

CONTRIBUTION FOR WORKSHOP N. 61: SCHOOL, ECOLOGY AND DEGROWTH

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ECOPHILOSOPHY FOR EDUCATION IN LINE WITH DEGROWTH

We are going to introduce philosophy curricula for senior high school, in line with ecophilosophy and degrowth practice, as already introduced in other documents by A.E.F. (Associazione Eco-Filosofica). This is a work in progress about content and essays by important authors of history of philosophy and the actualization of their thoughts, interpreted by contemporary critics and philosophers.

YEAR II

PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA

In *De Hominis Dignitate*, Pico describes a paradigm that can be considered ecocentric and is surely not anthropocentric. Giorgio Agamben in *The Open: Man and Animal* describes this strong idea:

“ For the central thesis of the oration is that man, having been moulded when the models of creation were all used up, can have neither archetype nor proper place nor specific rank. Moreover, since he was created without a definite model, he does not even have a face of his own and must shape it at his own discretion in either bestial or divine form... Insofar as he has neither essence nor specific vocation, Homo is constitutively nonhuman; he can receive all natures and all faces, and Pico can ironically emphasize his inconsistency and unclassifiability by defining him as 'our chameleon'. The humanist discovery of man is the discovery that he lacks himself, the discovery of his irremediable lack of dignitas.”

During the Age of Enlightenment, this is represented by *enfants sauvages*, wolf-children that appear at the edge of European villages, an incarnation of man's inhumanity.

YEAR III

F. NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche wrote that animal instinct represented the deepest nature of man. In a passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*:

“ Man is the as-yet-undetermined animal.”

Stefano Berni wrote in *Millepiani n. 31*, that “determined” can be translated with “shaped”, an expression that can be considered more convincing if the entire sentence is situated within the text, in which Nietzsche is challenging religion and Christianity in particular as agents of degeneration, homogenizing, approval, and domestication of man. So religion has shaped man in the negative, separating him from his natural animal state, (though fortunately) this shaping not yet entirely complete.

In *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche wrote :

“Assuming as true what in any event is taken as “the truth” nowadays, that it is precisely the purpose of all culture to breed a tame and civilized animal, a domestic pet, out of the beast of prey “man,” then we would undoubtedly have to consider the essential instruments of culture all those instinctive reactions and resentments by means of which the noble races with all their ideals were finally

disgraced and overpowered—but that would not be to claim that the bearers of these instincts also in themselves represented culture.”

The human animal is then severely limited by the forces of civilization, which demands uniformity.

Nietzsche was usually open about his presentation of the idea that the human species is not established once-and-for-all, but rather that humankind would benefit from evolving in ways presently unforeseeable, as in the following passage:

“Why shouldn't we realize in man what the Chinese are able to do with the tree, so thus it produces on one side roses and on the other pears? These natural processes of the selection of man, for example, which until now have been exercised in an infinitely slow and awkward way, could be taken over by man himself.”

Roberto Esposito in *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, observes:

“ Instead of being disconcerted by the unusual juxtaposition of humans and plants, we should give priority to Nietzsche's early awareness that the area of political confrontation and conflict will in future centuries, regarded as the redefinition of the human species as a part of a gradual shift of its borders, compared to what is not human - on one hand the animal, on the other the inorganic world.”

Nietzsche appears to have foreseen contemporary theories such as those proposed by Roberto Marchesini in regards to post-humanity (see R. Marchesini, *Post-human*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2002).

About human metamorphosis, Roberto Esposito says in *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*:

“ The Nietzschean text reminds us that man is not, has never been, will never be what he considers himself to be. His being is beyond of identity with itself. And indeed it is not even a 'being' as such, but a becoming that carries within itself along the tracks of a different past and the foreshadowing of a brand new future. The theme of metamorphosis is at the center of this conceptual change: compared to 'delaying' of every species - always intent on building new conservation devices, determined to last as long as possible - the Ubermensch is characterized by an inexhaustible power of transformation . He is literally located outside of himself, in a space that is not, has never been, the man-as-such.”

Man is a species in constant state of metamorphosis, infiltration, hybridizing, cross-breeding, as other species after all.

“ But in man's animalization - says R. Esposito Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy - there is certainly something else that rather than the ancestral past seems to mark the future of the human species (1). In Nietzsche, the animal is never interpreted as the dark abyss, or the face of stone, from which the man fled toward the sun.

*On the contrary it is linked to the fate of the 'post-human' (as you could risk translate *Übermensch*). It is his future ...”*

The German philosopher, however, continues to formulate questions that bewilder and dismay the supporters of calculating reason and absolute otherness and uncontaminated man with animal (such as Descartes and his newer followers, whose referential paradigm defines man, more than anything else, as thinking substance, while the animal is reduced exclusively to the extended substance). Nietzsche's questions which perplex and irritate advocates of the anthropocentric paradigm can be like the following:

“What are the profound transformations that must derive from the theories according to which one asserts that there is no God that cares for us and that there is no eternal moral law (humanity as atheistically immoral)? That we are animals? That our life is transitory? That we have no responsibility? The wise one and the animal will grow closer and produce a new type [of human]. ”

(F. Nietzsche)

The "new type," always temporary and the result of hybridization and metamorphosis does not seem a figure so spectral and equivocal, despite its vagueness. It is as though man and animal were two concepts-limit, two concepts-threshold, borderline, always ready to cross over, to pass into one another, in search of a zone of indiscernibility, of indifference. Therefore, given the current state of extreme degeneration of the human type, it seems fair to think, with Nietzsche, that the animality constitutes the 'post-human' man's future – post-human animality.

Almost anticipating the current theories of the cyborg, hybridization between humans and technology, Gunther Anders (2), in the wake of Nietzsche (and Heidegger), points to how the technoscience and the megamachine, have made man anthropologically outdated compared to the world of his products, which end up dominating him. As noted by Diego Fusaro in *Essere senza Tempo. Accelerazione della storia e della vita*, Bompiani, 2010, "If there were a time in which machines had to adapt to humans, to meet their needs, today the opposite occurs: humans have to chase their technical products, so sophisticated and able to achieve their goals with a literally post-human speed".

(1) In this respect, the cry of Johnny Lydon, vocalist of famous punk rock band Sex Pistols, "No Future," on the *God Save the Queen*, should be interpreted as a rejection of modern man and, therefore, as a wish that you not produce more men in the future. Moreover, the whole punk rock movement, also mentioned by anarco-epistemologist Paul Karl Feyerabend, is a hymn to animality in the purest sense.

(2) See Gunther Anders, philosopher and sociologist, was Heidegger's student near to the Frankfurt school. His most important book is *The Outdatedness of Humankind*. P.P. Portinaro in *Il principio disperazione: tre studi su Gunther Anders*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2003 says: “*Gunther Anders builds on the Promethean shame that characterizes man by the perfection of the objects he creates... which end up dominating him ... Anders takes (and leads to extreme consequences) the Marxian analysis of commodity fetishism.*”

For Nietzsche, human actions are not moved by reason or conscience because
“oblivion is needed for every action.”

In fact, the German philosopher thought that human actions are often an expression of animal instincts from the body, while rational intelligence is just a by-product of evolution and corporeality. In this regard, in a famous passage of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche wrote:

“But the awakened one, the knowing one, saith: "Body am I entirely, and nothing more; and soul is only the name of something in the body...The body is a big sagacity... An instrument of thy body is also thy little sagacity, my brother, which thou callest "spirit"- a little instrument and plaything of thy big sagacity... Behind thy thoughts and feelings, my brother, there is a mighty lord, an unknown sage- it is called Self; it dwelleth in thy body, it is thy body. There is more sagacity in thy body than in thy best wisdom. And who then knoweth why thy body requireth just thy best wisdom?.”

In *Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense*, written at a young age, the German philosopher wrote about human intellect (calculating rationality) and knowledge:

“Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of "world history," but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die. One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature. There were eternities during which it did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no additional mission which would lead it beyond human life. Rather, it is human, and only its possessor and begetter takes it so solemnly- as though the world's axis turned within it.”

Rational calculating and knowledge, and perhaps most of man's entire history as a species, are considered by Nietzsche to be, in the least, arrogant and deceptive things, essentially trivial and ephemeral, and not only in relation to eternity and the limitlessness of the universe.

Also the *Übermensch* is seen as the one who is about to return to animal instincts, radically challenging the bourgeois consciousness.

G. W. F. HEGEL

Even those who are very ignorant of philosophy but instead are very knowledgeable in terms of ecology and degrowth, would not at an intuitive level put this philosopher on the side of ecocentrism and simplicity, but rather on the side of anthropocentrism and acceleration against the natural rhythms of the cosmic flow – For Hegel, Nature is alienation from Idea (known by everyone) or reading *en passant* with deep repulsion features on mainstream websites and

magazines. Hegel quotes such as *"the mountains, the rocks are petrified Spirit, "or" the worst criminal is better than any work of Nature, because even the most infamous criminal has a glimmer of consciousness, which Nature completely lacks."*

In fact, Hegel, in outlining his concept of historical development, defines history as progress that occurs in stages and in a dialectic form, through contradictions and oppositions, in order to reach its fulfilment with modernity.

As observed by Diego Fusaro in *Essere senza tempo*, Cit., pp. 235-236,

"If we rebuild with scrupulous care the passages in which Hegel thematizes the transition to the modern world there emerges in an impressive manner, the accelerated rhythm suddenly assumed by the historical evolution of the Spirit, eager to get back to itself after the troubled process of estrangement from self. For Hegel, modernity is then to be seen as the time when the historical process becomes faster, speeding up the pace and experiencing the rush of its existential mode of a historical phase from the future: 'In such times this spirit appears as if it - having so far proceeded in its development at a snail's pace, and having even retrograded and become estranged from itself - had suddenly adopted seven-leagued boots', varying appreciably its steps."

This passage, from *'Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte' (Lectures on the philosophy of history) 1837*, is particularly significant and must be seen in relation to the genes is of modernity.

The seven-leagued boots - which allow those who wear them to walk seven leagues in a single step, constitute a symbolic acceleration of progress - are taken by Hegel as prerogative of Weltgeist pace during times when everything seems to gaining speed, creating ontological angst of future that pervades the modern world in every fiber. In fact, for Hegel, such acceleration is not only typical of the modern world, but rather occurs at every stage of transition from one Gestalt to another, to the extent that the Spirit, having gradually renovated the deep structures of reality, suddenly erupts to the surface, breaking the 'shell' in which it was enclosed and marking a sharp break with the previous era. The 'historical heroes,' led by 'cunning of reason,' have precisely the task of opening the 'world spirit' that already renewed itself, knocking on the door and waiting to burst onto the historical field, bringing to the surface content which has already turned. "

Yet for Hegel the modern era is the acceleration of the Spirit, the ramping up of its journey, and not only because of exceptional events (the French Revolution) but also because of the Industrial Revolution, which produced an incredible increase of rhythm and breath in history, quite unusual and unique. Reason in modern times is impatient, wanting everything immediately. In fact, because of the speed of change that dominates everything, it becomes more difficult for a contemporary to philosophically understanding the modern present, as noted by Hegel. Not to mention the huge difference with the East - it is with modernity, according to Hegel, that the distance between East and West became unassailable and definitive. When compared with the endless Eastern immobility - continues Hegel - the West is characterized by an unique dynamism, determined also by the Industrial Revolution that has spawned an incredible speed in the world of capitalist economic exchanges.

So if for Hegel the anxiety and haste are elements specific to the modern Western world, the Eastern world is instead characterized by "stationary element". There is therefore no doubt whatsoever: Hegel considered all historical aspects related to

the steady state, including economic aspects negative. We can only imagine what he would think of degrowth!

Perhaps one way out in the direction of our particular perspective point of view could be indicated by Alexandre Kojève, one of the most original Hegel scholars, who led a university lecture about *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in Paris from 1933 until 1939, attended by famous students such as G. Bataille, J. Lacan, M. Merleau-Ponty, R. Queneau and others. Among the various reformulations of the theories of Hegel, Kojève reconsiders the notion of '*the end of history*,' which has unfortunately, in more recent time, been severely distorted and misrepresented by American neo-conservative authors, the so-called theorists of one-way thought post-1989, neo-liberal followers of Leo Strauss, as F. Fukuyama in his famous book *The End of History and the Last Man*, Free press, 1992.

As observed G.F. Frigo in his *Afterword* to the Italian version of A. Kojève's book, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Adelphi, Milan 2010, reconstructed through the lecture notes by R. Queneau,

"The end of history - the conclusion of the exhaustion of all its implicit potentials - involves the 'death of Man,' as with its advent anthropogenic action which is the struggle for the affirmation and recognition ceases. In this sense, the hero of Phenomenology is Napoleon, who with his universal empire established the universal recognition of all, by all. The end of the bloody struggles, wars, class and roles struggles, requires the 'block' of human perfection: the 'human essence' has exhausted its 'potential,' philosophy that followed this process step by step in becoming aware also comes to its fulfilment: wisdom turns into static contemplation. Wisdom, as sophia, is the fulfilment and the end of philosophy. Within the universal and homogeneous state 'philosopher' is no longer justified, but neither man is justified, if man is the result of multifaceted struggle for recognition: the citizen of the universal and homogeneous state is now fully and completely 'human,' indeed is projected in a 'post-human' situation, in a state of new, different 'animality'." (pp. 764-765)

It seems, therefore, that even in Hegel's older works, animality can be read as overcoming of man, as post-humanity.

KARL MARX

Like Hegel, Marx is also commonly regarded as a relentless and uncompromising advocate of the historical progress and, in addition, the development of productive forces and social relations of production -- an enemy of steady-state and slowness. However, apart from 'historic' contributions (see Bontempelli and others), a vaguely cinematographic recent essay by Enrica Tedeschi titled *Ritorno al futuro. Il modo di produzione asiatico : dispotismo orientale o comunismo primitivo?* (Back to the Future. The Asiatic Mode of Production: Oriental despotism or primitive communism?), in AA.VV., *Marx e la società del XXI secolo*, Ombre corte, Verona 2012, introduced Marx as an alternative person, a hippie, in some ways going against the grain, at least in regards to his research hypotheses.

In fact, as Gilles Deleuze argued, books, even the most difficult ones, such as those about philosophy, which often are obscure and convoluted, written in a cryptic language, reserved to an audience of specialists, a few mainstream commentators and hermeneutics, should instead be read as you listen to a record

or you see a movie. We must not, therefore, be obsessively fixed on details, but as pop-philosophers, let us grasp the inner meaning, the deep mark that "the text" imprinted in us, that "the thought" leaves us as a gift. Therefore, Enrica Tedeschi stresses, we must not be distracted, as bad exegete, by Marx's judgment on the Asiatic mode of production, as Stalin was, since it is consistent with our *Weltanschauung*, because we consider Marx being developmentalist and industrialist, loyal to his line. In fact, since the line is not there, Marx is close to the possibility of a non-linear development, more multilinear than linear, marked by interruptions, regressive aspects and imbalances, breaking hinges. *"It reminds us of the possibility of decline, of self-sufficiency, plurality and diversity of solutions in the cultural life-worlds."* (E. Tedeschi, *Cit.*, P. 112)

According to Enrica Tedeschi, the Asiatic model of production can be identified by the following constitutive factors: 1) the peculiar eco-systemic aspects of agricultural societies' environment, such as a hydro-geological nature (particularly dry or too moist), not locally manageable, but in need of major structural repair, huge works promoting the rise of absolutist forms of governance, 2) self-sufficiency and village communities that manage the common goods, primarily the exclusive collective property, a sort of "economic primitive communism" consistent with superior structures of domination, 3) presence of large economic surplus and an efficient tax collection, 4) strong hierarchical social class structure, typical of the imperial cities, in which the best are the clergy, the military caste and class of bureaucratic officials of the establishment administration.

It is almost superfluous to note the remarkable versatility of notion of *Asiatic mode of production*. This, from a certain point of view, can be used as an interpretative device to analyze the historical and sociological situation of the post-communist Russia, oppressed by the regime of the so-called spectacular *vedette* (according to the famous definition of Guy Debord) the former head-of-KGB Putin (see the recent prison two-year sentence of the punk rock band Pussy Riot), or post-revolutionary China, which holds the sad world record for the annual number of death sentences and executions and faces in serious challenges not only on the environmental front, like the rest of the West, and on animal rights, but also about the most basic constitutional guarantees of the bourgeois kind (not that we're better in Italy, see recent G8 Genoa process verdicts or strange deaths inside prisons and police stations). The lack of democracy in those regions could be considered as a manifestation of an underlying substrate of ancient despotism of a deep level in those countries.

On the other hand, there are contemporary scholars who consider the Asiatic model of production as an improper weapon to be kept constantly in the conceptual backpack, ready to be used as an anti-globalization weapon against the capitalistic market.

Enrica Tedeschi observes,

"Marx identifies the last stage of history as conflict in capitalism ... Workers' vanguard would be the only social force capable of giving the final push to the system and put an end to human prehistory: the only segment of humanity experiencing the liberation of labor from all bonds with the past. To explain this final outcome, Marx operates a deconstruction: retraces in reverse step of work evolution ... He reconstructs the various developmental stages as logical steps more than as historical sequence of concrete events... Marx's search takes place in two stages, whose watershed is established at the start of the political instability in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century ... In the German Ideology

(1845-46), and the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) references to Asian companies are aligned to the Hegelian conception of secular stagnation of Asia.

Since 1850, the Asian issue begins to be more articulated. The logical concept is increasingly being contextualized into observable reality. Marx's attention is captured by British colonialism and the impact of capitalism with 'different' companies. The best observatory is London, where Hegel lived. In "New York Daily Tribune" articles the construction of an organic concept - which makes intelligible the process of transition from classless social formations in more complex structures - takes shape. The variables are: the presence of a strong state and the absence of private property ... Marx focuses on the study of self-sufficiency of basic cells of these companies. He points out that the absence of private property does not mean the absence of surplus labor that, even in the Asian communities, serves to maintain the local aristocracy and, in the most advanced forms in which state has developed, helps to support the bureaucracy. Now . Marx is interested in measuring the revolutionary potential of the backward countries "(*ibid.*, p. 104-106).

Therefore, it seems clear that the Marxian approach is designed to create conceptual structures open and constantly being redefined, especially with regard to our field of observation. It does not escape, in this respect, the debate around the role of the mature Marx and the potential of the Russian village community (*obscina*), a rural formation commune, managed by the *mir*, the traditional assembly, similar to a council of elders, which organized the use of the collective ownership of land.

"After 1861 – year in which Tsar Alexander II abolished villeinage and promotes the emancipation of twenty million farmers - continues Enrica Tedeschi - Marx criticizes the political positions of panslavists and populist, according to whom the village community is of course already structured as a 'commune', which would make automatic the popular rebellion and the application of the communist model in the countryside. (Ibid., p.109)

For Marx, Russian peasants are not able to implement a self-organized model based on industrial proletariat model. In addition, one can not conceive communism in a regressive sense, as a return to the past, to the village community, that "that" Marx considers archaic and reactionary formation.

Later, Marx change his mind, change several times his positions about the *obscina*,

"but his last considerations, contained in the letter to Vera Zasulich, opt for a flexible and open approach to the real potential of revolt of communal peasants ... In the famous letter - written on March 8, 1881 – he wrote 'The analysis in Capital therefore provides no reasons either for or against the vitality of the Russian commune. But the special study I have made of it, including a search for original source material, has convinced me that the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia.' Therefore, he considers possible the realization of socialism without passing through capitalism and sees the rural community as a model more dynamic than he appeared years earlier. He considers it capable of supporting the transition to other forms of production. From theoretical point of view, it is necessary to focus on the potential of internal differentiation of the Asiatic model of production, of which he already had identified the articulation in primary and secondary forms. The latter would involve tensions and

contradictions, hence the possibility of alternative developments and contingencies related to the social, historical specificities, and to the level of conflict."(E. Tedeschi, Cit., P. 109-110)

Therefore even *obscina*, the village community in Russia, can be framed in a Marxist context through the conceptual device of the Asiatic model of production, as well as the Amerindian societies of the Aztecs, the Mayas and the Incas.

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