



Aptenodytes forsteri



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Truth

Ends of philosophy

I

What we have today is not only the end of philosophy, there are even two ends of philosophy.

On the one hand, the first death of philosophy is what we find today in so-called theories of everything in physics. We are gradually approaching a scientific answer to big questions which were till now considered metaphysical questions. Does our universe have a beginning or an end? Does it have a limit in time or space? Do we humans have a free will? Today, at least the predominant approach is that our awareness of our freedom is, as it is put in the introduction to a cognitive sciences book, “a simple user’s illusion”. Even the big metaphysical questions, questions of natural causality or spatial and temporal connections, are now decided by experiments. Free will is treated as a question to be decided by brain sciences. This is why at the beginning of his late book *The Grand Design* Stephen Hawking triumphantly proclaims that philosophy is dead. With the latest advances in quantum physics and cosmology the so-called experimental metaphysics enters the scene.

Metaphysical questions about the origin of the universe can now be answered through experimental science and in this way decided.

II

On the other hand, we have a persisting transcendental approach. The hermeneutic, transcendental answer is that there is not one way things are in themselves and that every historical epoch defines the very difference between appearance and things in themselves in its own way.

According to Jürgen Habermas the point is that in order to approach reality science already presupposes a certain conceptual apparatus of scientific thinking and rational argumentation. The hermeneutic horizon of science is already here.

In a different way Martin Heidegger says the same thing. He

says that the question for philosophy is not how things really are, but precisely the historicity of how things really are.

Historicism

I always opposed historicism. It says, for example—to really understand Shakespeare, you have to know all the details of Elizabethan England. Shakespeare didn't understand himself. His work was full of inconsistencies, incomplete and if you come later it's not an obstacle. You can even understand Shakespeare better than he understood himself.

So, in some sense, we are not just reading Shakespeare differently. We are literally completing his work. The best cinema version that I know is done by Akira Kurosawa '61 or '62. The version of Hamlet set in contemporary Japan. Hamlet is a Japanese student returning from the United States. His father was a big corporate boss. And it has a wonderful title *Only bad people sleep well*.

There is a quote: "You can cheat some of the people all the time, all the people sometime, but you cannot cheat all the people all the time." This is a deeply ambiguous statement. It can mean that there are some idiots who can be cheated all the time, or it can mean that in some situations, I will be the idiot, in others, you will be, and so on. For me, this reflects how language is structured—the author himself is not the possessor of some hidden meaning.

To understand some historical event you should read it in a superposition with other possible events. When something happens, you should always ask yourself what other options fails so that this could have happened. Every new invention changes the entire past. It makes it interpreted in a different way. Let's say in several years, there is going to be World War III and there will be people who survive it. Later they will claim that it was all pointed towards this war. If there is no war, they will call it a "cold war", false alarms and so on. And it is not simply illusions, the situation is genuinely open.

Historicity in the sense of what counts as true. How reality appears to us is not a simple result of the cognition of reality but is always already presupposed by our approach to reality. If you are a scientist you don't approach the reality with the tabula rasa. You always rely on a certain mechanism of analyzing reality. And this mechanism cannot be itself scientifically grounded tested as true or not because it is already presupposed at work in every scientific approach to reality.

Many years ago, during the French elections, when one of the candidates was Édouard Balladur, there was a quote: "If Balladur wins the next election, his victory will be necessary." Here lies a paradox: after something happens, it becomes retroactively necessary.

The one who developed this historicist notion of truth fully to the end was Michel Foucault. His notion of truth can be summed up in the claim that truth or untruth is not a direct property of our statement but in different historical conditions different discourses produce each its own specific truth effect. A quote from Michel Foucault: "the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth and that which comes under some other category but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which are neither true nor false."

Scientific definition of truth

Science defines truth in its own terms: the truth of a proposition which should be formulated in clear and preferably formalized terms is established by experimental procedures which can be repeated by anyone.

Religious discourse operates in a different way. Its truth is established through complex rhetorical strategies which generate the experience of inhabiting a meaningful world.

If one were to ask Foucault a big metaphysical question, like

“Do we have a free will or not?”, I think his answer would have been that this question only has a meaning and can be raised within a certain episteme.

It is this episteme, field of knowledge and power which determines under what conditions it is true or false and all we can ultimately do is describe this episteme. German has the wonderful term “unhintergehbare” something beyond which you cannot go. And for Foucault, we cannot go beyond what Heidegger called “Lichtung”, the disclosure of being. Sciences produce big results, but within a certain disclosure of being, of reality.

Ontological incompleteness

What fascinates me in quantum physics is its ontological incompleteness. For example, the fact that we cannot measure position and movement at the same time doesn't mean that the particle doesn't have a definite position; it simply means we cannot measure it. But this is not a radical idea.

The more radical notion is that reality itself is incomplete. If you analyze reality to the very end, you will not arrive at a complete description of everything. How does this relate to philosophy? According to Hegel, the final result is not about attaining the whole truth. Instead, what you initially perceive as an epistemological obstacle—the limitation of your knowledge—turns out to define reality itself.

The great thing about quantum physics is that it contains an element of uncertainty that is not just epistemological but inherent to reality itself.

No reality without fiction - What is going on in this post-modern universe of ours?

The role of rumors

I want to draw your attention to one feature: the role of rumors. Our Big Other set of public values is no longer the public space,

clearly distinguished from the obscenities of private exchanges, but the very public domain in which fake news circulate. The domain in which we exchange rumors and conspiracy theories.

Recall the type of situation of a small group of people who all know some embarrassing secret about one of them. Plus, they all know that all others know this. But nonetheless they don't talk about it publicly.

This is the Big Other of appearances. Appearances have to be held. But the domain of rumors is exactly the opposite. Rumors do not deal with factual truth as opposed to appearances. But they are both outside factual truth.

Now, anonymous rumors are excluded from the public space, and they remain strangely efficient even if they are not true. How is a rumor usually circulated? I say, “I don't know if this is really true, but I was told” or rather “one says that somebody did this or that.”

This obscene Big Other, this space of rumors is supplemented by another Big Other: public authority. The one of neutral expertise in its different forms state apparatuses, legal order, science. And here the true problem emerges. Can we trust this Big Other even in its scientific form? Is not science caught in the procedures of technological domination, exploitation and of capitalist interests? Did not science long ago lost its neutrality? Is this neutrality from the very beginning not a mask of social domination?

The pandemic

Applied to the pandemic: does this insight not compel us to problematize the scientific medical justification of lockdown measures and other reactions to the pandemic?

A friend of mine, Fabio Vighi, argues that if we join the dots provided and by the close analysis of the financial background of the pandemic, we see a well-defined narrative outline emerge.

He said: “Lock downs and the global suspension of economic transactions were intended to first allow the federal bank of the

United States to flood the ailing financial markets with freshly printed money while deferring hyperinflation and to introduce mass vaccination programs and health passports as pillars of a neo-feudal regime of capitalist accumulation. The mainstream narrative should therefore be reversed. The stock market did not collapse in March 2020 because lockdowns had to be imposed. Rather lockdowns had to be imposed because financial markets were collapsing. SARS or Covid is the name of a special weapon of psychological warfare that was deployed in the moment of greatest need. The aim of the printing spree of money was to pluck calamitous liquidity gaps. Most of this magic tree money is still frozen inside the shadow banking system the stock exchanges and various virtual currency schemes that are not meant to be used for spending and investment. Their function is only to provide cheap loans for financial speculation.

This is what Marx called fictitious capital which continues to expand in an orbital loop that is now completely independent of economic cycles on the ground. The bottom line is that all this cash cannot be allowed to flood into real economy for the latter would overheat and trigger hyperinflation.

In short, it is not the pandemic which put the capitalist order into an emergency state. It is global capitalism itself which needed an emergency state to avoid a debilitating crisis much stronger than the 2008 meltdown. And the pandemic was fabricated as a welcome excuse for the emergency state. The passage from neoliberal global capitalism to corporate neo-feudal capitalism is the basic process that uses historical contingencies as excuses. And Fabio Vighi is not afraid to add ecologically grounded lockdowns to this series of excuses.

Far from just confronting capitalism with its faithful limitations, the ecological crisis will also be used as a scientifically grounded way to discipline and control the population. Green capitalism is not just a humanitarian mask of the global order. It is also a way

for the big corporate capital to reproduce itself.

What do I think about this view? Vighi takes into account the complexity of the situation. The interests of pharmaceutical corporations, the way the expert scientific insights that ground anti-pandemic measures justify new forms of social control.

For example, an important indication of the new phase of capitalism was a weird fact that took place in the spring of 2020. On the same day that state statistics in the United States and the United Kingdom registered a breathtaking fall of the GDP brutal product, comparable to the fall at the time of the great depression in 1920s, stock markets registered a gigantic rise.

In short, although the real economy is stagnating or even decreasing, stock markets go up. An indication that fictitious capital is caught in its own circle, decoupled from the real economy. This is where the measures justified by the pandemic entered the game. They, in a way, turned around the traditional Keynesian procedure, which is to print money, even if it means inflation, but invest this money to help the real economy. Here, it is the opposite: print money, but at the same time prevent this money from reaching the real sphere of production and consumption.

They in a way turned around the traditional Keynesian procedure. Which is print money even if it means inflation but invest this money to help real economy. Here it is the opposite print money but at the same time prevent that this money will reach the real sphere of production and consumption.

The paradox

I would like to add here another important observation: the so-called Lauderdale Paradox, named after a very interesting British thinker and friend of the French Revolution around 1800. What is the Lauderdale Paradox?

The most precious wealth of a society consists of course of objects which are freely available like water and air. But they do

not count as values which makes you rich because they are freely available. If water is easily available nobody gets rich by it. But if its supply is controlled by private companies those who own these companies get rich. So, in a technical sense of wealth, as embodied in values, there is more wealth in a society where you pay for water since the freely available water doesn't count as wealth.

Isn't this our situation today? If we live a country with the fresh good air, this doesn't count as wealth. Air is just there. You see the paradox. Let us say the air gets polluted. So, you have companies producing it, making surplus value. From the standpoint of capital's reproduction, the country where you barely can breathe but a tremendous industry is set in motion so that you can survive, this country counts as wealthier than the one where you can simply breathe. And I think this is our future with new ecological catastrophes. Yes, capital will survive. We will get more and more wealthy precisely because we will need all the machinery which will be on the market as values to make us survive.

I don't think that you can reduce the global warming and ecological catastrophes simply to an intended product of the reproduction of big capital. Like the only hysteresis, the only real thing that is happening is that capital was approaching a crisis.

Where I nonetheless disagree with Vighi is that I don't think you can reduce the pandemic or even global warming and ecological catastrophes simply to an intended product of the reproduction of big capital. The only hysteresis, the only real thing that is happening, is that capital was approaching a crisis. Fabio Vighi, in fact, is a little bit open here. Was the pandemic totally invented, or was it just an ordinary, modest flu? But capital needed it; they needed a lockdown to be able to avoid a financial crisis. I cannot buy this theory. It is, for me at least, a little bit too close to a conspiracy theory.

Conspiracy theory

In my books, I often use a wonderful example from Jacques Lacan. He says that even if what a jealous husband claims about his wife, that she sleeps around with other men, is all true, his jealousy is still pathological. Because his jealousy is not simply grounded in facts. The problem is not what the woman is really doing. The problem is: Why does he need jealousy to assert his identity to function normally? The Marxist answer is simple: because you need an external evil intruder to mystify the inherent antagonism.

What is wrong about them is not their truth or not. Conspiracy theories do something more. What?

The first problem with conspiracy theories is that they are usually dismissed as part of our relativist post-truth era. Every group proposes its own theory of truth. Conspiracy theories begin with skepticism, which is good, who knows what is true. But did you notice how then immediately they pass on to an absolute certainty. The agent of social authority but now in a more decisive radical sense of the other like god. The other like destiny, the idea that the world is not meaningless. It is not just chaos. There is a higher ordering principle.

The problem of conspiracy theories is that they do believe there is truth, an unconditional truth. And this truth is the act of an active all-powerful agent whose main goal is to deceive us. The formula of conspiracy theorists is better an evil god than no god. In today's time where even religion is getting relativized, we at least have an evil all-powerful agent of conspiracy.

Of course, cracks immediately reemerge here. Conspiracy theorists established with absolute certainty a conspiracy about the pandemic to then pass with uneasy easiness from one inconsistent theory to another.

You remember Freud's jokes about a borrowed cattle. You accuse me that I returned you a broken cattle that I borrowed from you and my answer is a) I never borrowed a cattle from you

b) I returned it to you unbroken c) the cattle was already broken when I got it from you. That is how most of the conspiracy theories function.

But I still don't like the idea that it is all planned by some secret state control agency, public authority, or capital agency. Why not? How does the pandemic function? On the one hand, we have medical healthcare; some of us get ill and others don't.

On the other hand, we have the financial economic consequences, the self-reproduction of fictitious capital with very complex links to the actual real economy, and the autonomy of financial capital. But I think what Vighi neglects a little bit is that yes, we have this crazy self-circulation of fictitious capital, but this crazy circulation, which neglects real life, has very strong material consequences in real life, just to mention enormous amounts of waste and pollution.

So, my final argument against Vighi would have been that he is too optimist. If we accept that the pandemic is just a minor disease and that basically all is fiction invented by fictitious capital the result would be just to return to normal life. But I think this is an all too optimistic view on today's capitalism.

Evil agent capitalism

Today's capitalism is a fictitious cycle of capital's reproduction, yes. But the other side of it is pollution, enormous amounts of waste and pandemics. In the last 10 years Marx was reading geologists biologists who focused on material reality of the reproduction of the capital. How it disturbs the circulation of nature. Concerned with the question: what is the material reality of capital?

I think that the main reason that we don't need to include the hypothesis of a pandemic or global warming as an evil plot of such conservative forces is that even though both are products of capital, they are already products of the normal functioning of capital. Even without an "evil agent capitalism", capitalism produces

them. The problem is science definitely is in the service of capital. It is coresponsible; it is guilty of our troubles.

And I like to quote Richard Wagner's Parsifal on this paradox: "Die Wunde schließt der Speer nur, der sie schlug. The wound can be healed only by the spear which did it." That is to say that there is no solution without science, without capital.