2002 Reflections

The Irish author Jonathan Swift wrote in 1711 A.D.: 'Every man desires to live long, but no man would like to be old.' The proper answer to this statement came more than 300 years later from Maurice Chevalier: 'Old age isn't so bad when you consider the alternative.'
Being retired, I pay more attention to my ageing parents: 85 and 87 years of age. They live 200 km south of Amsterdam. They are both in good health and do still have bright minds. Recently my father has indicated that he doesn't want to travel long distances any longer because no more does he want to carry heavy suitcases. They have a small apartment in Klosters, Switzerland and my mother loves to be there. Thus I was requested to accompany my mother the last week of November to Switzerland. Alas, Vera has to stay in Amsterdam. Her turn comes when she joins me next year. We are planning to visit Indonesia from end of the month of April till the beginning of June 2003. As you may recall, I have been born in East Java in August 1940. The family returned to Europe in February 1946 and since then I have never returned to the country of my birth.
Today it is cold and wintry outside. The century old elm tree in the backyard has already lost its foliage. So to say, the tree is naked, as she now is, and ready to confront the winter. T the contrary we, men, are putting more clothes on when it gets colder and colder. Winter is not my favoured season. The migrating birds, such as the heron, the stork and the flap-wing, have already left the Netherlands. What a sensible thing to do. Our travelling schemes do not have such a fixed pattern, prompted by the change of climate, as the migrating birds.
However, in 2002 the Dirkzwagers did not stay in one place (Amsterdam).
In March, for instance, we have made 10 days tour to Egypt to visit the ancient Egyptians. We were impressed by their amazing civilisation. Yes, we had read about their history, but for instance you have to experience the pyramids by seeing these with your own eyes as well as their craftsmanship. Did you know that the pyramid of Cheops has been the highest man-made building of the world until 1889 A.D.? The Eiffel tower build for the world exhibition in Paris superseded in height the said pyramid. We went to upper Egypt as far as Aswan and visited temples and museums. Interesting to learn that the ancient Egyptians had no monetary system. Taxes were paid in bushels of grain. Also we learned about the constraints of today's Egypt: 90% of its population lives on the 10% of Egypt's land area alongside the river Nile. The fundamentalist Islam movement tries to hit the income from tourism by terrorist attacks in order to upset the present government of the military dictator Mubarak. 10% of all jobs is related to the tourist industry. To protect the tourists from terrorist's attacks, the buses with tourists were to drive in convoy from one place to another under the guidance of the tourist police force. And every now and then we were halted by roadblocks manned by the military. An interesting experience, as I said.
Another interesting experience was my 10 days vacation in the Scotland at the end of the month of May. Since thirty years I am a member of a bowling club in Rotterdam. One of the members owns 50 km² highlands on the west coast for deer hunting purposes and he invited 14 friends of the bowling club to his manor near Ullapool. When we were there the hunting season was not yet open. He is a keen deer hunter. The population of deers in the highlands is estimated to be between 250 000 and 300 000. Every year about 65 000 deer are being stalked. This 'sport' generates an income for the Scottish economy of GBS 15 million. During the day the majority of the group played golf in the rain. Not me. I did some sight seeing and walked through the mountains. Scotland is notorious for raining. Also we had plenty of rain. The daily Scottish weather forecast is standard: When you see the mountains, it is about to rain; when you do not see the mountains, it is raining. The nature is overwhelming.
Vera has organised for the last time the Open Canal Gardens event. Right from the beginning she has informed the board of the foundation that she would do the job for not longer than

three years. It is an awful lot of work. During the three days event about 8300 visitors came to see 25 gardens this year. Vera received a lot of praise and she now gracefully bows out.
End of June we drove to southern France and stayed with friends in Ménèrbes and Menton. Friends, sunshine, delicious food and swimming in 'La Grande Bleue', we enjoyed all the pleasures Southern France had on offer.
However, every time when we are back in Amsterdam, it is for me a happy homecoming. Amsterdam is a big city in miniature size. There are no long distances. From our house we walk in 15 minutes to the concert building and in 10 minutes to the opera building. Also the interesting theatres and museums are within walking distance. Yes, we love Amsterdam but not particular the Dutch weather.
In October we were 5 days in Paris and stayed in a hotel on the left bank of the river Seine. To go to a theatre or a museum on the right bank, it takes each time at least a 40 minutes ride in the Metro. One evening when we returned in the hotel from a visit to the 'Opera Comique' theatre, we learned of the hostage taking of a theatre audience in Moscou. What sad that parties cannot solve their differences at the conference table. It could also happen in Paris as long as 'alle Menschen noch nicht Brüder sind', the desire sung in Beethoven's 9th . We visited museums and walked around. My story becomes monotonous commenting on the weather again and telling you that most of the five days it did rain 'cats and dogs', which spoils a bit the fun.

Finally a short scribble on the world-outlook of to-day. The world has become a global village thanks to satellite connections. The advantages are numerous and so are the disadvantages. For instance, the proliferation of all sort of classified and sensitive information via internet to the wrong type of persons.
And yet, all the political institutions are primarily national institutions. The primary objectives of these bodies are to see to it that the standard of living of their own population will not be set back relative the others. They do not entertain a long-term view on global issues. I recall the intellectual exercise on depleting resources from MIT as being a last effort to present a long-term view which could affect mankind. Later it has been derided. In hindsight every fool is wise. At least it has been a laudable exercise.
But what we dearly need is a supranational authority which has the power to deal with the long-term impact on a number of issues. I name one: OVERPOPULATION. What will be the threats to the world of the overpopulation?
In my opinion all future problems will emanate from the fact that the world is being overpopulated. Today the tally is 6.2 billion people. All circumstances staying equal, the world population will increase to 9 billion in 2050. What are the ramifications of such an increase in numbers? I sincerely do not believe that the world (nature/ecology/ environment/ hole in the ozone layer/energy) can cope with a living standard for the whole world population at the level we enjoy today in Europe and in America. There is no existing regulating supranational authority who presents a view. I can foresee a doomsday scenario as a result of the prevailing 'catch as catch can' philosophy of the present day politicians/nations. Limited access to clean water, proliferation of nuclear know-how, unjust division of wealth in the world, no fair distribution of fossil energy, etc. are an enumerative summing up for a reason to begin a war. 'You ain't nothing seen yet', to use a phrase of Ronald Reagan, former President of the USA .

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