



## HUMAN RIGHTS FROM ITS ORIGINS TO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

*A Journey Through Empathy, Love, the Will to Power, and the  
Will to Meaning*

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**W**hat is servant-leadership? And what is the connection between this philosophy and set of practices with human rights' design, implementation and defense? According to the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership's website, we are talking about a philosophy and set of practices with the aim of enriching the lives of individuals, building better organizations and ultimately creating a more just and caring world. With regards to human rights, we have a variety of definitions, but basically we understand them by the respect for the individual, the assumption that each person is a moral and rational being who deserves to be treated with dignity. A connection between both terms can be established when the servant-leadership approach tries to enrich the lives of individuals and to create more just and caring world, just as the human rights philosophy which aims to empower every single human being and to build a fairer and more equal society at a global level.



The concept “servant leadership” was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in *The Servant as Leader*, an essay that he first published in 1970. Later, Greenleaf would publish several works developing this idea in a deeper way. Thus, in 1977’s *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*, he stated the definition of this concept:

The servant-leader is servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. . . . The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (pp. 13-14)

In the following sections of this paper I will show how these ideas seem very connected with the human rights’ ideas of autonomy and dignity (“ . . . healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous . . . ” for Greenleaf). In addition, I will provide information proving that these concepts were developed during the enlightenment in the eighteenth-century by a group of philosophers, writers and intellectuals who aspired to lead and to foster and promote these ideas. As Greenleaf (1977) proposed two centuries later, a group of leaders have to show the way and to point the direction to other people. “As long as one is leading, one always has a goal. It may be a goal arrived at by group consensus, or the leader, acting on inspiration, may simply have said, ‘Let’s go this way’” (p. 15). As we will see in this paper, a group of people of the eighteenth century had foresight, a visionary goal. But also they had trust and



confidence in their cause and the followers accepted the risk along with the leaders. In other words, and as Greenleaf (1977) summarized brilliantly: “Not much happens without a dream. And for something great to happen, there must be a great dream. Behind every great achievement is a dreamer of great dreams” (p. 16).

Throughout the following sections of this paper, we will see that in order to develop the human rights discourse, the idea of empathy was a key element. About this concept, Greenleaf (1977) argued that people grow taller when their leaders empathize and accept them for who they are, because “leaders who empathize and who fully accept those who go with them in this basis are more likely to be trusted” (p. 21).

However, throughout my years coordinating the International Cooperation for the Development of Solidarity Foundation at the University of Barcelona, I met people all around the world feeling or experiencing empathy for the impoverished, the voiceless and the excluded. Unfortunately, that feeling was not enough to commit them to a cause, to bring them from their “ivory towers” to the field, and that situation has been very frustrating. Somewhat, Greenleaf was warning us about this when he wrote (1977): “In short, the enemy is strong natural servants who have the potential to lead but do not lead, or who choose to follow a non-servant. They suffer. Society suffers. And so it may be in the future” (p. 45). As a consequence of this, I have been wondering for many years about what is the necessary element to translate “theory” into “practice”.



As a result of this personal experience, I will explore in this paper how love was the energy that from empathy made the people of the eighteenth-century to transform their society. In addition, I will also show how, as soon as empathy and love were limited with the spread of the nihilistic and cynical ideas related with Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of will to power, and above all nationalism—an ideology that was focused on a national and not on a universal level—a human rights' crisis was initiated and brought humanity to the two more atrocious wars in history: World War I and World War II. However, nowadays, even if still empathy and love seem limited, I will argue that a human rights movement has been recovered and fulfilled with more meaning as a result of the spread of the will to meaning, a concept based on Viktor Frankl's work. This research, applied to the human right's discourse, tries to give a deeper and more holistic approach to their implementation and defense, and especially to the human dignity. In this respect, Greenleaf was an excellent visionary when he wrote in 1977:

I do not have the prescience to know what will come of all of this. And I am not predicting a golden age, not soon. But I do believe that some of those of today's privileged who will live into the twenty-first century will find it interesting if they can abandon their present notions of how they can best serve their less favored neighbor and wait and listen until the less favored find their own enlightenment, then define their needs and thus they may again be able to serve by leading. (p. 35)



Personally, I believe human rights approaches today are too limited to the juridical and political fields, and with this paper's description of the origin and evolution of human rights, I will show how the social component of their origins have been forgotten and it need to be recovered. According to my personal experience, in the university system in Western countries, curricula and professors are too focused on juridical aspects and do not embed their classes with a social connotation. In other words:

The contemporary university is the lineal descendant of the medieval one – a design which is now widely admitted to be suitable for a very small percentage of the population. . . . For many young people what should be a great creative experience is instead a literal incarceration in rigid, stereotyped academic programs for which they have little aptitude and less interest. The result is enormous institutions that are an impossible meld of elitist tradition and mass education, and which cannot withstand the shattering value changes that other forces are bringing in society. (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 54)

The purpose of this paper is to explore the servant leadership characteristic of empathy– along with the power of love–and their influence in the origins and crisis of human rights, and also to understand the process of recovering of the movement today through the will to meaning. In doing so, we will have a better understanding of the necessity of a servant leadership approach and the perspective of the will to meaning in the human rights curriculum of the university today.



Otherwise, we will continue focusing only on the juridical and political part of a holistic movement that, in order to be efficient, needs the social approach that both, the servant leader and the will to meaning offer. And as Greenleaf (1977) concluded:

If a better society is to be built, one that is more just and more loving, one that provides greater creative opportunity for its people, then the most open course is to raise both the capacity to serve and the very performance as servant of existing major institutions by new regenerative forces operating within them. (p. 49)

Finally, even if some of these ideas regarding human rights as a social movement connected with the will to meaning can seem too idealistic, we can conclude with one more Greenleaf's quote that brings us light to these shadows coming from certain people: "They should be reminded that we got where we are by doing the impossible, and future progress in the quality of our major institutions, which is both inevitable and imperative, will be by the same route!" (p. 111).

## EMPATHY AND THE WILL TO LOVE: HUMAN RIGHTS ORIGINS

In the 1760's the French invented the expression "rights of man" (*Droits de l'Homme*), that became very popular in the country thanks to its use by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Social Contract* of 1762 (Rousseau, 1987). However, along with that expression, Rousseau also employed other concepts such as "rights of humanity", "rights of citizen", etc. with the



aim of expressing a very general idea, but without political connotations of transformation or change (Hunt, 2007), so the idea of human rights that we understand today was not mature enough. It is not until 1786 when Marquis de Condorcet, influenced by the experience of the American Revolution, wrote his essay *On the influence of the American Revolution on Europe*, linking the expression “rights of man” with that revolution (Innes & Philp, 2013) and embedding the concept with a political view. For him, the American Declaration of Independence was the exposition of these venerable and buried rights (Hanley & McMahon, 2010), that we needed to recover.

From that moment on, the ideas on human rights started to spread around pre-revolutionary France and Great Britain, even if they were lacking a definition of the source of their power. In 1755, the French Enlightenment writer Denis Diderot wrote:

The use of this term is so familiar that there is almost no one who would not be convinced inside himself that the thing is obviously known to him. This interior feeling is common both to the philosopher and to the man who has not reflected at all. (Wasserstrom, Grandin, Hunt & Young, 2007, p. 8)

Even ambiguous, this was the first definition of rights of men, and with it, Diderot introduced a key element regarding the power of the concept: the rights of men require an “interior feeling” that everybody can experience just because the fact of being human, and in spite of social class or educational level. In other words, we were talking about emotions and sentiments in the Age of Reason. We were talking about empathy.



Regarding the term empathy, the psychologist Edward B. Titchener (1909) is credited with the invention of the term, and in his *Experimental Psychology of the Thought Processes*, he wrote, “Not only do I see gravity and modesty and pride and courtesy and stateliness, but I feel or act them in the mind’s muscle” (Titchener, 1909, p. 21). In other words, we can feel as well as perceive certain emotions. Moreover, he translated the term *Einfühlung* as empathy from the Greek *empathia*, which means “in” (en) “suffering or passion” (pathos). To him, empathy represented a combination of visual and kinesthetic imagery, by which certain types of experiences were possible. Also, he described it as a feeling, or projecting, of one’s self onto an object. Eventually, in his later writings Titchener (1915) gave empathy more social implications when he stated that was a way to make more human our communities.

In connection with servant-leadership, empathy is one of the ten characteristics that Larry Spears presented (Spears & Lawrence, 2004), and according to him:

The servant leader strives to understand and empathize with others. People need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits. One assumes the good intentions of co-workers and colleagues and does not reject them as people, even when one may be forced to refuse to accept certain behaviors or performance. The most successful servant leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners. (Spears, 2010, p. 3)

However, do all human beings feel empathy? Do some feel it more than others? And the key question, can empathy be





taught? (Hatcher, Nadeau, Walsh, Reynolds, Gales, & Marz, 1994). Although biology may provide an essential predisposition, each culture shapes the expression of empathy in its own particular way because empathy is developed through a process of social interaction. In the eighteenth century, those who read novels learnt to work on empathy through established social boundaries in terms of class or gender. As a result, they started to see people they did not know like them as a consequence of having the similar inner emotions (Hunt, 2007, p. 39). In other words, the characteristic or ability of empathy is something that we can learn and we can work on. And that was just what the people of the eighteenth-century decided to do.

One of the most important novels of that time was Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Julie et la nouvelle Heloise* (1761) which became a best-seller. The story explains the life of two separated lovers that exchange intimate letters showing all their feelings of suffering, sadness and love, and the novel's power lays in the fact that the readers could identify their own feelings with those of the characters. As Lynn Hunt (2007) explains:

Courtiers, clergy, military officers, and all manner of ordinary people wrote to Rousseau to describe their feelings of a "devouring fire," their "emotions upon emotions, upheavals upon upheavals." One recounted that he had not cried over Julie's death, but rather was "shrieking, howling like an animal." As one twentieth-century commentator on these letters to Rousseau



remarked, eighteenth-century readers of the novel did not read it with pleasure but rather with “passion, delirium, spasms and sobs.” (p. 36)

Some years before, Samuel Richardson had written in England *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-48) with similar effects among the readers, and in Germany, Johann Goethe wrote in 1774 *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a novel that supposes one of the starting points of the Romanticism and a psychological revolution in its time in terms of empathy. In the novel, the hero shoots himself after an ill-fated love, and shortly after its publication there were many reports of young men using the same method to commit suicide and lots of them were dressed like him: blue blazer and a yellow vest (Coleman, 2004).

As we can see, the performativity and power of the text is huge and could impact the readers in the eighteenth-century who started to identify themselves with ordinary characters who were invisible before to them but now were present in novels, poems and paintings (Bermingham & Brewer, 1995). As a result of this process that constructed this new psychology based in empathy, the established social and political order was destined to change, because thousands of people that did not “exist” before in terms of social and political consideration, suddenly “appeared” in different cities of Europe (Bray, 2003). In other words, we are referring to the inflection point that allowed them to go one step further from empathy to action: the origin of the construction of human rights.

In 1771, Thomas Jefferson declared that when reading



these works, he experienced a “strong desire in ourselves of doing charitable and grateful acts” and at the same time he felt disgusted by evil and immoral actions and behaviors.

According to Jefferson, reading fiction was even more effective than reading history in order to produce the desire for moral emulation (as cited in Boyd, 1950, pp. 76-81).

Now empathy had made visible the invisible and given voice to the voiceless but, what was that force or “strong desire in ourselves” that pushed people like Jefferson to do “charitable and grateful acts”? As a consequence of that feeling, they could not accept anymore a political, juridical and social community where huge sectors of the population were oppressed. In other words, they realized through empathy that their social status and amount of power needed to be legitimized, but how? According to bell hooks: “To begin by always thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility” (hooks, 1999, p. 13). Moreover, it was not a coincidence that after the “golden ages” of the Epistolary Novel (1760-1780) which helped to construct empathy, Romanticism held sway from the end of eighteenth-century to the first half of nineteenth-century. In other words, there was a process from the internal feeling (empathy) to action, and the energy that made possible that transition was love (as action, rather than as feeling, as hooks proposes). And with them, empathy and love, came the evolution of human rights discourse and its gradual application (White, 2005).



About love: “We do not have to love. We choose to love” (Peck, 1978, p. 83), and people from the Age of Reason chose to feel empathy for the excluded, but also to leave their comfortable positions and act thanks to the energy of love. As a result of this, they created hundreds of societies to defend the rights of the minorities and to advocate for the abolition of torture and slavery in different countries in the world (Bales, 2007). However, even if all these processes were very complicated and not always achieved, what can be considered a success is the fact that for the very first time in history at a global scale, the voiceless and the invisibilized had a voice and were visible thanks to the different human rights declarations that empowered them to be agents of their own destiny (Harris, 2007). The social elites that initiated that movement of empathy and love were aware that they, as we are doing today in our “liquid” times (Bauman, 2006), were living in a “transitional” period in history from the Ancient Regime to Modernity, and they decided to define and establish that paradigm shift through a set of declarations of rights of men and the citizen.

That process was very similar to the proposal that Margaret J. Wheatley suggests today when she states:

A few phrases come to mind from a wonderful gospel song: ‘We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.’ This is the time for which we have been preparing, and so there is a deep sense of call. Servant Leadership is not just an interesting idea, but something fundamental and viral for the world, and now the world that truly needs it. (as cited in Ferch, 2012, p. 119)



And that was precisely what the people of eighteenth century did; they started a movement to defend human rights initiated through empathy and love, with the aim of changing the world, and in order to accomplish that goal, they demonstrated to be leaders with great foresight and awareness serving their followers to transform them in leaders. They had initiated their servant-leader movement along with the human rights discourse.

#### NATIONALISM, THE WILL TO POWER AND LACK OF EMPATHY: HUMANS RIGHTS IN CRISIS

In 1789 we see the French Revolution first, and the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte's empire later. Napoleon's era represented a continuation of the struggle between human rights and the despotic monarchies in Europe that responded to the revolutions in America and France (Englund, 2005), though with many differences and nuances. However, as soon as the French Empire disappeared, a national sentiment arose contrary to the former centralist conception of Napoleon. All around Europe and the Latin American colonies, nationalist ideas gave origin to the Age of Nationalism throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries (Pilbeam, 1995).

Notably, the first half of the nineteenth-century was embedded with Romanticism's ideas that influenced to a high degree the development of the first national movements such as the Greek War of Independence in 1823 (in which Lord Byron, one of the most well known romantic writers, went to fight) and the European Revolutions of 1848 (Broers, 1996). In other



words, the discourse of human rights (along with empathy and love) which had been developed at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries was still a key element in creating the conditions that inspired those revolutions.

Nevertheless, the nationalist movements that initiated their journey along with the discourse of human rights and Romanticism gradually became more conservative, and from their universal point of view in the defense and protection of human rights, started to adopt more particularistic approaches (Hunt, 2007, p. 183). As a consequence of this, they continued forwarding the discourse of human rights but now considered their nationals “more human” than other nationals, starting what Hobsbawm (1986) was called the Age of Empires, a historical period that saw the Western world attempt to conquer the whole world (Imperialism). As a consequence of these nationalist movements, empathy was limited from a global level to a specific nation and same happened with the idea of love. As Greenleaf (1977) stated regarding the concept of love, this is a term difficult to be defined which has complex and deep manifestations. “But it begins, I believe, with one absolute condition: unlimited liability! As soon as one’s liability for another is qualified to any degree, love is diminished by that much” (p. 38). Unfortunately, nationalist movements limited love’s liability and with it, its energy to transform the internal feeling (empathy) to action.

On the other hand, it is not a coincidence that the period that I call “the crisis of human rights” which goes from the end



of nineteenth-century to the half of the twentieth-century, is the time when the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote his work (1870 and 1890), and especially his *The Will to Power*, published after his death during the first decade of the twentieth-century (Safranski, 2003). According to the ideas on power that we can read in Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*, the goal of every person is to take power and to concentrate it. This is something completely different from a human rights perspective which tends to give legitimate power to every person in order to transcend the negative, destructive and illegitimate concentration of power the philosopher advocated (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 375).

Gradually, these ideas started to embed in nationalist movements that became more and more conservative, and as Nietzsche (2011) stated:

The whole of 'altruism' reveals itself as the prudence of the private man: societies are not 'altruistic' towards one another—The commandment to love one's neighbor has never yet been extended to include one's actual neighbor. That relationship is still governed by the words of Manu: 'We must consider all countries that have common borders with us, and their allies, too, as our enemies. For the same reason, we must count all their neighbors as being well-disposed toward us'. (p. 382)

This nationalism, based partly in its racist conception of a superior culture, tended to make nations homogeneous in terms of culture (One Nation, one State), and did not hesitate to destroy other cultures both in a physical and symbolical way,



inside and outside borders. In other words, nationalism created homogeneous nations imposing a “superior” culture in a national society where there were before different primary cultures (Gellner, 2009).

With the mentality of Nationalism came an emphasis on the will to power. During the second half of nineteenth-century people experienced the rise of xenophobia, the control of immigration, and the consolidation of racism as the dominant ideology (Fredrickson, 2003). Again, and within this new context, what happened with respect to the protection of human rights? The answer was easy: at the eve of World War I all the countries embedded by this new ideology were still defending human rights discourse, but their vision of human rights was not a global vision for mankind as it used to be for the people of the end of the eighteenth-century. Now they were caring only about the rights of their nationals and other countries were considered inferior and did not deserve their rights to be protected and guaranteed (Hunt, 2007, p. 186).

Moreover, if necessary they considered themselves “legitimized” to attack when their “superior” nation was threatened. Nietzsche (2011) summarized that new mindset when he wrote: “A declaration of war on the masses by *higher men* is needed! Everywhere the mediocre are combining in order to make themselves master!” (p. 458). This process brought the world some years later to the two most atrocious and terrible wars of history: World War I and World War II, which resulted in the death of millions of people, the destruction of hundreds





of cities and towns, and in the end, a lack of hope and trust in mankind (Hobsbawm, 1996).

To exemplify about how much influence *The Will to Power* had in all that process, it is interesting to compare the declarations of the Nazi War Criminal during World War II, Adolf Eichmann, and the particular vision that Nietzsche had some decades before on similar issues. According to Hannah Arendt, who followed Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961, he was a very ordinary man in appearance with a flat affect. In his testimony throughout the trial, he insisted he had no choice but to follow orders, as he was bound by an oath of loyalty—the same superior orders defense used by some defendants in the 1945–1946 Nuremberg Trials (Arendt, 2006). Thus, it is surprising to realize that Eichmann's declaration is almost exactly what the German philosopher had written some decades before:

None of you has the courage to kill a man, or even to whip him, or even to—but the tremendous machine of the state overpowers the individual, so he repudiates responsibility for what he does (obedience, oath, etc.) Everything a man does in the service of the state is contrary to his nature. In the same way, everything he learns with a view to future state service is contrary to his nature. This is achieved through division of labor (so that no one any longer possesses the full responsibility): The lawgiver—and he who enacts the law; The teacher of discipline—and those who have grown hard and severe under discipline. (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 383)



Today, there is controversy whether Nietzsche was using the concept of will to power to propose a new society based on it, or he was just trying to anticipate the risks towards where European society was going. Whatever the philosopher's idea was, the final result was that the ethos of *The Will to power* had become embedded in the minds of the imperialist nations, and Nazi criminals used Nietzsche's work in order to legitimize and to justify their crimes.

#### A "MAGIC TRIANGLE" WITH THE WILL TO MEANING: HUMAN RIGHTS EMERGING AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

After two World Wars, the international community decided to recover the idea of human rights from a global point of view after the particularistic approach with what the nationalism embedded the fundamental rights of the people. Here the idea was to control and to limit the power of the State as a consequence of atrocities committed in its name (Donnelly, 1997). As a result of this, on December 10th 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (UDHR) and its Preamble recognized how the discourse of human rights had been forgotten and how necessary it was to recover it:

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world; Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have



outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.

Even if the UDHR was the expression of a set of aspirations more than of a reality that could be reached in a context of the Cold War, it represented a group of moral obligations for the international community similar to the declarations of the end of eighteenth century (Hunt, 2007, p. 213). Notwithstanding, a key question arose again after the creation of the United Nations and its organs and instruments of protection of the international system of human rights: What happened to acting with empathy and with love? It seems clear that after the atrocities committed during World War II, it was not very difficult (as human beings) to feel empathy for victims, and just the fact of acting and creating such a developed system in an international sphere was also a proof of certain love (again, from the internal feeling to action). However, in the context of the Cold War where the world was divided into capitalist and communist blocs, it was necessary for a new element to be added in order to really enjoy the fulfillment of those rights in a global way and not repeating the same mistake of particularism (now not in the name of a limiting nation but of a limiting bloc) that some decades before brought humanity to the two World Wars (Website of the *Center on law and globalization*).

However, several decades later, the communist bloc disappeared, and with it the limitations for a global discourse



of human rights. Thus, a process called Globalization—the globalization of the “Western world localization”—was initiated. Unfortunately, this process did not have the aim of spreading the human rights’ movement but only its economic system, neoliberalism, which was imposed almost all around the world (Lash & Featherstone, 1999). This economical system which has the capacity to affect all different aspects in life (politics, culture, etc.) exploits a big part of the humanity as means and not as ends, and concentrates on materialistic issues more than on spiritual ones (Santos, 2005). As a result of that worldview the number of people experiencing an existential vacuum confusing the material and superficial life with happiness and personal realization has arisen throughout the world.

I believe this lack of connection with other human beings, with nature, and with the universe, must be fixed in order to avoid the return of the will to power and particularism. Moreover, I consider it is essential to fulfill the lives of millions of people embedded with cynicism, hypocrisy, and nihilism (especially in Western countries) with meaning and commitment to a cause or to the whole of humanity. According to Viktor Frankl (2014), the human being must to transcend itself, and reach out for something other than itself (p. 55). That is why in order to transcend what could be seen as a discourse originated from above during the Cold War (human rights designed by the victors of World War II), it has become a social and global movement from below, and human rights have been there to show the way. Referring to Logotherapy, Frankl (2014) he wrote: “If there is, as some authors contend,



anything such as a ‘logotherapeutic movement’, it certainly belongs to the human rights movement. It focuses on the human right to a life as meaningful as possible” (p. 168).

For example, in connection with this idea, article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”. But what the countries that prepared the Declaration in 1948 were meaning with the human right to life? For them, the conception of life was only a biological perspective. In other words, their idea was that life is just the fact of being alive and breathing and, besides, the human being is separated from nature (Santos, 1995). However, as soon social movements decided to appropriate the term of human rights and to defend their cause, they decided to change that reductionist and limited biological vision of life, and tried to enhance it through a deeper meaning of the right to life, advocating for the right to a dignified and meaningful life where the human being is connected with nature (Saura, 2009). In doing so, they started a new social movement from below that until today tries to connect the discourse of human rights with the voiceless and the excluded, the process that happened at the end of the eighteenth-century, which can be seen as a consequence of the development of empathy and love, the interior feeling and the action. However, this social movement appears today in a deeper and more intense process of globalization, and in order to act it is necessary to be aware of a global community. According to Greenleaf (1977):

Where there is not community, trust, respect, and ethical behavior are difficult for the young to learn and for the



old to maintain. Living in community as one's basic involvement will generate an exportable surplus of love which the individual may carry into his many involvements with institutions which are usually not communities: businesses, churches, governments, schools. (p. 39)

Again, empathy and love can be seen as essential elements, but I believe they needed one more element to be added to their group in order to be effective in a world that had changed as a result of globalization and the neoliberalist system. I call it the "Magic Triangle": empathy, love and meaning. And what really makes this "Triangle" "magic" and unique is that from a top down process with a passive perception of people—we need to feel empathy and to love them—we go to a bottom up movement with an active proposal where they are agents who decide their meaning and purpose in life. It is not only about leaders who through empathy and love improve the lives of the followers. Now we are talking about followers that have become leaders through meaning and purpose in their lives. Oppressed people in a global dimension that have been empowered through empathy, love and, above all, with the creation of the elements for them to develop their own capability in order to define their meaning and purpose in the world. As a result of linking this magic triangle with human rights in the twenty-first century, we have the fourth generation of human rights or emerging human rights, which consists in a civil society's legitimate claim for the formulation of new or updated human rights (Palop, 2010). In other words, today the



key element in that journey of human rights is to see people finding meaning and purpose in their lives through empathy and love without any limits imposed from above by a nation or a political bloc. Frankl (2000), argued that meaning was ‘down to earth’, but he also recognized that some kind of meaning could be ‘up to heaven’, “as it were; some sort of ultimate meaning, that is; a meaning of the whole, of the ‘universe’, or at least a meaning of one’s life as a whole; at any rate, a long-range meaning” (p. 143).

I believe emerging human rights as a matter of justice, dignity, empathy and love. They give meaning to our lives and make us transcend ourselves in a relativist but also global way that could be the answer we are waiting for. In other words, a comprehensive approach from below that unites all different elements, and a global and active way of viewing the world and thinking, conversely to the narrower design elaborated from above by the victors of the World War II. Moreover, this new perspective seeks to avoid the separated way that human rights were built in 1948, and is a process of reconnecting mankind, nature, universe and divinity.

## CONCLUSION

A servant-leader approach aims to transform the followers into leaders. This is where the legitimacy of its power remains, which the people of eighteenth-century realized as they sought their goal of constructing a fairer and more equal society. They were aware of the paradigm shift of their time and they formulated a beginning to the process of human rights through



empathy and love. In other words, they showed the way and pointed the direction: “By clearly stating the goal, the leader gives certainty and purpose to others who may have difficulty in achieving it for themselves” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 15).

Unfortunately, it was not enough, and what seemed an unstoppable movement apparently found its nemesis in another one: The will to power that embedded the nationalist movements of the end of nineteenth-century and beginning of the twentieth-century. Its cynicism, hypocrisy, and nihilism brought the world to the most atrocious wars in history and also to an existential vacuum in the life of millions of people.

Today, after trying to recover the human rights discourse through the design of a very sophisticated system of protection of human rights, the world is still suffering from the strong influence of cynicism, hypocrisy, and nihilism. In order to fight against these anti-values, empathy and love seem insufficient. At the moment, more than ever, it is essential to add *the will to meaning* to our lives, consolidating a “Magic Triangle” that may be able to overcome the shadows of *the will to power*. Moreover, the will to meaning can also be seen as a tool in order to empower the oppressed and to be transformed in leaders. Through meaning and purpose they decide what they want to do with their lives in an active exercise that goes beyond the passive situation where they were settled before even if they were enjoying empathy and love.

Today, we are living in a global economic system where human beings are used as means and not as ends, and where we confuse money with happiness. That is why it is so important





to recover the dignity of human beings through meaning and purpose. Every human life is meaningful and every single person has a purpose in life that can be developed through the love for the others or the commitment to a cause. That is why we need to have this long term vision and global mindset, otherwise, we will be only concerned with accumulating money and / or power, but not considering the key element of long term and foresight. According to Greenleaf (1977):

Foresight is the “lead” that the leader has. Once leaders lose this lead and events start to force their hand, they are leaders in name only. They are not leading, but are reacting to immediate events, and they probably will not long be leaders. There are abundant current examples of loss of leadership which stem from a failure to act on that knowledge while the leader had freedom to act. (p. 26)

And here raises the following question: Are our leaders today aware of the need for foresight and vision? Personally, I think they are more concerned for winning elections every two or four years—or in winning money and power—than in designing a vision for the long term concerned about how to foster and to help to develop the purposes in life of the people they lead. As Greenleaf stated in 1977 regarding two types of power in our present times, it can be a matter of persuasion or of coercive power that dominates. However, “the difference is that, in the former, power is used to create opportunity and alternatives so that individuals may choose and build autonomy. In the latter, individuals are coerced into a predetermined path” (p. 42).



So can we teach our young generations to have empathy, to love and to have meaningful lives? This is a key question, but also a tough one, especially in the global and neoliberal context of today. However, even if we do not have the answer, I believe we can be congruent and to teach empathy and love, giving meaning and purpose to their lives through love to others or the commitment to a cause. It is our personal contribution, maybe a water drop into the ocean, but it will be our water drop. As Greenleaf argued (1977) “There may be a better system than the one we now have. It is hard to know. But, whatever it is, if the people to lead it well are not there, a better system will not produce a better society” (p. 45). It is clear that in terms of teaching human rights, a servant leadership approach that encompasses empathy and love, committed to the growth of people in order to build community and to develop meaningful lives, seems more essential than ever.

I see empathy as my personal strength but unconditional and sustainable love (or energy to action) I see as my weakness. However, knowing one’s self is the first step to improve your quality as human being as an end, and in my case, teaching at the university, I aim to be a better professor as a means to make those around me become more wise, more free, more autonomous, more healthy, and better able themselves to become servants (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 14): servants of the cause of human rights and social justice.

However, as a human being, the shadows of cynicism, hypocrisy, and nihilism are present in me, and the strength of our materialistic world is very strong. I believe it is the “Magic



Triangle” which gives the courage and the energy to embrace our shadows and to serve as “sustainable” leaders in the human rights field in particular, and in life in general. I know it is difficult, and I am sure is going to be even more difficult in the future, but as Antonio Gramsci (2011) said in his *Letters from prison*: “I’m a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will” (p. 299).

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