

I will not be telling you anything new if I say that the era we are living through is both fascinating and frightening. Like a narrow path that should lead to the summit, yet from which we could at any moment slip into the abyss.

Thanks to the prodigious advances of science and technology, we could rid all humanity of the calamities that have afflicted it since the dawn of History. We have the means to do so. Proof lies in the speed with which hundreds of millions of our contemporaries, across the planet and particularly in the great countries of Asia, have emerged from poverty in a single generation.

Each of us has benefited from these scientific and technological advances in our daily lives, and in a spectacular way. Today, anyone can access, from their own home, and even from a tiny pocket-sized phone, all the knowledge accumulated by the human species over millennia.

We have grown so accustomed to this that it now seems natural and trivial. When I first opened my eyes to the world, and even when I completed my studies, such a prospect still seemed inconceivable.

For all that it has invented, for all that it has built, the human species is undeniably astonishing, incomparable, and worthy of admiration.

But not every day, and not in every field. There is at least one domain in which our species appears to have reached its threshold of collective incompetence. I am referring to our inability to enable the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of the different components of humanity. An inability that threatens to annihilate everything we have built so far and that jeopardizes the future. An inability that manifests itself in every country, and also at the global level. One need only cast one's gaze across the world to observe the immense waste. Everywhere, wars erupt, even in regions that believed they had been freed from them. In Europe, in the Eastern Mediterranean, in the Sahel, and elsewhere. Everywhere, conflicts that persist and fester year after year, decade after decade, and which we do not know how to bring to an end.

By observing these conflicts, these sufferings, these destructions, these manifestations of hatred, we become concretely aware of the paradox of this century. Our scientific and material development continues, and accelerates still further, but our mindsets fail to keep pace; they stagnate, they stumble, and often even regress.

Is this really something new? Is this not how History has always unfolded? This objection is often heard, but in my view it is misleading. Our era does not resemble those that came before it. It is of a different nature. These innovative technologies, which have transformed our existence and will transform it even more in the years to come, represent, by virtue of their immense potential, unprecedented risks, difficult to foresee and difficult to avoid. We must constantly bear in mind that science and technology are morally neutral. Whatever they are capable of accomplishing, they will accomplish, whatever the intentions of those who invented them may have been.

With the cutting-edge technologies that have developed spectacularly since the beginning of this century, we are confronted with dilemmas unknown to previous generations. Will we know how to tame artificial intelligence so that it remains at the service of human beings rather than rendering them obsolete? Will we know how to govern genetic engineering so that it continues to improve our health and longevity without undermining the physical and mental integrity of human beings? Much will depend on the attitude that the different nations and human communities adopt towards one another.

If we succeed in moving from confrontation to reconciliation, from a logic of hegemony to a logic of solidarity; if we succeed in preserving cultural diversity and the dignity of all in order to build a vibrant universal civilization, founded on shared values and illuminated by countless cultural expressions; if we manage to unite to face together climate disruption, which constitutes a mortal threat to us all, then we may reach the summit instead of sliding into the abyss.

Humanity has not yet made its choice. But we must not believe that it will have centuries to do so. The decisive turning point will be reached, for better or for worse, within the next twenty years. This places an immense responsibility on the shoulders of our contemporaries, especially the youngest among them.

To them, to these young people: do not believe that the history of the world has already been written. We are still in the preamble; it is you who will write the most beautiful pages.