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Jean-Paul Bozonnet

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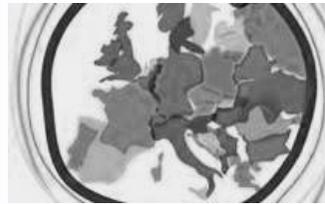
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Lisboa - Portugal

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# Has Ecocentrism Already Won in France? Soft Consensus On the Environmentalist Grand Narrative

**Jean-Paul Bozonnet**

PACTE-CNRS

Institut d'Études Politiques Grenoble - France

E-mail: [Jean-Paul.Bozonnet@iep-grenoble.fr](mailto:Jean-Paul.Bozonnet@iep-grenoble.fr)

Site: <http://bozonnet.googlepages>





# Objectives

- Environmental issues are coming to the forefront of media and politics in France.

- Nicolas Hulot during the presidential campaign elections (2007)
- « Grenelle of Environnement », an all out program of environmental public policies

- **Hypotheses**

- There is a **quasi-consensus** about environmental values in France, and more fundamentally an environmentalist *weltanschauung*.
- Consequently, the old grand narrative embedded in the biblical story or in the capitalist or socialist ideologies (Lyotard) has dramatically faded in favour of a new ecological paradigm.
- In short, ecocentrism has already won the ideological battle in France.



# Methodology

- Study based on the **European Value Survey (EVS)**
- This international survey was created in 1980.
- The questionnaire measures values as family, friends, jobs, politics, social capital, xenophobia,...
  
- The 2008 EVS included for the first time the ecological paradigm (**NEP**, Dunlap and alii).
  
- This paper is restricted to the case of France.
  - That makes 3071 face to face interviews.



# I. The New Ecological Paradigm: the Five Stages of a Grand Narrative

- General idea:
  - Ancient biblical narrative => the subject of history is God or Providence
  - Renaissance grand narrative => the “hero” is the human being
  - Industrial grand narrative
    - ...capitalist story => the captain of industry (Saint-Simon)
    - ...socialist story => the proletariat (Marx)
  - And who is the subject of history for the post-industrial grand narrative ?
  
- ...Dunlap & alii suggest that it is **nature**.
  - There was a drastic ideological shift in the seventies:
  - Nature is no more an instrumental value in the grand narrative, but becomes an ultimate central value.
  - Transition from **anthropocentrism** to **ecocentrism**.
  
- Indicators of EVS to measure the importance of this grand narrative are drawn from the NEP of Dunlap & alii (2000).

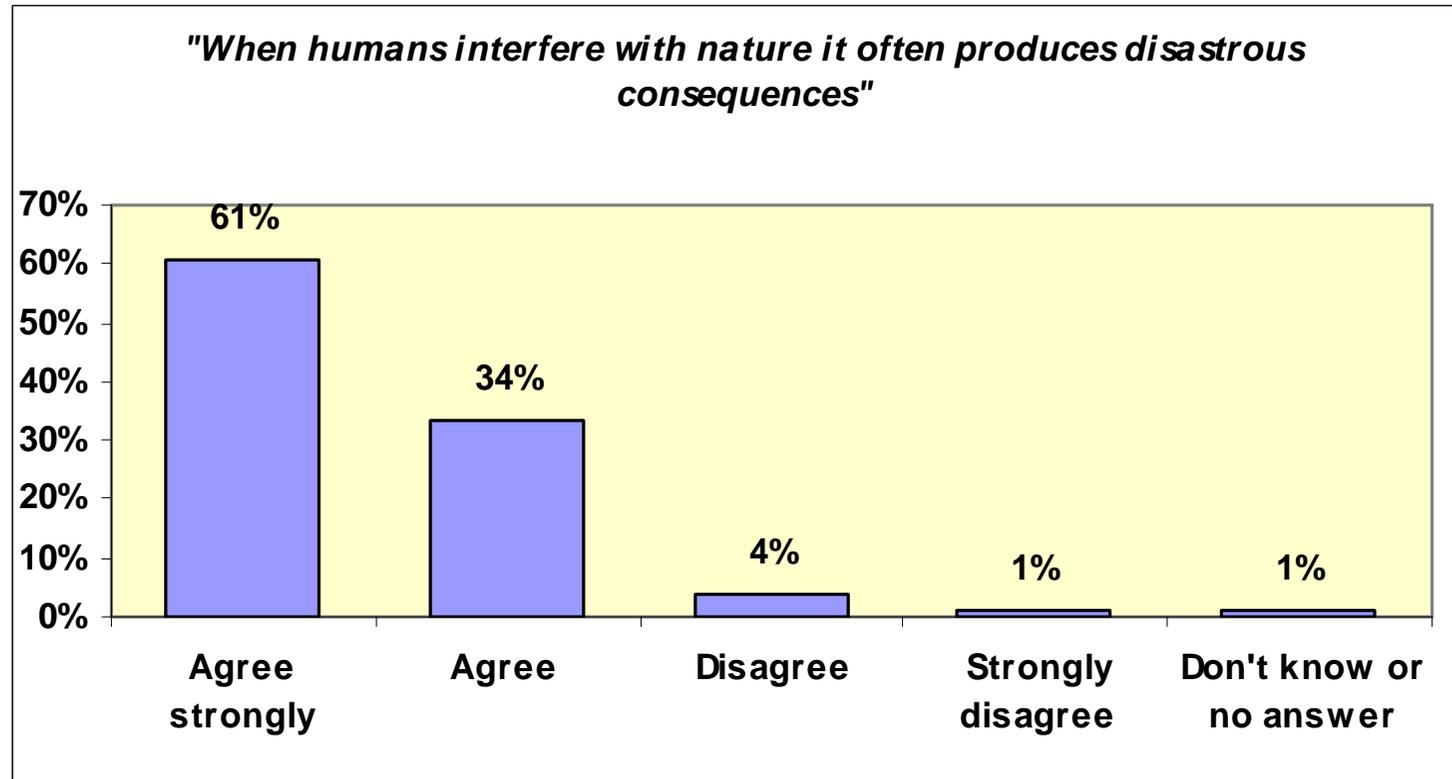


# The Contents of the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP)

(Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig & Jones, 2000)

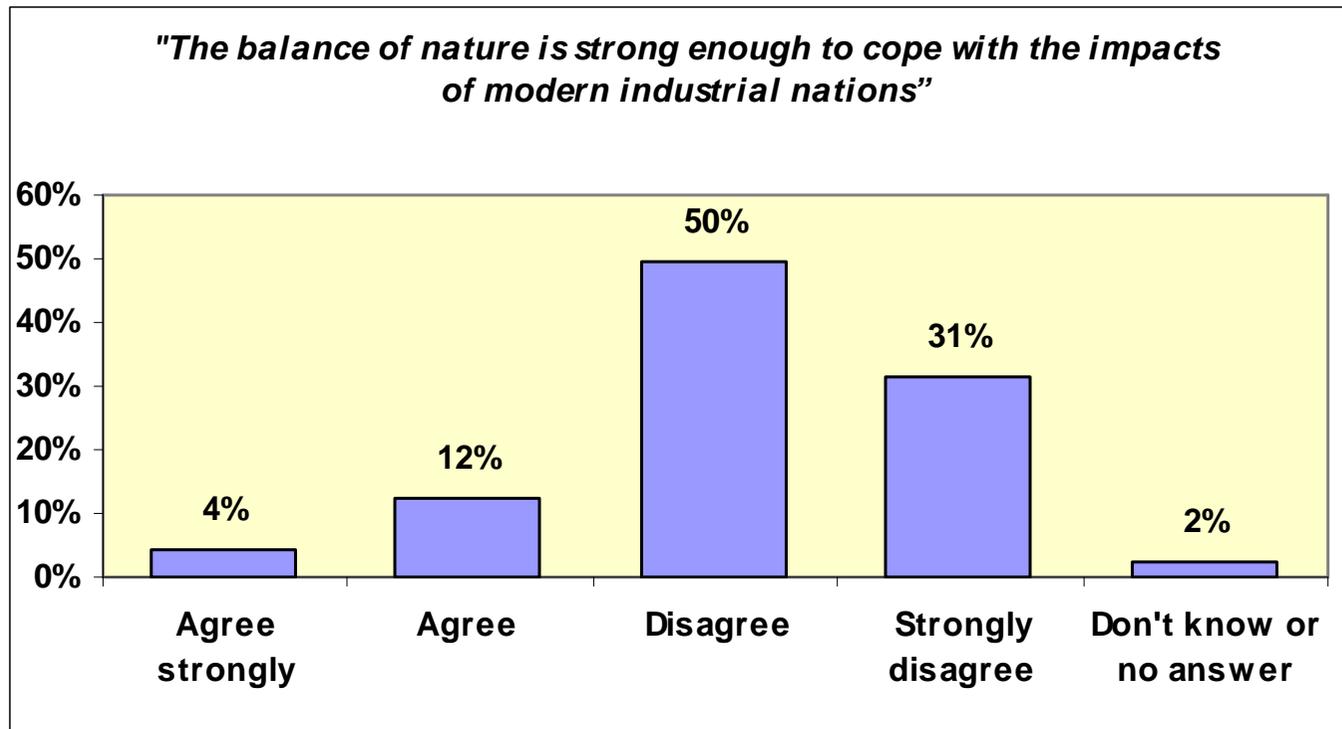
- It includes five dimensions:
  1. The awareness of the fragility of nature's balance;
  2. The knowledge of the limits to growth;
  3. The rejection of "exemptionalism";
  4. The refusal of anthropocentrism;
  5. The belief in a possible major ecological crisis.
  
- These dimensions form five stages of the ecological grand narrative.
  
- They were 6 questions in the 2008 EVS reserved to measure the NEP.

# 1<sup>st</sup> stage (I): The Awareness of the Fragility of Nature's Balance



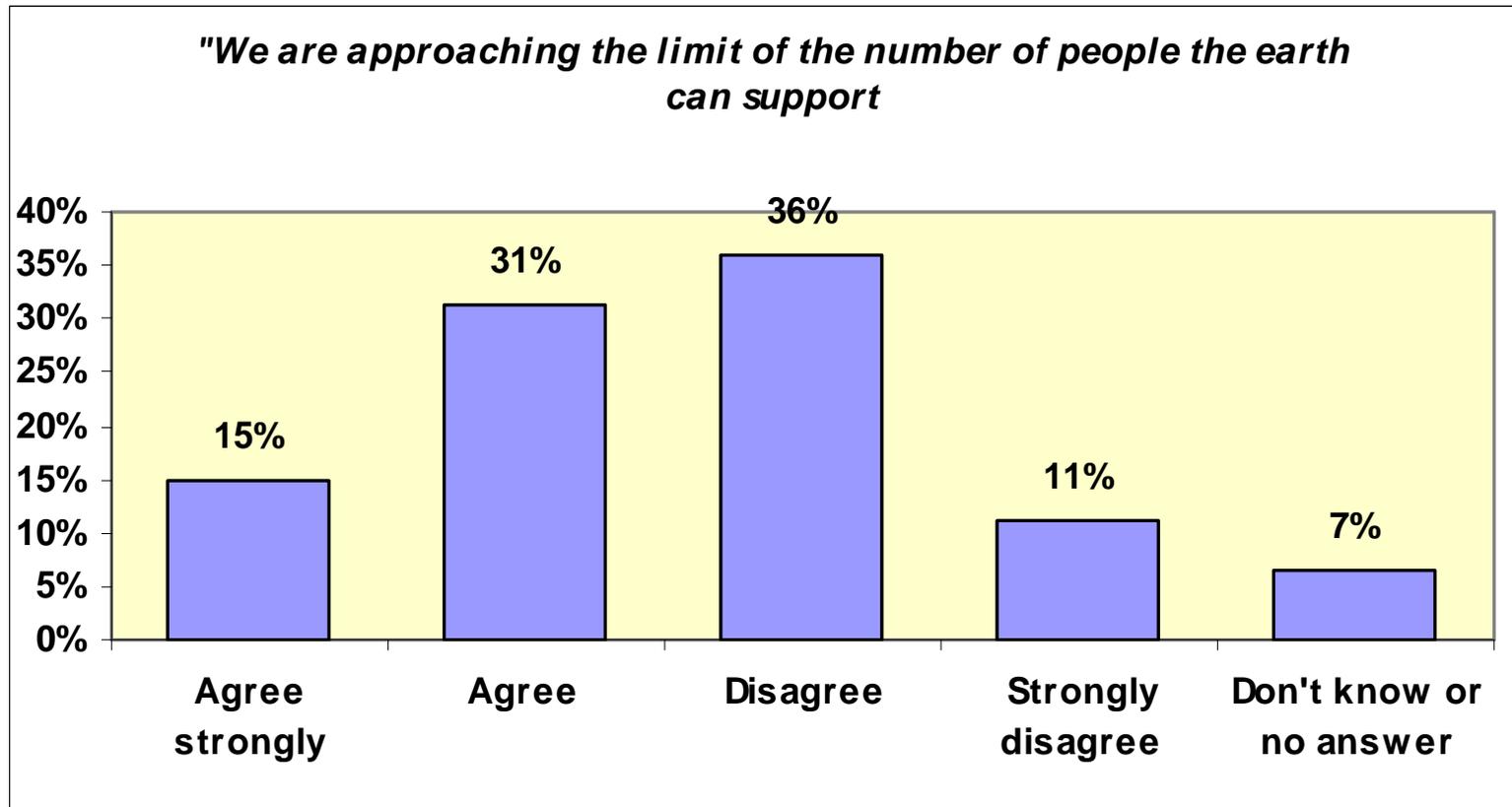
- 95% of French people agree => strong consensus on this idea.

# 1<sup>st</sup> stage (II): The Awareness of the Fragility of Nature's Balance



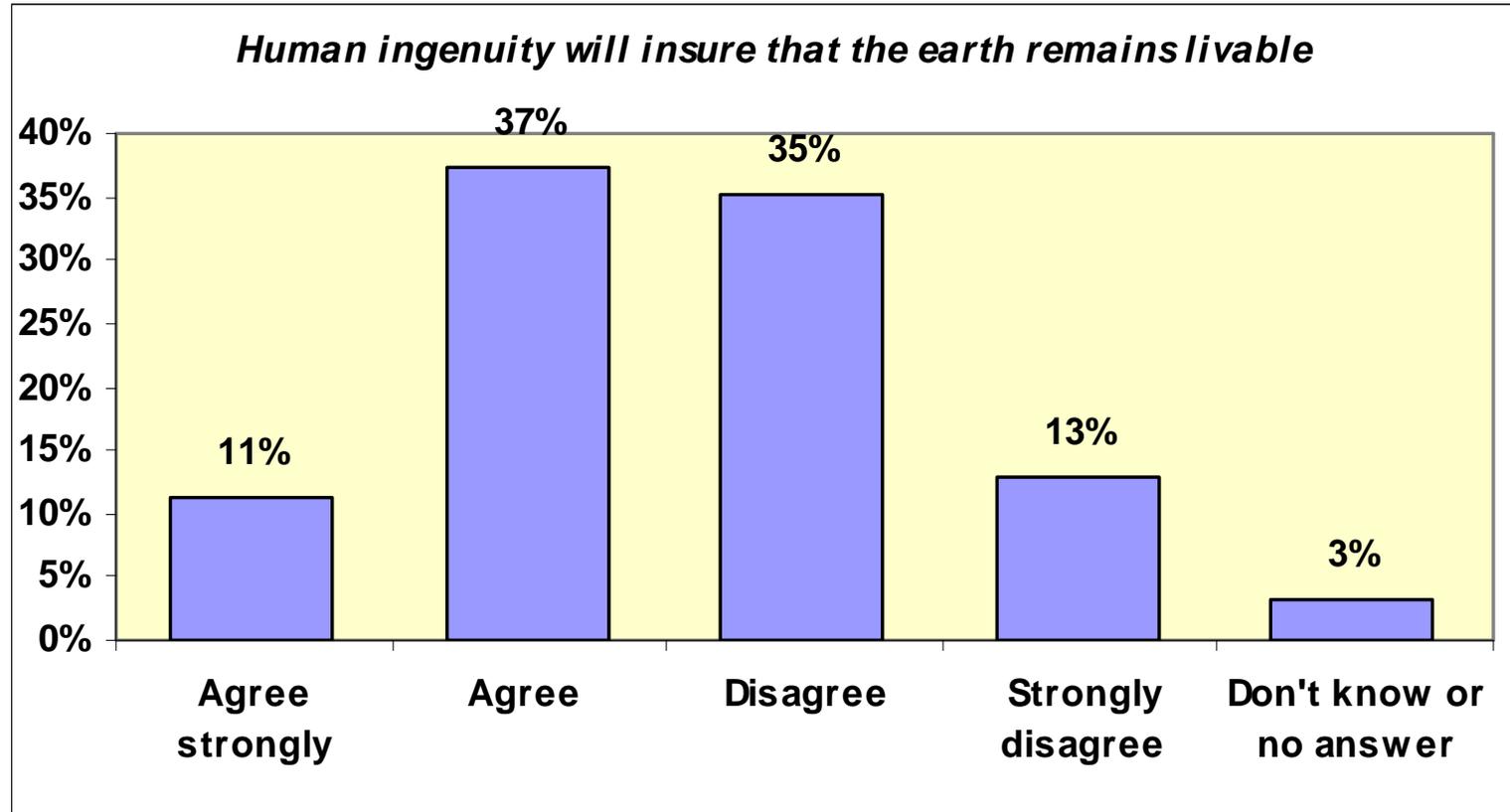
- 81% disagree with this statement => another evidence of quasi-consensus
- ...contrary to the traditional anthropocentric paradigm which considers nature as an indestructible and inexhaustible resource.

## 2<sup>st</sup> stage: the Knowledge of the Limits of Growth



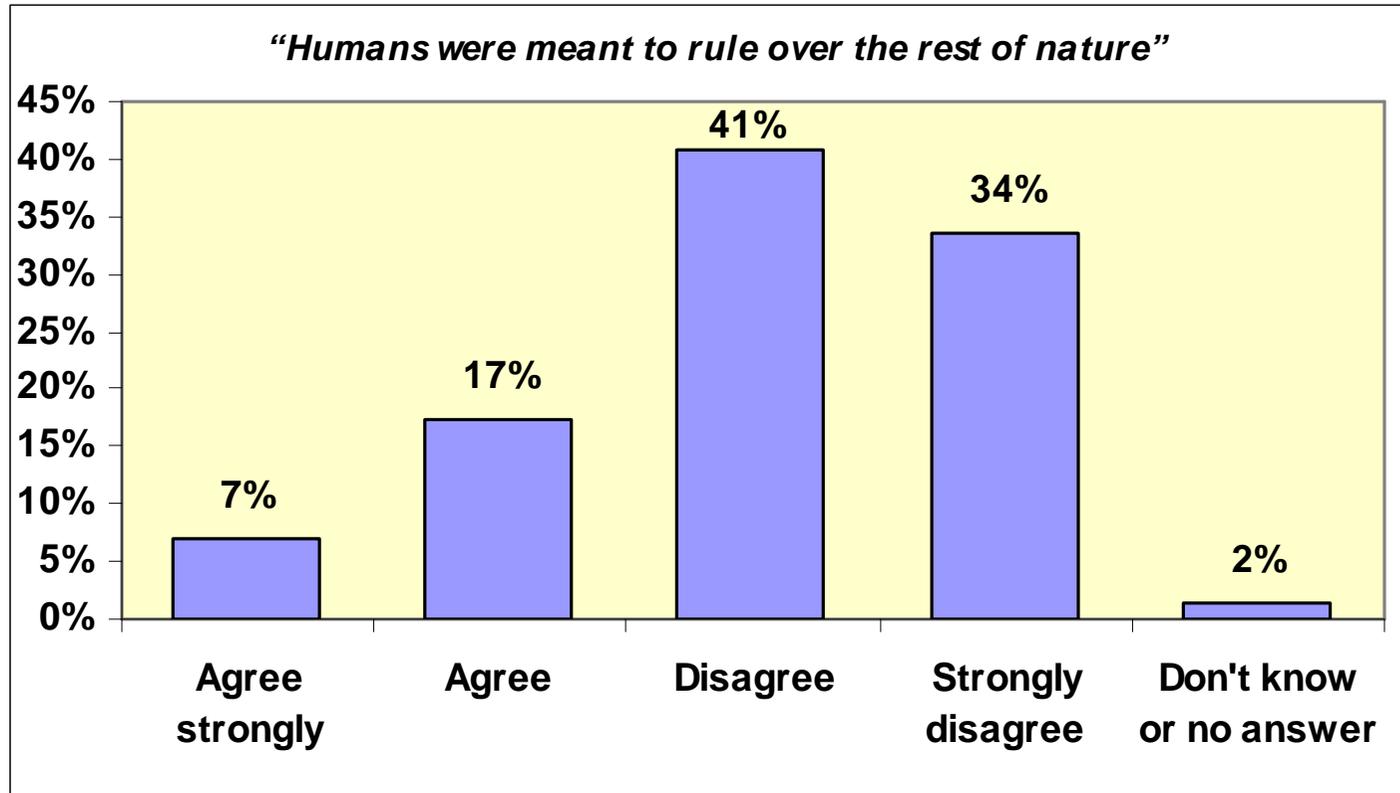
- Only 46% of French people agree
- But this indicator is not relevant in France,
  - ...because of the historical obsessive fear of depopulation in this country, and the Malthusian connotation of this sentence.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> stage: the Human “Exemptionalism” (humans are not submitted to natural laws as animals)



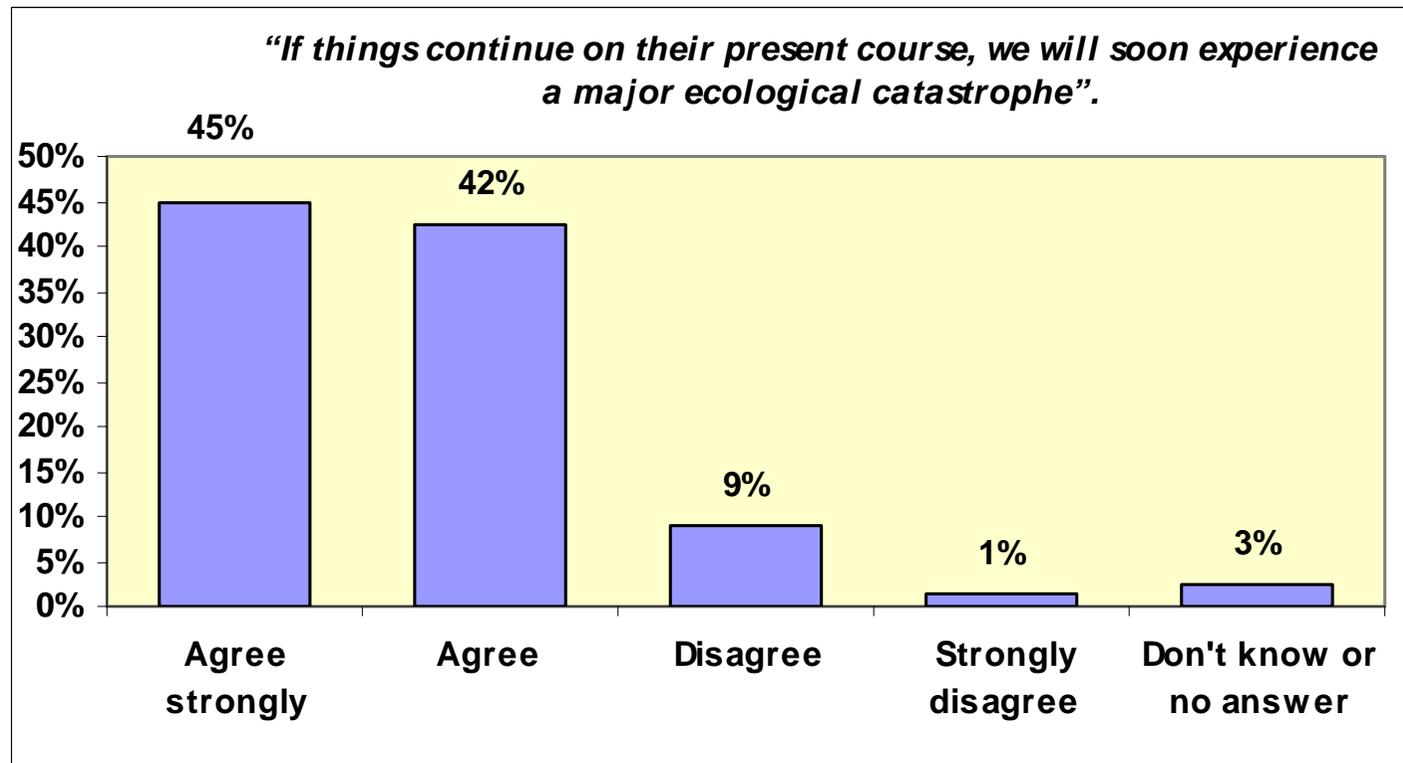
- 48% of French people agree with this statement: they are still inside anthropocentric allegiance on this dimension of the grand narrative.
  - This high rate is probably due to a Saint-Simonian and communist reminiscences and the resistance of the technical ideology, the “engineer culture”.

## 4<sup>th</sup> stage: Ecocentrism



- This dimension of NEP refers to the biblical grand narrative.
- 75% of French people disagree.
- This has a strong sociological significance:
  - ecocentrism goes hand in hand with secularisation,
  - ...and the fading of the structured religious discourse.

## 5<sup>th</sup> stage: The Belief in a Possible Major Ecological Crisis

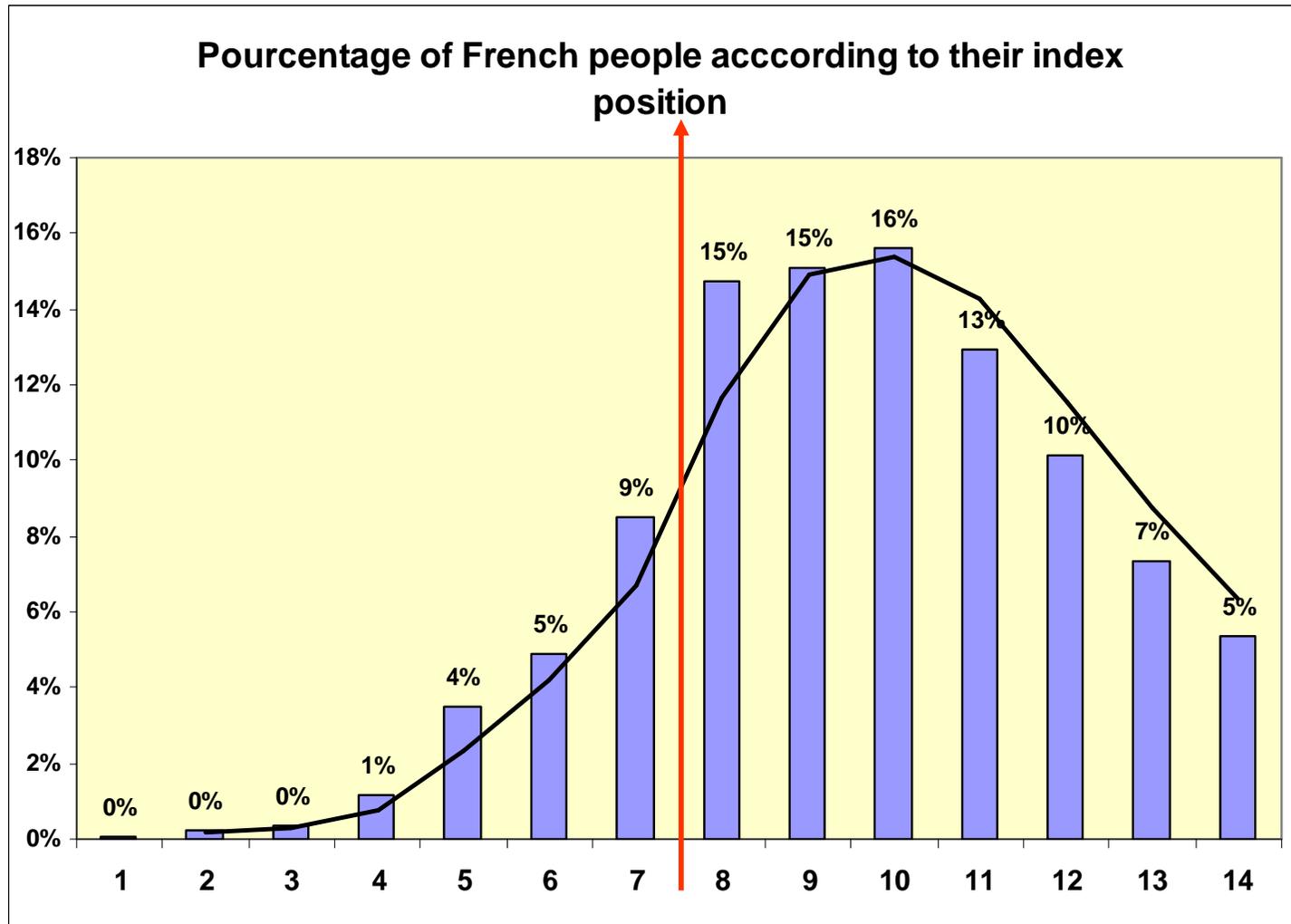
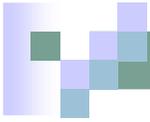


- The end of the postmodern ecological story is tragic: an environmental disaster!
- 87% of French people think it will likely happen. That is a quasi-consensus.



## II. An environmentalist soft consensus?

- It is possible to synthesize the results of the 5 previous questions (6 except that about overpopulation).
- We have constructed a cumulative index of ecocentrism/anthropocentrism with 14 degrees.



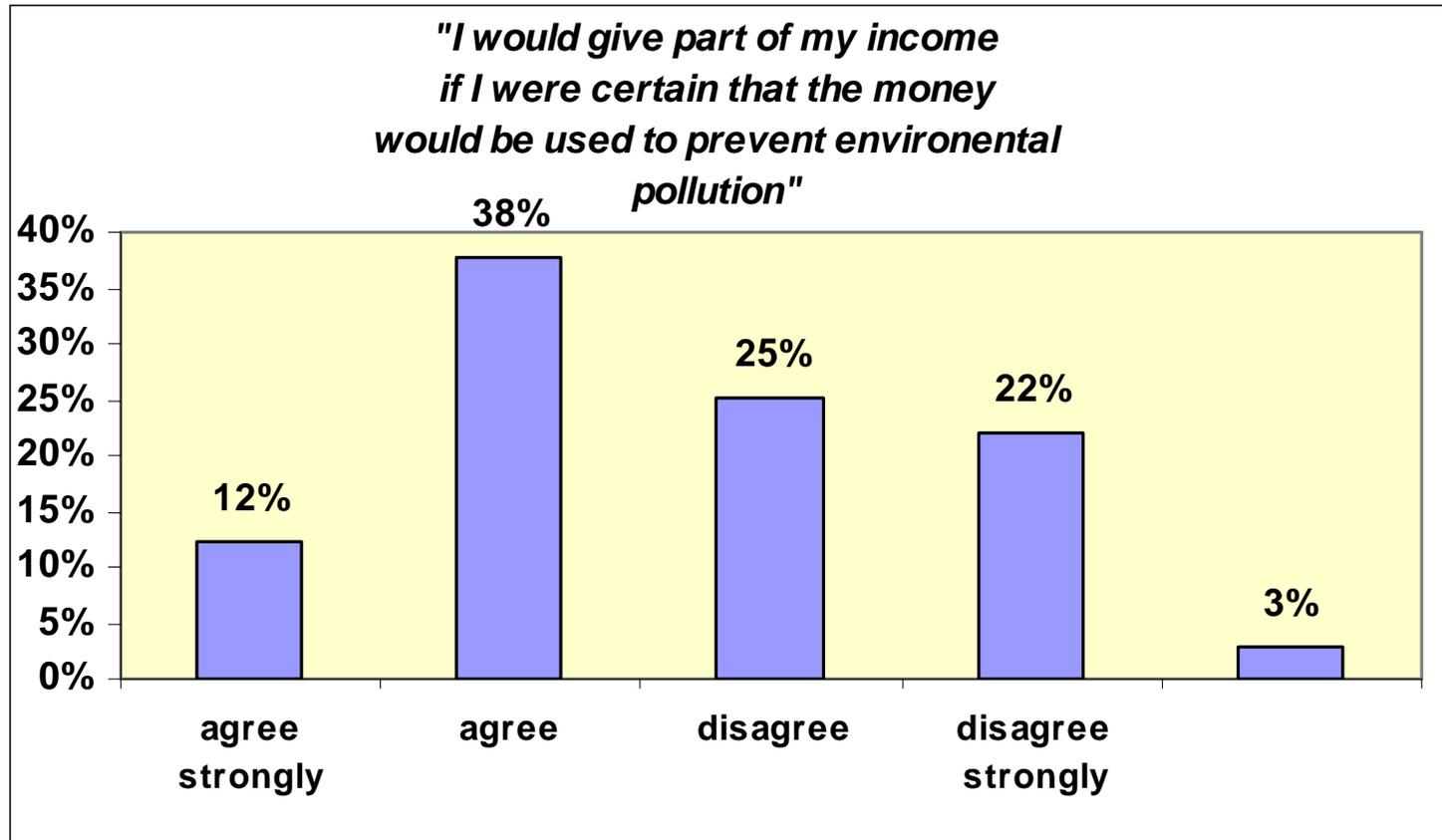
- 80% of French people are above the average, on the side of ecocentrism => quasi-consensus?



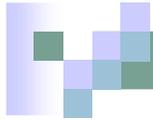
## ... Rather a soft consensus

- A significant part of French population keep its ancient conceptions of the world.
- Moreover, most people do not adhere to the entire ecological grand narrative, but only to some statements among the 5 dimensions of NEP.
- This implies two consequences:
  - The scale of Dunlap & alii is not homogeneous.
  - Ecological narrative is not strongly structured as religious or industrial narratives were in the modern times.
  - There are many contradictions inside this narrative for a same person, => cognitive dissonance.

Last, but not the least, there is a gap between ecological ideas and actions...



- 47% of French people would refuse to give money for the protection of the environment.



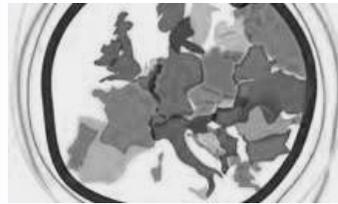
- This means that the NEP does not overcome the economic necessity, and remains a poor motivation to act.
- So it is a soft consensus in a time of ideology of low intensity



# Conclusion

## **What is the social meaning of the soft consensus on NEP?**

- There was a radical shift of fundamental values since the sixties in France: ecological paradigm in place of religious, humanistic, Saint-simonian, Marxist grand narrative,...
  - ...linked to the “End of ideologies”, the secularization,...
- And this was a silent revolution: no strikes, no street fights, no political debate... Why?
- ...Maybe it is because, globally, values has lost their importance, and none of these really matters any longer in the post-modern world.
- “Brave new world” is a pragmatic world. The only things that matter are practical consequences, and on this point, the French society is far from consensus !



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for your attention*

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