

De-universalization of the Idea of Growth

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According to Serge Latouche 'de-growth' is a political slogan with theoretical implications, that is designed to silence those who are addicted to productivism, to make it perfectly clear that we must abandon the goal of exponential growth, which means abandoning the fundamentalist belief in growth. And that is really what it is: a belief. 'Toxic addiction to growth' is not a metaphor. It is the consumerist bulimia. Alain Badiou described today's natural belief with a single statement: There are only bodies and languages. This statement is the axiom of contemporary ideology which is exactly the ideology or conviction of democratic materialism. The bio-version of democratic materialism is particularly relevant today, which shows a special concern for "the natural body", for "nature as such" (natural cosmetics, organic food, etc.) and, of course, this bio-materialism relates to ecology and eco-materialism. The problem is that all these prefixes bio, eco, although they look like a step in the right direction, are only a version of democratic materialism, that does not recognize any truth in its system, least of all the truth about itself. And the truth is: that it is an exploitative system that does not care about nature, people, solidarity, equality, etc. The capitalist mode of production in its neoliberal version uses an interesting strategy: creating a crisis. A crisis never really changes things but is only a simulacrum of change: it appears as a change, but it doesn't really change anything. Paradoxically, the crisis stabilizes because it changes the system just enough to keep the system alive. So, when we raise the question of the ecological crisis and want to answer with criticism, we put ourselves in a somewhat paradoxical situation: with our criticism of the ecological crisis, we may only be stabilizing the system and not changing it, because we are answering the questions that the system itself puts into our hands.

If we accept that the problem of growth is a problem of belief, then it would be useful and even fundamental to ask ourselves *when* and *how* this belief was fabricated. The major error that one can make in this domain is to search for the origin of such a belief in the capitalist mentality when this mentality is a *product* of such a belief and *not the origin*. To make an exhaustive depiction of the creation of our belief in growth would be without any doubt too complex or even impossible. Yet, there was a platform that had a very important role in the institutionalization of such a belief and operated on its distribution for numerous centuries, and this platform is a *monastery*. What Christianity changed in our civilization is that it bonded the political and personal spheres. The core pedagogy of the monastery is precisely the pedagogy of infinite personal growth that forms individuals to be as closer to God as possible, that is the most perfect versions of themselves. The monastery power is the structure of power where growth meets its linear and infinite path. From this point up to the actual situation that we have today, where we wonder how this obsession with growth happened, and where we lack the intellectual capacity to imagine the world without growth, is a matter of details. The conceptual framework of our political sphere is thus decided in the 5th century and

from then proliferation and monopoly of growth were more or less constant. This growth was first (and for a long time) merely personal and spiritual, and then in the second phase (from the 18th century on) more collective and material. Observed from this point of view, certain discontinuities, such as are feudal system, the appearance of the modern state or capitalist economy doesn't seem like discontinuities, but more intensifications of Christian religion. In this sense, Foucault was right, when he stated that the modern state is in a way an intensification of pastoral power and not its secularization.

To resume, some of the strategies and mental frames for future research of belief in growth and growth in general, could be the following ones: the appearance of a monastery as a laboratory of growth around the 5th century (or even before) and then intensification, distribution and universalization of its power until the present day. No discontinuities, no changes, no evolution, but merely intellectual stagnation through the illusion of growth.

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