

The Vision of Aurelio Peccei and Its Implications for Our Future*

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**This speech has been delivered by Roberto D. Peccei - Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of California Los Angeles and son of Aurelio Peccei, founder of the Club of Rome – at the conference “The Global Crisis as seen by Aurelio Peccei” organized by the Romanian Association for the Club of Rome on 15th March 2011 at the National Bank of Romania in Bucharest.*

Aurelio Peccei - a Global Conscience

The principal preoccupation of my father Aurelio Peccei in the last 20 years of his life was to raise the awareness of people around the globe to the predicaments that mankind was facing. This led him to form the Club of Rome with Alex King and other like-minded thinkers. It is remarkable that today, more than 25 years after his death and more than 40 years after the Club of Rome’s founding, his thinking and his wise suggestions on how to tackle the myriad of problems facing mankind remain relevant and timely. It is informative and useful to briefly look back at what were the principal tenets of his worldview, and the path by which he was led to them. Although there was already a strong tradition of thinking about the future in the 1960s, through the French school of Gaston Berger and Bertrand de Jouvenel, my father, due to his vast experience in the world, added a key new element- a global dimension

His approach to the future was holistic and global: “one cannot think of the future without developing first a global understanding of the problems facing mankind today-what is known as the *problematique*”. The problems in our planet are intrinsically correlated and their solutions must be reached at the same time.

A second key idea permeates Aurelio Peccei’s thinking- which can be directly traced to his background as a manager: “It is important to examine possible futures so as to be able to plan rationally the future of our planet”. This is what Dennis Gabor, an early member of the Club of Rome, used to call “inventing the future”

This holistic global thinking, accompanied with a desire to help craft plans for a better future, became a hallmark of the Club of Rome and remains one of its strong characteristics today. I consider my father’s second idea, that of “wanting to plan the future of the planet”, perhaps as his most remarkable. Not only it is fully consonant with his background as a manager, but it also shows him as a man without fear of the magnitude of the effort needed.

As a manager Aurelio Peccei was used to analyze problems and map out the necessary steps needed to resolve them. Faced with a world confronted with a series of interlinked global problems of incredible complexity, his reaction was to start a process of rational planning towards their resolution without being overwhelmed by the scale of the problem.

This was an incredible act of faith and required remarkable courage, given that he and the other members of the Club of Rome were just individuals and had no “official capacity” in the world.

“The Chasm Ahead”

Much of my father’s thinking on global problems can be traced back to his first book *The Chasm Ahead*. Although the book’s theme was on the growing gap between the USA and Europe in the development of technology, the second part of the book outlined what he saw as an even bigger challenge: “Our planet is facing an increasing set of macro-problems (population growth, resource scarcity, etc.) which nobody is worrying about”.

As a good manager, in “*The Chasm Ahead*” he outlines “Project 1969 - A Feasibility Study on Systematic Long-term Planning of a World Scope” aimed at remedying this situation. This Project had three principal elements:

1. Which problems need to be looked at in a global context?
2. How are these problems interconnected?
3. What technologies exist to tackle systematically these problems, so that one can then make some forecasts for the future?

This is, essentially, the program that will form the basis of what the Club of Rome will pursue later on.

In “*The Chasm Ahead*” Aurelio Peccei also proposes the conceptual basis of the new science and philosophy which will be needed to plan the future, outlining four principal elements:

1. Man and nature form an integrated macro-system;
2. Many of the subsystems of this macro-system are in danger because of man’s actions;
3. To tackle the interconnected problems of this macro-system and prevent its collapse it is necessary to begin a process of “global planning”;
4. To begin this process, and to initiate actions that will help ameliorate the planet’s predicament, is a collective moral obligation of mankind.

Alex King and the Club of Rome

The Club of Rome was founded in April 1968, in part to help to bring to fruition what my father called “Project 1969” in “*The Chasm Ahead*”. My father’s ideas, to frame mankind’s predicament globally and to seek rational solutions to the problematique, received enormous intellectual and moral support from Alex King, co-founder of the Club of Rome. In many ways, Alex King’s role was to criticize and moderate the ideas of my father, rendering them more understandable and, perhaps, more palatable. In a magical fashion these two men so different, but also so similar, brought the Club of Rome into life together in perfect harmony, without ever missing a beat.

It is really difficult to separate the intellectual contributions of King and Peccei. Aurelio Peccei was a man of action, used to making rapid-fire decisions. Alex King was more reflective and phlegmatic. Peccei had a lot of charisma. King had a fantastic sense of humor.

Both were deeply worried about the fate of the world. Together, in the Club of Rome, they were able to stimulate a global conscience. In his book *“Let the Cat Turn Around”* Alex King wrote fondly of the interpersonal relation they had in their years together. Let me quote Alex King: “our relationship was so close and relaxed that he took no umbrage even at my sternest criticisms. Indeed, many of his public pronouncements were developed jointly. I was usually in agreement- but not always. Aurelio had a deep belief in the basic goodness of people that I found a bit naïve and sentimental. I was more cynical”.

Although Aurelio Peccei and Alex King were the founding fathers of the Club of Rome, in the early days they were helped by other kindred spirits like Hugo Thiemann, Eduard Pestel , Saburo Okita and Mircea Malita. Here, I want to focus briefly on the intellectual contributions of three individuals who had an important role in helping develop the vision that my father and Alex King were putting forth. They are: Erich Jantsch, Hasan Ozbekahn and Jay Forrester.

Jantsch was a well-known system analyst and Peccei and King asked him to write the background paper for the meeting at the Accademia dei Lincei in April 1968. Jantsch’s paper *“A Tentative Framework for Initiating System-wide Planning of World Scope”* was brilliant, but difficult to understand because of its abstract nature. Its principal thesis was two-fold: the world is a cybernetic system, which is rendered unstable because of growth and to regain control of the system man’s intervention is necessary;

Jantsch’s paper was not well understood but helped advance my father’s notion of studying the problematique to ascertain what were the possible futures. What Jantsch and Peccei actually proposed then was that these studies should be carried out by a panel of experts named by the governments of the world. This idea, which in many ways resembles the 1992 idea of forming the IPCC to study climate, was judged impractical then (who would take responsibility?). The Club of Rome, in part, was created as an instrument to promote and carry out this proposal.

Although the idea of global planning for the future as a system response is due to Jantsch, the concept of a world problematique in all its generality is due to Hasan Ozbekhan. Ozbekhan’s full vision of what was the problematique was laid out in a proposal, entitled *“Quest for Structured Responses to Growing World-wide Complexities and Uncertainties”*, which he prepared for the Club of Rome meeting in Bern in June 1970. The proposal of Ozbekhan was simpler than the program proposed by Jantsch (and cheaper: \$ 900,000 vs \$10,000,000). However, the methodology of how to tackle the full problematique was not yet fully developed.

My father felt intellectually closer to the humanistic approach of Ozbekhan, but was concerned that the project would take too long and thus would not properly reflect the urgency of the global crisis. Thus he decided to seek another way. The Club of Rome had also invited Jay Forrester, a world expert on system dynamics to Bern to talk about his system approach to industrial dynamics. With strong support from Pestel, Thiemann and King, who had been impressed by Forrester’s presentation, my father asked Forrester whether he was prepared to construct a system model that would simulate the interaction

among the various components of the problematique (population, resources, industrial production, etc.). Forrester agreed and relatively quickly he produced the first simple model of the problematique: World 1.

Forrester's World 1 model was highly aggregated and simplistic. Nevertheless, the model showed clearly that continued growth in a finite world eventually led to a collapse of the system. This led the Club of Rome to decide to entrust to Forrester and his MIT group the task to build a more robust model, with \$ 200K funding provided by the Volkswagen Stiftung. This decision elicited strong objections from Jantsch [who thought Forrester's model was "pedestrian"] and Ozbekhan [who thought system dynamics was "worthless"]. This decision led eventually to the publication of *"Limits to Growth"* [Meadows *et al*] and the system models developed in the book helped build a new global consciousness of the predicament of mankind.

"Limits to Growth" was an enormous success and catapulted the Club of Rome and my father onto the global scene. However, *"Limits"* only discussed the consequences of continuing with "business as usual". It did not present an analysis of "possible futures", which mankind could plan for. To remedy this in part, my father and the Club of Rome turned back to a more humanistic approach, closer in spirit to what Ozbekhan had proposed in Bern. This development in the thinking of Aurelio Peccei is clear in his second book, *"The Human Quality"*, which was published 4 years after *"Limits"*. In this book he is much more explicit on what ought to be done, presenting a normative analysis of how one could (and should) attack the problematique.

"The Human Quality"

In the *"The Human Quality"* my father arrived at a third key concept to tackle the future. Besides adding a global dimension to our thinking and beginning to plan possible futures, he felt that mankind could only escape its present predicament if it faces the imperatives of our time with a new humanism. According to him, this new humanism will come about from citizens developing a global perspective, based on a love of justice and an abhorrence of violence. He felt that, once human beings truly discover that they are actors on the global stage, and then they will also naturally evolve culturally to tackle the problems facing mankind. In short, what my father suggests in *"The Human Quality"* is that the solution to the predicament of mankind will only be found when there is an evolution of man himself.

In this book Aurelio Peccei also outlines **6 missions for humanity**, whose purpose is to help mankind acquire sufficient courage to act – thereby helping it move further along the new humanism path. These six missions reflect the world in 1976, but continue to be important today because, alas, they have remained largely unfinished. These missions are:

1. We must learn what the "external limits" are that mankind is imposing on our globe [mission largely completed today through many studies - IPCC, UNDP, etc.];
2. In an ever-changing world what are "internal limits" of man? [mission achieved only in some areas];

3. How will we preserve our cultural identity? [uneven and sporadic successes in the past 35 years];
4. Can we arrive to alternatives to having sovereign countries in the world? [very little, besides the European Common Market, has been achieved];
5. How can we prepare for a world of 8 billion people? [We have gotten to a population of 7 billion largely without planning, but at an enormous cost in human misery];
6. We should study the structure of the global productive capacity to understand how best to stabilize it [Almost nothing has been done in this area and it remains an area of great vulnerability for the world today].

“Agenda for the End of the Century”

In March 1984, the day before he died, my father dictated a preparatory document for the Club of Rome meeting planned in Helsinki that June. This *“Agenda for the End of the Century”* is his intellectual testament and gives a sense of how his thinking on the predicament of mankind had progressed since writing *“The Human Quality”*.

The *“Agenda”* he wrote for the Club of Rome is clearly also an agenda for the world. To set the stage, it is important to remember that between 1976 and 1984 awareness of the problematique around the world had actually diminished. In *“Agenda for the End of the Century”* my father uses again the idea of missions that need to be carried out in the interest of mankind. He focuses on 5 missions in the *“Agenda”*, which in part overlap with those in *“The Human Quality”*, but now he emphasizes even more the human development needed to face the new challenges that are facing mankind. These missions rose in 1984 are still relevant today and are an important agenda for our planet, albeit one that is still poorly understood. Let me briefly describe them.

Human Settlements - We need a master plan which will provide an acceptable standard of living for the population growth still expected in the world, without devastating irreversibly the environment.

Preserving Nature - We need to understand better the earth’s carrying capacity and re-establish harmony between humans and nature. Mankind is just a small component of the biosphere and it should strive to keep it in a healthy condition.

Governance- Society, as is presently organized is ungovernable. We need human solidarity to expand from being at the national level, to being regional, and finally moving to a global scale, thereby helping to transfer this behavior to institutions and the political arena

Human Development - The most valuable asset that humanity has to prepare for the future is to be found in the, yet underdeveloped, human resources in each and every human being. These inner resources must be developed to ensure that there will be a future for mankind.

A Nonviolent Society - Although violence is considered part of human nature, nonviolence should become one of our core values. “Peace is the primary factor... and it should be

understood in its broadest and most significant aspect that of nonviolence not only at all levels and sectors of human society but also in the relation between human society and nature". These were the last words my father dictated 27 years ago.

Looking at the Future Drawing Lessons from the Past

More than 40- years after the Club of Rome was created, the situation today is worse than it was then. The only positive sign is that now there is much more awareness in the world of the problematique and the need to do something about the predicament of mankind. There has been very little progress on the **5 missions** my father discussed in the "*Agenda*".

1. There has been no real planning for the 1.5 Billion people who were added to the world since 1984, or the additional 2 Billion we expect by 2050, most of them in the developing world.
2. The carrying capacity of the world has gotten worse since 1984, with the earth bio capacity now 40% above the sustainability level.
3. Except for some growth in the membership of the European Common Market, the world is still Balkanized in 200 nation states.
4. Doing something about pressing environmental problems, like climate change, is part of the evolution and growth in the human spirit that my father so much hoped to see develops in the world of the future.
5. We are very far away from a culture of nonviolence in the world today.

From this report card – 3 fails and 2 partly successful - it is clear that mankind has not yet made the jump in human quality that Aurelio Peccei suggested was necessary for ensuring a sustainable future. Pessimists will say that this jump will never be made. The optimists among us [and I am one of them] continue to hope that with appropriate targeted interventions one can change the direction the world is taking.

But what should we do? In my view we need to face squarely and honestly the phenomena which is at the core of all our problems: growth must be limited. In a way, it is ironic that 40 years after "*Limits to Growth*" we should return to the original concept, which was then so heavily criticized. However, in a finite globe it is not sustainable to have any of the dynamical parameters of the world [population, industrial production, pollution, etc.] grow continuously. We are well aware of the necessity of limiting the growth of many dynamical parameters in our planet [e.g. population and pollution], but all our economy is based on growth.

Although concepts like "zero growth" or "steady state economics" are ideas that are not very appetizing economically, to overcome the predicament that mankind finds itself in we need a new economic system where growth is not the driving parameter. In many fields (e.g. culture and art) growth is not necessary for human satisfaction.

Nature is cyclical and its many subsystems are in equilibrium, not in constant expansion. Thus, the next great challenge is to design a world based on a completely different

economic structure not based on growth but on ensuring the sustainability of our planet. I very much hope that the views and ideas that Aurelio Peccei put forward in his lifetime will be a helpful guide in this necessary process to invent a better future for our beleaguered planet. In this respect, it is important to note that although it is desirable to invent a better future for the whole world, it is unrealistic to imagine that this will happen all at once. Instead, it is much more likely that the changes needed to move our planet towards a sustainable future will be made first in a few countries or regions where the ideas of the Club of Rome and of my father will find fertile ground.

In my view, Romania has a real possibility to play such an exemplar role.