

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Marx Said The Realm Of Freedom...

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(Written for academics)

MARX SAID THE REALM OF freedom begins beyond the realm of necessity, where social engineering stops. We need to remember that lesson today, because both capitalism and socialism have come to a crisis through greed of various sorts—not just predictable systemic movement. The words that follow are a materialist common sense thinking of the intuition of the transcendental, just as Marx's thought of the value form ("contentless") was a common sense materialist description of form. There is no desire for obscurantism here. If you work out what is written, you will see what it means. I have been hard hit by the clarity-fetishism of Little Britain Marxists. I hope you read the following paragraphs with an open imagination rather than a closed mind. The invitation is to keep in mind that the planetary system has no pathos about the extinction of the human race. This is not fatalism, but a curb on a digital idealism that feeds on the vanity of human wishes, good and bad. It is in view of this that we continue to teach, to work for social justice collectively.

If we think dogmatically (to borrow Immanuel Kant's phrasing in English translation) of planetarity as contained under another concept of the object which constitutes a principle of reason and then determine it in conformity with this, we come up with contemporary planet-talk by way of environmentalism, referring, usually though not invariably, to an undivided "natural" space rather than a differentiated political space. This smoothly "translates" into the interest of globalization in the mode of the abstract as such. This is the planet as an alternate description of the globe, susceptible to nation-state geopolitics. It can accommodate the good policy of saving the resources of the planet. My use of "planetarity," on the other hand, does not refer to an applicable methodology. It is different from a sense of being the custodians of our very own planet, although I have no objection to such a sense of accountability. For that a good epistemological preparation is Isabelle Stenger's *Cosmopolitics* (tr. Robert Bonono (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010).

The sense of custodianship of our planet has led to a species of feudality without feudalism—the good-hearted *bhadraloks* all the world over solving problems on behalf of the suffering *chhotoloks* (sorry for the ugly words, the phenomenon calls for it)—coupled with the method of "sustainability," keeping geology safe for good imperialism, emphasizing capital's social productivity but not its irreducible subalternizing tendency. But "planetary" is bigger than "geological," where random means nothing, which no thought can weigh. This is what translates and provides the alibi for good global capitalism.

Richard Dawkins style DNA-ism is an attempt to translate planet-thought digitally. But "planetary," I repeat, is bigger than "geological," where random means nothing, which no

thought can weigh: "living organisms exist for the benefit of DNA rather than the other way around. ... The messages that DNA molecules contain are all but eternal when seen against the time scale of individual lifetimes. The lifetimes of DNA messages (give or take a few mutations) are measured in units ranging from millions of years to hundreds of millions of years; or, in other words, ranging from 10,000 individual lifetimes to a trillion individual lifetimes. Each individual organism should be seen as a temporary vehicle, in which DNA messages spend a tiny fraction of their geological lifetimes" (Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, New York, Norton, 1986, p. 127). This, too, is a "dogmatic" thinking of planetarity.

If we think critically—via Kant again —only in reference to our cognitive faculties and consequently to the subjective conditions of thinking planetarity, without undertaking to decide anything about its object, we discover that planetarity is not susceptible to the subject's grasp (*Begriff* = Ger. concept). "The planet," I wrote some years ago, "is in the species of alterity," iterating the older expression "in the species of eternity." The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control globality. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. It is not really amenable to a neat contrast with the globe. I cannot say "the planet, on the other hand." When I invoke the planet, I think of the effort required to figure the (im)possibility of this underived intuition. Since to be human may be to be intended toward the other, we provide for ourselves transcendental figurations ("translations?") of what we think is the origin of this animating gift: Mother, Nation, God, Nature, Matter. These are names (nicknames, putative synonyms) of alterity, some more radical than others. If we think planet-thought in this mode, we connect with an inexhaustible taxonomy of such names, including but not identical with the whole range of human universals: aboriginal animisms rewritten through the named religions all the way to the spectral white mythology of post-rational science. If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us, it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away - and thus to think of it is already to transgress, for, in spite of our forays into what we metaphorize, differently, as outer and inner space, what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us as it is not, indeed, specifically discontinuous. We must persistently educate ourselves into this peculiar mindset, of accepting the untranslatable even as we are programmed to transgress it by "translating" into the mode of "acceptance." □