

ON THE PROBLEM OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND BIOCENTRISM

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The CPSU platform prepared for the forthcoming Congress of the SU communists in the summer of 1990, assumes that Man is the aim-in-itself of the history. Not communism but Man! This is a serious change in the Party's slogan.

But, these views are currently disputed in the socialist society, primarily by those who devote themselves to biology and biological education discussions on this subject are currently taking place at the Moscow University.

No doubt, the statement that Man is the aim-in-itself of the Development (beginning with a capital letter) of everything on our planet has a strong appeal for every human being, because it promised him or his offspring something fascinating, because this idea brings in the top priority and the pivot around which all the rest, all the subordinate, practically usable things should rotate.

All the needs of Man who occupies such a pivotal position are fully satisfied, since he is the aim-in-itself of Development, and the only problem to cope with is how to bring this Development to its desired end.

This concept is quite anthropocentric and that's why it is so severely criticized nowadays.

Paradoxical as it sounds, it is the problem of human needs which those thinking in anthropocentric terms fail to solve in a reasonable way.

Indeed, if I, a Human being, represent the aim-in-itself of the great process of Development on our planet, then I can claim the complete satisfaction of all my needs. But this would be an act of egotism, to say the very least.

Such a claim made in the name of large groups of people will result in imperialism (if made in the name of a state), in nazism (if made in the name of a nation), or in racial discrimination (if made in the name of a race). In other words, anthropocentrism, if it dominates the mind of a separate person or a group of people, a class, a state, a nation, or a race will inevitably lead to a certain kind of social discrimination, for as much as human needs are contradictory, unpredictable, and frequently unjustifiably enormous.

In a biological viewpoint, the aim-in-itself of the Development on our planet is the biosphere, not Man, i.e. all the living with all its great diversity, which maintains a hardly attainable equilibrium with its environments. Man is merely a part of this great diversity which has been created not by him and therefore does not belong to him, Man must bow to it and serve the purpose of its preservation. However, Man's activities are regulated by his mind having peculiarities of its own, and, owing to the individuality of each brain, the motives and actions of the representatives of a human population can be contradictory in a biologist's point of view, the prevention of the possible consequences of them would require that the legislations of all the states include the juridical statement of the guilt presumption of Man, as far as his relationship with all the other components of diverse Nature is concerned.

It follows that human needs (considering both the needs of an individual and those of the population as a whole) are only satisfied to the extent which still allows us to defend the interests of the whole diversity of life on the Earth as a whole. Incorporation of such a statement into different legislations will provide new criteria for solving problems and new priorities to be considered in decision-making. The moral analogues of this principle: "Thou shalt not kill" in religion, "Do not harm" in medicine are in essence derivatives of the principle presuming the guilt of Man in respect to Nature (or variants of its interpretation).

The acknowledgment of these considerations (and they are supported, for example, by an overwhelming majority of the biologists of the Moscow University) will invariably lead to a change in the goals of biological education in society. In other words, it will result in a new need of Man (and of the whole human population) for biological education. To apply the new criteria of education and to determine the priorities, it will be necessary to engage specialists with biological background who will hold, in the future biological civilization, the position of guardians of the diversity of life, the position of the "priests" of the new confession, the aim-in-itself of the great Development of all processes on the Earth.

Thus, they will be preachers and priests of biocentrism as opposed to anthropocentrism. The people in the new society will have a great number of both duties and rights, since they will dispose of the complete information knowledge) of the diversity of life in all its forms, of all the species known. They will enact a new legislation, according to which in a certain high sense-Man, the amoeba and the smallest virus will enjoy equal rights. Disagreement with this logical scheme and acceptance of any other one will inevitably lead to a certain type of social

discrimination and the so-called "reconstruction of Nature", which resulted in Lysenkoism in our country some time ago, and which stirred up, in a number of other countries, the dangers associated with the industrialized "consumer society".

The new biological education in society should be aimed not only at training priests of the "diversity confession" considered above, but at eradicating bio-illiteracy as well. Accordingly, primary school priorities should be changed. The belief in the paramount importance of the diversity of life should be of the same (or of greater) value than the simple ABC and the multiplication table.

Another aspect of the same subject is the introduction of an extended biological curriculum for those studying other sciences (By the way, such a project is being elaborated since 1989 by the Commission for biological education under professor G. Schaefer).

The guardians of the manifold life will, e.g. put a ban on whole applied sciences. On the applied but not on the fundamental (Fundamental sciences cannot be banned, as this would contradict their definition). Why not ban the military sciences? Or the sciences aimed at plundering the natural resources? But on what criteria will the decision to "ban" sciences be based? Such criteria are conceivable only in terms of safeguarding the diversity of life.

But, perhaps these considerations are unnecessary or premature? Are they based on the arrogance of biologists? Do they imply that we should return "into the caves?" No doubt, all these questions will be raised. But just look around...: The complete bio-illiteracy of the politicians. The impending ecological calamity. Ecological crises. Exploitation of the natural resources. Chernobyl. The attempts of physicists and chemists to change the biological nature of some species. And then, possibly to change human nature. What will the consequences of all that be like? Who will help us solve all these problems? Why does each representative of the human population at an early age learn that $2 \times 2 = 4$, and afterwards he rejoices to know that no one can cheat him, as far as calculations are concerned? But as long as he lives he remains ignorant of the vital aspects of his own life, of the life of others, as well as of the questions essential for human personality and behavior?

Why are the future experts in the great diversity of life derided as bug-and-flower enthusiasts at many schools, colleges etc. and as crazy people standing on the sidewalk of the great highway of progress, with cars driving along it and taking others to the paradise of unlimited consumption?

But there is no unlimited consumption at all. There are unlimited needs of people having limited intelligence. And, willy-nilly, one has to reconcile with the necessity of radical changes. These changes may be associated with ecological crises and take a heavy toll of human lives, but, they can be confined only to the changes in the level and priorities of education, on the basis of biocentrism, the new belief of atheists, which at a certain point may merge into religion.

The concept of anthropocentrism seems to become logical if we take account of Vernadsky's doctrine of the noosphere, i.e. of the Kingdom of reason-of a future stage of the Earth's development succeeding its present biosphere stage. But, a simple appeal for the transition to the stage of reason will have no significant effect. However, if we imagine that the kingdom of reason exists in reality, as, say, a certain field reuniting the intellect of all the human beings, alive and dead... No doubt, this may be a mere fantasy. At present, we believe that if a great man (chess player, taxonomy expert, or mathematician) dies the death of his brain leads to the loss of something which, if retained, could form part of the kingdom of reason. Alas! Even the books written (and, the more so, those unwritten) by him and his staunch adherents and disciples (if any) fail to make our idea of the kingdom of reason more true-to-life. Nonetheless, I would be glad, as a biologist of the end of the 20th century, if these logical statements were erroneous.

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