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12. A GENERAL OVERVIEW

In this last chapter, we will take a look at the conclusions drawn by those of us who have been working on this text, in an attempt to apply the Arizmendiarieta philosophy to today's questions and concerns.

1. The Arizmendiarieta Project: from heteronomy to autonomy

Based on a series of values and a specific philosophy, Arizmendiarieta was harshly critical of both his immediate environment and western capitalist society in general, and was totally committed to setting in motion alternative practices aimed at taking society down a different road. His diagnosis of the situation was clear: the social order of the time failed to respect what should be the principal objective of all human activity, i.e. human dignity.

He concluded that capitalist society did not guarantee human dignity. Why not? Because in the social order of Arizmendiarieta's day, workers were nothing more than merchandise within the economic process. The historical implementation of capitalist society had given those providing the capital the right to ownership, management and profits. Workers were left only their capacity for work, which they were forced to hire out in return for a salary.

From Arizmendiarieta's critical perspective, heteronomy was the basis of a society in which it was not worth living; a society in which people's lives were governed by objectives and functions imposed from outside. Dignity was not, therefore, a priority. In light of this, what workers needed was to become active participants with full rights in the socioeconomic process and organisation. They needed to become owners, decision-makers and the ones willing to take risks. The ultimate aim of this initiative was not to create a society without class struggles, but rather a society without social classes.

According to Arizmendiarieta's philosophy, the most important social struggle was that which took place between the different classes within the national framework. And companies were the central social figure within which this struggle took place. Therefore, the deep-rooted reform of the

company structure was the first step towards resolving the historical struggle (or the *social question* as it is often called) that had arisen as a result of the establishment of modern capitalist industrial society.

However, and this is the main message of this book, his co-operative initiative was not simply a new company structure aimed at ensuring that the ownership and management of the companies changed hands. It was much more than this. On the one hand, the aim was to change the **company's behaviour and social function**, placing it at the service of the welfare of both individuals and the community, as part of an effort to ensure a fairer society and the common good. And on the other, it is important to understand that to consider Arizmendiarieta's achievements simply in terms of a new way of defining or conceptualising companies falls far short of the mark. The co-operative company envisaged by Arizmendiarieta is the result of much deep thought. At the end of the day, it was a **social project**, not a business or an economic one. The aim was to enable citizens to **organise their own lives** and different social areas; to enable the self-regulation of human relationships. Enabling workers themselves to create and manage their own companies was just the first step along a road involving a wide range of processes all aimed at enabling self-government in as many social areas as possible.

Arizmendiarieta's project aimed to lead society from heteronomy to autonomy. It aimed to free human behaviour and actions from externally imposed conditions, and to create self-constituted communities and individuals through the development of self-regulated relationships based on co-operation. In place of passive subjects governed by unknown external philosophies, his aim was to encourage individuals and communities capable of administrating and taking control of their own activities¹.

2. The objective of social development

In Arizmendiarieta's day, social development or social promotion meant the material improvement of citizens' lifestyles. The philosophy developed by Arizmendiarieta aimed to provide a solution to the precarious social and economic situation in which Arrasate found itself during the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. It was, ultimately, an initiative aimed at promoting social justice, since it was the poorer sectors of the population

¹ This social project and philosophy is very similar to the theories espoused by a number of different contemporary thinkers. There is a marked similarity, for example, with Habermas' works. This author distinguishes between *systemic integration* and *social integration* in relation to the structure and organisation of society. According to Habermas, the former is a type of functional social integration which takes place without individuals being fully aware of it. Social integration, on the other hand, is a conscious process of harmonisation in which individual behaviour is aimed at achieving a common goal by means of a communal effort; in other words, it is the capacity for self-organisation (Habermas, J.: *Teoría de la acción comunicativa*, vol. I and II, Taurus, Madrid, 1992). In much the same way, Gorz distinguishes between heteronomy or functional integration and co-operation between members of society or self-governed co-operation (Gorz, A.: *Metamorfosis del trabajo*, Galilée, Madrid, 1991). These two authors share Arizmendiarieta's critical view of modern capitalist society, and like him, defend the construction of a new social order based on the paradigm of social integration and self-regulation.

who were most in need of improvement.

However, his intentions, actions and way of thinking should not be seen as merely an attempt to improve the living conditions of his fellow citizens, even though this was doubtless one of his priority motivations. Social development, understood in the widest sense of the term, was his true aim, and this required a **completely new approach to the problem**. His aim was to create individuals whose behaviour and values were all targeted at ensuring dignity, responsibility, freedom and community service; individuals and communities capable of taking responsibility for their own lives and developing the tools required for ensuring autonomy.

The principal challenge to which social promotion needed to respond was that of redressing the imbalances in the social power structure, ensuring true social democratisation (and not only political-institutional democratisation) and encouraging a more developed awareness of the potential for both community and personal self-government. It was important to enable people to take more control over their lives, to develop the capacity for both individual and collective self-organisation, to bring about a deep-rooted change in mentality as regards community ethics and to develop the resources required for enabling individual freedom and ensuring collective responsibility. A new type of individual and collective subjectivity was required in order to move towards personal and collective self-determination.

Arizmendiarieta's project aimed to promote the development of human dignity, striving to provide each person with a fair opportunity for realising their full potential - taking risks, becoming involved, integrating themselves actively in society, building, making decisions and assuming responsibility for their choices. This is the pillar upon which the much needed **personal and collective transformation** was based. As a result, a bi-directional relationship came about: in order to establish the co-operative model, a deep-rooted change in mentality was required, and at the same time, co-operation needed to be understood as the paradigm upon which the aforementioned individual and collective self-regulation was based².

This undertaking was one which required much work by many people; the aim was to end up with individuals and a community willing to play a key role as regards commitment and responsibility and be active participants in both their personal and collective lives.

² Through self-regulation, people can build a social order which responds to their needs. This new order will no doubt contradict the models imposed by the external reality, and seek to transform them. The collective experience should not be governed by money and state activities, but rather by social values which coincide with the concept of self-regulation. In this field also, we should underline the similarity between this philosophy and Habermas' thinking. According to this author, as a result of capitalist modernisation, the cognitive instruments of economic and state-based rationale have, to the detriment of the self-regulation of social relations, colonised areas which do not belong to them and which follow a different logic. Arizmendiarieta's mistrust of the possible supremacy of the economic rationale and state activities coincides with this reading.

3. Co-operation: a way of thinking and acting for the future

It has been some years now since Arizmendiarieta died, and since that time the world has undergone a series of important changes. It is interesting to take a look, albeit a cursory one, at the potential and consequences of the principles based on Arizmendiarieta's thinking within the context of the new world order created by the most important changes which have taken place over the last decade.

3.1. The ethics of economics and the scattered subject

The world has changed, and continues to change at a hitherto unknown pace. The threshold of the 21st century presents us with a drastic restructuring of the world which involves a profound displacement of both power structures and the focus of the social struggle. The economic and social life of the majority of regions and individuals is now structured in accordance with the principles of the capitalist socioeconomic system. From a planetary perspective, one of the most notable results of this restructuring of the world is the polarisation of power, a polarisation which is lending new force to situations of heteronomy.

One of the most important characteristics of the capitalist system is the unhindered diffusion of the economic rationale³. Throughout history, this rationale has always had certain limits, owing to the fact that the social order always recognised a number of other rationale or key philosophies, be they religious, cultural, social or ethical. Capitalism awards economic rationale priority, either deeming all other considerations irrational since they do not focus on ensuring economic efficiency, or simply drawing them into the economic arena, thus rendering them subordinate.

Neo-liberalism is the term used to characterise the final phase of capitalism in which we now live. At the end of the day, we are faced with a new boosting and diffusion of the economic rationale. Although the globalisation brought about by neo-liberalism is a fairly complex and widespread phenomenon, it is worth outlining the key social characteristics of this latter-day capitalist phase:

- Since it gives priority to technical-economic rationale, neo-liberalism is a movement which lacks ethical depth. It is the supremacy of economic growth and efficiency subject to market demands and subordinate to economic policy. In other words, it is an economist ideology.
- It is an individualistic outlook. We are faced with an attempt to build a social model based on individual responsibility: from now on, everyone must look out for themselves. The existence proposed by the new liberal ideology is one based on self-interest.

³ Gorz, A.: *Metamorfosis del trabajo*, Galilée, Madrid, 1991, page 162.

- **The individualisation of the social struggle.** In this era in which traditional protection systems are being gradually undermined, it is up to the individual to deal with the imbalances caused by any given method of social organisation. As a result, the social struggle is now being fought in the field of individual culpability.
- Collective activity and thinking has undergone a sharp decline in modern Western society. The collective subject has been divided and scattered. **The community dimension of society has been weakened**, and attention is now focused on a new social model based on individual performance and competitiveness. The direction of each person's existence is now determined by their individual skills and capacities, something which seriously undermines the concept of solidarity. The disintegration of community thinking and support paves the way for individual domination.

3.2. The economics of ethics and the community subject

Let us go back in time once again. Arizmendiarieta considered the economic variable to be of vital importance: it was essential for the co-operative concept to demonstrate that it was a viable initiative. He wanted show that workers' had come of age and were mature enough to cope with self-government and self-organisation. Economic efficiency and sustainable management were concepts that could not be ignored. This approach left the old, almost exclusively moral-ethical conception of co-operativism far behind. Arizmendiarieta's philosophy was that of a modern and rational co-operativism. It was a heterodox philosophy, one which broke many of the moulds of traditional co-operativism.

But at the same time, it was harshly critical of the predominance of economics. Arizmendiarieta believed that economic activity for its own sake was pointless, and only acquired meaning when it was placed at the service of a social-cultural-political programme whose aim was the improvement of the human condition in the widest sense of the term. Arizmendiarieta criticised the fact that economics had been transformed into an absolute value and went to great lengths to point out the risks involved in the predominance of this concept over everything else.

He defended a new relationship between economics and ethics. He believed that economics should not be seen as an independent category or natural science somehow removed from social ethics. He considered the economic principle to be nothing more than an instrument for achieving society's true aims. In his opinion, economics was dependent upon ethics, and should therefore be placed at the service of the population, not the

other way round⁴ - a concept far removed from the precepts of neo-liberalism.

Something similar occurs in relation to the issue of individualism versus community. Arizmendiarieta's philosophy attaches great importance to individual responsibility, since in order to be truly free, society needs to be responsible, conscientious and capable of making its own decisions. However, at the same time, Arizmendiarieta also defended those people who were able and willing to move from **autonomic towards community thinking**. What is more, he considered the collective models to be the best guarantors of a fairer social organisation, and community ethics to be the basic principle upon which his entire philosophy was based.

Arizmendiarieta's philosophy offers a very different ideology from the neo-liberalism which characterises today's society. It defends community subjectivity aimed at establishing a common collective destiny, from the perspective of the development and acceptance of individual differences. The self-regulation of civil society paves the way for the building of community spirit and social transformation. The ultimate aim of the initiative is the construction of a community project.

4. Development models

The globalisation of the modern world has not only brought about a profound change in economic activity, but has also forced us to consider a whole range of serious social struggles from a global perspective. Our world can no longer be understood merely in terms of our local or national framework.

In fact, over recent decades an extremely important and concerning realisation has gradually penetrated the common awareness: the development model most commonly used in modern society is unsustainable. This unsustainability has a number of different faces:

- The gap between rich and poor countries is wider than ever. Today, more people than ever before live below the poverty line, despite the fact that modern technology is more than capable of providing a solution to this problem. In an historical era in which more resources are produced than ever before, there is a drastic imbalance in the way in which such resources are distributed. And this gap is becoming wider.
- The exploration and discovery of our planet's physical limits has resulted in an unprecedented ecological crisis. The ever increasing technological applications developed to aid the economic growth of western civilisation have drastically reduced biodiversity and threaten to jeopardise our future.

⁴ The relationship Arizmendiarieta establishes between economics and social values coincides with the well-known definition of socialism given by Karl Polanyi. According to this writer, the essence of socialism is to place economics at the service of society, rendering economic activity subordinate to social values and objectives (POLANYI, K.: *La gran transformación*, Endymion, 1989).

- In addition to seriously affecting natural biodiversity, the expansion of western productivist society has also brought about a sharp decline in the wealth and quality of the world's cultural diversity.

The world-wide expansion of western civilisation has brought about a technological, human and cultural crisis of hitherto unknown dimensions. All over the world, scientists, sociologists, religious figures and intellectuals are all, to a greater or lesser extent, drawing attention to the unsustainability of the current development model and the need to find a new one. We need to **rethink** mankind's future trajectory on the basis of these new parameters, and that is precisely what co-operative thought aims to do. But how should we deal with this pressing problem?

Our starting point does little to make our task any easier. On the one hand, the values that underpin co-operative thought demand that we address this problem, but on the other, we ourselves are members of a society that enjoys a high level of material abundance. From a global perspective, citizens of western society live an opulent existence. Our culture is one of satisfaction, and modern capitalism is based on compulsive consumption and the impulse to sate induced needs.

Co-operative thought needs to widen its horizons and take a good look at some of the most serious problems facing the modern world, namely the gap between countries in the northern and southern hemispheres and the destruction of the environment, among others. We have no choice but to find a **new development model** for the future, especially if we wish to build a society based on solidarity, social justice and community development.

In light of this, the challenge posed by co-operative thought and experience is nothing new: we must find a way of developing an economic project that is compatible with our ethical ideals, no easy task in this modern era in which social ethics have been pushed to the sidelines. By differentiating between true development and mere economic growth, we need to rethink the values and initiatives that will give meaning to our activities, adapting them to the new world order.

And this is precisely what this project aims to do: enable the harmonious union of instrumental and moral rationale. Arizmendiarieta's philosophy is perfectly compatible with the parameters established by modernity. Modern society has made incredible economic and scientific progress thanks to the use of instrumental rationale. The progress made in the ethical field, however, is more dubious. And this is the heart of the challenge we face: we need to place the economic and scientific-technical capacities of modern civilisation **at the service of a community and ethical project**. And we need to do this in accordance with the new dimensions of modern ethics, i.e. from a global perspective and within the framework of balanced and sustainable development.

5. From the sowing to the reaping

Arizmendiarieta, a true farmer, was a sower at heart. Through education, he patiently sowed the seed of a new philosophy and, not satisfied with just that, was determined to oversee its growth and development.

The purpose of this text is to describe this process of growth. It is not this book's aim to assess or evaluate the resulting harvest, nor to analyse the results of the Mondragón Co-operative Experience. Even at a first glance, the reader will soon realise that the co-operative experience differs significantly from the transformation plan outlined here. This is hardly surprising, since it is always easier to formulate ideas than it is to bring them to fruition. In any case, the Mondragón Experience has provided and continues to provide much food for thought. We would like to underline here a number of ideas relating to the main theme of this publication:

- Lately, the transformation plan's integrity and sense of direction has grown somewhat weak within the Co-operative Experience. There is growing concern regarding the possibility that what used to be the principal tool (the economic aspect and formulation of companies) has gradually become the main objective. It could be said that there is a slight bias towards economic growth and efficiency. We say bias not with the aim of denying its vital importance, but rather to highlight the fact that we should perhaps be paying more attention to the other aspects that go hand-in-hand with economic concerns within the transformation plan, and which perhaps have been ignored somewhat in recent times. Evidence of this can be found in the field of education, in which despite the fact that much effort has been expended on promoting, helping and working on the technical side of things, the social, ethical and co-operative aspects have been somewhat neglected.
- One of the problems of the direction the Mondragón Experience has taken is that not enough importance is attached to certain functions. In relation to new social experiences, in addition to certain functions which are fulfilled in an exemplary manner in the Mondragón co-operatives (organisation, expansion, management, etc.) there are a number of others which are noticeably lacking, particularly the conceptualisation and putting into practice of new ideas (promotion) and educational activities regarding the meaning and importance of these ideas (sowing the seed and breathing new life into the initiative). These two functions have not been the subject of constant renewal within the Mondragón Experience and have not been developed to the extent they should have been, running rather on inertia following the death of Arizmendiarieta.
- Like many complex social phenomena, the Mondragón Experience is not without its paradoxes. On one hand, it could itself be seen as one of the driving forces behind the dominance of the economic rationale, having gradually turned its back on the critical concerns and liberation processes present in today's world and embraced instead western productivist behaviour and consumerism. Yet on the other, despite being

submerged in the world of economic competitiveness, the experience nevertheless has many things to teach us, which may in some cases provide the key to the future. Developing one's own complex and sustainable model is no mean feat, and can provide much useful knowledge and many vital solutions. Today, there is no global alternative equivalent to the prevailing system, and perhaps because of this, experiences like the Mondragón Co-operative Movement, which take an alternative approach, may prove the true seedbeds which will provide the solutions to tomorrow's problems.

The future is before us. And looking to the future brings us back once again to the main concern of this publication. What has Arizmendiarieta to offer the Basque generation of the 21st century? Three things come to mind for those seeking a new way forward within the collective experience:

Firstly, a philosophy of self-regulation that is strong, flexible and efficient.

Secondly, a selection of interesting attitudes, among which we find one often lacking in today's world: strength, or in other words, the courage to turn one's back on the prevailing rationale and think and act in accordance with an alternative set of values.

And finally, for better or for worse, the experience of bringing an idea to fruition. The ability to put ideals into practice. The testimony of a person (and group) who turned a way of thinking into a tangible reality.