

Adding Value to Irresponsibility: "You Will Die Here"

André Francisco Pilon¹

"There was nothing, absolutely nothing that could stop a human planetary survey party". With these words, the science fiction writer Clifford Simak begins the short story entitled "Beachhead", which recounts the arrival of a starship from Earth to a far away planet, in a condition that would prevent any material damage or risks for humans, thanks to the high technology that people imagine the future might hold.

In the short story, the landing area was literally sterilized, while sophisticated robots would respond immediately to any external threat, judged non-existent after the arrival of a harmless humanoid, without any apparatus, resembling rather a matchstick, which accepted the receiver-transmitter-translator offered by the ship's commander to establish an initial contact, in view of a good neighbour policy:

"We come in peace, we are friends, we'll teach you, we brought new things to you," he said. "You should not have come, you will never leave, you will die here," replied the native in a cold, logical and matter-of-fact statement. Judging that it was a threat, the commander bluffed: "Dying, what is dying?" The native simply conveyed a feeling of disgust, ended the conversation and plunged into the woods.

It was not a threat: in the next expedition to the native's village, the clocks stopped, communications were interrupted, robots fell to the ground and the ship did not respond to the commands. There was something on the planet that human's advanced technology was unable to detect or control, that prevented the use of any equipment and that was why the natives did not have any sophisticated implement.

"Since man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras), the humans were limited by their own measures and could not predict the unknown, the unimaginable, which escaped from their own experience. And it was no surprise the melancholic destiny of the expedition, trapped forever by unknown forces in a strange and desolate world, where the captain of the ship experienced, for the first time, the futility of human ingenuity.

For how much longer will humanity be trapped by man's own stupidity, thinking it wise to carelessly manipulate the small and fragile planet Earth? Could we hope for a global citizenship and government, as part of (though not inevitable) natural evolution of human history (Paehlke, 2004)? Will a global government continue to be in the hands of big business corporations, while ordinary citizens are constrained by this asymmetry of power?

While the common good succumbs to the false propaganda of the unlimited gifts of nature, powerful "lobbies", controlled by a devastating web of "egocentric producers and consumers" (Chermayeff and Tzonis, 1971), circulate around the holders of political and economic power worldwide, and, deeply rooted in the public administration, endorse the expansion of mega projects that deplete natural and cultural resources.

A cultural pathology can not be broken by any nation or entity: privileged people, not subject to the struggle for survival, remain involved on their own private interests, in the increase of their personal and familial assets, and, if holders of political and economic influence, contributing to the enactment of laws that legitimize the "freedom" to do as they please, despite the damage to the natural and built environment and overall quality of life.

People do not "make the system", the focus of change is not people, but the system in which they operate, the conditions set out by the paradigms of growth, power, wealth, work and freedom embedded at the heart of social, cultural political and economic institutions, and continuously flaunted by the mass media, public and private entities, and the so called "opinion leaders" covered by vested interests.

Studies in the Social Sciences describe how public opinion can be manipulated by marketing and advertising strategies (powerful tools of persuasion in today's world), using information from research in social psychology, psychology of learning, and public media communication (radio, television, press). Principles and ideas, values and genuine communication are replaced by jargon, slogans and self-serving propaganda.

The uncritical education, seeking to put patches on ruptured fabrics, inadvertently helps to legitimize power as domination and exploitation, wealth as predatory exploitation, growth as unlimited expansion, work as segmented specialization (O'Sullivan. 1987), deadening curiosity and innovation, encouraging acceptance of unsustainable living as being normal and to passively wait for others to take action.

The dominant political-technological-economical establishment changed Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" to "I measure therefore I am", a logo nowadays ingrained in all aspects of human life and uncritically accepted by academic formats, public policies and marketing interests, influencing man relationships with himself, with the environment and with all institutional and cultural extensions of being-in-the-world.

The crisis of our times is reflected in the loss of sensitivity and critical ability to discern and implement aesthetic, ethical and cultural values essential to the well-being and quality of life; ephemeral and predatory production and consumption threaten the natural and cultural heritage, culminating in the tragedy of an unhealthy world, unjust, violent and without beauty, where many people doubt whether it is worth living.

"By creating the world," God made it possible for animals of different species to multiply, flowers and fruits to bloom, birds to embellish the landscape with their feathers and songs; the ecosystems, however, were at the mercy of the will and intelligence of man to be well maintained in terms of the four dimensions of being in the world: intimate, interactive, social and biophysical (Pilon, 2010).

Paehlke states that global governance can only be legitimized from ethical principles, in which the character of people and organizations constitutes the fundamental element for the changes, not just by the development of capabilities, knowledge and skills, as the commander of the spaceship would think and many of the influential elites of our times openly advocate (economic, political, educational, cultural, military, artistic, media, entertainment).

Will there be a light at the end of the tunnel? Bible readers have evidence of apocalyptic forecasts, already in course: wars, famine, pestilence, death, ecological disasters, climate change, geological, social and economic imbalances. Could we still close the eyes to the calamities that disturb the planet, so nothing would remain but (in biblical language), "ask God to abbreviate these days of torment"? Could we still rely on the "men of good will"?

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ⁱ André Francisco Pilon has an extensive career as an Associate Professor (University of São Paulo), as a Psychologist (Court of Justice of the State of São Paulo), as a Department Director (Health Education, Ministry of Health, Brazil), and as a Journalist and Editor-in-Chief (journal *Academus*). He is the author of several publications and presentations at national and international scientific events and he is affiliated with many national and international organisms worldwide. For his public profile and selected publications, please see the website below:

<https://usp-br.academia.edu/Andr%C3%A9FranciscoPilon/CurriculumVitae>

E-mail: gaiarine@usp.br

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