Georgios Tsiakalos

Mr. Krupp and the Relation of Biology to Politics

In Dennis V. Razis (Ed.) The Human Predicament II - Ecological Dynamics and Human Nature. The risk of a mass extinction of life on the planet. Delphi Society, Athens 2003, 469-480.

Introduction

The somewhat strange title of this presentation is an attempt to remind of the self-evident; namely, by speaking about "the risk of a mass extinction of life on the planet", even when we associate it with the concepts "Ecological Dynamics and Human Nature", we do not refer to phenomena that act on their own. On the contrary, we always refer to the behavior of definite people, which entails the danger of mass extinction. Making this clarification is worthwhile because much too often the way we use certain concepts in common as well as scientific discourse -concepts that we human beings have constructed- tends to invest them with a substance of their own, a substance similar to that of human beings. Thus "globalization" seems to be "responsible" for a variety of things, "nature" seems to "take revenge" every now and then and so on.

In other words, the title "Mr. Krupp and the relation of biology to politics", implies that the association of a science with politics is an association manufactured by certain people as a result of a certain logic, for a certain purpose. Here, by the name Krupp, the name of the family that was originally linked with the production of steel in Germany but mainly with the production of guns used during the 1st and 2nd World Wars, what is actually meant is the significance people of particular financial power may have in this sector.

Here is the relevant story of Mr. Krupp's involvement in Biology and Politics.

Krupp and the applying of principles of Biology to human society

On January 1st of the year 1900, the German press announced a scientific competition with unusually high monetary prizes and with the title: "What do we learn from the principles of the evolution theories concerning internal politics and the governing of countries?" The contest was placed under the auspices of three prominent university professors. The famous biologist Ernst Haeckel was one of

them. The generous Maecenas, on the other hand, preferred to remain anonymous. Only after his death, two years later, it became known that the Maecenas was Friedrich Alfred Krupp -the known tycoon of steel mills in the Ruhr area[1] and the "king of cannon production". At the same time, he was an amateur biologist who financed the establishment and operation of the first Institute of Sea Research in the gulf of Naples, since Capri was his resort, as well as of two fully equipped vessels for sea exploration[2]. An individual who fell in love with nature – an avant-garde ecologist, who, moreover, decided to invest his profits from cannon production and contribute to the implementation of biology "laws", that is, "rules" valid in nature, in governing human society.

The success of the contest was grand in terms of scientists' participation and mostly, in terms of its direct and sustainable impact on science and on political life[3]. The award winning "Heredity and Selection - Epitome of Socio-Biology and the Science of Service for Race" by Wilhelm Schallmayer[4] became a bestseller for several decades to come. Similarly, the award-winning work -third prize- by Ludwig Woltmann, later became one of the most referenced books by Hitler's national-

---

[1] The most important industrial center of Germany at that time.

[2] Dieter Richter:"Bruder Gluecklichs trauriges Ende". In DIE ZEIT, Nr. 31/2002, S. 74.

[3] The "Verlag of Gustav Fischer in Jena", a well-known German publisher, established a special series for publishing the awarded books. The series was called "Natur und Staat - Beiträge zur naturwissenschaftlichen Gesellschaftslehre. Eine Sammlung von Preisschriften" (Nature and State – Contributions to a scientific study of society. A collection of awarded books). Characteristic Following books are characteristic: Darwinismus und Sozialwissenschaft (Darwinism and Social Science) by Arthur Ruppin (1903), Die ererbten Anlagen und die Bemessung ihres Wertes für das politische Leben (Inherited abilities and the estimation of their value for the political life) by Walter Haecker (1907).

[4] Schallmayer, Wilhelm (1920): „Vererbung und Auslese – Grundriss der Gesellschaftsbiologie und der Lehre vom Rassedienst". Jena, Verlag von Gustav Fischer, (Vierte Auflage. First published in 1903).

socialists[5]. The "biological laws on which cultural evolution is based" are recorded in this book. It is worth noting that Ludwig Woltmann belonged to the social democratic party up to that point and in 1898 he had published the book "Darwin's theory and Socialism".

The production was generally rich and concerned with the attempt to establish every aspect of social life -from moral to practical politics- on evolutionary biology. A large portion of the scientific community seems to be "obsessed" with the prospect of linking social, political and humanitarian sciences with biology -with the latter in the role of basic science.

Within this drunkenness, whereby certain sponsors donated generously, several scientific voices remained unheard and thus ineffective. These voices insisted that in science, it is necessary to determine the various fields in which our hermeneutic models apply and whenever we attempt the use of a model in another field we must prove its validity in the new field and never consider it given from the beginning. A characteristic example of a serious scientific work was, for instance, Albert Hesse's (1904) book "Nature and society - Critical exploration of the significance of the evolution theory for social life"[6], in which each and every area to which biology may be connected with social sciences was checked as well as every other area for which there was no such possibility.

These loud scientific voices existed but others prevailed. The theory that "society should function according to Biology's rules" constituted one of the weapons Nazis used to reach power and with Hitler's raise to power it became a powerful doctrine.

The results are known. "National-socialism is applied biology," claimed Hans Schem, the Nazi Minister of Education of Bavaria in 1935 addressing educators in a Conference. "Applied Biology", as we know today, meant death for millions of people in concentration camps, in battlefields and in countries occupied by Nazis.

The question "how could such a crime happen?" has often been posed since then. The answer offered by Konrad Lorenz, the Nobel Prize winner for his research studies

---

[5] Woltmann, Ludwig(1936) "Politische Anthropologie", Leipzig, Justus Doerner Verlag (first published in 1903).

[6] Also published in the above mentioned series of the "Verlag von Gustav Fischer in Jena".

on the biology of behavior, was characteristic: “I was so naïve, so stupid, so trusting”, he whispered. Thus, he claimed, he could not imagine that when he talked about “natural selection” and “rejection”, the Nazis would understand “biological extermination” and “massacre”.[7]

That was his only answer when asked about one of his most important works published in 1943. It was a publication that sought out a scientifically founded racial policy to deal with “the threat of extermination of the German people”. Just as in the case of malignant tumors, he suggested, societies should also cut off and remove all dangerous elements. This policy, he warned, has no room for “intellectuality” and “sick emotionalism” that lead to “leniency towards the morally incompetent”.

Let’s draw our first conclusion from this story here: A man may be a nature lover on vacation, a gun manufacturer in everyday life and promote the abuse of biology in favor of an ideology leading to the mass extinction of life on earth. And scientists may participate in mass extinction, because they are so naïve or play naïve so that they do not understand that the meanings expressed in scientific language become political action after they have been appropriately translated into the language of dominant politics.

Human nature and the extinction of life

Could we perhaps draw a conclusion also about human nature from the story above? We certainly can. The simplest and most obvious conclusion is the following: the repertoire of human kind involves a large variety of behaviors, mostly due to the main and basic property of human behavior, which is its vast flexibility.

For this reason it is right to say that it is not mainly Biology but Auschwitz that teaches us the vast variety of human behavior: It ranges from the behavior of Rudolf Hoess,[8] the commander at Auschwitz, who used to work all day in order to finish his

[7] More about it and references in Georgios Tsiakalos: „Der Beitrag von Ethologie und Anthropologie zur Bildung gesellschaftsrelevanter Kategorien“. In E.J. Dittrich – F.O. Radke (Hrsg.) Ethnizitaet – Wissenschaft und Minderheiten. Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen 1990, 227-243.

[8] About the behavior of Rudolf Hoess see Hans Askenasy “Are We All Nazis?”, Secaucus, New Jersey, Lyle Stuart Inc., 1978.

deadly machine for the gas chambers so that it could exterminate the largest possible number of people to the behavior of the prisoner Janusz Korczak.

Janusz Korczak was the writer of many successful children's and young adult literature and also a very successful doctor. Early on, he dedicated his life to the orphaned Jewish children in Poland. With the German occupation and the closure of the orphanage, he went with the orphans and lived with them in the ghetto of Warsaw. On August 5th 1942, a decree was passed ordering the children to be transferred to Auschwitz. Korczak accompanied the children to the railway station and he was about to board the train with them. At that moment the German commander recognized him and ran to him. "I read all your books when I was young" he told him. "Please, get off the train. The decree does not concern you." "And what about the children?" Korczak asked. "The children will have to go but you can stay." "You are deceived!" Korczak answered. "Not everyone is a rascal". And he boarded the train. This is the last documented report on Janusz Korczak. But the legend that persisted in Auschwitz says that Korczak accompanied the children to the gas chamber and died with them a martyr's death.[9]

My point with this example is that the involvement of "human nature" in the exploration of causes that may lead "life on the planet earth to mass extinction" is proven pointless over and over again. The question which behavior is in harmony with human nature and which is a deviation, that of Janusz Korczak or that of the Auschwitz commander, is answered neither with the record of the frequency it appears in human society and history nor by comparing it with the situation prevailing in the groups of species biologically close to us. This question is answered by measuring the system of values each one of us has embraced.

Let us keep in mind that the first damage to which a particular association of biology with politics contributed involved the scientifically unacceptable effort of applying rules of biology to human society. This effort led to an indescribable catastrophe and its replication will surely lead to a larger one.

[9] About the moral of Korczak see the chapter "Education for Justice: The Vocation of Janusz Korczak" in Lawrence Kohlberg "The Philosophy of Moral development – Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice" Harper & Row, San Francisco, pp. 401-408.

Technology and ecological risks

Are there such efforts, like the ones described above, today? There are but they do not appear to be pregnant with dangers of equal severity with those of the past. The greatest danger today is located in a possible uncontrollable catastrophe of "ecological dynamics" which will involve "the risk of mass extinction of life on the planet".

It is important to stress right from the beginning that the main risk does not consist on the multiplication and geographical spread of today's very grave ecological problems that have been vividly presented in many publications. It lies in the unprecedented dangers involved in the possibility of the almost uncontrollable use of all biotechnological products. A possibility allowed by the political rule because biotechnology implies high profits and economical growth.

Let us examine the relevant speculation and, in particular, the arguments which served to confront the various types of resistance -resistance originating in the prospect of a risky ecological development.

The most common argument is purely manipulative. It is the claim that every technological revolution in history has been met with resistance on the basis of its alleged dangerous developments. This is the case now, according to those who refuse to see the risks or consider the reactions exaggerated. But this claim is not true, especially concerning the reasons on the basis of which people rejected new technologies in the past.

Therefore, the issue under question here is whether there is a special aspect in the technological revolution of our era in relation to previous technological revolutions concerning the risk of a mass extinction of life on the planet.

The answer is that technological revolutions of the past are significantly different from recent revolutions based on nuclear power and biotechnology. The difference consists in the fact that the advent of technology in the past was strictly defined and controlled by man in space and time. The opposite is true with nuclear power and several products of biotechnology.

In the past man had the possibility to stop the negative consequences of a risky technology by avoiding or even abandoning the use of this technology, which, normally, was based on mechanics. To these I include even actions with clear large scale ecological consequences such as the construction of water dams and the drainage of lakes. Even such actions, the dramatic effects of which we have

experienced recently all over the world, can after all be controlled when their negative consequences in various sectors of life are identified.

This does not apply similarly for nuclear energy. The consequences of a nuclear accident are incontrollable both in space and in time. In time, in particular, it is not only the consequences from an accident that are uncontrollable but the consequences from the use itself as well.

The same applies in the case of the creation of microorganisms for use in nature for the purpose of confronting various negative effects, such as the confrontation of the consequences of frost on citrus crop and the dissolution of oil patches on the sea.

Contrary to the microorganisms created to "provide services" in the lab (production of insulin and other hormones) which have no way of surviving and therefore causing any damage even if they escape, the organisms created to "provide services" to nature constitute potential dangers of unpredicted dimensions. Because of such an organism we may know the one property for which it was created but we have no way of knowing all its other properties, particularly in the various environments it may happen to enter.

Profit and the application of human laws to biology

These are the facts. The question is, "how can it be that these facts are not known?" The answer is simple: They are known but the decision to allow the use of such organisms obeys two principles:

-First, the principle of profit – almost everything that can produce profit is as a rule acceptable.

- Second, and this is important for our speculation, the principle that the risk of an intervention in nature is what has to be proved and not the absolute lack of danger.

By this last principle we enter a new era concerning the association of biology and politics: While at the early twentieth century the association of biology with politics was based on the scientifically unacceptable effort of applying rules of biology to human society, today, we deal with the effort of applying the laws of human society to the field of biology. In fact, it is the tendency to apply, in the case of new organisms, the principle of human society that the innocence of an individual pertains until his or her guilt is proven.

This is unacceptable, because in the case of new organisms, the proof of "guilt" is practically impossible and once proven in nature, then consequences would be as a rule incontrollable and irrevocable. This is ecological dynamics, which actually involves the risk of mass extinction on the planet. At this point, we are allowed to include "human nature", which I originally excluded from our discussion, in our speculations –but only as its negation: it is the negation of our human nature with its restriction at the cognitive level and our effort to behave as Creators, which may create new ecological dynamics with destructive consequences for life on the planet.

Here we may draw our second conclusion: With profit as the ultimate goal, people adopt laws of human society for the field of biology. The result of this scientifically unacceptable swap is the danger of developing an unprecedented ecological momentum, which may lead to the mass extinction of life on the planet.

Is there any hope?

At the end of the description of such perspectives the following question arises: is there any prospect of changing this route and if yes, what are the characteristics of this change?

In search of a correct answer, we must take into consideration the fact that as to the data there are no significant disputes between those who exercise politics today and those who resist. The dispute lies in the assessment of data and consequently their implementation in planning and exercising politics. The promise of serious economic profit obscures the fears of ecological destruction, for the first group of people and for the second, the resistance to the prospect of ecological destruction is not reduced with any economic promise or deal.

It is often argued that the second group of people cannot be transformed into a political movement that could put pressure and impose its own direction to the course of humanity. But the fact is that more and more people with different ideological start points and worldviews discover that their value systems converge to a large degree and their meeting point includes the values of protection of nature and respect of human dignity, both as *ab indiviso* property of all human beings. Their convergence and coordinated opposition to those political groups who consider that human life acquires significance only through the successful pursuit of profit is not a utopia -it

may be an interesting political venture with prospects of reversing those social and political tendencies, which may seem irrevocable today.