

PENTTI MALASKA

A Visionary and Forerunner

Edited by Laura Pouru • Markku Wilenius • Karin Holstius • Sirkka Heinonen





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Pentti Malaska

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Edited by
Laura Pouri
Markku Wilenius
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A MESSAGE TO HUMANKIND

*The mission of a human being is to prove
that human life is a valuable part of life in general,
that life
is richer and more precious with humans than without.*

– Pentti Malaska

TIME AND REALITY

*Time flows
to the Present
from two directions:
from the Past
and from the Future*

*From the Past
as our deeds accomplished,
results materialized, and
from the Future
as our aims and visions,
ideas of hope
or despair,
objectives targeted and committed to.*

*At the Present
the streams of Time
are mingled together and moulded
into new realities*

*Like by a cosmic black hole
the flows are caught, and
the time can't escape
from becoming real*

*Men and women,
all the same everywhere!
But their past and futures flow different
create diverse realities of the Present
– a precious gift of the Humanity –
but why so strange to face, and
so difficult to tolerate?*

– Pentti Malaska

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TO THE READER

This book about the work and life of Pentti Malaska (1934–2012) began its own life many years ago when I, together with colleague Sirkka Heinonen and Pentti's wife Karin Holstius, started to contemplate the idea of compiling a commemorative volume that would trace Pentti's diverse thinking and activities. The idea gradually matured and we began to assemble the materials we needed for our project at the Finland Futures Research Centre. This was soon completed thanks to the efforts of Karin Holstius and the assistance of my colleague Juho Ruotsalainen. The next stage was for my colleague Laura Pouru to systematically review these materials and to begin to give a shape to the volume. And now, largely by virtue of Laura's dedication and hard work, we've reached the point where we have the book in our hands. Its four editors are Laura Pouru, Karin Holstius, Sirkka Heinonen and the undersigned.

This book is not a straightforward biography, nor does it provide an exhaustive account of Pentti's written production. Pentti was a true 'Danube of thoughts' who had an incredibly diverse range of interests, and it was therefore imperative for us to restrict our focus. To use another figure of speech, Pentti was a renaissance prince of our age, which in fact is not too far-fetched a comparison. That is, a recent description by Latinist Pekka Matilainen tells us that the birth of renaissance was effectively a symbiosis of early humanism and the evolution of modern scientific thinking.¹ If anything best describes Pentti's ambitions and activities, it is a combination of relentless faith in the potential of humans, on the one hand, and systematic and empirical scientific thinking, on the other.

We have organized the book into five sections. Part I of the book provides an introduction to Pentti's thinking and life, and we have also included one of Pentti's articles as an authentic illustration of his voice and thinking. We want to provide an insight into Pentti as a person and futures researcher. Part II is built around the countless newspaper and magazine articles and interviews published of Pentti over the decades. It is divided into three chapters that reflect Pentti's views on the conditions for sustainable development in our society. The question about the broken human-nature relationship, the nature of social development and the application of human potential were the main perspectives from which Pentti sought to unravel and understand the future of our societies. Part II includes many excerpts from Pentti's production, which are set out in italics.

¹ Matilainen, P. (2016) *Muutoksen tekijät. Renessanssin synty ja perintö.* [Change makers. The birth and heritage of the Renaissance.] Ateena, Jyväskylä.

In Part III we explore in more detail the methods that Pentti used in his research. Pentti was by training an electrical engineer for whom the crunching of numbers and construction of equations was a natural way to study relationships between different processes and phenomena. Pentti was a builder of systems-level models who genuinely knew what he was talking about. In addition, Part III sheds light on Pentti's views about management and strategic competence – an area he called visionary management. Pentti's role and contributions to the supervision of academic theses and his pioneering contacts with China are also covered.

In Part IV, a large number of colleagues describe their encounters with Pentti. Inevitably, these accounts only scratch the surface, yet they provide an intriguing insight into the breadth of Pentti's networks. Pentti also loved to express himself through aphorisms and poems, some of which are dotted across the book's pages, but Part V additionally brings all of these together. Pentti's CV is attached as an annex for readers who are interested. Kimmo Ojaniemi's series of artworks inspired by Pentti's theory of the ecosystem-technosystem relationship provides a separation between the different parts of the book.

I should like to thank all the contributors to this work for investing their valuable time. A special word of thanks goes to the Turku School of Economics Support Foundation for their generous funding for this project and to Dr Sakari Alhopuro for his financial support for the translation and publication of this English version of the book. Thanks also to David Kivinen for his translation and to our colleague Anne Arvonen for the visual design and layout of the book. Finally, our thanks are due to the Finnish Society for Futures Studies for accepting this book for publication in the society's series.

This volume is first and foremost a tribute to the memory of Pentti Malaska, a futures researcher, humanist and great friend of nature. We sincerely hope that it will contribute to further the themes that Pentti addressed during his career and that continue to have extraordinary currency today. The best ideas and insights never die, but continue to live on and gain momentum for as long as humankind has a future to look forward to. I'm convinced that many of Pentti's ideas fall into this rare category.

Markku Wilenius

31 January 2018, Helsinki

Pentti Malaska - a man always ahead of his time

Ilkka Virtanen

If anyone perfectly fits the description of a man always ahead of his time, it must be Pentti Malaska. This was clear to me and to other students of his from very early on, and therefore we decided to put together a commemorative book, exceptionally, on the occasion of his 40th birthday. Ten years later, on his 50th birthday, we did the same. When Pentti was approaching his 60th birthday in 1994, it was clear we needed to come up with something different. Eventually it was decided that we would extend our greetings to Pentti in a collection of video recordings and letters. I myself chose to write a letter. However, our project never materialized, at least in the format we had planned. Pentti therefore never received my letter.

This continued to weigh on my mind for quite some while, but 15 years later I had the opportunity to rectify the omission. In 2009, Pentti received an award from the Finnish Cultural Foundation that he greatly appreciated. To celebrate the award, he arranged a small reception at his home, and I was delighted and honoured to have been invited. I had a facsimile prepared of my letter, which I now handed to Pentti as a token of my congratulations for this notable recognition. The words and ideas I had written down in the letter 15 years earlier were still current at the time. And because I very much feel they are still current today, my letter from 1994 forms the bulk of my tribute here.

Professor Pentti Malaska

Turku, Helsinki and the globe

60 years 11 April 1994

Vaasa, Easter Monday 1994

Dear Brother Pentti,

Popular wisdom teaches us that there is only one way to live longer: you have to grow older and have birthdays. Children love their birthdays because they bring friends, parties, presents. In youth, the succession of birthdays becomes part of the transition into adulthood. Every year, young people gain new civic rights, as well as new duties and responsibilities. In adulthood, birthdays are hardly noted at all beyond the closest family circle. In mature age, things change again. Milestone birthdays are particularly interesting and important for people and interest groups closest to the birthday boy.

For you, Pentti, reaching a milestone age is not an event you want to make a big fuss about. But there are many of us within your circle of influence who do want to highlight the great significance that your being there among our circle of friends and colleagues has had and continues to have on our lives. The Finnish way is not to blow one's trumpet even about personal relations that have had importance to one's own life cycle; instead these are matters that are left for occasions such as birthday speeches. I'm sure that against this background you will understand that we have been highly motivated to put together this collection of letters.

When we were discussing a suitable motto for this collection, one idea stood out above all others: 'Pentti Malaska – a man always ahead of his time'. We know it's not your thing to go skiing on well-groomed tracks with loads of tourists. Your preference is to go deep into untouched wilderness, to carve out your own track in deep, pristine snow (though I do sometimes wonder whether it's really necessary to do this in the hardest way possible, on the steepest ascent and in a freezing blizzard). Yet without exception you always manage to find the most interesting terrain and routes, and soon there will be masses following your lead. I've always been in the fortunate position of being able to follow your adventures at close quarters, either as a member of your expedition or in some other capacity.

Your 1960s doctoral dissertation, which provided an analysis and projection of electrical energy consumption in Finland, was one of the pioneering works of time series analysis in our country, representing a significant rival and complement to econometric models. The model you developed in this work also proved to be a useful tool for teaching purposes. The inclusion of both deterministic and sto-

chastic component processes in your time series was clear and (in simplified form) straightforward enough to be incorporated even in the basic economics curriculum. Time series analysis has of course since then become one of the mainstays of empirical statistics. The ARMA and ARIMA models developed by Box and Jenkins and the powerful computer software created on their basis have subsequently made time series analysis accessible to all scientists. It was easy for me to take onboard these methods in my own work, too, as I had learned about the fundamental ideas of time series analysis through your research and teaching materials.

Doctoral training programmes have now become an integral and central part of Finnish academia. And that's excellent because for far too long, progress to the doctorate was via what's known as the 'Iisalmi model', where researchers were given a subject to pursue by their professor or where they came up with a subject themselves and then withdrew into their chambers to research that subject in the manner they best saw fit, often without any real outside guidance. The latter half of the previous decade saw the arrival of doctoral and postgraduate training programmes, both university-level and national, in Finnish universities.

There is, then, a historical sense to my having been part of one of the very first systematic doctoral training programmes that you launched at the Turku School of Economics in the early 1970s. Not only was the programme among the first in its field, it was also progressive and open-minded: it had a multidisciplinary orientation, with teachers and students coming from many different universities, and from the outset it placed great emphasis on publishing and international exchange. The programme became very broad and comprehensive in its coverage. It comprised both work and pleasure. Excursions and their scientific and social programmes were a key part of it all. I'm proud to be able to say that I'm a product of this doctoral programme, even though formally I earned my doctorate from the University of Turku. The programme has left a very clear mark on my subsequent research work. Throughout the 1970s, at least, that programme can be equated with you.

Expressed in mathematical terms, you have never shown very much interest in local minimums or maximums, you have always aimed at the global optimum. Global thinking, an interest in global problems and shifting the focus from the present day to the long-term future have made you a global citizen, a member of the Club of Rome, a leading figure of global futures research societies. All of this stems from a period just a couple of decades ago when the issues you raised were not yet considered important, they were not fashionable and they carried no real political weight. But for you, the only relevant angle has been that of a research scholar, a philosopher. It's been quite amazing to see you sketch on a paper napkin

the very first flowcharts of natural resource circulation, human activity and its consequences, which have then later re-appeared in major research treatises and global commentaries.

When three months ago I myself turned 50, I was asked in newspaper interviews and other contexts to describe my academic career. What has driven this working-class kid, the family's first matriculated son, to become a professor: ambition, hard-headed determination, or what? In my own mind there's no question: it's all been down to a disciplined attitude to studying and working at different stages of my life as well as to fortunate coincidence. There were two sides to the fortunate coincidence. In 1968, a position of assistant became vacant at the Turku School of Economics, and the previous office holder came knocking on my door and pretty much grabbed me by the scruff of my collar. Had I not been hijacked like this, I don't think I would have ever contemplated an academic career; I was thinking more along the lines of a job as an industrial mathematician. And I'm sure my academic career would have been very short-lived hadn't you, Pentti, been my future superior. The conditions had to be just right for me to be able to identify and to put to good use my scholarly talent. The general climate of postgraduate training, the research community that grew up and especially the relationship between you and me, the superior-subordinate relationship, the teacher-student relationship that evolved into a relationship of collegial friendship of complete trust – this was what ultimately decided the course of my life's work. Beyond this all I've had to do is put in the effort, and to always do my job to the best of my abilities.

I'm pleased that we continue to remain in such close contact after all these years. Recently a new dimension has been added to our relationship with our postgraduate students, whose work we are now supervising and reviewing together. I've been delighted to discover that in these key areas of our knowledge and expertise our views remain consistent. After my most recent life change in the summer – as I now imagine I will regain some say over what I want to do – I wonder whether we might once again start planning a joint expedition somewhere into terrain unknown, perhaps into knee-deep snow. Who knows, maybe one day.

My best wishes on your birthday. I wish you every happiness and success for the years and decades to come.

Yours,

Ilkka

As it turned out, Pentti was delighted to receive my letter, after so many years. A few weeks later, I received a warm letter of thanks from him which showed that we had indeed shared very similar experiences of the things I had mentioned in my own letter. I want to quote just one paragraph from Pentti's reply.

So it was with great pleasure and appreciation that I received your letter at this time. You mention things whose value and significance I've only come to recognize in retrospect. The positive things that happened or that we accomplished in the 1970s, I feel we did all that together – more than with anyone else or on my own – complementing each other in some very profound and successful way. I believe this has always been a deeply mutual sense for both of us, and over our lifetime it has led us into new endeavours and achievements. We can be very pleased with the special issue of Futura and our article in that issue, which we hope will now reach a broader international audience. Every now and then I remind myself of Anatole France's aphorism: If you only want to accomplish great things rather than do something you can do right now, you might end up never accomplishing anything.

In his letter Pentti refers to our close research collaboration that we rekindled in the 2000s. Our studies dealt with the methodological foundations of futures research, which we addressed under such headings as 'futures universes' and 'futures universum'. In other words, the wish I expressed on the last lines of my 1994 letter regarding new research collaborations had in fact materialized. Our joint commitment and efforts continued to bear fruit until the very end of Pentti's life, in my own thinking and in my own actions even beyond and up to the present day.