

## 22. Introduction to Part IV

### Claude Henry

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In Chapters 23, 24, and 25 of this part of the book, Anuna De Wever Van der Heyden, Luisa Neubauer, Hilda Nakabuye, Sadrach Nirere, Adenike Titilope Oladosu, Sophie Handford, Raven Maeder, leaders of the movement Fridays For Future (FFF) in Belgium, Germany, Uganda, Nigeria and New Zealand, respectively, make several references to two tenets of the movement, formulated initially by their friend Greta Thunberg: (1) “Why should I study for a future, that soon will be no more? Ask yourself this: wouldn’t you go on strike too, if you thought doing so could help protect your own future?”; (2) “Why do you want me to study sciences if you do not listen to what scientists have to say? The scientists have been very clear about what we need to do to tackle climate change. We are uniting behind the scientists. We are only asking that our leaders do the same”.<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that various applications of science are at the root of various critical situations – the climate crisis in particular – in which humankind is trapped. It is no less obvious, notwithstanding vociferous denials, that scientific knowledge is crucial for understanding the problems and for opening up paths to overcome them. The FFF activists have a perfectly clear view on that and equally clear and effective ways of promoting it. They have been able to find inspiration and support from a remarkable organization, 350.org, the founder of which, William “Bill” McKibben, is the author of Chapter 26.

In a rather different context, that of an “elite scientific university”, students at the French *École Polytechnique*, Antoine Bizien, Elsa Deville and Lucas Dubois in Chapter 27, happen to share the FFF view on science. Moreover, they criticize their institution for not providing them with appropriate scientific tools, that is, tools useful and necessary to navigate the critical situations that they expect they will face. Alessia Lefébure shows in Chapter 28 that such failure is not specific to the *Polytechnique*, it is common among higher education institutions.

Between coming generations and older ones, the chasm is not only about different appreciations of the role of science. Students at *École Polytechnique*, and other “elite” schools and universities in Europe, to whom the “best” jobs are offered after they graduate, refuse – in ever-greater numbers – offers that don’t open up ways towards transitioning to a sustainable society and

economy. There are employers who seem unable to redefine the jobs in ways that would attract ecologically conscious graduates, like the oil major Total (the CEO of which and seven out of eight of his immediate predecessors graduated from the Polytechnique). Others simply dismiss students' concerns as mere transient youth idealism. For the students, escape is often found in small, recently established organizations. As Alessia Lefébure shows, based on an analysis of the values, beliefs and aspirations of the current young generation, these tensions are not restricted to the Polytechnique, but magnified.

Between FFF activists and older generations, confrontation takes more muscular forms: we've relied on adults to make the right decisions to ensure that there is a future for the next generation. If those in power today don't act, it will be our generation who will live through their failure. Those who are under 20 now could be around to see 2080, and face the prospect of a world that has warmed by up to 4°C. The effects of such warming would be utterly devastating.

Then: *Au Revoir les Enfants?*<sup>2</sup> The chapters here all shout No! as we are determined to build our future, and as we don't yet despair of our parents. Either as actors or authors, or both, women are leading in the initiatives discussed here. Until now men have dominated history on our planet. They have mostly failed. It's time to pass the baton.

## NOTES

1. The quotations are either from chapters in this part of the book or from a guest editorial in *The Guardian* by Greta Thunberg, Anna Taylor and others, 'Think we should be at school? Today's climate strike is the biggest lesson of all', 15 March 2019.
2. A film directed by Louis Malle. On a cold morning in January 1944, in a Carmelite boarding school near Paris, students say farewell to three Jewish classmates and to Père Jean, headmaster, arrested on the spot by the Gestapo.