

Ethics in the Era of Globalization

In this title we have the conjunction of two terms, ethics and globalization. We can note the importance of the first term in the beginnings of philosophical thought. The second term, “globalization” on the other hand has not yet acquired, at least in the dictionaries consulted, the signification which interests us for the purposes of this debate.

Although it looks like a neologism, the term “global” is not new and can claim some titles of nobility. The word was used for the first time in 1950, of course in a different context, but still in the way we use it, by the most modern champion of the subjectivist concept of politics, Carl Schmitt. Let us recall that Jacques-Alain Miller commented on this author several times in his course “The nature of semblants”¹.

In *Il nomos della terra*², Carl Schmitt introduces the term global, not as a solution but as a question, into a series of problems to be resolved. What is to be resolved is the necessary dialectic between the norm and the localization, between *die Ordnung* and *die Ortung*. We might say, using our categories, that the norm and the law belong to the symbolic and that the real is linked to the earth, the thing that Man inhabits³. The solution he sees as feasible – again, using our categories – is that of semblance. In this light, making war is considered as a purely symbolic game in which, despite deaths and devastation, the rules of the game are followed.

For Carl Schmitt, “global” has a purely political sense, whereas the current use of the term shrouds the political aspect in economic finery. We must recall in passing the importance Lacan gave, not only to politics but also to what could be the weight of psychoanalysis in politics – a weight it does not have at present. And recall as well, the importance Lacan gave to economists' studies, as he emphasizes in Seminar XVII, *L'envers de la psychanalyse*. It is for analysts, says Lacan, to institute this other field of energy – that of jouissance which would require other structures than those of physics⁴.

Psychoanalysis and cybernetics

Globalization is a revolution, a silent revolution, a total revolution. It is a revolution because it modifies the relationship of the subject to the Other. It is a revolution because it disrupts the level of communication.

This disruption breaks up the borders separating individuals. In a globalized world, anybody, near or far, can become our neighbor. Globalization implies a radical transformation of time and space never achieved before now. Globalization means that a human action can spread simultaneously from one part of the world to another, annulling time and space.

So what is the vehicle for diffusion such as this? It is communication. But communication, the

1 J.-A. Miller, “La natura dei sembianti”, *La psicoanalisi n° 13*, Astrolabio, Rome, 1993, p.183.

2 C. Schmitt, *Il nomos della terra*, Adelphi, Milan, 1991.

3 For a confrontation of Carl Schmitt's thesis with that of Hans Kelsen, see N. Irti, *Norma e luoghi. Problemi di geo-diritto*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2001.

communication of globalization, uses time and space in the particular dimension of cybernetics where space is without space and time is timeless.

In 1955, in his conference “Psychoanalysis and Cybernetics”, Lacan speaks, when he refers to cybernetics, of “wonders”⁵. These wonders touch on the fact that cybernetics, like psychoanalysis, is coextensive to language. Today, others speak of the wonders of cybernetics as well, but in a different sense – in the sense of the results obtained by globalization in the politico-economic field through cybernetics.

“Why does globalization do us good?” asks the subtitle of Paulo Del Debbio's recent book⁶. If that were the case, and nothing is less certain, the problem would be to find out if globalization does others good as well.⁷ Noam Chomsky thinks that it does good neither to us nor to anyone else.⁸ In fact many are those who deplore, each in their own way, the disasters past and still to come. I will not enter into the merits of the voluminous literature about the *Global or No-Global*, nor the different models, of would-be *Global Governance* anymore than the comments on the goodness or perversity of globalization. Nevertheless, we will briefly allude to certain aspects of globalization.

Globalization

First aspect: globalization contains within itself the reduction of just anyone to the function of the neighbor, a neighbor to love according to the principles of biblical law and one to be eliminated according to the principles of structure – the other, as we know, occupying our own vital space.

Second aspect: globalization is a universalisation through the imaginary, where the third party is eliminated. This brings about the suppression of the dialectics of friend/enemy, and the reduction of the adversary to a criminal. Fear and insecurity find sustenance there.

Third aspect: globalization, which has no defined space, imperils the sovereignty of States whose laws, for their part, are tied to defined space.

Fourth aspect: globalization does not produce communities but shopping centers. Rather than citizens, it produces consumers.

Fifth aspect: globalization goes hand and hand with information, where facts and opinions are intentionally manipulated on a worldwide scale.

Sixth aspect: globalization generates tension with the local, for which the supposed remedy would be the so-called *Glocal*.

Seventh aspect: globalization questions the pact between citizens and States upon which democracy is founded, a word often used in many States, and not the least among them, for nothing more than to conceal oligarchies. Democracies swallowed up in an *Empire*⁹, the title given to a book by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in which we see *The End of Liberty*, another title, this time of a book written by Gore

4 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse*, Seuil, Paris, 1991, p. 93.

5 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre II, Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et la technique de la psychanalyse*, Seuil, Paris, 1978, p. 339.

6 P. Del Debbio, *Global. Perché la globalizzazione ci fa bene*, Mondadori, Milan, 2002.

7 See A. Bononi, *La comunitamaledetta. Viaggio nella coscienza di luogo*, Ed. di Comunita Turin, 2002 and Z. Bauman, *Dentro la globalizzazione. Les conseguenze sulle persone*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2001.

8 N. Chomsky, *Sulla nostrapelle. Mercato globale o movimento globale?* Tropea, Milan, 1999.

9 M. Hardt, A. Negri, *Impero. Il nuovo ordine della globalizzazione*, Rizzoli, Rome, 2001.

Vidal.¹⁰ A. Baldassarre hypothesizes that the era of Locke's morality of democracy is over and that the revenge of Hobbes' absolute sovereign, enlightened or not, is looming on the horizon.¹¹

The grinding machine

Lacan's teaching could shed multiple lights on all these aspects but I will limit myself for the moment to isolating just one of them. I would like to emphasize the functioning of this grinding machine which strives towards its own ends.

For some time now economists have realized that the free market functioned according to its own internal laws, strictly symbolic then, which express the real functioning absolutely independent of any subjectivity.

Lacan reminds us that cybernetics on which the free market bases itself, and globalization therefore, is a science of empty places, of encounters in and of themselves, a science where there is combination, totalization – Lacan does not say globalization. It is a science that starts functioning all by itself¹². This accounts for the irrepressible character – like that of the signifying chain – of the functioning of the politico-economic system that is the free market. Yet today we come to give a meaning, a direction, finality to this irrepressible functioning, articulated as Lacan says specifically for cybernetics, as a syntax.

The market is thus comparable to a self-regulated machine, after Adam Smith's image of “the invisible hand”¹³. From whence comes the free marketers' command to not upset the free market machine, since not only is its functioning inescapable but it knows where it is going as well. I want to underline these two aspects: it is a machine and a machine with a direction. We are familiar with the nature of this machine because it is founded in cybernetics – it is a language machine. If this self-regulated machine has a direction, then its final cause enters into play.

May I remind you of Aristotle's definition: the final cause of ethics is that towards which strive all things¹⁴. Ethics is determined by its final cause. And its final cause is good. It is a question of man's good and not a univocal good as a reality in and of itself¹⁵ in the way Plato conceived it. Even if, through the Scholastics' reelaboration, this good coincides with God¹⁶, the enjoyment remains specific to each man¹⁷. Throughout the entire aristotelico-humanist tradition, despite the multiple meanings of good, both concrete and particular, it has always been a question of the good towards which human action strives and of which Man is the beneficiary. This central position of the good of Man remains, whether we put it in theistic terms or not.

The ethic of the machine

The great change, the great chiasmus¹⁸ as Lacan says, comes with utilitarianism. For two reasons: first because utilitarianism, in confronting the question at the level of the signifier, highlights the functioning of

10 G. Vidal, *La fine della Liberta. Verso un nuovo totalitarismo?*, Fazi, Rome, 2001.

11 A. Baldassarre, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

12 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre II, Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse*, *op. cit.*, pp. 350-351.

13 A. Baldassarre, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

14 Aristotele, *Etica nicomachea*, Rusconi, Milan, 1979, I, 1, p.1094a.

15 C. Mazzarelli, "Introduzione alla lettura dell *Etica nicomachea*", Aristotele, *Etica nicomachea*, Rusconi, Milan, 1979, p.15.

16 Tommaso D'Aquino, *Somma teologica*, I, 6, 1.

17 *Ibid.*, 2-2, 180, 7.

18 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre VII, L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, Seuil, Paris, 1986, p. 269.

the signifying machine as we call it, which functions inescapably and without eroding. And secondly because the aim of ethics is no longer the good of Man as the philosophical-humanist tradition formulates it, but is inherent rather in the good functioning of the machine itself¹⁹. In this sense, Bentham initiates a dialectical movement between the symbolic and the real that will soon besiege the entire Freudian experience.

The utilitarian ethic and the ethic of psychoanalysis both underline the importance of the functioning of a machine – a symbolic apparatus articulated to a real. With utilitarianism will emerge, much later of course, the supposed ethic of the free market. Psychoanalysis with Lacan will promote the ethic of desire.

The ethic of the free market does absolutely not have the good of Man as its final aim. Its final aim is that the machine go where it is going, following its own circuit inescapably and irresistibly. Free marketers uphold that the final aim of the machine is necessarily positive because it is the best system of resource creation yet invented. So the good of the market becomes the good of Man because it does not proceed directly from man's intention, since Man could very well want evil. Of itself, they repeatedly say, the process cannot strive toward evil. In fact it strives neither toward good nor towards evil. Henceforth we are outside the moral categories of good and evil, while we are still in the problematic of ethics founded on an Aristotelian ethic, an ethic founded on that towards which all things strive.

An ethic of desire

There is a substitution. The beneficiary is no longer Man but the functioning of the machine itself. Max Weber says it in these terms: “there where the market is left to its auto-normativeness, it knows only the dignity of the thing and no longer the dignity of the person.”²⁰ The ethic of psychoanalysis too is situated, like the ethic of the free market, on the side of the symbolic machine and its functioning.

What is the difference between these two ethics?

The difference certainly does not reside in their humanism – neither the ethic of the economy nor the ethic of psychoanalysis is humanist. Neither wants the good of Man. The difference resides in the relation to the real. The ethic of the market economy wants to make believe that the real in play is the accumulation of riches. This is, without a doubt, a pure illusion and certain to cause confusion. In fact, riches are nothing more than the results of the machine which functions according to the principles of the law of the signifier while ignoring the value and the rights of men. It would be as if we, psychoanalysts, considered that the real was an accumulation of understandings and knowledge enriched by the psychoanalytical process and of which the ego would be the master. Besides which, in the free market riches have their own riches, those Marx called surplus value.

The ethic of the free market makes believe that the real is riches, whereas the real, as Lacan reminds us, is what the rich does not pay²¹. This real consists in the hole implied by the symbolic. They pretend, like Hegel's beautiful soul, to believe that there is no hole in the functioning, that the symbolic is intact and entire. They pretend to believe that there is no surplus value, that there is no surplus enjoyment. In this way, the free market falls in a rut analogous to that of a kind of psychoanalysis, that school of psychoanalysis that is an accomplice of hermeneutics. In the field of economics and in the analytical field, they pretend that everything can be reduced to the signifier, that the machine of language totals itself up in the signifier, without wanting to know anything about the real. But psychoanalysts know that this exclusion of the real

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

20 A. Baldassarre, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

21 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse, op. cit.*, p. 95.

is paid for at the highest possible price because what is not inscribed in the symbolic returns in the lives of people in a devastating way.

Globalization is the unleashing of the hermeneutic utopia in the field of economics.

But what differs from hermeneutics, that can remain an abstract game for philosophers and intellectuals, possibly showing the very inaptitude of the various kinds of psychotherapy to which it aspires, is that the free market could very well be the field in which the death drive unfolds itself globally.

Fifty years ago, in a careful study of law and place, between the symbolic and the real, Carl Schmitt predicted a situation that would have been unthinkable at the time, that of the unleashing of terrorism, the installation of a so-called just war and finally, a global civil war. He said these were decisive agents for the future.

The death drive is inherent in the functioning of the signifying machine. The flip side of language is jouissance, in Lacan's sense of the word. How then to deal with this jouissance that Lacan says in Seminar XVII, only God knows where it will take us?²² The machine knows where it is going. But we do not know where the machine is taking Man. Let us say frankly that the solutions offered at the moment are ridiculous.

We cannot look for solutions from the free marketers because their solution is to accompany the automatic movement of the machine. Their *credo* is do not disturb the helmsman. Even though the machine in fact maneuvers of its own accord.

We cannot look for a solution from the Left, the entire Left, Italian, European. Because the people of the Left do not know which fish to catch and act brave while waiting for a solution to fall from the sky. They would like to stop or at least master the machine, but their will resembles that of the neurotic faced with the inescapability of the symptom, and their words go no further than so many good intentions revealing only a growing incapacity.

Then there are those who are terror stricken by the functioning of the machine, or those who are carried off by the death drive. Those choose extremist political parties, whether they be left or right wing.

The Lacanian solution

Let us come back to Lacan. I quote: "The intrusion [of psychoanalysis] in politics can only come about by recognizing that whatever discourse, and not only the analytical discourse, it stems from jouissance."²³

Belonging to the Lacanian field – a title J.-A. Miller gave to the chapter of Seminar XVII that deals with these propositions – is not only psychoanalysis, but the free market as well, which can seem paradoxical if we forget that they are both in the order of jouissance.

Here we enter into the crux of the Lacanian solution to the problem. It is not an easy solution, nor is it a utopian one and it may prove to be inefficient because of our incapacity to give psychoanalysis its rightful place in this world.

This Lacanian solution is called discourse and its "hot spot" is "that which refers to jouissance" – "discourse touches on it incessantly, in that it begins there"²⁴. As Jacques-Alain Miller points out in his four

²² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

discourses, Lacan shows the mode of treatment of jouissance according to the structure: “the introduction itself of the signifier depends on jouissance and . . . jouissance is unthinkable without the signifier”²⁵. Jouissance centers Man – to be litter, a scrap, is what he aspires to, without knowing it, by the fact that he is a speech being.²⁶

I will close with a few thoughts.

The first concerns revolution. Lacan considers that revolution is what permits each element to permute with the others in an ordered rotation, as the four discourses show us. Only a revolution such as this, where the elements circulate, can permit a change in the master’s discourse. It is a matter of trying to make it a little less limited, “a little less damned stupid”²⁷.

The second thought concerns the displacement Lacan operates when, in place of philosophers, he starts speaking to political economics experts, in other words, experts in jouissance. It is not at random that Lacan links the name of Marx to the analytical symptom and to surplus enjoyment. Even the Marxist primacy of the value of exchange in its relation to the value of use underlines the signifying nature of the economic machine.²⁸

The third thought is about capitalist discourse. Lacan gave the mathema for it here, in Milan, thirty years ago on March 12, 1972²⁹, during a conference at the State University. This mathema shows Man in the reign of capitalism as reduced to a consumer of countless objects, false objects of desire. I quote Lacan: “The consumer society takes its meaning from this; that what makes up the element in quotation marks that we qualify as human, is given the homogeneous equivalent of any other surplus enjoyment that is a product of our industry, a fake surplus enjoyment”³⁰.

The fourth thought is about the Catholic Church, “the real one”, as Lacan says. Faced with the unleashing of the pastoral theology of “we are all brothers” who want each other’s good, it would be timely to restore the primacy of the Son and part ways with the dogmatic theology that is a discourse developed around the hole of mystery, of the *Mysterium fidei*.

The last thought concerns jouissance. Lacan ties, curiously at first sight, the solution of jouissance in the social and political order to sexuality, precisely to the possibility of isolating a type of jouissance that we call phallic³¹. Phallic jouissance is always localized – never globalized then – it is particular, so not universal. But he also ties the solution to jouissance to the incidence of another type of jouissance in to which the woman plunges her roots, like the flower³².

We understand why it is so difficult to keep democracy alive in a globalized world. Democracy is like *The woman*. It does not exist. There are democracies. For this reason, the jouissance of democratic living, following the example of feminine jouissance, is difficult to find and difficult to inscribe.

We propose that ethics, in the era of globalization, be an ethic of discourse.

Translated by Julia Richards

25 J.-A. Miller, “Les six paradigmes de la jouissance”, *La Cause freudienne* 43, p. 24.

26 J. Lacan, “Il fenomeno lacaniano”, *La psicoanalisi* n°24, Astrolabio, Rome, 1998, p.10.

27 *Lacan in Italia*, La salamandra, Milan, 1978.

28 On this subject, see Adriano Voltolin's comments from this Symposium.

29 *Lacan in Italia*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

30 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse*, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 89.