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Review

Value - Spirit Vs Technological Utopia

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Within the world economic context, the “spiritual value” in Bernard Stiegler’ terminology (2005) seems to be losing ground to the detriment of the “libidinal economy”, to use an expression belonging to the same author; this economy is characterised by consumerism, speculation, excessive mercantilism, totalitarian marketing, virtual values, greed, glaring inequality and the “reign of quantity” (René Guenon, 2008). On this background – one of disenchantment of the world, and annihilation of the old myths – older or very recent authors, the “technological utopians” as we have called them, reassure us that we are entering a new golden age – courtesy of technology – which is about to put an end to poverty, and bring abundance instead; it may also affect – to annihilation – even the human being and life on planet earth. This is why we advocate for a reification of reason, a new psychic individuation, more balance, as well as a re-enchantment of the world.

Keywords: Value, spirit, utopia, technologism, crisis, immorality, totalitarianism, distribution, myths, post-human era.

INTRODUCTION

In 1939, Paul Valéry noticed a spiritual decay in full expansion. We know what followed. At the end of the last century, Jacques Derrida made similar remarks talking about the ob-scene world, about the “pulsional television” that gives rise to “telereality”, and about an economic populism that takes advantage of the benefits provided by the new technologies, turning the spirit into a mere reflex organ, stripped of consciousness, a brain crossed by a bunch of neurons, such as those that control the behaviour of a slug and which has become mere

exchange value, whose market value is steadily decreasing. Its “cells” have gone through a phenomenon of apoptosis or phagocytosis, which empties them of any trace of consciousness. At the same time, the most refined control technologies are currently emerging.

Contemporary with Valéry, Walter Benjamin and Sigmund Freud also saw, starting with the new communications technologies, an emerging history of consciousness (and, undoubtedly, of the unconsciousness), generating a further

development of capitalism around the figure of the consumer, a kind of libidinal economy, in Bernard Stiegler's terms, which channels desires and requirements in an increasingly totalitarian way. Benjamin went as far as to talk about a "totalitarian anaesthetisation of politics", just as today we could talk about a totalitarian anaesthetisation of economy, including the new control technologies and the "manufacturing" of a new consumer "king", a new organisation of the production of wishes, a new episode of the libidinal economy.

Spiritual value

As Max Weber and Marcel Gauchet argued, the world was disenchanted, or uncharmed. Thus, out of the blue, the great destroyer of myths fighting "in the name of truth", Lucian Boia, has reached the conclusion that he did not know how history wounds were healed, maybe the future will take care of that (!), but he accredited instead four "engines" accounting for the evolution of the human society: power, wealth, sex and knowledge. It is a reductionist amalgam of a precarious spiritual condition. At least knowledge is from another register, and joining it to sex and the other two is an indication of the fact that we have different perceptions on knowledge. Probably for Mr. Boia, sex is just another kind of knowledge. To these, philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu adds freedom, for the pot to be even richer; and this despite the opposition of the great historian, who believes that people always prefer, to the greatest part, protection and not freedom; they would not know what to do with the latter anyway. Finally, they both reach the conclusion, on the stage of the Romanian Athenaeum, that they do not know what the meaning of life is (!); maybe do good to people around you, ultimately suspects the philosopher.

First of all, the myths are also part of the Truth (see Andrei Pleșu, *Parabolele lui Iisus. Adevărul ca poveste*, Humanitas, București, 2013, and Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițională românească*, Polirom, Iași, 2013); then, people are highly dependent upon them, including on their way to the knowledge; they are not "mere stories" as the philosopher posits, and not just freedom (equally hard to define) is the one to have pulled humankind frontwards; important works were written and storms were caused in its absence also. As Pope John Paul II said, "Truth is more important

than Freedom". True freedom only begins after Truth is revealed.

Concluding this digression, let us say that the re-enchantment of the world, even with the help of the knowledge technologies, means revisiting the role of the spirit in the organization of the economy and the end of what Stiegler called "the reign of the beast". The re-enchantment of the world could be a project for the future of capitalism, beginning with the action taken by the spiritual value against populism. It could become a project aimed to provide the necessary conditions for a society of knowledge, of the spirit, of consciousness. Knowledge production is possible even in the absence of the spirit, knowledge is not; also, the more elevated the spirit is, the highest the value of knowledge will be. Some people talk here not about phenomenology, but about a technology of the spirit.

During these difficult years, we have had to test, both at individual and at society level, a remarkable intelligence and a saving sense of responsibility, which could help us evolve as human beings, and not as mere crawling slugs. We are faced with many dangers and challenges, which are likely to turn us into post-human, inhuman beings. Or, there is no other way than creating a culture governed by a new trans-human consciousness. The changes required are so deep that they even seem unimaginable. At this point, it is again Lucian Boia who can help us, since he has long flirted with the imaginary (2006).

There will be years with less classical resources, narrower leeways, less reliable and less helpful years (so as not to call it despair). There will be years of scarcity and insecurity, years we will get through by declining the verb to be rather than to have, and by doing more with less and less. The era of consumerism is gone. We need a new quality growth, with a net improvement in distribution and redistribution; we need a new modernisation. And some of these transformations may not occur in a peaceful way, at least not unless we prove intelligent enough, and we revalorise the spirit and increase the level of consciousness. A new world war would be fatal and should be avoided at all costs.

The qualitative increase is based not on "always more" but on "always better", and on a better redistribution, on an increase in the individual and collective consciousness, leading to the formation of a comparable conscience. Consciousness – Intelligence – Action – Lucidity – Responsibility, these are the words that should guide our efforts to

get out of this time marked by gregarious mentality, by unconscious brains and nervous systems converted into automated, pulsional systems, so as to answer the marketing systems turned toxic for the human being.

Mental regression and the moral slippage that accompanies it, the anaesthesia of the intelligence and, thus, of the will, are the “values” governing the contemporary world and the speeches of those who govern it. Change can only be possible through a spiritual and intellectual awakening, an increase in the spiritual value leading to a modification of this system based on unlimited growth, on blind and suicidal consumption. Never before has mankind been so blinded, so brutalised and irresponsible. The entire social life is controlled by the money industry, destroying individual and collective consciousnesses.

Only the fight against the beast provides the opportunity to re-enchant the world. It is important to give reason its primary meaning: that of reason (motivation) to live, that of *logos* of Aristotle's *nous*, reason as a means of orienting the existence. Only a disenchanting world could be dominated by the frozen values of modernity, by the de-sacralised platitudes of the elite whose domination ambitions were aimed precisely at turning culture into a gregarious form and society into an idiotizing, amorphous mass, incapable of any discernment and reaction, fit solely for work and pay taxes, a new slavery. The destruction of community spirit through an exacerbated individualism, “the reign of quantity” (Guenon, 2008), coarse materialism and ferocious selfishness; these are the “values” that our children learn in the idiotizing camps called schools and universities.

As Weber (2003) argued, for this to happen, we first needed a deceptive enchantment of the world, by means of a new religious offer – the Protestant one – which paved the way for all these “freedoms”, together with another technology of the spirit – the printing machine. Thus, instead of traditional spirituality, the world was introduced with a “new spirit”, packed in a new form, one that Weber called rationalism-rationalisation, and which may be understood as a technicization and an account of all human activities, which constitutes in fact a new definition of reason, as *ratio*, i.e. a simple calculation; this led to the collapse of what we call the spiritual values of societies, a collapse that the followers of the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer,

Adorno and Habermas) called a reification of reason.

Libidinal economy

The age we live in displays extremely low levels of spirituality, reaching extreme limits; this accounts for the need for change, for inventing a new spirit of capitalism, proportional with a decreasing trend in desires, the main libidinal energy of the current system, which exploits its pulsions, a dangerous and explosive phenomenon. Therefore, capitalism needs a new spirit to survive, although it does not have a credible alternative yet. Capitalism must be open to the values of the spirit and abandon the consumerist populism.

Television and the Internet, the new “spiritual tools”, have become massively pulsional, especially after 11.09.2001. Since then, we have been invaded by innumerable forms of commercial and political populism, various kinds of fanaticism and regressions of all genres; hence the necessity of inventing a new model built around the spiritual value. These are also techniques used for the manipulation and the control of opinions, by means of which some post-modern sophists are trying to turn knowledge into an instrument of power. Today, philosophy has a double battle to fight: on the one hand, one with itself, with the sciences in general and with the human sciences in particular; on the other hand, a fight against this world of knowledge, in order to impose a new spirit and a new intelligence, a new psychological individuation. Although worn with the weapons philosophy, this is however a political struggle.

Psychological individuation is seen here as a process aimed at the training and the mental transformation of individuals; and, through them at the transformation of the societies they form, as a means of reuniting the society to the service of a higher cause, based both on past experience, and on the new knowledge, which binds us to the past and guarantees unity projecting a certain future. The techniques and technology allow both a spiritual elevation, an increase in the spiritual value, and a dismantling, or regression, causing the decrease in this value. Defining the conditions under which a particular technology can lead to spiritual growth or regression, to the emergence or the reduction of capitalism, financierised to dehumanization, pertains

to the fields of politics and economics. The new political economy we need is a matter of life and death for humanity. This is why it cannot be left to economists only.

A true policy should be able to promote an economy of the spirit, without substituting itself to the economic initiative, but providing a framework of social and legal norms, as well as the necessary public investment, and crystallizing a political and spiritual will, that is, increasing the level of individual and collective intelligence, in the attempt to transgress the ignorance and re-enchantment for the survival of the human being and its elevation to the life of the spirit (Hannah Arendt).

Technological utopia

History advances at a slow pace. There is an almost understandable inertia and convenience, though the rhythms differ from people to people. However, from time to time acceleration phenomena occur when history rushes. Evolution is then interrupted by revolutions. The latter may be due to the emergence and application of ideas, by significant technological breakthroughs, demographic processes, natural events, etc. I intend to analyse here, more broadly, the technological vector, certainly in close connection to the others, as they mutually reinforce each other and amplify their effects.

In many people's opinion, the revolution brought about by new technologies exceeds by far the importance and meanings of the Italian Renaissance. Mankind has always considered utopia, including the technological one, a desired gate of escape from the human condition. The world has constantly secreted utopias, as forms of dream, in order to make reality bearable and maintain hope. Contemporary technological utopianism is indeed a radical lifting of the stake, because it turns man into a replaceable component within the system, and it brings about, for the first time, the "post-human" and/ or "post-earthly future", because technology – they say – will allow moving to another planet, or even its unrecognisable changing. Followers of the technological optimism claim that by 2030, non-biological intelligence will surpass human intelligence. Our bodies will thus present a new version: 2.0., with spectacular upgrades – the super-human condition, so to say, in which "reasoning" will no longer be restricted to humans only.

However, the change driven by technology has considerably increased the dynamics, the pace of evolution. Moreover, properly harnessed, technology will allow building, or rather rebuilding the world we want, rather than the one we are afraid of. It is even hoped that we will not longer be afraid of death. Perhaps if we solve this mystery we will become gods (or golems!); or perhaps we have already long become gods, and we have forgotten or not we didn't even realise, busy with so many technologies. As argued by Moore's Law (Gordon Moore – co-founder of Intel), the computing power of computers doubles every 18 months. The followers of technological utopianism argue that this exponential rate can be extrapolated to the entire technology. Thus, they argue, vast amounts of wealth could be created, so that we may also enter a post-poverty era.

Therefore, technological innovation will ensure the further domination of liberal capitalism, eliminating the potential political unrest and even diseases and epidemics which no longer stand any chance. All remedies will be on Google. We are announced the arrival of a new golden era of humankind, called the "Internet Renaissance". Not only famine, but also war will disappear, becoming futile. History reaches amazing heights: a perfect future. A feverish optimism was established in the environments of technological utopians, aimed at an infinite progress, normal and natural. Bill Gates, for instance, states that "a realistic estimate of the human condition commits to an optimistic view of the world". In his turn, Tzvetan Todorov considers that human life will be "guided from now on by a project for the future, not by an authority from the past". This future would have a powerful, hypnotic effect on the secularised Western imagination.

What can I say? All the great utopias promised a golden future. Only the more we approached it, the farther it went – the "pipe dream". Unfortunately, it should be pointed out that all these utopias ended badly, generating awful disillusionment. This time however, there could be some reasons to be optimistic, on condition that these formidable technologies – which are ultimately mere tools, means – be used to the service of the common well-being, thus, for purely benign purposes. Every coin has two sides, and the use of these means for other purposes could destroy mankind. The stake is huge.

Among these optimists, there is also the Nobel Prize-winning economist Jeffrey Sachs, who

solemnly announced in 2005, in his *The End of Poverty*, that crisis is no longer possible due to these “breathtaking” technological advances. Two years later, the crisis indeed cut our breath. For Sachs, these scientific and technological systems will lead to the installation of political systems that promote peace, rationality, welfare and democracy in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Nothing more than sweet fruit. Meanwhile, experts found a decline in democracy around the globe, an increase in authoritarianism, an extremely dirty war in which everyone has come into conflict with everyone, a completely irrational war, bore with unimaginable means. As for the welfare... its name is global, structural, systemic crisis. Isn't thus better to be a little more tempered, more balanced? And always ask ourselves, as H.-R. Patapievici (2001) urged us, what is lost when something is gained?

Neither Bill Gates nor Jeffrey Sachs consider themselves utopians, but rather realistic. By 2025, they foresee the achievement of a world without extreme poverty, certainly due to the technological progress. For the first time in history, we will achieve surplus beyond the human needs, a plus of wealth that is fairly arranged. Sachs's prophecies would actually represent the universalisation of liberal capitalism. In communism, they were called “svetloie buduşceie” meaning “bright future”. Only the present was always dull.

These promises have nothing religious; they are based solely on technology. It is a sort of Messianism without the Messiah. Although many religions seem to reborn – and I refer here to Islamism, Taoism, Hinduism and even to some Christian denominations – they are not assigned any merit, although there is a well-known connection between their core teachings and their attitudes towards poverty, for instance. And some people's hope that religions will evolve into some version of the secularised Western liberalism is not at all justified. This resembles a lot to the fundamentalist stupidity of Fukuyama, regarding the “end of history”.

It seems like someone insists on us believing that the universalisation of the Western liberal democracy represents the future of humankind, its ultimate form of government, which is deemed to ensure perpetual peace and excessive well-being for everyone, this time based on the technological vector. Thus, the fight against poverty, climate change, happiness itself is not an economic,

political, or moral issue; it is rather a technical one, a technique that brings us the light.

On the other hand, we can see an idle, an increasingly closed West, with significant demographic problems, desecralised and which gives the impression of a *fin de siècle*. Clearly, they no longer have the answers to the problems of humankind. It is not at all clear that liberalism will prevail in this century; and this is visible in the decline of democratic governance in different parts of the world. We are now informed that the first step is to enthrone order; only then can the time of freedom come, just like in the case of the “Arab spring”. In other words, first we need *Big Brother*, to follow our every move (there is adequate technology for this purpose, and it is actually used). Only then can freedom begin...

Religion disappears from the West, it is true; but it explodes, just like the war, in vast regions of the poor world. Dictatorships revive at various places, while some large emerging powers may be writing the obituary of communism; nevertheless, what grows beneath is an authoritarian, non-liberal capitalism, which seems to be more successful than its liberal version. The optimists and technological utopians began to announce their victory – paradoxically or not – just as the smattering political, economic and ideological consensus – built after 1991 – began to erode.

CONCLUSIONS

People have always oscillated between exaltation and despair, passing through many intermediate stages. Nowadays, the belief in a *deus ex machina* waiting to come from the internet and solve the problems can twist the minds of many. But I still cannot see how some technical means can resolve the serious moral, political, economic, etc. problems that the humankind is faced with. Utopianism or optimism as such do not constitute a problem, but rather their inadequacy to reality, the lack of an attribute that is very dear to these illuminists, namely rationality. Faith in technology cannot become, in any circumstance, a quasi-religion. Why? Because it lacks emotion, for instance. And morals. And love...

In 1939, Paul Valery and Walter Benjamin noticed a widespread spiritual decay. We know what followed. Something similar can be noticed

nowadays, a decay of the spiritual value and the capital of virtue to the profit of a libidinal economy (B. Stiegler), which channels the wishes and the demands of the consumers, organising the production of wishes through a totalitarian marketing. It requires an economic and political change, or a political economy, if you like. We need a new growth, a quality growth, an improved distribution and a re-moralisation of the system. This change is crucial for humanity. We need a re-enchancement of the world, a spiritual growth, a reification of reason and a new psychic individuation, leading to a decisive change in the individuals and, ultimately, in our societies.

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