THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
OF ENVIRONMENTAL LOSS AND POWER

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Abstract: The word Anthropocene, referring to a new era of humanity's uncontrolled exercise of power over the Earth as a geophysical unit, could be translated using a cognitive metaphor as "the Age of Loss". We have gained such power that we are unable to adjust or even fully track its manifestations. The relation between loss and power is continuous in all the basic areas of materialization of socio-political concepts: in politics, in economics, in law and the judiciary, in legislation, environmental protection, etc. The philosophy of loss and power is inseparable from economic concerns. The entirety of Western civilization is built on the economic calculus of profit and loss, whose results are directly transformed into decisions of power made by the administrative, political, ownership and power-broking elites. The environmental and climate crisis is therefore also a crisis of privilege of one group over others. The question for politics is which political means can one use to achieve a state of uncorrupted voluntary depriviligization. This level of prosperity will itself be the subject of environmental self-limitation, being presented as "loss". It will be posed as a political problem with the intention of depoliticizing the subject and inequality of civilizations; precisely in accordance with the posed political problem of democracy, which has already uncovered the basic connection: liberalism won't make a poor country rich.

Keywords: power; loss; anthropocene; environmental and climate crisis

On echoes, resonances, and pauses

An echo is a relation, sometimes an audible physical phenomenon, other times the metaphorical resonance of people in the spaces between each other, between them and their surroundings, the environment or nature. Mutual interactions between people create relations, both human relationships and all others. In the relational emptiness of the late modern world, under the influence of people's multiplied alienation: from each other, from the work they carry out for the accumulation of profits, from the environment they live in, we expend the utmost effort searching for ways to save, renew, reinvent these relations or just figure out what counts as one. To live in relation to and be affiliated with the "world" and its constitutive openness, is turning into an impossible dream. The notion of "feedback" unexpectedly binds us to our social, economic and political world, which after all *is* an environment of bondage. We have resonances, customer satisfaction surveys, artificial echo-locators installed in our online shops

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("Would you recommend our shop to your friends?"), which due to their purpose often become their own opposites, leading to a personally fully understandable position: why can't you just leave me alone? Feedback is aggression localized in the space between the customer and the goods, between consumers and consumer prices.

This resonance has nothing to do with the echo provided to humanity by its unavailable, but still reachable world, which communes with others and nature. We don't register the tremors through which our environments are telling us they will no longer be available, but will instead resist their further disruption: the echo will be replaced by a language whose alphabet includes drought, desertification, tornadoes, climate crisis, melting glaciers and permafrost, increased pollutants in the water, soil, air, food, mass migration. It has many more letters and we hardly understand them all. We are but slowly learning that the world is constitutively unavailable, despite thinking the opposite for centuries. I cannot command the dawn, the dusk, the lightning, first snow, to transform my world at breakneck speed into something quite different than the barren frost, I have no internal, volcanic terrestrial vitality, nor can I wield that general repulsion which the Earth is capable of effecting to contravene our human attempts to make it maximally available. A structural change in the relation of humanity to the "world" has been underway from the 18th century, according to a single principle: modern society's dominion over the natural world is stabilized through purely political and economic dynamics, meaning the status quo is upheld through sustained economic growth, protected by political, police and military power. As a result, we have access to things whose permutations are based on the speed and depth of technical innovations.

The having of things and the unavailability of our planetary environment are not necessarily in conflict. Humans are beings of scarcity and as *homo compensator*, they must alleviate it via industry and culture. So long as the world replies with an echo, the relations are in harmony. A rift only appears when humans stop compensating and succumb to the panic of impending loss. The fear of having less than I do now, than I had in the past, creates a psychological reversal leading to the will for world domination. Civilizations appear, formed around the idea of the unlimited imperial disposability of a world transformed into a kingdom of possibilities. Over barely three centuries however, even the most aggressive of these, the European and subsequently Euro-Atlantic, realized that when the damage created by forced disposability is transferred to the world and the costs of extracting profits are carried by others (the inhabitants non-European civilizations or their own precarized citizens), the world no longer echoes, it becomes silent. The benefit of that echo was essentially an open question; silence is menacingly reticent and makes us a social and global formation where everyone (apart from the elites of corporate capitalism) becomes a *global citizen*, i.e., people inextricably linked to the world in serious, insurmountable and eventually deadly conflict. This is the nature of the resonance between us and the world as our environment.

The philosophy of loss and power

The word Anthropocene, referring to a new era of humanity's uncontrolled exercise of power over the Earth as a geophysical unit, could be translated using a cognitive metaphor as "the Age of Loss". We have gained such power, that we are unable to adjust or even fully track its manifestations, only to discover we are losing hope in fulfilling our ambitions. Power and loss are more than tangentially related; on the contrary all we need is the empirical finding that power is experienced most powerfully when paired with freedom, to see that a loss in freedom also manifests as a loss of power. The relation between loss and power is continuous in all the basic areas of materialization of socio-political concepts: in politics in economics, in

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law and the judiciary, in legislation, environmental protection, etc. In the theory of state and law, this relation is axial and also functions as the axis of political economy, around which the systemic demands for the treatment of both nature and humanity are formalized.

The philosophy of loss and power is inseparable from economic concerns. The entirety of Western civilization is built on the economic calculus of profit and loss, whose results are directly transformed into decisions of power made by the administrative, political, ownership and power-broking elites. The 2020s are the start of an era where these decisions take place with geopolitical and geoeconomic discretion; since its imperialization, global capital has become strong enough to compensate for local or regional losses in favour of overall profits. The so-called "capital flow" factor was already understood by classical political economy as a tool to dampen the effects of crises of overproduction. Today's loss calculations don't follow developing socio-economic crises, but instead influence supranational political power relations by creating unconventional and artificial dependencies (by providing direct investments, cash loans, involving third countries in economic and financial transactions, selling certain commodities such as IT or weapons, etc.) and geoeconomic alliances. Not every calculation or rather estimate will pan out, however as a general rule every immediate loss must result (usually in the medium-term) in what is known as a "*win-win* situation".

The economics of loss calculus that drives the political decisions of power to eventual profits has put something of a geopolitical stop to any illusions of free markets or the fully deregulated competition of market subjects. Political economy had to drop its illusions of sporting contests between market participants, with each winner walking away with the gold medal of free economic space to follow their interests. But this did not mean the end of industrial economy; industrial modernity remains the peak of economic and social progress, as far as the purely technological provision of humanity's economic self-reproduction goes. The problem has instead shifted from the social science prognostications of the 1980s, which populated their ideal type of post-industrial economy with specific aspects (post-Fordism, knowledge societies, experience economy, service economy, respectively the tertiary sector, cognitive capitalism, cultural capitalism, etc.) to the question of whether the geoeconomic notions of capital usage which promote their geopolitical interests through a new and significant role for the state as shall prevail. Capital, subject to the political dominance of the state and applied according to the principles of a mid-term loss calculus in a geopolitical environment, has shown to be a highly flexible tool for the growth of economic and political power, as is seen in the radical change to China's international standing. Apart from this, its functioning has also uncovered certain contexts which Western (Euro-Atlantic) civilization does not want to see, although they result in a new situation that requires serious contemplation from many angles, namely from that of the political philosophy of the Anthropocene. What has been discovered is that the notion of markets and market competition has its limits and that markets are defined politically; that politics also has such limits, when we approach them it generates hopelessness; that the public sector and its requirements also have limits; limits past which transcultural communication no longer functions as a real factor, where the rift between the military and civil sector widens; for our current mundane economic situation we lack a theoretically mature political economy, leading to the lack of a precise science-based and reliable means of understanding and managing the situation; this lack is compensated through a clash of ideologies and value hierarchies, the creation of normative value scales and complex disinformation.

The reaction to the most evident failure of Western civilization to come to terms with these circumstances and find solutions, has been a boom in substitutionary political gestures: looking for enemies, investigating new axes of evil, monitoring respect for human rights, provoking

military tensions, undertaking media disinformation campaigns – all in the hopes of finding a way to escape the disappointment spiral of Neo- and Post-neoliberalism. Citizens of the wealthy Western ("first") world, with high ambitions in terms of the economy, education and power, on a foundation of progressive modernist rationality, suddenly find themselves in a world of agonal paradoxes; pressured by often nameless external forces to adapt their way of living to unfulfillment, failure, wreckage and loss; vainly searching for anything to help them come to terms with the fear of loss, beginning to feel the conjunctural ideological calls for self-determination, self-identification and autonomy as a false and deprived civilizational lie. Late modern (post-industrial) society itself is beginning to feel the strain of hard-to-define forces bringing rage and apprehension; reacting with depression and ever-growing aggression. Individuals' polydimensional social existence leads to aimless situational aggression, breaking apart the system of norms establishing who, how and what is allowed or should be done. This breakdown of norms means a breakdown of sanctions or at least minimizes the willingness to accept sanctioning actions as a materialized expression of specific kinds of rights. An environment of arbitrary power arises and new kinds of power enter, whose removal or suppression is not systematic, but rather takes place on a case-by-case basis, according to the ad-hoc decisions of the most powerful contractual parties in the sanction conflict. Liberalism has led the Western, late-modern society along something of a U-turn back to the exact situation described by J. Locke: until there is a general institution with more power than the most powerful of participants in the sanctions conflict, arbitrary power will rule supreme.

On power

The first property of power is its ubiquity in human societies. As a social animal, humanity organizes itself into the societies it lives in, primarily through the application of power. Power is therefore a fact: anthropological, social, economic, political, instrumental, linguistic, authoritative. The primary social experience of every human in all historical societies is linked to power; power is such an everyday component of the social environment, that its presence can be inferred in every process of culturalization, in the creation of forms of life, in the development of organisation and social order. Notably in philosophical anthropology, this suspicion of the omnipresence of power has led to the formulation of three questions commonly considered essential: 1) What is power? 2) Is the drive for power inherent to humanity or is it forced by social power relations? 3) How can the destructive effects of the lust for power be curbed?

All three are ambivalent and the way they are asked makes it impossible to determine what they are actually asking. "What is power?" is among other things a question concerning one's individual experience of power, where there is obviously no common denominator; the "inherent nature" of anything, including power, would require a perfect knowledge of the genesis of the human condition, attainable (if at all) only through partial backwards reconstruction, never as a definitive reconstruction; and any reflections on "destructive effects" are normatively evaluative, with unexamined assumptions (what criteria establish "destructiveness"; which subject is authorized to carry out such an operation, etc.). The terminological differentiation of power is insufficient at the level of philosophical anthropology; it may have peaked with H. Plessner (Plessner 1931), who defined the constant of "the human situation" as the political (*das Politische*, Plessner 1931, 194), not limiting itself to the state's sphere of influence, but rather permeating all human relationships and tying up ambivalent manifestations of power. Basically, Plessner's conception can be understood as the transition from philosophical anthropology to political philosophy, where the notion of power remained.

In current political philosophy the debate surrounding power is dictated by a conflict between two concepts: the classical concept according to Thomas Hobbes and the modernist concept according to M. Foucault. This corresponds with the contradictory conceptualization of the two main theories of power, the substantialist and relationalist. The ambivalence of the term power stemming from its historical contexts allows us to treat power as substantial potency (the ability "to be power"), as well as the relation that capacitates power in the first place (without that relation, power is incapacitated). Because there is a classical bipolar "either-or" relation between the two theories, the first reason for their investigation is to be able to mediate between them, secondly to overcome the rifts and barriers they have built up between each other in the direction of an urgent problem of the Anthropocene: the answer to the question that allows us to access the problem of power and loss in the first place. That is, what is our understanding of society? Political conceptions of society that challenge the existing social order as well as its means of legitimacy are common and their reflections cannot be avoided when investigating controversies. So-called practical politics no less strongly promote a latent distaste and weariness for anonymous power struggles in modern Western societies, which are transformed into doubts about democracy and provoke the populism of strong words and simple solutions. A social situation arises that is a breeding ground for discussions of the end of democracy, the end of politics, the end of the fantasy view of ourselves and our possibilities that we have held for several generations. All these understandable manifestations of civilizational despondence should however be preceded by the question, how do we understand society? What is sociability? Until we can explain these basic problems, we will not know why we reject the current social state, why we require its change, reform, overall reconstruction, reorientation of values, new direction and new leading forces.

Sociability as a broad spectrum of regulatory forces that give rise to the social order while simultaneously legitimizing it, is a question of power, *per se*. Someone must use certain means to establish ("make"), promote and ensure the elementary relations, these being sufficiently justified for a social order to grow out of them. From the first constitutive steps, this is a question of power, force, domination and violence; in this relation, theories of power are in fact best suited to sufficiently explain, evaluate and initiate adequate behavior concerning the phenomena paralyzing our current Western civilization. In their favour as a research "window" into the social consciousness, there is also the argument that unlike with politics, democracy, morality, governance or economics, power is not in crisis. Power is no decadent manifestation of a unified and indivisible will, but a highly differentiated perspective whose analysis always only covers certain aspects, never the "whole". It is a normative quantity, following no norms itself. It may seem symbolic (Bourdieu), but instead it prefers to be invisible (not entirely, then it would be impotent, but as much as possible while remaining perceivable) rather than visible. For Weber, power was a sociologically amorphous quantity (Weber 1972, 28), although he had no qualms interpreting it as a ubiquitous chance to set up the desired social order and form itself as the "government". Power and government do not however necessarily represent the same thing, because the manifestations of power in governance (such as elections as a clear, visible and manageable act of power) are not identical with manifestations of power when promoting interests enabled for example by electoral victory (these may take place entirely outside voters' control).

The rational thought of power and its perception in real social relations are not in conflict and may be jointly integrated. Social relations are structured explicitly asymmetrically, into relations of dominance and subordination, so that each society mirrors the hierarchical factors that also ideally in fact legitimize the existing hierarchy. It is much more difficult to figure out when such an ideal situation occurs and how it is even possible. In modern industrial societies,

the main hierarchy-creating factors are the market, ownership and governments, with the market and government being in a complementary relationship: market globalization is complementary to the neoliberal principle of government policy, for hyper-globalization it is the principle of *global governance*, aiming towards fully denationalized economic integration supported by defanged national governments. Markets and governance cannot be mutually substituted for each other; political democracies have every right to protect their social order, which cannot be replaced with market relations. If this right collides with the requirements of the global economy, then it is conversely not possible to substitute the market using participatory democratic policy. The rules that are produced by democratic processes (up to the level of global standards and regulations) are impractical for the market, economically inconvenient and undesirable; furthermore, they contain the risk of incompetence that is necessarily transferred to the forms of political governance they initiate (decisions made at the state level).

Markets and governance, i.e., economic power and political (state) power must complement each other, but may only do so under weak and ineffective rules; this is the ideal case for the neoliberal dogma of the weak state and strong market. If the complementarity of markets and governance fails to lead to the lowest common denominator compromise of ineffective rules and if national governments don't abandon their political responsibility on behalf of the economy, this is the ideal case of a state regulated market (state capitalism for example of the Chinese or Russian type). As a result, the relation between market and state can play out in the mode of market-controlled non-state hyper-globalization and in the mode where the nation state is the dominant political and economic organizational structure. For both of these there is a certain modus of collectively binding decisions, i.e. the modus of applying the power necessary to maintain a functional order; here, both types of market and state complementarity lay claim to political democracy. For the modus of market-controlled non-state hyper-globalization, a relational conception of power is more typical: because as a relational quantity, power only refers to itself; where we would have previously looked for a specific holder of power (the ruler, the monarch, the capitalist authorised to wield power due to capital ownership, etc.), today there is an "empty space" formed by the self-referential nature of power. Conversely in the nation state mode, there is more of a substantialist understanding of power, which is tied to a specific established and commonly visible place; it is something of an "unemancipated", static power, distributed by the highest institutions and organs of power in the state. Accepting a share of that power allows us to clearly follow the creation of social power relations with their limited dynamics; on the other hand, accepting that power share can be seen as the transfer of an obligation that is (although not necessarily) in practice derived from the exercise of power. If sanctions of power relations become part of the legal order, it will be possible to develop interdependences of power, in government, administration, management and control as performative moments of the functional material presence of power and to gradually coalesce these into beneficial, successful and socially useful performances of power (its "exercise" which is carried out as a performative community, e.g. as a community of environmental risks and needs).

Rather than talking about abstract power, it would be more precise to talk about powers plural; it was the ongoing differentiation of power that laid (exclusively) the foundations of a pluralistic civil society in Western civilization and supported the development of individualism as the condition for the broad application of the rights and freedoms of individuals and citizens. Everywhere in society, we also come across various powers, producing various differences including contradictions. The political philosophy of power, therefore, tends to be an analysis of environments of power with the goal of understanding which powers and why are currently in play (which of the powers is currently "at the helm"); for political economy it then remains

to investigate in which relations of power within and between the differentiated powers the current (predominant or categorical) characteristic of capitalism is being realized, capable of reacting to and changing the original powers themselves. The existence of power in the form of many parallel powers differentiated in their effects makes it difficult to answer one of the classical questions of political philosophy: what gives license to power, what can power exercised as power legitimately rely on? The idea that powers can only function if they are legitimized by the will of the majority expressed through the act of voting (the primary materialization of political democracy) is farcical. Despite the fact that a majority can be gained without the need for political democracy, there seems to be no definitive relation between the powers in action and the majorities (meaning consensually established sections of the political public).

Half a century ago, in the context of the fading student revolts at the end of the 1960s and the burgeoning peace movement (protesting against the Vietnam War), H. Arendt wrote: "All political institutions are manifestations and materializations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them." (Arendt 1970, 42).[2] Even taking into account the context of the time, which tended to favor notions wholly conceived in the minds of their originators over arguments, such a strong thesis should surely be supported be the example of at least one historical civilization where it could be confirmed. Arendt does not provide one: she cannot, because instead of historical facts amenable to investigation, she chose to undertake a political and philosophical analysis of a mere ideological premise, almost one of the political mythologems. The premise that it is "the people" (in what sense is this term clear?) who hold this "living power" (implying the possibility of an "unliving power" and transposing the discussion into the realm of metaphysics) precludes us from confirming that these are the very pillars undergirding our system of political institutions. "Research" of this type does not lead to verifiable knowledge about the situations of various political systems, but aims to constitute and organize such political situations. It does have a long tradition, traceable throughout the history of ideologies, as well as a certain inertia, because it continues to crop up in various forms to this day; but it fails to bring what environmental political philosophy and political economy require from qualified theory (the interpretation of qualified premises).

Shortly after Arendt's contribution there was another, which had a detrimental effect on research into powers, governments and control in the political philosophy of the second half of the 20th century. This was J. Rawls' work *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971), which caught everyone's attention by establishing a new dominant topic, justice. The subsequent decades of discussions on liberalism and communitarianism, theories of hegemonialism, antagonism and agonism, deliberative democracy and negotiation built on Rawls' theory, frequently and rightfully criticized for the constraints of its ahistoricism, brought about a flood of literature still considered to be the basis of political philosophy at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, but did little to expand our understanding of the central topic of power in post-industrial society. Until modern political theory clearly distanced itself from Rawls' identification of political philosophy with a specific conception of the problem of justice, where politics and the political tended to be relegated to the realm of social imagination without the factor of active, effective power (Mouffé 1993, Geuss 2008), power and governance were developed into a complex problem requiring the broadest trans- and heterodisciplinary use of the logical, hermeneutical and empirical tools of multi-perspective analysis, outside the capabilities of (environmental) political philosophy. The situation was made even more complex due to the immense loosening of terminology, where the term power could be used as filler in any discussion of late modern

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[2]"Alle politischen Institutionen sind Manifestationen und Materialisationen der Macht; sie erstarren und verfallen, sobald die lebendige Macht des Volkes nicht mehr hinter ihnen steht und sie stützt."

societies, whether or not this was a critique of late imperial capitalism or merely a vivid depiction of systemic power relations and the existential powerlessness of individuals. As a result of this conceptual indulgence, today we can come across power as an "equivocal and polyvocal term that only functions as a totalizing […] political metaphor" (Kupke 2008, 63).[3]

Theories have a tendency to singularize; similarly, Rawls' socio-political theory assumes that what it considers philosophy, can do without history, politics, sociology or empirical research. Its isolating conceptual exclusivity creates a situation where these various disciplinary approaches supposedly conflict, predetermining the legitimacy of its theoretical statements. Environmental political philosophy cannot afford to take this route in the case of power, as well as other basic questions (governance, administration, democracy, the political imperative, authority, etc.); the same is true for environmental political economy and ecological economy. These generally gain political legitimacy for their theories only when coupled with research, so in practice via their transdisciplinary, reciprocal constitution. Environmental political philosophy should be developed more in the opposite direction than that recommended for example by multitude theory (Hardt, Negri 2002; Hardt, Negri 2004): not from singularities that develop joint activities, whose ultimate manifestation is mutual cooperation and solidarity, but from mundane environmental facts that together create the "universe" of the Anthropocene and whose further detailed comprehension then leads to disciplinary singularities (analyses) leading to reciprocal knowledge synthesis. Environmental political philosophy will never self-organize, if only because it will never have sufficient means of communication; especially since our current digital communication is used entirely as a source of self-legitimating energy by capital – digital communication is something of a recuperative unit, capable of saving capital's strength and energy for the application of power. Neither can it organize itself according to the principles of multitude, which are incapable of preventing even the value differentiation of singularities (multitude accepts certain differentiations as welcome and others as unwelcome), nor its social hierarchy (instead of unification and solidarity the hierarchical system of differences is only strengthened).[4]

The political philosophy of power must begin with a theory of society as the space of the practical realization of power, governance and subordination. Whichever hermeneutics we choose, be it culturally historical, socially ontological, environmentally ecological or politically economic, the manifestations of power will always be crucial in the conceptual analysis of any theory of society. By investigating power and control we protect society, as Foucault wrote (Foucault 1997), meaning that we exert a reverse disruptive force of resistance in opposition to the controlling power of capital (however humorous the comparison of these two powers may sound); we can defend society better if we learn to understand it. Capital requires a living, maximally communized society from which to extract surplus-value; the profit required for accumulation as the decisive form of capital's existence. Because it depends on life, capital must systematically intensify processes of communization and subordinate one sphere of life to itself after another; the growing anonymous exercise of power amounts to an outright takeover of the world and of life, that cannot be socially resisted. One can however, as one of the affects most difficult to capitalize on, awaken a social consciousness of loss: the loss of perspectives in life that is the result of capital control over the communization of life and the world, nature, resources, material and non-material values, individual opportunities, consumption, ownership,

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[3] "…sei Macht auch zu einer Art Füllsel, d.h. zu einem derart äquivoken und polyvoken Term geworden, dass er nur noch als totalisierende [...] Metapher für das Politische selbst fungieren kann".

[4] A separate chapter among modern theories of power is Foucault's concept of governmentality, which requires a more detailed explanation than there is room for here. As a result I have omitted it from the discussion.

historical and social materiality of life's relations, identity and self-identification, overall understanding of the Self and Us.

On loss

In 1819 a bill on the regulation of child labor was introduced into the British Parliament (the *Cotton Factories Regulation Act*). It envisaged a ban on child labor under the age of 9, while children aged 10 to 16 would only be allowed to work 12 hours a day. The law only applied to the textile industry; work in spinning and weaving mills, and other factories had a disastrous impact on the health of children. The proposal was highly controversial; it was rejected as an attack on the freedom to enter into work contracts and so as an attempt to eradicate the foundations of the free market. During discussions in the House of Lords, it was often repeated that work must remain free: the children want to work and the factory owners want to employ them, what then is the problem? Only in the furious desire of the state to regulate human freedom.

The defenders of free markets will complain that this happened two hundred years ago and that nobody would talk about child labor in this way today. Of course, they're right: children's rights don't allow (at least in the West) to treat children in ways that were common before the end of the 19th century before child labor laws actually came into effect. Before that time there were however many of those for whom such restrictions were a violation of free market principles, i.e. a loss (of freedom).

Various legislation is being proposed today which is met with a similar reaction to that of two centuries ago. In the past 40 to 50 years the parliaments of democratic countries have been presented with draft legislation on ecological issues; these concern limiting the operation of industry with extreme impacts on the environment and emission rules for motor vehicles. From at least the 1970s it was clear which harmful substances were escaping into the atmosphere from motor vehicles (and their amounts), but it was only in 2007 that a regulation of the European Parliament and Council (EC) introduced carrying out emission checks by producers and technical services. The member states of the EU subsequently changed their legislation accordingly and today it is taken for granted that no such "gas chamber" of a vehicle is allowed on the roads.[5]

What about all the other similar necessary laws and regulations impacting the market or even "individual" freedoms? One cannot imagine that everything will continue on as before and that the problems that are already outgrowing our ability to solve them, will just go away. Every day of inaction is an accumulation of the necessary strength of future measures it will no longer be possible to avoid: restrictions, regulations, prohibitions, sanctions, consumer cuts and further limitations as required by the mundane facts of our environmental situation. The generation of today's teenagers, at the latest, will encounter something they have never experienced due to their hypersensitive socialization, something difficult to understand: that they cannot exercise what they consider their rights. During the covid pandemic, one aspect of the thinking and action of the inhabitants of modern societies was uncovered: a fundamental revulsion to self-limitation, accompanied by an emphasis on the value of the Self. This only involved a fraction of our citizenry, but the question remains: what will the reaction to much stronger limitations necessitated by the environment be? Our administrative state will presumably have no other options but coercive enforcement, or conversely a softening, eradication or even revocation

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[5] This does not however apply to the military transport and combat equipment, which are exempt from any controls. Because they are subject to no emission or other standards, the result of any debates of "carbon footprints" in the automotive industry are somewhat skewed.

of the measures in question. Both are dead ends whose destructive effects may approach that of retaining the *status quo* and waiting for the impacts of environmental hazards.

Another very risky example concerns the loss of cultural integration. Since the 2008 crisis, there has been an increasing awareness of disintegration as the requirement for a new unification of society and critique of its split. Those criticizing these splitting social processes tend to have a short-sighted focus on portraying the classical polarity of "us" and "them": "they" are the people splitting society with their behavior, which "we" reject on principle. Professional journalism is lauded for dancing on the barricades it has itself erected, without much interest from segments of the public. This conceals that the loss of cultural and social integration and a concentrated call for *new*, *alternative* integration are remnants of neoliberal politics, whose dogmas and norms have long been surpassed by actual social life. Individualism, full self-sufficiency, complex responsibility for oneself and the conduct of one's own life, things liberalism presented to the individual as necessary obligations, have become the basis for an institutionalized egoism that has manifested in the expansion of "subjective rights" and the creation of the "qualified subject". The feeble, scarcely academic resistance of neoliberal social institutions to the nonconformity of individuals to the reach of cultural integration could not prevent the establishment over the past decades, of a relatively numerous fraction of the citizenry who will always and in all situations insist on their own idiosyncratic wishes, purposes and interests (understood as rights), rejecting any obligations and standards imposed from outside as limitations or curtailing of their individual wants.

This failure of neoliberal politics leading to social disintegration took place in parallel to the economic restructuring of the middle-income classes, the former "middle class", whose emancipatory efforts focused in particular on the "qualified subject" as an interesting goal for individualized consumer capital. It seems the partial revival of middle-income groups has not provoked a new social self-understanding. Rather, the tensions between current political and cultural conflicts (primarily environmental, but also of a social nature) and the economic changes of the past two decades have somewhat evened out. This concerns one segment of society: egalitarian subject culture of the "middle class" whose massive development in the second half of the 20th century is otherwise identical to the drastic changes in the structures of economic inequality. These middle-income groups are strictly isolated from low-income ones (the global poor), but simultaneously just as strictly isolated from the wealthy ones. Their socio-political importance lies in their ability to function as a mass self-image of contemporary society that is broadly shared despite not adequately representing social reality; they gain in persuasiveness merely through their discursive capacity for rhetorical self-representation of our economic policy. The "middle class" itself continues its profound collapse due to the disintegrative effects of the dual dynamics of socio-economic development: the dynamic of post-industrialization and the expansive concept of education. Academically educated people employed in fields with future potential enter elevators lifting them up to the higher floors of the middle-income classes; catering to this group's needs is the service sector, where those who are socially expendable end up, but above them all and above everyone hovers the shadow of precarization. Inside the middle class there has emerged a divided three-class society without the ability or will to integrate; it shares no common perspectives, interests or goal. These middle-income classes have no homogeneous culturally economic and political profile; the very idea of "three classes" inside this class is something of a schematic aid, because inside each of these there will be further differentiating income relations and employment relationships. Between the interests of bankers and managers on the one hand and doctors and teachers on the other we can find much more divergence than harmony, as is reflected in their political orientation. Political differences lead to other, often antagonistic divergent attitudes towards

society, culture, civilization, the world. As heterogenization increases, so also does the level of internal aggression in society, disintegration breeds aggression.

Both examples show that the typical relation between two humans, just as that between humanity and the environment, is that of conflict. Humans don't create the conflict, they themselves are a conflict. The less capable they are of self-evidence, the less they perceive themselves as a conflict and the less they reflect the conditions of the constitutive insufficiency of evidence, under which they can still survive. When humans look for consensus, it is not in order to compensate the insufficient evidence of their conflicting nature, but in order to establish (always only consensually) what is real, what reality is like and how to deal with reality. The predominance of consensually established reality is oriented towards comprehension; everything humans lack is made up for by this "immediate" approach to "reality". It does not matter whether or not reality is something like "objectivity" or even "truth". All of these terms are merely a question of consent, which in turn stems from sufficient conviction, i.e. the ability to convince. Throughout the development of Western civilization all that mattered were concessions, accepted based on an original constitutive lack of self-evidence.

Up until in now the evolution of human civilizations, original deficiencies have usually acted as indirect stimuli for evolutionary cultural innovations.[6] But this was no simple, direct relation (we lack fire – let's learn how to start one) that could be imitated just as simply. Compensating deficiencies, either those given by humanity's natural abilities or arising as a result of its own behaviour, presumes a given deficiency is an ontologically conditioned deficit of rationality applied in practice. As long as this refers to one of the basic conditions of human existence (providing safety, food, warmth, etc.) it is only a manifestation of physical weakness compensated through the achievements of rationality. As soon as it arises in connection with the practice of domination through power and use of the natural environment through rational means, it becomes a deficiency in applied practice: a threat, a risk, a mistake – in general, a loss.

Its compensation moves to the realm of rhetoric. In the original situation of deficiency, a human acts contrary to their biological indisposition; in the second a situation has been created where everything depends on their mercy and sufficient rationality. Both are a paradox: while initially the human was so evolutionary successful precisely due to the will to overcome their deficiencies, the current supremely developed evolutionary practice creates a situation of deficiency for all that is alive. The effect is that of conflict. Loss of deficiency, originally through practical compensation, changes to compensation of deficiency through rhetorical relativization of evil. If the rhetoric is successful (which will be every time it defends the amenities and prosperity of undifferentiated "human civilization"), it becomes a basic factor of politically sanctioned human existence, which fails to remove a single deficiency, but promotes itself as the consolation in absorbing loss. The basic deficiency of the practice of rationality in the era of the Anthropocene, i.e. the insufficient evidence of deficiency, is untouched by that consolation provided by political rhetoric.

Philosophy always loses when in conflict with rhetoric. Perhaps as early as Plato, who recognized the necessity of rhetoric and pulled philosophy into confrontation with it, we can observe the demise of philosophy in the face of the rhetoric of compensating human misery. Things are no different with political philosophy in relation to political rhetoric. Political philosophy is unable to rid humanity of the loss that, in the era of the Anthropocene, appears to attest to the complex civilizational failure about to take place at the moment of peak historical

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[6] On the anthropological theories of humans as deficient beings (*Mängelwesen*), cf. e.g. Horyna, B., *Počátky filosofické antropologie* [The Origins of Philosophical Anthropology], Brno: Torzo 1999.

success of civilizational practice. It will never have the same confidence as the non-theoretical, non-argumentative, inconclusive, dogmatic or even outright lying compensatory political rhetoric. Political philosophy is able to differentiate and analyze the loss of one's relation to reality; the loss of critical perception; the loss of cultural subjectivity; the loss of customary sensory schemes; human disappearance and suspension within digital technologies; the loss of affective contact with the external environment; the loss any sense of the relation between stability and instability; the loss of the elementary ability to reflect on the collapsing symbiosis between the foundations of one's own civilization and the mundane environment of life – study of the Anthropocene provides enough opportunities to continue this incomplete list. Political rhetoric has no qualms about pronouncing as real and true whatever it is able to push through.

From philosophy as well as rhetoric we are given names. These are important, since naming is a social act that allows all members of society to recognize certain phenomena in different places and different times as something of the same type: as a loss that becomes an organic (although perhaps shocking) experience in the age of the Anthropocene. Our decisions to classify things are in this sense arbitrary, we make them only in order to pass from one kind of phenomenon to another; political philosophy asks about the possibilities of *political* decisions, and because of that we need to find out whether or what there is, among all the strange things contextually given, that is *general*, to which it may relate. Environmental political philosophy makes reflective judgments (it uses critical *Urteilskraft*) that don't aim to create terms for objects, but instead includes them in their complex occurrences under terms as principles: in this case under the term "loss". Compensatory political rhetoric requires only a correctly oriented eloquence (the ancient *eloquentia*) in order to prioritize any particular loss.

Conclusion

Post-industrial and post-neoliberal societies are just as much political societies as all the modern ones; as far as their tendency to present any imagined thing as a political question. At the same time, only politics is authorized to form collectively binding decisions. We can look for the boundary that runs between the political and apolitical at the level of society, but it doesn't seem we can arrive at anything but subjectivist perspectives. The very dispute over the existence of such a boundary is itself political and is not undertaken in order to safeguard the sphere of "privacy" (the private sphere is the site of many clashes at the level of society, it is a dynamic field invigorated by political interests; typically when ensuring the "security" of persons by increasing supervision over them), but due to the possible existence of partial spheres of depoliticization and/or reflexive repoliticization, which mutually relate to each other and change the character of politics via changes to politically binding decisions: for example, patriarchal power structures are replaced by democratic ones. This is still political power because change relates to dispositional mechanisms and new configurations of power.

The environmental crisis is a crisis of prosperity; the enormous level of affluence that the Western world has achieved over the several past centuries at the expense of others – nature, other cultures, different generations of its own culture; at least 18% of the global population has travelled by air at least once in their life, of this 97% were members of the rich Western world; the environmental and climate crisis is therefore also a crisis of privilege of one group over others. The question for politics is, which political means can one use to achieve a state of uncorrupted voluntary depriviligization? This level of prosperity will itself be the subject of environmental self-limitation, being presented as "loss". It will be posed as a political problem with the intention of depoliticizing the subject and inequality of civilizations; precisely in accordance with the posed political problem of democracy, which has already uncovered the basic connection: liberalism won't make a poor country rich. Neither economic liberalism nor

liberal democracy can withstand the environmental and climate crisis brought about by modernist free market ideology. We don't have to condemn or defend it. It's enough to come face to face with it and ask the question, whether it is really self-evident that humans can exist.

Acknowledgments

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