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Responsible Innovation?**

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ABSTRACT

Innovation is known as the introduction of new things, ideas or ways of doing something. However, the consequences of innovation could harm the planet, ecosystem, and even increase social issues. More than ever, the responsibility is a need to innovate. If responsible innovation does start to emerge in different places of the world, could the philosophy of spiritual exercise be the key to unlocking this new necessity to innovate? Indeed, there is a need to rethink innovation through the lens of philosophy and try to rethink it using the philosophy of spiritual exercises. Pierre Hadot dedicated his research to rendering an image of philosophy as a way of life. This way of life, Hadot often underscored, was anchored to a set of spiritual exercises that were neither merely preparations for nor complements to philosophical theory. Spiritual exercises are activities which work on the human being as an aesthetic, emotional, intellectual, and bodily whole. Some examples of spiritual exercises are meditation, self-examination, memorization, asceticism, correspondence and reading, writing, physical exercise and examination of conscience. These exercises can help the innovator become more mindful of the consequences his innovation might have on the ecosystem. This is what responsible innovation is or should be. It means considering the negative aspects of a prospective innovation and being mindful of the consequences it might have on society. Philosophy of spiritual exercises are the ultimate aid to develop responsible Innovations and how the 21st century innovator must make use of these aids to further his sensibilities and perceptions.

Responsible Innovation and its Importance

As a result of innovation, animal populations and species are disappearing. The massive development of technologies, products, consumer, and non-consumer goods has had and continues to have a direct consequence on the depletion of natural resources. It is undisputable that the atmosphere, soil, and oceans are deteriorating due to anthropogenic activity and our constant quest for economic growth. Increasing urbanisation is profoundly and lastingly changing the balance of the biosphere. These challenges are global: acid rain and radioactive pollution know no borders, and the “7th continent” made of plastic is adrift in the Pacific beyond national waters. These are the direct consequence of the unpredictability of the innovations introduced onto a market¹.

In the 16th century, French novelist François Rabelais said, “*Knowledge without conscience is but the ruin of the soul*”², proving himself to be particularly visionary. This observation does not apply only to the environmental impact of science: electronics have invaded our everyday lives with communicating objects; the “digitalisation of the world” is becoming a global challenge; nanotechnologies are ubiquitous in food, clothing, furniture, cars, etc. And this is certainly only the beginning, considering the advances still to come in the exploitation of the human body and its brain through artificial intelligence.

If we as humans believe in the need to preserve and develop humanity, then innovation needs to be rethought in great depth. In order for us to preserve our sense of humanness, we need to rethink innovation in great detail. To rethink innovation, we must reach beyond its usual boundaries.

Innovation through the Lens of Philosophy

There are many arguments that underline the need to use philosophy to rethink innovation, to consider philosophy to be, it seems, the “right” treatment³. This one is curative and preventive; it is cathartic and therapeutic⁴. Indeed, philosophy treats and cures illnesses. Through its work on the soul, philosophy makes it possible to consider situations in a different way, it helps to think in a preferable way to live better⁵. It is also preventive, in the sense that philosophy – especially among Stoics– helps to anticipate evils that may arise, prevents obstacles, helps to prepare for future risks and likely difficulties.

¹Xavier Pavie, *Critical Philosophy of Innovation and the Innovator*. John Wiley & Sons, 2020, p. 15.

²Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, Gallimard, 1964, chap. VIII, «Comment Pantagruel, estant à Paris, recueillit lettres de son père Gargantua, et la copie d’icelles», p. 137

³André-Jean Voelke, *La philosophie comme Thérapie de l’âme*. Études de philosophie hellénistique, Fribourg-Paris, 1993.

⁴Xavier Pavie, *Exercices spirituels, leçons de la philosophie antique*, Les Belles Lettres, 2012, p.71-76

⁵Pierre Hadot, *La Philosophie comme manière de vivre*, Albin Michel, 2001

Among its technical qualities allowing us to consider healing, philosophy has the capacity to put us on a different level. It allows us a certain distance which allows us at the very least to look at a problem from a different perspective, to analyze it precisely, to criticize it rightly, to judge it with temperance.

Spiritual Exercises to Transform the Innovator

Having originated from over 2500 years ago, spiritual exercise is consistent with an essential aspect of philosophy, to make people's lives better. The aim of the spiritual exercises is to make it possible, through discourses, techniques and methods, to help individual to live better in the face of the obstacles that may present themselves.

Through spiritual exercise we are preparing to be better innovators. Through philosophical techniques, people learn to live a better life even with several obstacles. The different schools of thought focus on different principles of learning. For Stoics, one of the main challenges is self-control in all circumstances: learning to control one's passions is like accepting everything that happens as conforming to a universal order that belongs to nature, in other words, accepting that some things depend on us and others do not⁶. For Epicureans, if it is a question of "preparing" to take care of one's soul, to lead a better life. For the Epicureans, pleasure is easy to obtain, because it is a question of having very few needs: to provide only for the natural and necessary desires to live happily – to eat and drink with simplicity, to have a modest home, to dress with sobriety⁷. According to them, this contrasts with unnatural and unnecessary desires – wanting to consume luxurious, expensive food. Finally, for Cynics, self-care is self-sufficiency. For them, pleasures and passions are misleading, harmful, and ephemeral. It is therefore a matter of being wary of them. For the Cynics, the aim is apathy and not happiness⁸. Apathy lies in the desire to find oneself in a state of serenity that is sufficiently serene to face the dangers of life, of everyday life without suffering.

Once these foundations have been laid, the disciples must train themselves to follow these principles so that everyone can incorporate, understand and practice them. To do this, we need methods and exercises that are varied: asceticism and meditation, correspondence and reading, writing and physical exercise, examination of conscience and attention to diet and of course the support from a master. These are the practices that must be developed among innovators.

The different schools each provide a different way of approaching spiritual exercise and in our contemporary space it is not necessarily a question of selecting one school over another, it is preferable to make use of these schools,

⁶Epictète, *Manuel*, chap. I à III, trad. J.-M. Guyau.

⁷Épicure, *Lettre à Ménécée*.

⁸Diogène de Sinope in Diogène Laërce, *Vies et doctrines des philosophes illustres*, livre VI, trad. M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, Le Livre de Poche, 1999, p. 703.

to have an overview of their proposals to adapt them as best as possible to modern problems. From the aspect of the innovator, those exercises make the innovator realize his accountability for the consequences of his/her innovations. It is vital for the innovator to build and think of all the consequences of each step in his process of innovation. This helps the innovator to be mindful of the positive and negative side effects of his innovation.

This discussion thus brings us to the imperative point of the importance of philosophy and spiritual exercise. There is a pressing need for the innovator to question his "self", what he is and what he does. He must have a concern for him to constitute him/herself as an "ethical subject". In other words, an individual who must question his own conduct, who works for his own transformation while knowing how to take care of himself and others. No law, sanction or framework allows this. This need is imperative because it concerns the one who shapes the world. It is certainly important that everyone can act as a philosopher and make the effort to practice spiritual exercises, but for him, the inventor of the world, even if only partially, this approach is fundamentally a priority and a decisive factor for all, to constitute a more responsible world.

So, the question is not whether to innovate, but rather how to innovate. And the path to practicing spiritual innovation exercises seems to be a possible one.

The Need for a Master

Whether the name is "supporter", "guide" or "counsellor", innovators need someone to help innovators escape the state of *stultitia*⁹, that state of blindness that innovators have of themselves and that does not allow innovators to change their relationship with the world. Entering their certainties from an early age, their education, their environment, only the intervention of others can help innovators to change their vision. This external individual will allow them to highlight their confinement and its limits, their obstinacy and its risks, their ignorance, and its dangers.

If innovators must confront others to guide them, to enrich them and, ultimately, to help them see the world differently, others can be much more than that for them. It can also be the one that leads innovators to conversion, the change they must make. It is a necessity to have a guide, someone to guide innovators in their conversion, someone who is interested in the universal good. The master in Antiquity is the one who helps to sort out what is good and what is not: what readings are favorable to read? What arts should we confront? How can we contemplate to improve ourselves? What bodily practices or dietetics are important to follow? What education should be followed? From Plato to Montaigne, from Aristotle to Marcus Aurelius, the great philosophers all had masters.

When an innovator finds himself under strong pressure from his shareholders and management, whose obsession is to make a profit as quickly as possible by launching non-compliant products, it is understandable that the innovator may

⁹Sénèque, *De la tranquillité de l'âme*, II, 6-15, trad. R. Waltz.

not be able to cope well with the situation. And he is not necessarily aware of this, he too can be locked in his environment, and he then ensures that he responds to the shareholders' request without considering what he does in his daily life, without the discernment that it would be necessary to have.

To accept having a master is to accept to listen, a decisive attitude for spiritual exercises¹⁰. We talk, we communicate, we exchange, but listening is perhaps the most valuable behavior. Listening is crucial to acting with kindness as it requires a real commitment. It is a manifestation of the listener's desire to come and find something, a path to follow, a voice to hear and eventually follow. As soon as we get involved in an exchange with someone, we have to consider this objective of modification by listening, and therefore set up the conditions for it to work: attention, concentration, application.

Change, Adaptation and Conversion

It is the philosopher's challenge today to help the innovator to act according to the good, to convert him to something other than what he is used to doing, to direct him towards other types of behaviors and actions. The goal for the philosopher is not to change the innovator for himself, the goal is to ultimately change the City. As an actor in the world, the innovator has the power to manage it and it is precisely what concerns the philosopher, that the city as a whole, the world in the broad sense of the term, is moving towards benevolence and wisdom rather than exploitation and degradation. That is why, moreover, it is indeed the philosophical conversion that must be followed, the other types of conversion do not lead to man as a man here and now, they can lead to a transcendence, but what we need is conversion to man here and now and his environment.

One might at this point think as to how philosophical thinking can directly help innovate for a better world. We need to understand the concept of conversion¹¹. The spiritual exercise and self-care prepare oneself to be ready to change radically, that is into a new way of being. The objective is to trigger a new way of acting, shedding any passions that prevent us from being free. Hence it is the philosopher's challenge today to help the innovator act according to what is good, to convert him to something other than what he is used to doing, to direct him towards other types of behaviors and actions. To be able to change the world around, the innovators need to break free from daily life, applying spiritual exercises. To break free is to be able to change the habits and reflexes the innovator always applies. They should be able to think in a different manner and perceive the world differently to be able to bring it to the changed state.

To convert, the innovator must first of all tear himself away from daily life, through the practice of spiritual exercises. It is a question of breaking

¹⁰Diogène Laërce, *Vies et doctrines des philosophes illustres*, trad. Richard Goulet, *op. cit.*, p. 804

¹¹Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, *op. cit.*

away from the habits that the innovator may have, changing his reflexes, those he has always applied.

In a concrete way, an individual who practices spiritual exercises, who wonders about the interest of glory, being rich, and powerful, for example, what depends on him, who practices meditation, who practices introspection to question himself, who remembers his actions and instructions in the form of *hupomnêmata*¹² became a man not only different, but above all one who acted differently. However, this does not mean that a man excludes himself from the world, if he has been able to escape it out of necessity, to change himself, it is to return to it better. And it is not a question of abandoning one's functions because of the risk of not being able to do so, by rejection in the end, after the established conversion, far from it, because others, certainly more malicious, will take its place. What is needed is not the absence of innovators, but another form of innovator, the kind of caring innovator that can be expected. The innovator must continue to fulfil his mission by practicing this philosophy of spiritual exercises, he will certainly continue to innovate but in a different, benevolent way.

Philosophy and Spiritual Exercise the Ultimate Aid for Responsible Innovation

Spiritual exercises were born with philosophy in antiquity. They persisted, in the philosophy of the Middle Ages, in that of the Renaissance, the Classical Age and the Modern Age. Montaigne, Descartes, Shaftesbury, Kant, Rousseau, all have an impact on contemporary philosophies¹³. Obviously, this relationship with the spiritual exercises of the Ancients does not end there. The contemporary space, from the end of the 19th century onwards, was no less affected by an influence, or even a presence, of ancient spiritual exercises. Thinkers who range from Wittgenstein to Peirce, Foucault, Thoreau, or Emerson but also more recently Pierre Hadot, Hilary Putnam, Stanley Cavell, Richard Shusterman¹⁴. This means that the contemporary relevance of spiritual exercises must take root in ancient philosophy, and innovation with its daily consequences and implications is certainly one of the preferable grounds for this. The powerful desire of the ancient spiritual exercises that survived to find themselves present in our world requires at the very least that we pay tribute to them by using them. And there is no better way to use them than to confront them with a certain situation where wisdom seems to be lacking now.

This 21st Century innovator can only be a philosopher. They will only be able to act with philosophy, with the philosopher's attitude to take care of themselves.

At times laws, legislations, conventions, and agreements are not sufficient to have a positive impact on the world. The tool of philosophy, taking care of yourself and others, is an important one to take the world in the right direction.

¹²Michel Foucault, *L'Herméneutique du sujet*, op. cit., p. 308.

¹³Xavier Pavie, *Exercices spirituels, leçons de la philosophie antique*, Les Belles Lettres, 2012, p. 235

¹⁴Xavier Pavie, *Exercices spirituels, leçons de la philosophie contemporaine*, Les Belles Lettres, 2013.

Innovators need to use philosophy and spiritual practices to better understand and take the world on a better path.

It is crucial to rethink the notion of innovation. People should consciously monitor the consequences of their actions. Spiritual exercise is the aid that will help people become a better version of themselves, hence put innovators in a better position to think about the entire ecosystem and all those who live in it. Regular practice of spiritual exercise prepares innovators to become more adaptable to change, hence ready for innovation, and prepares them to keep a foresight for consequences, hence making them responsible.