to diffuse the more metaphysical and existential core, abundantly explored in *Matrix* (or in the above-mentioned films concerned with our anthropological situation).

Although the discussions and debates on such provocative subjects can be fierce and often contradictory, because they are usually polarizing the involved participants, such theoretical acuteness doesn't hold any water if seen from a more pragmatic level. Such debates go actually nowhere and we can be pretty sure that they rapidly disappear into thin air or instantly evaporate as water dropped on the hot desert sand – they are just 'semantics' after all, nothing more than 'word-games' meant to conserve a rigid social order and not to explore or find the truth about our human condition. Consequently, there are no consequences, meaning literally no consequence (nothing is, in fact, following, no practical issue is born out of those heated discussions). Although such discussions are using a lot of words and maybe

some sparkling ideas too, nothing remains for some action – much of the ‘word-games’ is played only on the semantic level without any pragmatic consequences. And, because there is no action, or behavioural change, or rethinking of one’s main ideas or genuine life orientation, there will be even more debates transferred in some papers published as an un-consequential consequence of the film that wanted to move us spiritually by dislodging our assemblage points from their fixations in “the desert of the real” (an expression Morpheus uses while initiating Neo in the subtleties of the matrix). Such debates come as a direct consequence of unfinished conceptual business which leads to the pragmatic paralysis of a total incapacity to take practical measures to change one’s own life course. Those debates are possible because the initial departing point is ‘on the wrong side of the blanket’, born under a false and un-reflected destiny which, once it is set in motion, cannot stop, look back, rethink, or re-evaluate its own road.

From such a perspective, the papers published and the commentaries written on *Matrix* are, in fact, helping the matrix to close, or at least to patch (as in ‘hide’) the gaps the film intended to open. As if some sort of protective mechanism, those texts, coming from the matrix itself and being actually ‘the voice of matrix’ in philosophical disguise imbued with hotchpotch make-ups, are just the antibodies portrayed in the film by agent Smith and his cohorts. Always on the run and always alert, the agents have one holly mission, only one task to fulfil, namely to watch for any glitch in the matrix, to patch it as rapidly as they can, and to repair the damaged structures of the social framework in order to hide its fissures. They are to remake and, by doing that, to heal the wounds or scratches the matrix can get from any unconventional curtain lifting or unexpected frontal confrontations. From such a perspective the discussed book is a great disappointment; instead of being an eye-opener and mind-elevating text, it comes up with insignificant stories in the classical citation style of conventionalities, inconclusive ideas, ambiguous conclusions depleted of genuine existential directions or a minimum of teleologic orientation. It is as if nobody is capable to muster the courage anymore, or the stamina to properly name things as they really are. When it comes to assuming a strong position, contemporary philosophical reflection is very weak. It is more a mishmash of some inconsistent sort, told and withhold at the same time, concomitantly expressed and withdrawn, rather in the mode of subtle double-bindings going in both directions, naming but not really addressing the subject and wonderfully avoiding its inherent ‘hotness’ or directness. Those texts are in fact without qualities, which reminds us of the *Man without Qualities*, the magistral nov-

el of Robert Musil. If Musil's hero without qualities was an exponent of a decadent Austro-Hungarian Empire and its bourgeois nihilistic philosophy, so are a number of philosophical texts written in our very own decadent postmodern times: inconsistent, brimming with ambiguities and sophisticated linguistics, expressed with "to many words" but no conclusions carefully avoided by apotropaic euphemisms, endless ideas and references to authority but no general direction and in fact avoiding the main subject like pest. All is done as if to avoid, hide, cancel, neglect, or ignore any possible metaphysical views or any serious and profound existential interrogations (as the film we are talking about tries to raise and to present *prima facie*).

It is interesting to observe how our society needs "beings without qualities" (not only men but women or even children too), if we want to explore a little bit this new direction of (post)modern thinking. As R. Musil historically places his novel – the decadent Austro-Hungarian empire at the beginning of the twentieth century – it is the right time and place, meaning the geo-political and social moment for significant existential questioning about the meaning of life and the directions it should take because it is, at least under the surface, a time of crisis due to disorientation and bewilderment. The whole humankind, ordinary men and women as well as the leading class were at a loss, as Musil exposes it page after page, not knowing which way to go and where to look for their existential target or ontological objective. Such confusing moments of disorientation that decadent times come with, represent, on an implicit and rather subliminal level, the chance for a spiritual opening and the possibility for existential re-evaluation or even paradigmatic rewriting and re-orientation. Different historical periods, where there is a lot to do and to build, meaning on-going (and not stagnant) trends of the social, economic, and the political, are less prone to interrogations, in the first place because there is no time for this. When there is to build an entire country and its infrastructure, as it was the case of Germany after the Second World War, there is neither the time nor the place to hold on and to raise deep philosophical questions or to ask for deeper or hidden existential directions. But in abundant, affluent, and already edified societies, such as the one presented in the *Matrix* film (where we might clearly see, as through a magnifying glass, our own society), decadence is largely at home and, consequently, the critical and interrogative spirit is there, around the corner, just waiting to explore and question the *status quo* everyone accepts so unconditionally.

That is what we can see in Mr. Anderson's attitude to his work, corporation, and boss – he is *blasé* to the core and listens, hypocritically submissive, to the moral 'lesson' preached by Mr. Rhineheart, probably not for the

first time – he is *in-there* and *part of it* just with the most superficial part of his personality, namely his *persona*. Maybe it is interesting to remark here that the name Rhineheart, can be split into *Rhine*, as the homonym river in Europe, and *heart* as the main organ of our body, and as such, it might indicate the emotional affiliation – *heart* – to the Rhine and its treasure, from where so many problems, as we know from Richard Wagner’s opera cycle *The Rhinegold*, came and evolved dramatically. It is the materiality of that treasure buried in the Rhine that brought the whole drama with it because every ‘Rhine-heart’ wanted it after they let themselves be blinded by the power of gold – of materiality, so to speak. As such, Mr Rhineheart from the film, is just another corporatist CEO, a perfect portrait for the person who is nothing more than a *persona*, which cannot understand that there are other values in life, that there can be alternative meanings to one’s own existence besides the fat pay-checks of every month and the unheard-of bonuses at the end of every year. Mr. Rhineheart reveals us, while moralising Mr. Anderson, that he knows just what he should know: the subtleties concerning human resources, meaning schedules, punctuality, productivity, and efficiency of a big and very important company. For such an efficient administrative human-machine there is no humanness left to be seen in others, for him Mr. Anderson is no more than any other Mr. Anderson, or Mr. Brown, or Jones – all are there just to be tied to the labyrinthine network of the company’s intricate matrix in order for the system to function smoothly and most efficiently. That type of Mr. Rhineheart – a mere humanoid prototype – cannot understand individuals like Mr. Anderson (that tries hard to become a person able to build up a personality of their own), that wakes up late in the morning after a night of searching for some kind of wonder, gurus, guides or teachers to heal their soul and find spiritual guidelines and orientation.

Mr. Rhineheart and his company, “MetaCortex”, as well as every other corporation in town or in the world, needs pliable individuals – not individualities, conformist *personas* – not independent personalities, disciplined workers who do not have questions but are just capable to answer to any request the corporation has. What they need is just Mr. Anderson, the perfect ‘yes-man’, the ‘son of every other’, meaning, on a more abstract level, the perfectly anonymous *persona* fabricated and perfected by the capitalist world to such dazzling accuracy. The ‘Rhine-hearts’ of this world do not need awakened people, subversive, restless, and always looking beyond or behind the curtains, as the hero of the film does every night with the help of his computers. Their waking up call should be only that of the alarm clock initiating everydayness. Their waking up call cannot come from a mysterious

personage who names himself Morpheus and answers the inner calls of one's own soul (as the Great Wizard of Oz who has all the answers from behind the curtains). Mr. Rhineheart and all his fellow CEO's of the corporate world want conformity to the established rules and norms. He, as well as they, cannot tolerate exceptions based on special needs, spiritual calls from exceptional personalities living outside our concrete and competition-like world. Such conformity must abide to the rules established by generations of Mr. Rhinehearts, rules that obscure that there is or could be something else worth living for besides the materialist treasure-trove filled with all the Rheingoldian corporate that capitalism has to offer on a global scale.

The call Morpheus addresses: "wake up Neo" is just for the Self, for the unfalsified and unfalsifiable core of personality. For sure it is not a call for the *persona* represented by Mr. Anderson. The *persona* is, so to speak, the most superficial part of our whole personality. Being a compromise between oneself and society, the *persona* represents the frontiers of our personal territory and has no direct connections with the centre or the core of what we call and feel as being, on the most intimate level, ourselves. *Personas* are replaceable, as Mr. Anderson was left to understand by his boss, while individualised selves are not. As such, Neo wakes up from the slumber in which we have all been submerged by the insidious workings of the semi-conscious (as I specified and exemplified at large in my book, *Adultus Rex*, 2021). It is a very peculiar psychology involved in the workings of the semi-conscious, namely one that finds itself usually in-between the conscious and the unconscious. Never at rest, incapable of steadying itself, either - or, jumping from one mental state to an emotional one and back again in very agile, but completely out of control jumps. As such, the semi-conscious *modus operandi* is chaotic by its very own nature and, not surprisingly, it surprises everyone, even the owner at any given time. We can see that well illustrated in everyday conversations where there is hardly anyone capable of paying attention and concentrate to what others have to say. Our semi-conscious *modus operandi* is constantly bombarding us with an endless flow of quasi-thoughts, unfiltered feelings, aborted or repressed emotions, and a myriad of other neuronal or hormonal eruptions more or less chaotic – in short, it is the perfect analogy with the Brownian motion. There is no up and no down, no solid reference points, or psychological frame system, a world where the neuro-emotional *laissez-faire* reigns absolutely, where even an upside-down structure can be easily and unproblematically accommodated. The semi-conscious operates and integrates every 'common triviality' or sordid nonsense, except its very own absurdity. Only

such a mental ‘level’ can appropriate and integrate the senselessness of the nine-to-five rat-race that modern life presents us as the pinnacle of human existence. Always on the lookout for both sides of the coin – personal advantages and objective disadvantages coming from outside – akin not to lose or miss something, the semi-conscious mind frame wouldn’t be able to see beyond the shiny banners of globalised consumerism.

Such a perspective allows us to see Morpheus’s call for Neo as the call addressed to the conscious mind to *wake up* from its semi-conscious slumber where society puts every one of us. Of course, it is about awareness which has to be awakened and sharpened to stay rather on the conscious side than to let itself slip into the hypnotical intricacies of semi-conscious whims, ready-made ideas, emotional unresolved attachments combined with social standardisation and politically correct requests. Neo, as a person with a personality, represents a different dimension than Mr. Anderson, one that integrates the partiality of his own social role, namely the *persona*, as a mere fragment, necessary but not at all sufficient, in a larger and profounder unit our very own humanity allows us to achieve. Towards such an integration and understanding should philosophy work; even more so in our time invaded by the new developments of the sciences which have appropriated the entire world as their exclusive domain of truth revealing research. But what science cannot research is exactly the problem of the meaning of life, especially human life, respectively the noetic aspects of existence. Aspects concerning anthropological ontology are not to be appropriated by the strict rationality of science (because, as we see in the film, that would be the reign of the machines), nor the existential problems concerning our individual life, its meaning, and its possible developments.

TEACHERS AND DEMOCRACY, QUESTIONABLE QUESTIONS AND FALSE PRETENCE

Why do I know a few things more than other people?

Why in fact am I so clever?

*I have never pondered over questions
that are not really questions.*

I have never wasted my strength.

F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*.

In our society demands, requests, and the need for complicating and overcomplicating things are on the rise and computers do not simplify, as

promised, our workload or reduce our work hours. One of the modalities to complicate the not-so-simple everydayness of our life is bureaucracy – a Hydra with multiple heads, every one of them posing a problem by itself, but, once cut and considered resolved, the wounded neck will form another two which are very alive and ask to be confronted and resolved. In a subtler but non the less more insistent form than the one Heracles encountered as his second labour, today's bureaucracy has become a time-devouring machine that tends to engulf every sector of professional life – teachers no exception. It is clearly visible that too much is asked from university teachers and, unfortunately for them, this process is in a continuous crescendo, without any consideration or reverence to the fact that not everybody has endless resources of creativity at hand. It should be very clear that by demanding researches, papers, conference presentations, studies, or published books, and setting a certain quota of those, the already limited capabilities will be forced even further. Not everyone (we mean here every assistant professor, associated professor or even professor, which, for short, we will name university teacher or simply teacher) has the gift of genius manifested in papers easily written, or in the unlimited outpouring of ideas from an unrestricted inspiration and unlimited creativity. De facto, university teachers are there to teach, to do their didactic work – which does not forcefully guaranty that they are blessed with inspiration to write article after article, or books on demand, or do year after year innovative presentations at conferences, or come forward with new, interesting, and unheard-of research plans every year.

In fact, the great majority of teachers have rather modest literary yield, most of them based on their doctoral thesis stretched and split in every direction, augmented, and reframed with the usual tools of text-recycling one does when changing the façade but preserving the core subject or the main ideas. The demands raised by the hysteria of the global classification of universities, by the continuous upgrading of academic criteria imbued by mathematics and statistics for a forced scientific 'face-lifting', extended in the humanistic field, are inadequate nonsense raised to the level of unheard absurdity. It should be clear, even for academia, that not everybody can draw like Rafael or Leonardo for instance, or compose with the ease of a Mozart or a Rossini, that is not everybody's piece of cake. The fact that a fellow professional can do something does not imply that that something can be done by everybody and less so on demand or against a deadline. Regulations cannot make, out of every university teacher, an accomplished philosophical writer as a David Hume, Arthur Schopenhauer,

or a Bertrand Russell. Such inspiration, or creativity, or great talent cannot be requested or commandeered. Despite universal university scores and the mania for numbers, statistics, or qualifications, one cannot command a constant flux of research papers from every university teacher. Besides his or her teaching and all the work involved in preparing that didactic process, and amounts of extracurricular activities, those people too have families, probably children, maybe elderly parents, a circle of friends, a number of other problems, and maybe, if there is any time left, a personal life, a hobby, or a passion, which is not forcefully writing papers or submit sophisticated annual research plans.

On the other hand, and coming to the more didactic involvement, one cannot expect university teachers to pay attention and to try to answer *any* question a student raises. The politics of ‘there are no stupid questions’ (as some puzzling pedagogic papers profess on the internet) is as dubious as any other hyper-democratic and super-liberal ‘anything goes’ in a society where the hubris of political correctness has become the ‘Big Brother’ of our everyday life (and more so for academic life). There are, of course, stupid, or inadequate, or nonsensical, or useless, or worthless, or wrong questions. Some of them aren’t even questions (as Nietzsche agreed too, see the above motto), meaning they are not raised to actually obtain answers, or clarifications, or some revelatory insight. Some of them are asked just to derail discussions from the main subject or, even better, to unhinge or lead astray the teacher and the course of the lesson and the class. Others are just for the fun of it or to parade oneself on stage to get some attention. Consequently, teachers beware, especially if confronted with questions – they are not forcefully innocent, candid, and pure, but they can be poisonous and toxic! Here too, we realize how acute and awakening the call of Morpheus is, because here too it is about “wake up Neo”. And it is not just about a short *wake up*, but a relentless awareness, an alertness of consciousness that cannot allow falling asleep or relaxing while on duty in front of the class.

Such awareness can be better understood looking in the New Testament where it is suggested at least in two places: 1) Mathew 21:23-27, where Jesus does not answer a direct but obviously impertinent and worthless question, coming from a pharisaic split-tongue, but reciprocates with another question proposing a *quid pro quo*, as it were, and 2) Titus 3:9, where Paul says: “But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.”. If those two men who were among the biggest teachers that humanity had, tell us that there are worthless and unprofitable questions, it means that there

should be at least some truth in that. Not every question is, just because it is a question, legitimate and worth answering and, consequently, not everyone that asks a question should get a straight, simple, and direct answer; if the question itself is not straight, the answer cannot be otherwise. One should be able to recognise the questionable aspects of an apparently innocent and genuine question (as it is emphasized and exemplified, at least a few times, in the New Testament). As such, awareness should be exercised even concerning questions, because, like words, they are or can be, depending on circumstances or contexts, more than just simple curiosities satisfied with simple answers. In fact, they can be used, besides curiosity or the genuine thirst for knowledge, as tools or instruments of attack or derail, as smoke screens, drowning discussions into the marshes of irrelevance or anecdotal, or preventing substantial issues by trivialising important subjects and reducing them to the desert of concreteness.

There is, hidden underneath, well behind what we usually regard as questions, a serious and intricate emotional side that is not to be neglected – especially if we are teachers. Answering every question – such a large and altruistic openness and readiness – means, in fact, an unconditional surrender to discussing any subject (although the teacher has a certain plan to discuss, a main theme, one that is and should remain his own). Any classroom situation is fundamentally different from a more relaxed one with friends ready to endlessly meander between question and answer, without a plan, a structure, or a pedagogic objective. The difference is between formal and informal and while in the former context we usually have a plan and some objectives, in the latter we can raise pretty much any question and expect an answer to it. The conversational space of the informal context is limitless and can stretch or develop in every direction because it is defined as being beyond the more strict and formal educational objectives of university. In fact, if we look at the word ‘formal’ it means that something has a form or a *Gestalt*. University means and implies formalness which is to be understood as having a certain structure that has to be reflected even in the level, area, or contents of discussions, namely in the formalised dialog between question and answer oriented towards knowledge building in a certain field.

The actual university classroom is structured, organised, and understood as a little democracy (at least one *in nuce*); but, as the late Mr. Golnick – the director of a school for social workers said to his co-workers: “We are here in a democracy, consequently, we do things as I say!”. After all, even in the most developed democracies, somebody has to be the leader, somebody has to say when “it’s the end” (as the ‘colonel’ says in the final scene of

Disney's *The Aristocats*). In order to maintain such a 'democratic' process and to instil some governance, organisation, and structure to the whole pedagogical approach (which is, by the way and *per definitionem*, formalised), the teacher has to *wake up* from the slumber he is embedded in by educational principles, norms, objectives or bureaucratic egalitarian noise, not to mention cheap, second-hand democratic values (which are more valuable in the sphere of demagogic politics, but not in that of education).

Although a teacher, while in front of the class, is in a *persona* – representing an institution, a mere social role, imbued and sustained by a certain status – one should not forget oneself as the centre around which everything revolves. Being a teacher means playing a role, but we should not forget that the role is played by a human being, and that some of the questions aim to unhinge the human being behind their protective social role and attack the established status of that person. And of course, such questions are sometimes foolish, non-academic, and hypocritical, which means they are out of the question because, in fact, they don't ask for sincere answers or genuine insights, but merely want to play some psychological cat-and-mouse games. It is not always easy to discern the genuine motivations involved in a question, especially if they are not coming from a sincere need for knowledge or understanding although that is 'the face' they usually get. Consequently, *waking up* means, for the teacher, a binocular vision attentively looking at the told and especially at the untold, namely the hidden messages of an apparently innocent question. Otherwise, a lot of peccability apparently innocent, naïve, or even benevolent, hidden behind the mask of curiosity and interest for knowledge, can slip into the classroom and end up on the rather emotional side and not on the educational one. Missing such an important distinction reveals a serious lack of differentiation between the multiple levels human communication usually implies and contains.

Modern education is not only about showing respect to the student, as some internet or 'on request' articles may suggest. Teachers capable of using their above-mentioned binocular vision, by which they see not only the theoretical aspects of knowledge but also the possible emotional collateral involvements, should look at the respect problem from a wider perspective. There is a respect owed to the class too, as it is one for the subject discussed and, last but not least, to the teacher himself. As such, the teacher has to be a highly differentiated person capable of holding his own and the emotional system of the class in check, while conducting the main intellectual developments along with the subject at hand. The teacher cannot lose one's bearing or become lost in the mishmash of everyday discussions that

easily degenerate in irrelevant but sordid gossiping. One should stay alert and awake on a more or less constant level of differentiation which allows the finest distinctions between the emotional and the intellectual systems as they were emphasized by Murray Bowen. For the details of the intricacies of M. Bowen's theory I recommend, besides the writings of Bowen himself, Michael Kerr's introduction to his *Bowen Theory's Secrets* (Kerr, 2019, pp. xv-xiii). As Kerr emphasizes, Bowen's theory should not to be taken with a casual eye as it is subtler than we usually are willing to go or to think. Once one has understood that it involves an existential approach and not only a mere psychological one, one shall realize its potential for personal development of a rather anthropologically oriented theory.

We teachers and normal citizens alike, should be able to question the questions we are presented with, especially if they are, at least from a hunch, a feeling, or inner intuition, questionable. Although in politics or the media there are "questions worth asking" (as Frank Underwood tells young reporter Zoe in the series *House of Cards*), that doesn't forcefully transfer to education. Those "questions worth asking" are meant to essentially stir up doubt and radically change the topic of a discussion by spreading gossip nuances. In fact they derail the intellect from the subject at hand towards the sordid emotionality of personal attacks. It is by a highly trained attention and very fine differentiation that somebody is capable to realize when a topic is degenerating into malicious gossip. In the end it is about awakening, about constant and relentless awareness, the same one that Morpheus invites Neo by waking him up from his slumber.

SCIENCE IN THE MAKING OF SCIENTISM

*Our doings are not as important as we naturally suppose;
our successes and failures do not after all matter very much.*

Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*

There seems to be a curious aspect of contemporary scientific and even philosophic writings, a certain paradigm of *Research*. First of all, every wannabe intellectual must have or do research, not as much for the sake of it, but rather because it is needed for the academic *cursus honorum* or for the universal classification of universities, to accumulate points or marks – for oneself and for the University – which reflect sustained activity and illustrate serious involvement, requested by approval committees, ministries, or other control mechanisms our liberal society emplaced. It is hard to

imagine who can study or at least read all those research papers published by every assistant or associated professor in the world. Probably nobody! Or maybe just some other assistant professors who need citations from the latest research papers in order to be published as well. The consequence of that complicated and almost perfectly circular process is that information is like elementary particles accelerated in a doughnut shaped hadron collider. Although the whole process is costing a lot of money, time, energy, and involvement, it moves only inside a specific circle of specialists, from one to another, without making any contact with the reality of everyday life where the great majority lives (this paper is probably not an exception to the same circular process). Like those complicated and elaborated dances of past centuries we see in documentaries, researchers interact, move, dance, and change information between themselves, in their very special and isolated palace of science, in a ballroom which is perfectly insulated from the outside world; and the party goes on and on, without any foreseeable ending although the steps of the dance get more and more complicated by bureaucracy. It is a never-ending story, a bizarre research *perpetuum mobile* which, instead of moving mechanical machine parts, is just circulating informative information that does not inform very much.

After all, who has time? As the Merovingian – a main character in *Matrix Reloaded* – asks. The contemporary depersonalized individuals have, paradoxically, no time for themselves because they are so excessively occupied with themselves and their very own obsessive self-importance; always on the lookout for their whims or smallest desires and their immediate satisfaction, our fellow citizens are like that old person, desperately searching for the glasses which were on their nose. They are so full of themselves, their endless problems and stressful life, that they cannot see what's in front of their very own eyes. They should search for who they really are because they are filled to the brim with what they have, possess, or want. If looking somewhere else, they do it just to search for what they want, desire, or need – stringently and incontrovertibly –, always greedy for more (like the “young wolfs” described and analysed in *Adultus Rex*, see references).

The next big issue about the daily, weekly, or monthly research papers published is their scientifically pretentious nature, their forced scientism (which is hardly science but rather a second-hand enterprise). Papers concerning psychology or philosophy, but also sociology or social psychology, are usually full of citations proved by the elaborate, very impressive, and long lists of references. All that is just such a pretence of ‘let's say we are making science now’, but, as we all know, science cannot grow out of

nothing or out of the blue. Science should have some serious, reliable, and proven proofs, and at least an uncommon creative spirit to initiate research. If the prerequisites of science-making are not present or they are obtruded by everydayness and the relentless pressure of contemporary life coupled with the constant crescendo of academic workload, the teacher is quasi-obliged to make rather pseudo-scientifically research without raising one's eyes from recently published papers. As a consequence, one is forced to search in other's research papers and studies in order to find some building blocks for one's own ideas or theories to be expressed in yet another freshly baked paper. It is very modern nowadays, at least in psychological papers, to do one's own research based on *metadata* – which is the short version for not having time to read all the research in one's field, consequently, one needs just the key words or the abstract of any paper in the field – and put together as analyses of *metadata* (which sounds so scientifically interesting). This is just another form of the ubiquity of the approach of one superficial, but academic, *persona* to another, a hopefully less superficial *persona*. Everyone in the academic world is concerned with publishing papers – not because they like it or they were born-geniuses able to produce papers stream-like, but because they must, because academy norms and expectations are mandatory for everyone – even for those who do not want to or cannot be promoted. Nobody has the time anymore to seriously document oneself, to search for, wait for, or invite inspiration, to do real and serious research, or to develop and accommodate mature new ideas or interesting concepts; consequently, they will use and abuse the modern concept of *metadata* and thus drowning us and themselves – for that matter, in the endless river of information.

As psychologists and even more so as philosophers we cannot let ourselves engulfed by such an endless river in order to be drowned by tsunamis of insane requests that have since long passed the threshold of reasonability. After all, we should not let ourselves be treated like children easy to scare or like adolescents who believe that happiness is just around the corner. Such illusions are not in the domain of science, they do not help us to evolve psychologically and do not add anything to our philosophical judgement or development. We cannot make science out of the hat of pseudo-science based on citations as we cannot construe philosophy by always regurgitating observations or insights 'the greats' (which tend to be *great* because you based your doctoral thesis on them) in philosophy made or had. Citation and the never-ending stream of constant referring to one or the other ('great' or 'important' one) is nothing more than quasi-science and little more than pseudo-philosophy. Although we usually build on the shoulders

of giants, we should not overestimate them and, in consequence, underestimate us. We should grow out of our small children shoes, overtake our adolescent idolatries, and become fully adults on their way to maturity. As such, we must emphasize once again the call to *wake up*, this time from the comfortable slumber of immaturity. Infantilizing is omnipresent our days; starting with the perpetuation of school itself, which educates conformity to rules and norms and instils the habit of work, competition, and senseless greed for good marks, status, self-importance (the classic: fame, fortune, and glory), and enduring in every walk of life (paradoxically we can see childish parents who have their own children), the perpetual childhood of immaturity reigns supreme.

As we can see and understand from *Philosophers explore the Matrix* (and unfortunately not only there, but in so many papers recently published), in philosophical papers one feels constrained to constantly refer to somebody else (directly named, or cited, or present somewhere in the background, rather implicitly). It is easily understandable that, as in all fields of knowledge, in philosophy somebody should be an authority: let's say Descartes, or Kant, or Heidegger. By the contemporary academic norms, an aspiring philosopher cannot write something out of the blue, out of their own inspiration (based, of course, on their cultural background in the field concerned), but has to pack-up their research with names of great resonance, the 'heavy echelon' of philosophers, even if they are being criticised, or just used for a word (the famous, and unfortunately untranslatable "*Dasein*" of Heidegger, for example), or a concept of very large use and inescapable abuse (the *cogito* of Descartes). Such consecrated terms, ideas, concepts, or great names are, of course, intended to provide a certain backbone to the text and a backup also.

Usually, such items are rather ready-made ideas propagated throughout every book of the history of philosophy. As nowadays nobody has time anymore and philosophers are hardly an exception to this iron rule of social pattern, they too, especially the younger ones, must gather their knowledge from *Wikipedia*-like metadata collections of key words or essentialised abstracts. But putting together and tightening up some disparaged information, seasoned with 'quasi-concepts' in the few pages of a text called 'paper' is far from making philosophy (at least from what we usually assume). It is rather a pedantic process of pretence, retailing and retelling, on the lookout for some reward, promotion, or advantage, which essentially is just superficially interested in the philosophical research and thinking itself.

It is not just a bygone idea that philosophy is for old persons, those

who have time to think and reflect as they begin to realize that they do not have much time left to live. But life actually wants to be wholeheartedly lived, with all our passion and dedication, and such involvement leaves very little time to reflection – to actually live and to reflect upon life are essentially two very different things. From such a realistic context we realize that young people are rather (pre)destined to live while older ones, especially if they have some philosophic flair, have more time to ponder on living and what it represents. Consequently, as one crosses over the threshold of middle age, leaving behind the impetuosity of young age, one has the possibility to develop reason, calmness, and a reflective capability unimaginable in the first half of life. But, as life is not very fair, it is from the young age that all the self-promoting, growth, and building-up of fame, fortune, and glory is demanded. It is the young academics who must write papers, do research, to have initiatives, and be constantly in the first line in order to be remarked and eventually promoted to higher and better paid statuses. In our relentless society imbued with stressful demands it is only normal that in order to academically survive one should expedite everything one does, even if it is about writing philosophical papers.

YOUNG AGE, IMMATURITY, AND PHILOSOPHY

*There is no ultimate satisfaction in the cultivation
of one element of human nature
at the expense of all the others, ...*
Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*

A philosophical point of view implies detachment as an unadulterated prerequisite of its possibility, more precisely it means detachment from the trivialities and contingent concreteness so generously offered by everyday life and its attachments, dependences, desires, or never-ending complications. Seen from such a detached perspective, life is engulfing everyone involved in living in down to earth objectives, actions, alternatives, or implications. One does not need very much reflection, and even less the criteria of philosophical thinking to go on through ‘everydayness’. Even my cat does it (and although it is a philosopher’s cat it is not a philosopher cat). Even children do it without difficulty. A childish point of view, oriented by the instinctive approach to life is on the right track of an existence that goes on very well by the mere implication and consequences of needs, wants, and desires. Detachment would be, in this case, a secondary, inopportune,

and totally needless gratuity, a super-structure life doesn't need as such. The involvement in action, pragmatical, and concrete, does not request deep thought, or profound philosophical judgement, or deliberation. On the other hand, a childish perspective, namely an immature one, cannot pretend to achieve any philosophical status or perspective. Children, adolescents, youngsters, or disciples for that matter, cannot and will not be detached from their impetuous involvement amid life events – they all are driven by intentionality, always wanting, needing, or searching for something that should be somewhere, out there, waiting to be found or discovered right then.

Those categories of people are following their own idiosyncrasies, of inexorable physiological origin, that colour and determine their very own psychology, namely attitudes, behaviour, or thinking. Far too attached to their whims, momentary and imperative wants, or whatever goes through their head, they are, by their own nature, not capable to dis-involve and to distance from the imperatives' atavistic emotional strata of phylogenetic origin continuously exert on them. Such physiological and emotional involvement, perfectly justified for every living being that has to grow, develop, and satisfy the needs of an incomplete, immature, and yet fragile organism, one that has so much to learn and to experience, will consume every bit of energy in order to complete this main process of basic hominization. As a consequence, there will not be very much left for the other process we humans should go through, namely the process of humanisation. But once hominization is completed and once one arrives at adulthood, one can stand on their own feet to contemplate, from such a vertical, up-right position, looking upon a wider horizon, the spectacle of existence itself, namely the great circle of life (in which one is just a tiny, little, and ephemeral part).

As such, adulthood is the precondition for maturity, necessary but by far not sufficient or mandatory, for a certain verticality and detachment from the determinants of physiology and its close and intimately linked associate, psychology. Only once the threshold of maturity is passed, one moves into a new territory of existence. It is as if one would climb a high skyscraper or went in a plane to finally see the world from above. Compared to every other point of view, the philosophical perspective is comparable to an aerial perspective, (akin to a bird's-eye view) for which one must climb, meaning to detach oneself from the earth and mundanity in order to see this earth we are all living on (and off). Of course, that such a view and perspective can be made more and more abstract by distancing from the earth (as we see it in the pictures taken by astronauts). And, we should not forget that

the more abstract the perspective, the more it loses in concreteness, all the important things we value here on earth, are, from a cosmic perspective, insignificant and perfectly contingent. It is probably this perspective that Neo in *Matrix* has to accustom himself with when he repeatedly does his ‘Superman thing’, namely flying into the skies, go far beyond the usual mundane attachments and daily routines (left behind him once he raises through the clouds). By doing that, in fact he distances from the *persona* that Mr. Anderson represents for him and for so many others nine-to-fivers.

On the other hand, such a distancing from our involvement in the ordinary pettiness of life, which cannot and should not be ignored or devalued, but just placed between brackets for the instances of philosophical thinking, involves a complete ontological and epistemological reframing that every philosopher should do. In other words, it is about meta-positioning oneself above – and that is not to be considered from an axiological point of view, evidently without ‘looking down’ on others or their way of life. It is the meta-positioning vis-a-vis the ultra-complicated concreteness of everyday life, a detachment from the complete absorption in the endlessness of small things (often necessary of course, but at the same time, so blinding and overwhelming). Meta-positioning, in other words, tries to achieve a status of an aware spectator contemplating what is going on right there on the concrete scene where life is absorbing people in its own rhythm while playing its very own endlessly complicated game. For such a contemplation we need philosophy and philosophers able to do such a jump from concreteness to the abstract level, from innumerable particularities to the general, and from involvement to the detachment necessary to reflection and meditation.

It is from such a perspective, that a philosopher should say or do something for himself and for others as well. And, on the contrary, it is not by commenting and having uncertain opinions about ‘matrixes’ or what else there is out there in “the desert of the real” – nowadays, rather the desert of the screen. Because philosophy, although it is mainly thought and deep thinking about big, abstract, or very general things, it should not stick to that level and produce mere words, phrases, paragraphs, papers, or books. Philosophy should be life-transforming as well, it should also be transformative knowledge that induces behavioural changes or at least attitudes re-channelling. Otherwise, knowledge is more or less gratuitous and, as such, superfluous. To do philosophy, although we go far into generalities and abstractness to acquire a certain perspective about everything, we must return to the solid ground of our very own lives. We cannot remain wafting, strand-

ed into thin air like a balloon filled with helium and the hilarious effects of our own word-games.

Philosophy should certainly come from life and be inspired by everything there is, but it should, after due reflections and hardly conquered conclusions or at least a few new concepts, return to the same life that it has put between brackets to do all the thinking. Philosophy, in other words, should make wiser, not only smarter – the world is full with smart people who do not change their lives even a bit and continue the same everydayness they were thrown into, as Heidegger would have said. The philosopher should not only comprehend something about something else, instead he or she should apprehend that kind of knowledge and actually live it by applying it to their own life. Consequently, one's own rhythm, involvement, dependencies, or usual approach will change as everything will be seen from a different perspective, one that is and has to be life-changing. We are speaking here of a metamorphosis, an inner transmutation of the spirit in order to meet itself on its very own authentic and unfalsified realm. Otherwise, by writing only words and papers, which must appear, be printed, and multiply endlessly, nothing is gained besides maybe some strictly academic merits, rewards, or career advancement. A better job, a higher position in one or another hierarchy, a more distinguished status, or a mere raise of salary are not forcefully life-changing, although some can imagine that.

Such things are mere illusions to fix and hold the individual to one's own fixed position in the *matrix*, to attach the person to the system, which is actually "the desert of the real", as Morpheus calls it in the first film when presenting Neo with what is (really) real and what is not. Such an attachment is in fact very tempting, valuable, and engulfing as long as one looks only from a mundane perspective, one that is shared by so many that it seems to be the only one possible. Consequently, one cannot see beyond one's own attachments because they become one's world and define its guidelines, items, and margins. It is a perspective that gives and fixes the strong points of the world-view one adopts as one's own and, as such, one cannot see beyond that predefined horizon, not even that that horizon is limited, purely conventional, and totally arbitrary. It was said to be out there, unique, and perfectly objective, one for all, once and for all, and we believed it because they said so. It is such and such, incontrovertible and irretrievable, and we believed that it was as they said it. Apparently, it is objective, but in fact, it is reified by us, by everyone of us who is acknowledging it as such without questioning it. In its essence a pure theory, a social ideological concept made of words, a creed that becomes a credo – pulled over our eyes to pre-

vent us from seeing the truth (that we are slaves, as the same Morpheus tells Neo while revealing the matrix works).

CONCLUSION

As we near the end of this article, we must say it again: doing philosophy and being a disciple in this field, is contradictory; these two life positions are exclusive because they are, at the base, incompatible. You cannot be a good philosopher (which, by the way, goes for psychologists as well) if life hasn't left its marks on you, if the waters and storms of existence haven't washed away your adolescent enthusiasms and cleaned a bit of your excessive phylogenetical involvement or blanched your hormonal engagements and excessiveness. Because, that too, means to be mature and, starting from there, to do philosophy, namely to go beyond the modest threshold of initial humanisation in order to attain the maximum capacities our minds can lead us to. As Ken Wilber indicated, it is about the acquiring of the "*postformal* stages of cognition" (Wilber, 2000, p. 26), as to acquire higher levels of intelligence able to integrate complex, pluralistic perspectives in holistic ways. It is a level to which a philosopher should aspire in order to get to some unity of thought based on a dynamic dialecticism or universal *integralism* (*ibid*, pp. 26-27). Correspondingly, you cannot be a good or a profound philosopher while still immature as every disciple *per definitionem* is.

Nowadays it is considered that once you have finished your academic studies and have obtained your diploma, you are a certified psychologist or philosopher. What does that mean? Nothing more and nothing less than the hard-to-understand fact that you can name yourself a psychologist or a philosopher. And, once you do that, you will act accordingly and behave as such, in consensus with your diploma and freshly acquired title, but not necessarily in accordance with your inner abilities, your own maturity or life experience and its fine tuning or nuanced perspective to the world around you. Having a diploma implies, and that is a very common psychological feat, being excessively preoccupied with oneself, either on the narcissistic side of proud or on the inferiority of permanent self-doubt. Arrested either on the one or the other extreme or even hostage of both in endless compensations and overcompensations, the young adult, involved in one's own problems, is not capable to perform sufficient objectivity and (self)detachment. And school does not forcefully liberate from such self-involvement and constant preoccupation with the lacks and leaks of one's

own personality. School has many important roles, usually analysed in the field called ‘Sociology of Education’. A very important one is taking young people hostages to a closed system of knowledge with very sharply fixed limits. Once those limits are instilled in the young minds, they will define a specific mental horizon, some sort of a blue print through which everything is lectured and brought to attention. Indeed, such an approach is usually placed on the higher levels of the formal stage (already emphasized by J. Piaget), but that too is just another aspect of being taken prisoner by a certain, precisely circumscribed zone of the mind. What we are trying to say is that a good psychologist and a likewise philosopher should leave the formal stage that is inevitably unilateral, fixed to a doctrine, and attached to an ideology, and become acquainted with the dazzling perspectives offered by the postformal, the universalist and pluralistic perspectives, which see beyond simplistic cause and effect explanations that the normal mind is able to perform easily.

If philosophy is a business for mature or old age, and as it is rather a means to learn how to die, it implies that young people have, generally speaking, a difficult access to its subtleties and genuine mode of processing knowledge. Young people are prone to draw conclusions, they tend to jump to firm sentences without even considering possible nuances or subtler and more unusual meanings. As for example, we have a sample from *Philosophers Explore The Matrix* that proposes to get linked to the network (as if we weren’t already linked to it) in order to become a cyborg – as a consequence, the author says, life would be better because the machines of the future will have a far superior intelligence than ours. And, if such an anthropological abandonment and total dissolution of us as humans would not be enough, the author comes forward with the ethical conclusion for a future where we could “be part of a matrix system” because it “is morally far superior to our Neolithic morals of today.” (Grau, edited by, 2005, p. 207). Firstly, it is interesting to observe that the author of that article pushes that kind of progress into the future, while the *Matrix* film is presenting the *matrix* system as being already in place. We do not have to move towards something “and get into the future as soon as we can” (*ibid.* p. 207), because, as the film tries to show and insists on, we already are contained in the *matrix* system coordinated by the machines and their “far superior” morality. Actually, what is missing in such projective theories is the shocking conclusion that the film is pointing to a present situation where we live oblivious of being arrested in a prison of ideologies, of expectances, of wants and needs instilled in us by the forces of constant social pressure and the laws of social psychology.

Being a social and political animal (as Aristotle already recognised it more than 2000 years ago), we are determined, through our very own education into being a human, by a preestablished ideological system that works as the *matrix* in the film. We live in an elaborate illusion which assumes that to have a family, to have a (good) job, to have money (lots of it), to have a big car (bigger than the Joneses), or to afford expensive and exotic holidays – or, in one word, to constantly enjoy oneself, you must work hard to create a solid base (and here money represents a fundamental prerequisite) that will allow you to fulfil every whim that goes through your head. In other words, we have learned that we should live our life on the thin imbalance between the reality principle and the pleasure principle (as Freud mentioned it). If we take into the account a more psychiatric terminology, that roller coaster named life is to be enjoyed in a manic-depressive way, the agony of work should be followed by the extasy of weekends and holidays.

Such a system is already present, we actually live in it day in day out, and what *the Matrix* film is trying to show is that we can see it as such and, consequently, act to get out of it or at least to place it between brackets once we surpass the formal levels of consciousness inherent to most of the adult world. The above-mentioned author is confusing the real timeframe in which things actually are, although – we must admit it – the film, with its marked SF appearance, is a bit deceiving. But, if we pay enough attention to the subtext (of the film), we will remember that it is the year 1999 when everybody in the *matrix* thinks and believes they are. In that year the illusion of the *matrix* system is already set for pretty much everybody. Later on, in the second film (*Matrix Reloaded*) Neo meets *the Architect* who tells him about the failures of previous *matrix* systems, which were designed to be flowless and perfect, but failed. That was the past and thus it cannot be the ideal or better future, as the above-mentioned author suggests. Initial, *in illo tempore*, paradises, it seems, it had to be abandoned because it was leading nowhere – they had no future and, of course, they have no present – but evolution, change, dynamism and pluralism are provocative and maintain a certain level and direction of movement in the world.

If somebody writes academic papers, by doing just that, such a person keeps oneself at a safe distance of an obvious forced and unnatural objectivity – one is cool, we could say – keeping oneself sheltered under the snow globe of a commentator who does nothing about the problematic goings of the world while only being preoccupied with one's own detached comments. As such, placed on a conspicuous and manifest objectivity, non-participant and apparently detached, just observing as a reporter, this

researcher should realize that, as Werner Heisenberg enounced, and later constructivism realized, the role of the observer is contributing to the observed, one cannot place oneself totally outside the observed event. In other words, the observer does intervene in the observed fact or context; in fact, one's so-called objective observation is an intervention because it is co-participatory.

One forgets easily that every pointed finger towards others implies three other fingers pointing towards oneself. And these three fingers point not only to some theoretical insight or new perspective, but rather towards a practical approach too: as to realize not only a syntactic, but also a semantic and afterwards a pragmatic approach. Or, if we want to see it in a psychological key, it means sensing, perceiving, understanding, and then putting it into practice in order for the learned to preclude and determine behavioural or at least attitudinal changes. Otherwise, it is just words, words, words ... that will never materialise if not only in some smart papers to fill the internet or to be published in book format.

With the articles on *Matrix*, that we are analysing here, we are back at the high school level where we did literary analyses on a given text considered to be an authority. But that was some time ago and it cannot be still actual. To add more nuances to our argument we want to lien on what M. Scott-Peck stated about his observation concerning psychological regression which he has seen not only in stress situations but also in group settings or college reunions. As an observation already made by Gustave Le Bon in his *Psychology of the Masses*, there is nothing new about the great power the collective has for reducing the individual levels of intellect. There are always, in such manifestations, an observed dependency on the leader, said Peck (Scott Peck, 1983, p. 223). If we look better at that general tendency, we will see that the leader can be not just a person of authority, but also virtual as are laws, norms, expectations, or every other "one has to ..." that people are conforming to. The conclusion of M. Scott-Peck, with which we agree totally, is that "most people would rather be followers" (*ibid.*, p. 223). It seems that apathy and non-implication or non-participation is the norm of all who don't want to fully engage, although they are present (but not on the very active side). Of course, it is about being passive, avoiding risks of unpopularity or even rejection or unacceptance from the spirit of the group that could exclude one from its midst – which is the greatest anguish in our excessively extravert society. But that, as we know from the psychology of development, is a fear characteristic to children and, consequently, should not be present in fully grown adults. As Scott Peck emphasizes "The prob-

lem is that the role of follower is the role of child.” (*ibid.*, p. 223), meaning that group members, reduced to followers, are placed in infantile roles and inevitably childish attitudes or reactions. In other words, followers are not really adults, they cannot manifest any signs of maturity and self-expression because that is not what children, *per definitionem*, do. It is, in the end, a dependency on the leader as it is on one’s very own parents. Consequently, we can discern an emotional regressive tendency of the average individual “as soon as he becomes a group member.” (*ibid.*, p. 223). Being a therapist, Scott Peck emphasizes that for a group leader such regressions are not welcomed – the therapist should encourage and foster maturity rather than childish regressions. That is, unfortunately not the case in universities or the academic ladder climbing process where maturity is set as the final, rather ‘ideal’ goal, while the rest of the process should be carried out from the submissive (childish) position of a follower.

We could end here our little introspective analyses with a citation from the end of the *Matrix* trilogy, saying that those papers we tried to discuss up until now are mere: “Vagaries of perception. The temporary construct of a feeble human intellect trying desperately to justify an existence that is without meaning or purpose.”. It is as if once you realize that mere existence is problematic and more or less chaotic, meaning it makes not very much sense, and if there is some purpose to be found in it, it is usually coming from outside. At such a level one should realize that everything seems to be at least “as artificial as the Matrix itself, ...” (Matrix Revolutions). Therefore, it is not farfetched to insist on looking beyond the appearances copiously offered by the omnipresent system we must live in. Fortunately for us, we are not yet in the future presumed by the author we discussed earlier, and we still have some independence. Consequently, we should use it (until it is not to late) and cut ourselves a consistent slice of freedom for our inherent humanity (which should be nowadays more precious than ever).

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