

The Bet

Index:

Introduction

Real risks

The thesis

Consequences and conclusions

And here's the bet

Introduction

Modern society has generated an enormous amount of work aimed at producing useless objects and services. Obviously, those who support the affluent society, or consumer society, state that the production of any good or service represents a chance for someone to earn a living and send their child to school. Certainly, every job is useful for someone. But that doesn't mean that the product of his work is useful. It is all too easy to show examples: among snacks for children and fighter-bombers for adults there are all the inessential products that an "illustrious" entrepreneur has quantified in 70% of the production. While calling it inessential, he exalted it! Of course! according to our entrepreneur, the machine of social desire must work at full capacity. Nothing is more necessary than the superfluous! It feeds "income, happiness, progress". It is difficult to reflect on the fact that the development of increasingly refined goods, while achieving income for the citizen-worker and satisfaction for the citizen-consumer, involves the retroaction on basic collective consumption, determining their decline. If 500,000 Europeans die every year from respiratory problems due to atmospheric pollution, it means that some productions have feedback on a primary good such as the air they breathe. Needless to add countless examples. Furthermore, it would be necessary to investigate the sense of emptiness and the irremediable unhappiness experienced by ever more extensive masses. However, I do not want to debate controversial issues linked to visions different from mine. Better to move the subject elsewhere.

Covid19 previewed the model of conditions that will occur in the future. It did so, at first, by determining the closure of that complex of productions that have been called "inessential"; then, with the second wave of the

pandemic, acting on catering services, tourism, culture and everything that was not strictly necessary for manufacturing production. The result? a crisis never seen after the Second World War!

Now, something like this will happen in the very near future, but it will not be a virus that will decide the cancellation of the production surplus. Other conditions will lead to the collapse of truly inessential production. This could happen in two ways: a) as a new international governance following the acknowledgment of the unsustainability of a secular system or b) as a systemic collapse. The second possibility is more likely. The persistent insistence with which the supporters of this social organization will want to keep alive two corpses, the corpses of the liberal economy and the liberal society, will determine the definitive collapse of civilization.

Real risks

A startling forgetfulness induced by the pandemic can be identified in the removal of the environmental issue from the political landscape. It would seem a understandable fact given the urgency to safeguard the functioning of health structures or to support economic activities undermined by the circulation of the virus. A fact remains: whether we like it or not, the environmental issue cannot be canceled by suspending its discussion. It is the real "stone guest"! Most humans do not want to accept the idea, but what Gunter Anders called a "reignless apocalypse" is coming. Anders was referring to the atomic war between superpowers. That was a potential apocalypse, which, fortunately, hasn't happened yet. Even the dominant human are "perplexed" at employing *ultimate* weapons. Instead, the apocalypse that is coming in great strides is damn more treacherous. It does not manifest itself as an instantaneous explosion that incinerates the world. No, it cooks it on a low flame. The new apocalypse has already begun, and it silently accompanies the live of the world community and a large part of non-human life. It just waits to unleash its fury by welding together feedback loops that we tend to think as separate. All this has not yet been understood. The companies that extract fossils have not understood it, nor have understood political parties, nor economists, nor trade unions, nor workers, nor consumers: all are clamoring for the maintenance of a cornucopia now withered as its meager contents.

Humans have not understood dynamics inscribed in quasi-deterministic processes carved on the metal pages of the book of future history. Only a superhuman effort, therefore *not very human*, can allow us to deviate from an extremely probable docking. Which docking? *the fall of the West*,

the regression of civilization, the end of history as it has been imagined for centuries, the entrance into a permanent dystopia, an eternal conflict.

The chain of events is quite definite. To understand it we must refer to the attributes of what is now universally called "anthropocene": 1) the climatic warming connected to the use of fossil fuels, 2) the enormous extraction of resources that opens up the problem of sustainability, 3) the transformation of extracted resources into immense heaps of refusal and the spread of pollution over vast territories. Points (1), (2) and (3) then determine, as a direct effect, 4) the destruction of biodiversity whose delicate balance represents the condition for the permanence of life.

The exponential acceleration of the four phenomena will lead to the destruction of vast areas of the ecumene. Millions of people will flee from the misery and disruption of their lands. They will go where they think they will find refuge by meeting the reaction of other peoples, also by now seriously impoverished, who will reject them thus decreeing the end of all possible human solidarity. Ideologies, ethnicisms and new religious wars will arise from the new Pandora's box in an attempt to find a simple and impossible solution for the new emergencies. The world elites, overwhelmed by the complexity of the problems and committed to finding the few remaining resources in a vain attempt to appease the anger of their respective peoples, will no longer be able to relaunch their respective economies if not by attacking the latest nonrenewable resources of nature. And in doing so they will only make the situation worse. The resentment of the populations, lured for decades by the impossible promises of infinite progress and misled by the fall into unexpected conditions, will feed the nationalisms that have played such a role in the devastation of the last century. The war of all against all is likely in a context in which passions will prevail over reason.

There is no need to insist too much on the creepy scenarios that should worry and which instead tend to be ignored. There is now a very "materialistic" literature extending extensively on these looming dangers; whoever wants can have access to it. Unfortunately human knowledge has been constructed in an atomistic, piecemeal way, each issue is viewed separately from everything. In this way it is thought that, for better or worse, it is possible to find definitive or even partial solutions, and to get out of any dangerous condition. What is missing is an overview that allows us to identify the effects that an event is able to generate on others, causing an uncontrollable reaction. There are few truly alarmed voices capable of linking together the effects of human action on the planet:

scholars of non-mechanistic sciences, the actual Pope, some radical movements. However, although they are concerned about looming dangers and able to see the interconnections between environmental, economic, political and social issues, not all of them offer solutions. Many of them stop at warnings by asking politics to pay attention to future dangers hoping that adequate solutions will be put in place. Do they find ears available?

It must be said that politics, once completely deaf to environmental issues, have now changed their attitude. Following the pressures of climate scholars and alerted by increasingly extreme phenomena connected to climate warming and ruinous on the economic level, the States have for some decades promoted international conferences that have always rigorously failed. The production acceleration did not stop and CO₂ continued to increase despite the signatures on protocols full of cold intentions. But since the production acceleration leads to an acceleration of environmental and atmospheric phenomena, the anxiety to find some drastic solution is also accelerated. Thus were born the Green New Deals in Europe and the United States and various policy programs aimed at trying to reduce the impact of fossils on the world's economies.

Long last! everything ok then? no way, friend!. We should remember that there are four manifestations of the anthropocene. Of these, excess CO₂ production is only the first. Moreover the idea that global warming can be solved in an absurd way is widespread. It is assumed that CO₂ abatements can arise thanks to technological solutions that would even create a further push towards the development of new super-skilled jobs capable of occupying the surplus workforce. In the past, things have manifested just that way. But the resources of the planet were largely untouched. As if this were not enough, this illusion carries with it another one: the belief that the climate question and its annexes can be resolved:

without a radical reconstruction of the main institutions of the human community: the state, the constitutions, the property relations, the jurisdiction that governs them, the economic theory and much more.

With this paper I does not intend to delve into widely debated issues that in the near future are destined to capture the scene at a fast pace. But

since this debate remains internal to logics that we could classify as mainstream, whether they develop within the business or technological or political or (even) environmentalist world, I will try to bring out theses that run underground and struggle to get general attention. They are antithetical theses to the picture that is proposed from everywhere. These theses are antithetical to the dreams that offer wired cities with futuristic technologies; to the dreams of superficial environmentalism; to those of a more aware environmentalism that looks at reality in a worried way but that keeps the hope of saving, as they say, goat and cabbage. Now we can move on to the theses

The thesis

Thesis 1 – No alternative energy, except nuclear energy, can significantly support an economy previously based on fossil fuels

The acceleration with which Western civilization – and, later, globalization – gained momentum was made possible only by the use of energy concentrated in carbonaceous fossils. The current support for production is still guaranteed by ample supplies of oil, gas, coal. If this availability were to be lacking, humanity would only have solar energy available in various ways, but distributed in too extensive forms. Therefore, alternative energies, in addition to causing undoubted environmental problems (if pushed beyond a certain threshold), would encounter objective limits that would restrict their availability.

Corollary: affluent society is destined to disappear with the end – or drastic reduction – of the use of fossil energies

Thesis 2 - The problems of the man-environment relationship are not caused by the lack, but by the excessive availability of energy

We must remember the four factors that characterize the anthropocene:

1. climate warming
2. frenzied extractivism
3. dissemination of pollution
4. destruction of biodiversity

A hypothetical inexhaustible energy source without effects of the first kind in the hands of a species still impregnated with speciesist ideology (the belief of human centrality in the life of the Planet) would be simply

devastating for the accelerating effects on (2), (3), (4). It would allow our species to expand its presence to colonize the last square meter of the Earth, destroying the very foundations of life.

Corollary: *Nuclear energy could solve the effects of global warming (1), but, regardless of **well-founded** classical objections, it must be rejected **even** for consequent effects on (2) (3) (4)*

Thesis 3 – *By virtue of its technological capacity, the human being is the only species that causes irreparable wounds on the planet's skin. Every technological development determines entropic accelerations, that is, a rapid increase in the disorder of the process so far fixed by evolution*

The third thesis extinguishes some fundamental hopes that rest in the depths of the human. In particular, the reconstructive or restorative capacity of the original environments through technological or geoengineering solutions. The only possibility, if you want to try to restore a lost condition in a certain area, consists in a lightening of the anthropogenic pressure, in a more or less marked "retreat". The greater this solution, the higher – but never certain – the chances of recovery. We must warn against another illusion. Ecology studies the interrelationships between all living beings (biocenosis) and the environment that hosts them (biotope). Humanity breaks this balance. There is no doubt that it too is in a state of dependence with respect to other species, but since the beginning of its appearance, it plays a decisive role in breaking the pre-existing equilibrium and, little by little, upsets it. Let's ask ourselves a question. Can we speak of "ecological balance" in the ecumene (the terrestrial space colonized by humans) if the biomass of farmed animals represents a weight 15 times higher than the biomass of all wild animals? or if the current weight of the manufats exceeds that of the biomass of the entire Earth? Ecology cannot constitute the science of an environment in which human beings represent a significant presence! In short, the human claim to assume "ecological behavior" is absurd; he can only attempt to minimize the damage associated with his activities. Behind the idea for environmental protection or ecological behavior by politicians and entrepreneurs – by now everything has become "ecological" because it is fashionable – there is the concealment of variously impacting and almost always very serious activities.

Corollary: *no modern human activity performs (or can perform) an ecological function*

Consequences and conclusions

We start from the hypothesis that the three propositions illustrated are well founded. If so, which road should be taken to avoid the chasm? It is necessary to insist on a fact that we always tend to forget: the human problems related to the relationship with the environment cannot be exclusively traced back to climate change, but to the set of four factors that have been repeatedly mentioned.

Of the three theses, the second is the one to take into consideration the most: the excess of energy availability has proved catastrophic. The large availability of energy is slowly but literally erasing resources that evolution has produced over millions of years. The creeping power of energy is not perceptible to a species that directs its attention to other interests; profit, for example, or the exercise of power. For this reason, *even*, nuclear energy must be canceled. In turn, the first thesis, although it obliges us to drastic rethink about the consumer society, must be accepted with serenity: the clean energies obtainable without absurd forcing, together with the quantity of fossil energy compatible with the protection of the climate, the environment and biodiversity constitute the limit condition from which it is possible to derive, backwards, the *possible economy*.

The third thesis, in turn, tells us that technological solutions are not capable of maintaining current mass consumption because the idea that they allow us to produce more with fewer resources and less energy is simply a lie. This can be demonstrated by drawing on the pioneering studies of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and those who collected and developed them. To this we must add the definitive consideration according to which human social behavior – inevitably technological – is not, nor can it be, ecological. This means that every production – even in a low intensity energy system (see, eg. the case of Rapa Nui) – should be carefully evaluated in its impacting implications before being implemented to verify its compatibility with problems (2), (3), (4).

If the theses are true, the consequences are obvious. We need an abrupt slowdown in the human capacity to dissipate natural stocks (the real problem of the species); moreover, it is also necessary to reduce the absorption of flows produced by nature. In other words, society must be organized so that it can withstand a production shock such as has never been seen in economic history. Obviously, it is impossible to go into details, but it is clear that the abatement of human activities in

developed countries must be vertical. Consider that billions of humans still live in unacceptable conditions that need to be healed, so their context cannot bear any decrease in the production of indispensable goods, rather, the opposite. Furthermore, it has been ascertained that development was created by creating, in turn, underdevelopment; also for this reason a rebalancing of the living conditions among peoples is an absolute moral duty.

In short, beyond any specious and pedantic reasoning, the material resources on which the species draws must drastically decrease. It is not a whim dictated by undesirable pauperistic philosophies, but the right price to pay for having taken the wrong and dangerous paths. The human species has made very serious mistakes towards itself (in particular towards a part of itself), towards the biological environment that gave it life, towards its traveling companions on this Planet, those who persists to call "animals". When would this tough transition phase end? When Homo sapiens will be able to decrease its number, it will have the opportunity to catch its breath and give itself a few more chances (provided, in the meantime, he does not forget to create a just society). After all, the law is very simple: if the material resources that a species can access are finite, within reasonable limits the per capita availability increases with the decrease of heads.

How should we proceed? No single individual can give those recipes that only good politics could define. However, it is certain that only drastic measures could immediately begin to give great breath to our planet and reopen perspectives to human destiny. Let's assume some unavoidable objectives:

- Eliminating all breeding would mean a) stop colonizing huge spaces still rich in biodiversity, b) return to biodiversity large areas not yet irreversibly damaged, c) drastically reduce the green deserts of monocultures, d) get rid of zoonoses and therefore of inevitable future pandemics, e) gaining collective health thanks to the consumption of exclusively vegetable foods, f) recovering the relationship of empathy with other species lost from time immemorial with surprising effects on collective mental health.

- Eliminating air flights – at least those destined for mass tourism - would mean offering an immediate increase in air quality.

- Eliminating weapon systems – all weapon systems – would mean freeing up an immense amount of raw materials; it would mean an important saving of fossil energy; but it would also mean

preventing dangerous psychopaths from continuing wars and conflicts that involve, first of all, the suffering imparted to unarmed populations, and then the destruction of artifacts and the acceleration of entropy.

– Reducing the use of private mobility – abandoning the dreams of impossible ecological cars (who speaks of it is in bad faith) – would mean recovering a large part of matter and energy for different uses.

– Conversely, if the economies in poor countries were developed correctly, the demographic brake necessary to bring the species back to its right number would be determined (which in any case should also be recalculated in "developed" countries).

It would therefore be necessary to act on everything else to cancel the useless economy that has a heavy effect on the wounds inflicted on the Planet. It is useless to delude oneself. The effect of all the interventions would be enormous compared to the temporary losses that the world economies have suffered due to the pandemic, and, above all, it would be durable for indeterminate period.

It is useless to go further on matters that no single individual can detail. Instead, it is better to stop and reflect on the flavor of "utopia" that seems to accompany the proposals illustrated. The adjustment of modern societies to a level of austerity which is unimaginable today seems absurd. I am perfectly aware of this. But let's think. Utopia is an imaginary vision of something that is out of reality. This term should not be used in the context of our discussion because it is improper: if a desirable and possible state of things is opposed by preponderant political forces, there is no reason to accuse the project of being utopian. There is no reason to think that weapons systems cannot be eliminated, or mass air tourism, or that private mobility cannot be replaced by public mobility. Therefore, strictly speaking, since the problem has a conventional nature, that is linked to the choices of political subjects, talking about "utopia" is misleading. It was not utopian to aspire to the cancellation of slavery or to universal suffrage. All this makes us understand how every solution – all the proposals made are materially feasible – can encounter very hard obstacles (just think of how human work should be rethought in a condition such as the one outlined, a huge, truly titanic issue), but not impossible. Of course, none of this will happen without new institutions. Adequate institutions are needed which can only spring from political subjectivities capable of inserting themselves as a hinge between a world in decline, the one that rejects the three theses, and a new world, the one

that takes them into consideration. In the absence of these political subjectivities, imagining the idea that human activity may have some chance of being brought back to a level of compatibility with the biological laws of life means falling into the most burning illusion. But, I repeat, "utopia" has nothing to do with it

And here's the bet

Frankly I do not think that this humanity is able to become vegan, pacifist, austere in consumption, the enemy of the intoxication of the chemical and psychological poisons that it absorbs daily. I don't think it accepts that it wants to pass towards life, considering that it is prone to necropolitics and its false promises. I know that talking about "humanity" is risky. In fact, humanity is made up of exploiters and exploited, but compared to the nineteenth-century binary canons (proletarians vs exploiters) things have changed a lot. The stratification has increased, and in the current context, full of dangers and risks of regression, everyone clings to what he has and does not want to lose it. This belongs to the logic of things. Therefore, in the absence of a numerically relevant class and with well-defined interests, leaving one state of things to enter another is considered an adventure not to be run. Unfortunately, there is still no political entity capable of carrying out a mass pedagogical action and freeing minds from falsehoods and fears in the perspective of a great transformation of civilization. It follows that the system (in its broadest meaning) becomes a conglomerate of elements that are certainly litigious, but which hold each other tightly, confirming the collective will to push towards the abyss.

So, the bet is this:

I bet that if the three theses are not placed at the basis of the future choices of peoples, humanity will enter the descending branch of the parable of its history and will experience the descent into hell.

Of course, bets can also be lost. However, I propose it with a serene spirit. Indeed, if the theses prove to be false, general attention will be turned to the fireworks of the "magnifiche sorti e progressive" of "Human" and the ravings of an "unknown catastrophist" will simply be forgotten. Besides, I'll be extremely glad I was wrong. If, on the other hand, the thesis turn out to be "pregnant", those responsible will have to explain why the road to perdition was taken and to serve what interests. If the Cartesian science, the business, and the ineptitude of bad politics – three highly integrated areas – will lead to the realization of something far from their eternal promises and if, indeed, the worst dystopian fears materialize, then it will be granted to re-propose the paraphrase of a famous marxian anathema: the "great" responsables for future catastrophes will be nailed to that eternal pillory from which they cannot be redeemed by any

exculpation, because they will have had the opportunity to make different choices, and they will not have made them. And given that, despite the collapse of History, their names will leave traces, it will be possible for children and grandchildren to discover their "deeds" and piss on their graves.

aldo sottofattori 20.11.2020