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Reframing Relationships Between Humans and the Earth: The "Anthropocene", a New Ideology to Justify the Status Quo?

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The political and economic status quo is presently associated with desertification, pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, global warming, uncontrolled waste and many other aspects involving governance and general well-fare, with awful consequences on the majority of people that lack educational, social and economic means to survive.

The studies on this subject, of course, leave no doubt about the consequences of human action on the environment, altering the characteristics of existing species (many in the process of extinction), with dire consequences on the humankind, susceptible to physical and mental changes, due to a set of related environmental and cultural causes.

Although it received little acceptance among ecologists and geologists, the term "Anthropocene", proposed by chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugène Stoermer at a meeting of the International Biosphere-Geosphere Program, was adopted as the beginning of a "new geological epoch", in view of evidences collected by different researchers.

The "Anthropocene", as a time when human activities have changed how the planet operates (nuclear testing, widespread use of oil, coal, chemicals and fertilizers), have let its marks everywhere, evidences already confirmed by the International Commission on Stratigraphy in the Earth's rock formations and in distinct lines in sediments every year.

But the evils attributed to the "Anthropocene" cannot be the responsibility of all humanity; the main culprits, who have the political and economic power to shape the forms of production and consumption and define lifestyles, must be distinguished from the majority of the population, whose power to change things cannot be compared with those.

The Anthropocene argument is called "a conceptual and historical mess, a neo-Malthusian view of population, a fanciful historical interpretation" (Moore, J.W., 2022). It is not just about a word, but a misleading way of understanding things, affecting communication, advocacy, public policies, research and teaching programs (Pilon, A. F., 2023).

If responsibility is attributed indiscriminately to all of humanity or to the complexity of contemporary life (systemic approaches), political and economic actors would be exonerated from their responsibilities. The selective disposal of waste by households does not exempt packaging industries from producing it (cardboard, bags, plastic, etc.).

"Systemic" interpretations, supported by theories of "complexity" and the "Anthropocene" as a new era in human history, may inadvertently obscure the role and effective action of people and groups that control economics and politics in today's world, who find an easy excuse to decline their responsibilities in the destinies of humanity.

As long as profitable policies and practices remain unchanged (business as usual), a series of political, economic, social and environmental problems cluster and worsen around the world and have a synergistic effect, reinforcing each other. This would define the current era, that some scholars classify as the "corporatocene" or "capitalocene" era.



Figure 1 Effect of Human Actions on Nature: Primitive versus Modern Cultures

“The idea that everyone is to blame for damage to ecosystems and climate change hides the real culprits”, says S. Falzi. an ecologist and UN environmental negotiator, we are in the era of the “corporateocene”, another term for the “capitalocene”, that is, capitalism, as a way of organizing relations of exploitation between man and nature (fig.1).

Although “complexity” implies diversity, a large number of interdependent parts, it has been recognized that the “whole” does not entirely control its parts. People always have, under different circumstances, the option of complying with or opposing, through their thoughts and actions, the prevailing culture, although in many cases this comes at a price.

Systems thinking is proposed to understand and deal with many problems, expanding the range of options to deal with them. The focus is not on isolated variables, but on the interconnections between them, as they combine to produce phenomena, interweaving different dimensions of being in the world (intimate, interactive, social and biophysical).

Could the “system” explain everything, or is something missing from this equation? The verdicts of international courts could clarify many conceptual frameworks, by correctly identifying individuals, who, within a “system”, commit crimes and atrocities, not only in wars, but also in different environmental, political and economic circumstances.

The systemic analysis does not apply, for example, to the problem of population concentration in large cities, which occurs to the detriment of the development of small towns and rural areas, of family farming, as an option for the production of organic food, which would not require the vast tracts of land for the production of goods for export.

The proliferation of automobiles or trucks, the construction of highways, are directly linked to public policies that neglected locomotion on rails (passengers and cargo), for public transport in cities and between cities, which is still a competing means of transport in different countries of the world. Is it only up to citizens to leave their cars at home?

There are no complex problems, but problems that *become* complex. “Because everything has become problematic, everything is also a matter of indifference” (Sloterdijk, P., 2022); “If humanity’s technological progress can be compared to climbing a mountain, then the Anthropocene finds us perched on a crumbling ledge (Kirsch, A., 2023).

The inequalities of wealth and opportunities, the circumstances that prevent people of lower socioeconomic status from going beyond the daily concerns of survival, add to the

indifference of the richest people, who, immersed in the profitable "world of business", remain concerned only with maintaining the "panorama" in which they are inserted.

In a world stripped of moral principles, in the absence of things that really matters in life, the conspicuous consumption of goods widely trumpeted as a sign of status and prestige in the "anything goes" of advertising campaigns, has tempted young people from the less favored populations to go to crime to get things valued by the "system".

The consumption of narcotics is a symptom of the "general phenomenon", of the deficient attention to the physical, social and mental health of entire populations, of an economic, political, cultural and educational crisis, aggravated by the lack of structured services and community participation to deal with the problems before they get chronic.

Contemporary crisis, involving the environment, economy, society and politics."imply a fundamental transformation of values, beliefs and social practices in many sectors of society" Lidskog, R. et al., (2022), calling for a "redeeming change" , a transformation that cannot be confused with "techno-scientific fixes" and vigilance devices.

Localism describes a range of political philosophies which supports local production and consumption of goods, local control of government, and promotion of local history, local culture and local identity, giving the power into the hands of local councils, communities and individuals to act. Localism can be contrasted with globalization.

The United Nations Secretary-General urged world leaders to present a "Rescue Plan for People and Planet" (SDG Summit, 2023), taking into account national and global commitments to inclusion and sustainability, the impact of multiple crises and interconnected political, social, economic and environmental consequences.

In the face of rapidly increasing global climate and environmental problems (first, do no harm), the Alliance of World Scientists (AWS), intent on turning accumulated knowledge into action, is calling on the world's scientists to become signatories to a document in the face of an emergency situation, in view of a collective international responsible voice.

This would imply the permanent vigilance over global conventions and international pacts, on the implementation of legislation and on the actions of politicians, who may place private interests above the public good, in view of the intense lobbying of business corporations and the fleeting glare of headlines on segmented issues,

Problems are deep inside the "boiling pot", not in the "bubbles" of the surface (fragmented public policies, reduced academic formats, mass-media headlines or public outcry). What is in cause is the "general phenomena", the "world-system", with its boundaries, structures, techno-economic paradigms, support groups and rules of legitimization.

"Being-in-the-world" implies the combination of four dimensions (Binswanger, L., 1963): man's relationship with himself (intimate); man's relationship with his fellows (interactive); man's relationship with society (social); man's relationship with his environment (biophysical). Eliciting events and changes entails the interaction of all dimensions.

Scientific efforts, teaching and learning, public policies, advocacy, communication, goals and new paths to reach them, should contemplate a set of values, norms and policies that prioritizes socio-ecological objectives, human well-being, natural and built environments, the aesthetic, ethical and cultural meaning of 'being in the world'.

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