

## René Dumont: Utopia, Forty Years Later

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**“Do we have the right to make bets on the future of mankind?” Forty-one years after being the first ecologist candidate in a presidential campaign and publishing his manifesto book, René Dumont’s intuitions and warnings have lost little of their relevance.**

In 1974, René Dumont (1904-2001) was the first “ecologist” candidate in a presidential election. The same year, he published a manifesto-book entitled *L’Utopie ou la mort* (English translation, *Utopia or Else...*).<sup>1</sup> Forty years later, how does this utopia measure up against current reality? What intuitions and errors, what dazzling ideas and blind spots, did it contain? While Dumont was by no means the first or only ecologist thinker,<sup>2</sup> in France or elsewhere, he did play a pivotal role in combining theoretical ecology and political ecology at this time. He only won 1.3% of the vote in the 1974 presidential election, but this nonetheless launched the political ecology movement in France. It has since developed substantially and even became a party of government in 1997, linked to the left wing.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore interesting to revisit this forty-year-old *Utopia* in light of such development, asking whether some or any of its content can still be seen in contemporary political ecology or whether the principle of governmental reality has shifted emphasis away from its utopian aspects or completely eradicated them.

### From colonial agronomy to ecology

René Dumont followed a multi-faceted career path in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To paraphrase the title of the book by mathematician Laurent Schwartz<sup>4</sup> (1915-2002), he could be referred to as an “agronomist grappling with his century”. Jean-Paul Besset – a journalist who later became MEP for the French ecologist party – has written a rich and essential biography of Dumont.<sup>5</sup> An abiding feature of the latter’s career path was his strong disillusionment with colonialism, which began in the 1930s when he was a young engineer in agronomy in Indochina. His experience on the ground showed him that the French colonial system was ill suited to training native populations and improving their skills, for example in his field of agriculture. This analysis led him to write his best-selling book published in 1962, *L’Afrique noire est mal partie* (English translation, *False Start in Africa*, 1969).<sup>6</sup> His evolution towards ecology was a slower process. Under the Vichy government, he was an expert in

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<sup>1</sup> Éditions du Seuil, 1973. Updated in 1974; new edition 1978 with no subsequent editions. Published in English translation in 1974 by André Deutsch. René Dumont published over fifty books between 1935 and 1997. The present analysis is based on this specific work and focuses on its publication alongside the 1974 presidential election and its status as a “manifesto-book”.

<sup>2</sup> Examples include his contemporaries (and in fact slight juniors) Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) and Bernard Charbonneau (1910-1996). For an insight into these authors’ texts, see *Nous sommes des révolutionnaires malgré nous*, Paris: Seuil, 2014, coll. Anthropocène.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the position of Minister for the Environment (or equivalent) has continuously existed in France since it was first held by Robert Poujade (1971-1973). There have been two incumbents from civil society: Brice Lalonde (1988-1992, under F. Mitterand), who was Dumont's campaign manager in 1974, and Corinne Lepage (1995-1997, under J. Chirac).

<sup>4</sup> Laurent Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with his Century* (Birkhäuser, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Paul Besset, *René Dumont, une vie saisie par l’écologie* (Stock: 1992) (re-ed. Les Petits Matins: 2013).

<sup>6</sup> According to Besset, this book sold 250,000 copies while *L’Utopie ou la Mort* (which will be the main focus here) sold 150,000 copies.

agricultural productivism.<sup>7</sup> He retained a productivist stance until the 1960s and was fairly favourable to chemical fertilisers and pesticides, with a view to fighting hunger in the world – in line with his passion for third-world development. Dumont’s position changed at the end of the 1960s, in what Besset qualifies as a real “Copernican revolution”, shifting towards an activist ecology aware of the need to limit unbridled growth and to preserve the planet.

*La Terre française [The French Land]*

This was the title of a weekly publication (from November 1940 to August 1944) for which Dumont wrote several articles in 1942 and 1943 as lecturer at the National Agricultural Institute. His biographer Jean-Paul Besset notes with some regret that Dumont, who was a militant pacifist before the war, was not a Resistant during WW2. Besset describes the articles Dumont wrote for this agricultural journal, linked to Vichy propaganda, as “technical”. While the articles are technical in scope, it is nonetheless useful to provide a few extracts. Faithful to his perspective as a modern and productivist agronomist, which he maintained until the end of the 1960s, Dumont wrote:

“The key issue at this current time is increasing, or somewhat less ambitiously, maintaining our agricultural production at pre-war levels over the coming years.”<sup>8</sup>

The following sentence – which one might have preferred not to see written by him – is in the same vein (conclusion of the May 30, 1942 article):

“German farmers are observing us, let us be proud of our reputation; let us show them progressive agriculture, up to date with the most recent techniques.”<sup>9</sup>

He nonetheless concluded other articles by suggesting measures of a social nature: all agricultural holdings should concede a plot of land to each of their permanent employees allowing them to cultivate this land during their free time using the tools of the farm (conclusion of August 21, 1943 article); *métayers*<sup>10</sup> should climb up a social level to the rank of farmers (conclusion of September 18, 1943 article).<sup>11</sup>

Social progressivism and technical progressivism (of which agricultural productivism was a form) were components of the Vichy regime. They were implemented through active technocracy, coming close to reactionary conservatism and opposition to technical progress in the name of upholding the values of yesteryear.

Let us now return to the 1970s, the time of Dumont’s presidential candidacy and book. *Utopia or Else...* already contained the matrix for ecologist thinking as we know it today. This matrix was already present earlier in Ellul or Charbonneau’s work, albeit in a more radical and theorised form and with a less Third-World perspective – in terms of ideas, Dumont was no forerunner (as we have seen from his career path) and was far more a man of the field than a man of theory. He had been

<sup>7</sup> As his articles published in *La Terre Française* between 1942 and 1943 have never been discussed, it seemed useful to do so here in a box alongside the text. It is not a question of discrediting Dumont, but rather of calmly examining what he wrote at this time. Other great post-war figures were also active under the Vichy regime, such as Alfred Sauvy (1898-1990), demographer and graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique, and especially Bertrand de Jouvenel (1903-1987), who was also a pioneer in political ecology. Dumont knew them and mentions them both in his book.

<sup>8</sup> René Dumont, “Le problème des engrais en période de crise”, *La Terre Française*, November 29, 1941.

<sup>9</sup> René Dumont, “La récolte et la conservation des fourrages”, *La Terre Française*, May 30, 1942.

<sup>10</sup> *Métayers* are tenants cultivating proprietors’ land according to a form of sharecropping, paying rent in kind, as opposed to *fermiers* (farmers), who pay fixed monetary rent.

<sup>11</sup> Between July and October 1943, René Dumont was *La Terre Française*’s “special correspondent” for a series of five articles focusing on the South West. The article published on August 21 was entitled “La situation du vignoble languedocien” (the situation of the vineyards in the Languedoc region); “L’évolution agricole du Sud-Ouest et l’obstacle du métayage” (the agricultural evolution of the South West and the obstacle of *métayage*) was published September 18; and “L’Aveyron et ses fromages” (the Aveyron and its cheeses), on October 2.

strongly marked by various texts he had read, including the Club of Rome's report *The Limits to Growth* (1972), and developed the idea of the necessity of breaking free from the constraints of the profit economy. In his view, "until the last few years" the latter had never taken into account the need to protect the planet. According to him, it was necessary to rise up against the "'religion' of growth" imposed by an "oligarchy of the rich"<sup>12</sup> – the very same people responsible for the most waste. However, within this matrix of ideas – which are those of the current ecologist and degrowth movements – a certain number of very different directions can be identified in Dumont's thinking in 1974.

### **Towards a responsible 'new man' willing to forego growth**

One of these subjects that seems surprising to us today is the notion of a *new man* (mentioned several times in the book), which is linked to the idea of utopia. It is not necessarily surprising that this idea should have disappeared from contemporary ecologist discourse. Ecology has become a government party with elected officials and it therefore has to contend with mankind as it stands, without aiming to "create a 'new man'". On the contrary, Dumont believed: "we also have to change people" to make them accept the constraints "that will very soon become essential if we are to achieve, as we must, zero growth in world consumption".

However, while Dumont called for utopia in 1974 (as evidenced by the title of his book), he wanted to build "relatively rational utopias". This call for a rational utopia is difficult to understand without drawing links with the 1930s effervescence that Dumont had known.<sup>13</sup> At that time, nascent fascism and communism had both been utopias to some extent. The same could also be said of the so-called "Third Way" ideologies: the personalism movement (which included both ecological forerunners Charbonneau and Ellul) and the X-Crise or Ordre Nouveau groups were all utopian and called for a new man. The relationship between these "new man" utopias and the notion of trans-humanism, from the 1930s onwards, should also be taken into account, as Olivier Dard has shown in the case of engineer Jean Coutrot.<sup>14</sup> This was a period in which scientists and engineers wanted to refashion the world – in France, the latter often claimed roots in the utopia of Saint-Simonianism. These movements must have had resonance for Dumont, a thirty-year-old engineer in agronomy at the time, and the continued presence of these 1930s engineering utopias can make it easier to understand Dumont's call for utopia and a new man in the 1970s.

For Dumont, this dialectics of the 'new man' was linked to the need to educate individuals. He deplored the role of the press, which monopolized the attention of "ordinary working people [...], not by interesting them in the major issues of the day [...] but with the love-life and general goings-on of film or television stars and millionaires." In his view, almost all the media showed:

news that will be popular with the mass audience [...] instead of concentrating of informing us, on turning us into the 'new man' who is so badly needed if we are to create a fairer society that is capable of survival.

According to Dumont, the press was too dependent on advertising,<sup>15</sup> which encouraged overconsumption and waste. In this same spirit, anti-advertising campaigns (for example in the Paris metro) have increased in scale over the past ten years, even though they are not always explicitly linked to militant ecology. Dumont was also a visionary on the topic of objects being

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<sup>12</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations within inverted commas are taken from *Utopia or else...*

<sup>13</sup> Dumont was in his thirties during the 1930s. When he wrote in 1974, these 1930s were both as near and as far as 1974 is for us today.

<sup>14</sup> Olivier Dard, *Jean Coutrot : de l'ingénieur au prophète* (Presses universitaires franc-comtoises: 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Charbonneau and Ellul developed analogous analyses on this topic in 1935 ("advertising leads to the total subservience of the press") and suggested more drastic solutions ("complete abolition of the so-called 'human interest' press") ("Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste", §77 & 78, in *Nous sommes des révolutionnaires, op. cit.*).

replaced too frequently, stating “I’m told that some groups of furniture manufacturers are giving serious thought” to the idea of making “articles that are less hard-wearing and therefore don’t last as long”. The frequent replacement of electronic equipment (like mobile phones) that we see today, perhaps due to programmed obsolescence, would certainly tend to confirm his position.

Another key notion for Dumont was the fear of overpopulation. This idea, which he developed from his very first book in 1931, is difficult to hear today, or at least with the same intensity. According to him, it was necessary to put an end to pro-birth policies, for example in France embodied by “Michel Debré [...] with his pro-nuclear policy and his programme to encourage a rise in the “birth-rate”. The notion of “large families”<sup>16</sup> had to be first discredited, before “penalties were brought in” and eventually they were made “illegal”. In Dumont’s view, high birth rates in rich countries meant wasting both food and energy. With his usual oral and written flair, he had no qualms in painting an exaggerated picture<sup>17</sup> referring to “irresponsible people” allowed to “breed like rabbits” against which defence was necessary:

It would be just about possible [...] to keep the birth-rate down to the same level as the death rate, and thus bring about zero growth in a short time. This would involve the introduction of authoritarian measures – though they would surely be justified in view of the global danger we are facing.

Such authoritarian measures had indeed proved successful in China and North Vietnam, where “the birth rate [fell] fairly quickly”, whereas in developed countries, Dumont believed that “the gap from 1931 to 1971 represent[ed] forty wasted years”. In France, in particular, the Catholics and communists apparently rejected the neo-Malthusian idea of controlling birth rates. Why has this fear of overpopulation waned in current political ecology? First, because today the growth of the world population is currently slowing down; second, because the discourse of political ecology has shifted from utopia to electoral realities and has become substantially refocused on the West, whereas Dumont was above all concerned with the Third World.

### **Third -Worldism and praise for Mao’s China**

A third discrepancy, with radical effects this time, lies in the failure of Third-Worldist utopia – the dream held by certain Westerners that Third World countries would develop *differently*. Another ecological thinker, Ivan Illich, theorised this in *Tools for Conviviality* (1973). The paths to development followed by Asia, in particular, have tended to correspond to Western standards. Dumont’s praise of the “regiments of bicycles bowling down the broad avenues in Peking” no longer fits with the contemporary development of ring roads in Chinese towns. At the end of his life, Dumont had no doubt understood this, but in 1974 he was still immersed in this utopia. China is not a chance example: Dumont’s references to this country revealed not only a lack of foresight, but also a real blind spot. While he remained reserved about the Soviet regime, which he mentioned very little, he made a great many positive references to non-Soviet communism in Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea, Tanzania,<sup>18</sup> and of course China, a country that “has produced new men as strong as steel” and where it was possible to find “the basis of a new belief in man”:

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<sup>16</sup> In France, the notion of *famille nombreuse* (large family) relates to a particular status given to families with three children or more, which entitles them to discounts and subsidies in a variety of areas from tax to transport to leisure activities.

<sup>17</sup> A surprising sentence can be read p. 40 of the English edition: Dumont writes that “the custom whereby girl babies born to poor families in China were abandoned can therefore be seen, in the light of recent observations, as a reasonably wise move”. Here we can see the continued presence of eugenics, still widespread until the 1970s. As an engineer in agronomy, Dumont was familiar with theories of natural selection and his interest in demography meant he was aware of the active eugenics policies in the 1930s.

<sup>18</sup> Under president Julius Nyerere, Tanzania was very close to the Chinese regime between the Arusha declaration (quoted by Dumont, February 1967) and Nyerere’s economic failure, as evidenced by his resignation in 1985.

A different development policy is already in operation in the most densely populated country in the world – China. The Chinese system does certainly allow for a moderate level of growth, but this is achieved without overseas aid, without unemployment, without waste and with very little pollution. [...] So let's salute the Chinese leaders for their devotion to the general interest and to that of the workers.

It is easy to be critical of such a position after the bloody events of Tiananmen Square (1989). But such blindness on Dumont's part can also be questioned, and his biographer Besset did just that, pointing out that Dumont had not grasped the effects of Mao's delusions from the Cultural Revolution onwards. Dumont had not seen beyond the benefits of the agrarian revolution in the new communist China of 1949. As an engineer in agronomy, he saw this reform as a great success, with increased yields and an end to famine; he also considered the regime's strict control of birth rate as a positive measure.

On this subject, was the man in the red pullover (as he appeared in the television programmes of the presidential campaign) a Maoist? Certainly not in the Western sense given to the term in the 1970s! But as we have seen, in Dumont's eyes in 1974, the Chinese model was the best path towards development and socialism, both of which he held dear. Returning to France and the 1974 campaign, he did not mince his words regarding his "Marxist friends" at a time when the Communist Party was still powerful. He incited them to realise that the "theft of man's common heritage" – nature, resources, etc. – was a more important issue than the extra profit levied on the worker. Dumont deplored the fact that Georges Marchais, the leader of the French Communist Party, did not "take the opportunity to denounce capitalism as responsible for the looming catastrophe" and that another communist, Claude Poperen, should sing the praises of everyone having a private car. When in Bucharest, Dumont himself argued in favour of reducing energy and food consumption in the US, union representatives insulted him.

#### **Dumont and the 1972 Attacks**

Dumont's 1974 vision of future geopolitical struggles proved incomplete. He predicted that non-developed countries would revolt, becoming "terrorists representing the world's poor" who would seek to "frighten us". In his view, the Third World could be compared to the third estate in 1780, which had "little hope left" and was ready to launch a revolution against the privileges of developed countries. He saw initial confirmation of this in the acts of nascent terrorism at the time, citing the Palestinian attack against the Israeli team at the Munich Olympic Games (September 1972) and the attack by the Japanese Red Army on Tel-Aviv airport.<sup>19</sup> (May 1972). In Dumont's view, Israel was a target in its capacity as a developed country. However, while this may be one component of Palestinian terrorism, it is far from the only one. Entirely given over to his Third-Worldist perspective (countries with a Western way of life vs. other countries), Dumont – along with others at the time – did not see that the targets here were first and foremost the State of Israel and Zionism.

#### **Pioneering ecology versus post-modern individualism**

Dumont's position on cars, in opposition to French communists, leads us to consider a fourth discrepancy between his 1974 book and contemporary political ecology. The latter has had to take into account the great shift towards the freedom of the individual, or even individualism, often a

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<sup>19</sup> Three members of the Japanese Red Army, also claiming allegiance to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), killed 26 people and wounded 80 others at Lod Airport in Tel-Aviv on May 30, 1972.

driving element in society today. Dumont, however, was sincerely imbued with the idea that the Collective Good was the priority and should be defended in an authoritarian fashion if necessary. Examples of this stance include his call to decrease birth rates through coercive methods and his hatred of the idea of everyone having a car:

The arms race, the private car and the monster-town are the chief enemies of the late twentieth century [...]

He made concrete suggestions in this regard, some of which could still be justified today: taxes on large cars before they were “banned altogether”, or banning private cars in large city centres. He deplored that in 1972 road traffic had overtaken rail traffic – today the proportion is 12-88 in favour of road traffic!<sup>20</sup> – and sang the praises of the aerotrain, a hover train designed by engineer Bertin as a low-consumption form of transport. While the aerotrain was a failure,<sup>21</sup> Dumont went on to support TGVs (French high speed trains) against cars, which brought up him against certain militant ecologists who saw the TGV as destroying the countryside and alienating the notion of leisure.

While the notion of everyone having a car was still up for debate in France in 1974 (but was it ever really a debate?), other positions held by Dumont appear completely out of step with the wave of individualism and freedom of the individual to come. He deplored the rise in keeping pets in Western societies while children were dying of hunger in Africa. He also objected to Western diets and envisaged “a Spartan diet” emphasizing eating vegetable products (proteins extracted from leaves, oil-cakes) rather than “camembert, a nice piece of beef or a dish of seafood”.

This censorship of ways of life was a side to Dumont’s thinking that did not anticipate the post-68 wave of freer customs and individualism, and is evidenced by his positions on birth rate, private cars, “a Spartan diet”, and even the sensationalist press. Some of his other ideas could today be qualified as *reactionary* – in fact, a certain number of contemporary degrowth movements can also sometimes be seen that way. For dominant countries, Dumont called for “the right of everyone to work and to enjoy a decent standard of living [...] both more important and more urgent than the right to vote, which can so easily lead to various forms of corruption”. It should also be noted that the book includes two references to ecology under the Nazis: “In 1936-1944, the Germans [...]” (*var.* “In the Hitler period, the Germans [...]”) had organised careful recycling of all waste, which Dumont mentions favourably. The intention is not to discredit his overall argument – whether here or in relation to his writings under the Vichy regime – nor to infer any supposed *Nazi roots of ecology*,<sup>22</sup> rather the aim is to present objectively certain, now out-dated, references still present among the 1970s generation. In all events, Dumont’s form of authoritarianism regarding ways of living and his call to make the masses “accept the necessary disciplines”<sup>23</sup> should be considered alongside the idea of “well-intentioned, well-informed tyranny” developed a few years later by Hans Jonas, a philosopher of ecology (*The Imperative of Responsibility*, 1979).

### **On current ecological subjects**

Having examined several subjects in Dumont’s thinking that are almost completely absent from the

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<sup>20</sup> *Mines. Revue des ingénieurs*, n° 473, May/June 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Alongside the Paris-Orléans train line, certain portions of the Paris-Orléans aerotrain’s raised concrete rails can still be seen.

<sup>22</sup> Today, a certain number of authors (particularly in the Anthropocène collection published by Seuil) are highly critical of Luc Ferry’s book, *Le Nouvel Ordre Ecologique*, Grasset, 1992 (*The New Ecological Order*, University of Chicago Press: 1995). However, this book was one of the first in French to remind us of the Nazi ecological laws. The author rightly stipulates “we also must be wary of the kind of demagogy that invokes the horrors of Nazism to disqualify any ecological concerns a priori”. Is it Luc Ferry’s later political evolution (as Minister in a right-wing government between 2002 and 2004, and columnist in the *Figaro* newspaper) that justifies such severe criticism from his denigrators? Aside from the title, and certain arguments at the end of the book, such criticism seems essentially unwarranted.

<sup>23</sup> The word appears on several occasions, generally in the plural form, but it is *discipline* to which Dumont is referring.

current ecological debate, it is now time to turn to the issues that are still very present today, looking at how his positions resemble or differ from contemporary mainstream ecological thinking.

In 1974, the energy debate was still virtually non-existent, but it went on to take great importance as well we know. The Messmer government had launched an electronuclear project at the beginning of the year, following the 1973 oil crisis. Dumont's opposition seems fairly abstract (even metaphysical), in line with the civil nuclear programme itself which was still a project at this stage (arguments against nuclear energy became more concrete as it was implemented):

[...] atomic energy, which Barbara Ward rightly refers to as Prometheus' fire: 'We're playing with the raw material of the universe' [...] Already we don't know how to get rid of nuclear waste safely, since some of it remains radioactive for a very long time.

Regarding fossil fuels, Dumont, along with Club of Rome, saw gas and oil resources running out within 30 to 60 years: it does not seem like that prediction will be fulfilled. However, Dumont clearly indicated that "the worst danger of all [wa]s the increasing amount of carbon-dioxide in the air" and despite there being little discussion of this subject at the time, he warned of possible global warming due to industrial growth, which could combine with a "natural cycle of reheating".

Regarding science, Dumont was fairly divided. He condemned military research, particularly because its results are kept secret, which "hinders the progress of the basic sciences, which are after all becoming increasingly indispensable if we are to survive". This was the scientist speaking, but he seems to be somewhat in contradiction with one of his later postscripts at the end of the book:

We must shake off our belief in a scientific truth that is leading us to a predetermined future. If you substitute ideas for reality you no longer need to justify your actions – and that can lead yet again to some form of neo-Stalinism.

The assertion is a strong one: who today would think that science is *predetermination*, in a quasi-religious sense? But here Dumont was fighting against a "religion of progress", which was still very dominant at the end of the 1960s particularly among the left wing. And only in appearance was this a contradiction with the "progress of the basic sciences" that he called for; in his view, it was necessary to redirect all research budgets towards the survival of humanity by being capable of imagining "a pleasant, relaxed and tranquil society in tune with nature". Dumont was addressing "younger readers", to convince them that the future depended on them and was not already set in stone and necessarily brighter.

So how can some of the concrete measures he advocated be viewed today? There is a feeling of déjà vu when reading Dumont deploring that "Japan and Norway refused to stop whaling" – sadly there seems to have been no change here in the past 40 years. Conversely, other ideas have been implemented: the end to open-air nuclear tests; unleaded petrol; a tax on excess capital, although an international tax on primary resources in favour of poor countries has not yet been put in place. Other ideas have also been applied, but not in the spirit imagined by Dumont. He suggested that each rail station should set up a public depot from which bikes, electric motorbikes, and electric cars could be hired. This was a nice idea, but the shared rental bicycles and cars that are appearing today belong to private sector companies and, above all, exist only in towns and cities. In the countryside, cars have become almost the sole form of transport and the number of rail stations that still have passenger traffic is constantly decreasing.

### **A "watchman" of action rather than political posturing**

Ultimately, what lessons can we draw from a contemporary rereading of this book and of Dumont himself? It seems imperative to bring this charismatic figure, highly symbolic of the 1970s, back to life for those who are too young to have seen the man in the red pullover on the television

themselves. His ideas were close to those of the current leaders of political ecology,<sup>24</sup> but his career path, his outspokenness, and his “on the ground” approach set him apart from them. Dumont was a “watchman” of sorts, a man of conviction with very fixed ideas and little tendency towards compromising with his conscience.<sup>25</sup>

As for his book, it makes pleasant reading and remains highly relevant today. And this is the paradox of its fate. If it were no longer relevant, then this would be all the better as it would mean measures had been taken. But if it remains relevant, then this means its utopia is still only a utopia. In the first case, this fortieth anniversary could be seen as celebrating the coming of age of the book’s ideas; in the second, it marks them being side-lined. Leaving the reader with this alternative, the following beautiful words by Dumont can offer a fitting conclusion: “Have we got the right to make bets on the future of mankind? [...] The first question to be answered is: when will the majority of world opinion really grasp the seriousness of the threats to our planet?”

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<sup>24</sup> The blurb on the back of Bertrand de Jouvenel’s book *Arcadie. Essais sur le mieux-vivre* (new edition by Tel Gallimard 2002, preface by Dominique Bourg, published in English as *Economics and the Good Life. Essays on Political Economy*, Transaction Publishers, 1999.), suggests “measuring the distance that separates this speculative political tradition from the political posturing of its contemporary representatives”.

<sup>25</sup> According to his biographer Besset, in 1989 he was invited by Brice Lalonde – who was Minister for the Environment at the time – to attend a political meeting regarding how to structure the ecologist movement. He stormed out of the meeting in question with the words “I have listened to you with continually increasing stupefaction. Goodbye”.