

Alternatives to the Barbarity*

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The Barbarity

At the end of January 2001, in three different parts of the planet, three connected events took place. In Washington–USA, former President Clinton handed over the presidency and was applauded for the achievement of a long period of sustained national economic growth. In Davos, Switzerland, surrounded by protesters, leaders of rich countries' governments and top managers of multinational companies established a set of coordinated actions to shape the global economy according to the corporate interests. In Porto Alegre, Brazil, thousands of people manifested their dissatisfaction and discussed alternatives for the barbarity that came with globalization and all the unfairness behind its establishment.

The continued economic growth, which the world currently experiences has granted to civilization the longest period of wealth and opulence, in a global economic system; in the meantime, humanity witnesses one of the most barbarous periods of history.

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Unlike all the preceding barbarities, temporary ones, happened in wars or even concealed—the barbarities that occurred since the end of the Twentieth Century can be easily observed around each individual, along with the exuberance of an opulent wealth. This nearness between the absolute wealth and the most degrading poverty aggravates the picture of barbarity of the early Twenty-First Century in the global world.

And the worse of barbarity is still to come.

Civilization pursues its historical project by dividing humankind into two different parts, following a model of a global scale separation. The global world is a divided one and humanity has been cut off by a golden curtain and divided into: the rich ones—included within modernity—and the excluded, that is, the poor ones. On one side, an international First World, composed by the rich ones form an internationally unified country with the same standards of consumption, culture and integration; on the other side, an archipelago of poor groups, excluded from modernity, no matter where they live, and deprived of an access to wealth, basic services, and so on.

This apartness makes it easier and safer for a rich person to cross an ocean than to turn a street corner at his/her own town. Rich people will feel at home in a different town, country or continent, facing different languages and climate, but may find a foreign land just around the corner. The global world is a Third-World one, divided into the CM-HIPs (Countries-with-Majority-of-High-Income Pop-

ulation) and the CM-LIPs (Countries-with-Majority-of-Low-Income Population), each one carrying out an internal division between the included–rich–and the excluded–poor.

Men had never been so close, regardless the distance between the places they live in, although apart from each other, despite their physical nearness. And the future can bring a greater separation, so radical that it will differentiate all human beings, making them dissimilar.

The Evolution towards Barbarity

Humanity has turned several corners to reach the current evolution point. The first one was a biological corner, when a group of animals was differentiated from others by acquiring a more developed brain. In a second turn, these new beings found more efficient ways to survive without the need of hunting, and became sedentary. The third corner was turned when they started seeing reality as an external phenomenon that was submitted to human understanding, which set the grounds for the development of modern science and technology. In the following (turned) corner, logical thinking deploy the industrial civilization. Finally, in the Twentieth Century, humanity turned a fifth corner which established the use of technical progress to build a society based on consumption, and to devote intelligence to constantly create new products, instead of raising the production of the existing ones, which would allow universal access to them.

The result is a stupid intelligence, that continuously creates new needs, instead of eliminating them; that is able to build an atomic bomb and kill hundreds of thousand of people, and to produce robots that create unemployment and impoverish millions of people. Until the half of the Twentieth Century, such tendency had a democratic evolution. While promoting technical improvement, humanity extended freedom and made human beings more similar to each other. The Twentieth Century dreamed of a wealthy and fair humanity, with universal access to all goods. However, the perception that natural resources were finite, which would impose limits to growth, put an end to its equality dreams. Humanity had to choose between reducing consumption for all, and concentrating consumption for just a few.

Neoliberalism, like apartheid, admitted the existence of aparted humanity as an inevitable fate, and legitimated instruments to build this project of separated development. An immoral intelligence, that acknowledges the impossibility of guaranteeing the consumption of superfluous goods for all, rather than reorienting its purposes, concentrates its beneficiaries; in order not to change such route, it divides humanity and submits ethics to technique.

The Crossroads of Modernity

After ten thousand years of stride, history enters the Twentieth Century with a new crossroad to face. However,

for the first time, humanity can perceive the bifurcation ahead, and is able to take a new direction. On one hand, there is the possibility to maintain the Twentieth Century route of a society based on individualism and consumption, orienting technical abilities to building new products and demands for few, rather than meeting the needs of all. This route will soon lead to an *aparted* civilization, divided in two separated groups: those who participate on the technological modernity and the excluded ones.

One example is the advancement of biotechnology at the service of few, which will develop two types of human beings, so different from each other that soon one of them will not consider the other as being human. By taking this path, humanity will have turned the corner of biological separation, closing a perverse evolutionary cycle: from the natural mutation which originated human being towards a mutation produced by science, creating a superior being who would live longer, healthier, wealthier and more intelligent; a being with no similarity with the poor and weak people kept away from the products of biotechnology and medicine, away from modernity.

This turn is not inevitable; there is a second path. Since humanity is aware of the crossroad ahead, it can choose an alternative path: modernity ruled by ethics. An alternative route where the future of mankind is defined and pursued based on new civilization purposes. The first one would bring about a radical inversion, giving ethics a dominant role over technique. In this new civilization, there would be

no place for the technical domination over the economic rationality and then over the social objectives; society would build a new paradigm where the ethical values would define social objectives, thus determining the economic rationality and only then making the technical options.

Secondly, humanity needs to define new ethical basis for those values, which will guide humanity in the future:

- respect for nature—protecting the natural legacy of the planet, instead of destroying it;
- refusal to apartness—aiming at meeting the essential needs of the whole population, and at assuring equality in basic human rights;
- freedom—promoting total respect for people’s choice, belief, taste, consumption and political options;
- global integration—orienting a worldwide integration by respecting culture, sovereignty, ethnic diversity, as well as tribes’ and minorities’ rights.

Therefore, humanity faces two distinct alternative paths:

- to perpetuate the *technical modernity*, based on the production of goods and consumption, thus promoting apartness and environmental destruction;
- to build an *ethical modernity*, based on a new civilization purpose, that aims at expanding human legacy, protecting the cultural, natural, material and immaterial patrimony, ensuring that people are free to choose how to spend their free time, respecting nature and meeting the essential needs of the entire population.

The Obstacles to this New Route

Everybody is in favor of the supremacy of ethics over technique. But from the political point of view, impediments make the barbarity of technical modernity quite impossible to be subdued.

In first place, there is a cultural obstacle in the collective imaginary. After a hundred years of having the same civilization model, humanity has consumption as its ultimate purpose. The Greeks considered the culture as the ultimate social purpose; in the Middle Age, the search was for virtue, cathedrals and relics; in the mercantilist years, the search was for gold. Presently, humanity focuses on the definition of wealth based on the increase of consumption, through the GDP growth. This creates a major difficulty in the search for a new definition of modernity, and demands a revision of the concept of wealth.

Within a period of time of less than two centuries, humanity has become addicted to an idea of defining wealth as a synonym of consumption goods availability as well as to the effort of pursuing objectives that put in risk the integrity of the planet and stimulate apartness; this seems to be a natural and inevitable way, according to the neoliberal assumptions.

Apart from this cultural obstacle, it is very unlikely that the discontent political forces are able to present a viable alternative. Traditional left-wing concepts became retrograde, either adjusted to the conservative forces and co-opted by the neoliberalism, or oblivious of the advancements in the social and economic realities. The traditional

left-wing theories were unable to revitalize themselves in order to create a new utopia adapted to the new world's reality: the physical limits to growth, the taste for consumption, the solution of economic dynamics through apartness, globalization and minorities' rights.

Today's right-wingers either endorse this barbarity or turn their back on it. At the same time, broad leftist sectors, lacking a revolutionary perspective and failing to change the concept of wealth, claim for higher wages for the modern sector workers, or support a fairest distribution of goods among those involved in their production, overlooking the incorporation of the excluded ones—those without wages or any purchasing power. Or, reject globalization and neoliberalism with no new propositions regarding alternatives to overcome barbarity and are still attached to the logic of economy and to the concept of material wealth, promising to better distribute it, instead of reaffirming their ethical compromises with the excluded ones. They even refuse to follow the political agenda to overcome the poverty situation, labeling as compensatory policies any measure to alleviate poverty and set the grounds to build an alternative for the future.

Even the political groups which came from the socialist ethics utopia have lost themselves within a technocratic vision of the world, which would build a communist utopia, thanks to a technological evolution and productivity growth that would eliminate poverty, forgetting that, for Marx and the utopia socialists, productivity grew in order to produce

the same goods, thus reducing scarcity. Meanwhile, in the 20th Century, productivity would grow slower and less than those new products, thus increasing necessity day-by-day.

In the past decades, capitalism managed to co-opt the organized workers of the modern sector, mainly at the CM-HIP, by meeting great part of their consumption desires. This led workers to leave behind their dreams of another consumption utopia, and undermined any possibility of solidarity between workers and excluded masses: South African white workers did not fight against apartheid; French blue-collars will not fight for the rights of African immigrants, Brazilian workers did not fight for social inclusion. Currently, the workers struggle is guided by the warranty of past-acquired rights and not towards new rights of workers and excluded ones.

It seems that barbarity has comfortably settled in. And there is one fact which complicates it even more: the neoliberal economic structure—based on international networks, unsubject to national interests—and the creation of an elite of planet owners made a radical economic reform impossible, with a risk of provoking an instability which would worsen—instead of alleviating—the difficulties faced by the poor. A new leftwing is needed to retake its utopian dreams, reaffirm its ethical commitments, reassess its preference for economic logics and put an end to the current barbarities, avoiding the final barbarity that will separate human beings.

The Alternative Path

The search for alternatives to such barbarity will demand a thorough reconsideration of:

- a) the purpose and destiny of humanity, the relationships between human beings and their behavior towards nature;
- b) ways to make national democracies compatible with the increasing power of the owners of the planet—being those the elected presidents whose power surpasses the limits of their countries, or leaders of international companies and organisms who did not even count on the legitimacy of the vote;
- c) the rights of minorities and of each tribe in a world facing the inevitable trend of cultural internationalization;
- d) the need of technical advancement, its advantages and dynamics, considering the risk of increasing unemployment.

However, one should not wait for the findings of social philosophers who, in general, follow political actions results. To be a leftist means to be a humanist concerning compromises, and to deal with the difficulties faced by the poor masses without waiting for the birth of a new utopia. Waiting for a new paradigm will help consolidate the apartness and the definitive rupture between human beings, with an eventual loss of the feeling of similarity. We need an immediate agenda of concrete actions. The World Social Forum can be the starting point of a movement that will stop

barbarity and promote the development of an ethical alternative we can all abide for.

There is a long distance between stopping barbarity and building utopia. This distance can only be covered by immediate steps:

1. Social Forum Movement. The World Social Forum, held for the first time in Porto Alegre, must become a permanent and international movement. Capitalists can afford the luxury of holding an annual meeting in Davos and keep permanent contact. We ought to turn our meeting into a movement that incorporates non-governmental organizations, progressive political parties, and unions, so that they try to understand the complex issue of apartness and start mobilizing the world's population to stop barbarity in a short term and help building utopia in the long run. The World Social Forum can work as a network, holding its annual meeting in a different country each year, or in different parts of the world simultaneously.

2. A communication vehicle. Apart from being a network that is in constant movement, this Permanent Forum must count on communication media (videos, leaflets, magazines, websites) to keep the public opinion informed and mobilized, reaching more and more people everyday.

3. A court-to judge the neoliberalism crimes. An immediate task for those who aim to search an alternative to barbarity consists of fighting for the implementation of a world court to judge neoliberal crimes committed against humanity, by governments, politicians, and businesspeople;

and to judge those crimes committed against ethnical groups, nations, environment and peoples, as well as crimes concerning the manipulation of information. Such crimes are as serious as the ones committed by dictators, and deserve to be treated likewise. Such crimes are as serious as those committed by the global world administrators who do not have any social respect, as they provoke poverty, forced migration, refugees; they destroy the environment, leave millions of people unemployed, denationalize peoples and expropriate public patrimony. The World Social Forum could summon—from Porto Alegre—a Court of the World’s People against the Crimes of Neoliberalism, similar to the one summoned by Bertrand Russel to judge the crimes in Vietnam.

4. Tobin Tax. The idea of creating a Tobin Tax, to tax the daily movement of speculative funds, must continue to be a banner of this global movement.

5. Debt swap for education. Only 13 percent of the external debt service paid by the CM-LIP (Countries-with-Majority-of-Low-Income-Population) would finance Conditional Cash Transfer programs such as “Bolsa-Escola” (paying a monthly stipend to each poor family provided that their school-age children attend school regularly and in accordance with their local needs) to assist the families of all 250 million working children worldwide; 28 percent of the debt service of African countries would put in school all 80 million out-of-school children in Africa; regarding Latin America’s 23 million out-of-school children it would take only 3 percent of its debt service).

6. Worldwide minimum income program. The population of the CM-HIP (Countries-with-Most-of-its-Population-of-High-Income) already counts on social protection nets and on minimum income guarantees. The world's poor population needs them even more. US\$ 100 billions per year would ensure a minimum income for one billion people, or two hundred million poor families in the whole world.

7. Global programs for social development. After the Second World War, the USA implemented a program to rebuild Europe, thanks to which the European continent has reached the highest living standards of the planet. A similar program could be launched, aiming at the social recovery of the excluded people worldwide, addressing educational, health and environmental issues—it would not be a program which would perpetuate a lie: that an economic development distributes its products. With an yearly investment of US\$ 500 billions, it would be possible to eliminate poverty, place all children in school, feed the hungry ones, provide health care for all 3 billion—of deprived—people in the world. This amount is equivalent to only 1.6 percent of the worldwide income, 33 percent of which could be collected by the proposed Tobin Tax. The impact of such investment would not only alleviate and terminate poverty; it would also rescue humankind decency and would create a positive impact on the global economy.

8. International social fund. These resources shall not be managed only by the CM-LIP (Countries-with-Majority-of-Population-of-Low-Income) local governments without any risk of corruption. Therefore, it would be necessary

to create alternative mechanisms to manage and monitor the use of such resources, making sure that they are properly used as an alternative to barbarity.

A joint Executive Board, composed by UN representatives and non-governmental organizations of all continents, could control such International Fund:

- a) a fund to finance programs of eradication of diseases, implementation and recovery of a medical infrastructure, construction of water and sewerage systems all over the world, with a program of global mobilization for health care;
- b) a fund to finance the “bolsa-escola” (monthly stipend for all poor families whose children attend school regularly and in accordance with the local needs) which would eliminate analphabetism and guarantee that every child of the world graduates from high school;
- c) a fund that would employ the poor ones for the recovery and preservation of their country’s environment;
- d) a fund that could be used by the countries which want to participate of a global program of low income;
- e) a fund that would guarantee social support for feeding and health care for each child who needs such support.

9. Worldwide responsibility concerning children’s needs. The Davos Forum was set as an attempt to globalize

trade, currency, finances, but has neglected the world's responsibility towards their children. The World Social Forum must reiterate such global commitment. One should not tolerate the barbarity of a world that produces US\$ 40 trillions per year and has created a universal communication system, through which one may watch the death of millions of children due to starvation, as well as children labor due to their parent's poverty; and does not prepare their children to face the challenge to understand and change the world.

10. The right to international mobility. The WTO and the Davos Forum stand for free market organization and tax exemption of circulating capital. The World Social Forum should stand for a similar freedom of mobility for human beings all over the planet.

Theoretically, in a so-called global society, nobody should be considered an immigrant. Human beings should be entitled, at the very least, the same freedom granted to goods, services and money, and be able to freely travel and work around the world. Every excluding laws that state otherwise should be revised.

11. The right to live in the birthplace. Apart from the right to international mobility, the Forum should fight to ensure that nobody is forced to migrate for economic causes. A program of incentives can revert the picture of the massive migrations forced by the tragedies of social abandonment in the CM-LIP. A program of this kind would not only benefit directly the CM-LIP populations, but also have a positive impact on the CM-HIP, by peacefully reducing immigra-

tion. This would also have a significant impact on intellectuals, technicians, and professors of the CM-LIP that would not be forced to migrate to a more attractive CM-HIP, thus preventing cultural losses and the lowering of local technical efficiency. The salary of each border policeman of the U.S. would guarantee a scholarship for one thousand children from Honduras, for example.

12. State ethical and efficiency recovery. The Davos Forum stimulates the destruction of the State. The World Social Forum should fight for the definition of a new State profile, uncorrupted, fiscally responsible, socially committed—in short, a State that builds the solidarity that neoliberalism attempts to eliminate.

13. Porto Alegre's ethical modernity consensus. The Washington consensus launched a pact for social exclusion, ecological destruction, human apartness, and individualism. Davos is the capital of this project and represents a concrete opposition to humanistic dreams. Porto Alegre should become the capital of a new consensus for ethical modernity, and claim for the urge of a new ethical order, mobilizing decent leaderships of the entire world, non-governmental organizations, union leaders and the overall population, towards establishing a new ethical order for humanity and building a Porto Alegre Consensus for Ethical Modernity.