Transformations and Challenges in the Global World
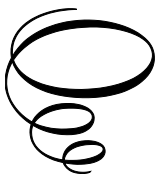
Transformations and Challenges in the Global World

Edited by

Mario Marinov, Valentina Milenkova and Boris Manov

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Introduction

Mario Marinov, Valentina Milenkova, and Boris Manov

The book which you are reading is an innovative way of presenting the social construction of thinking, relationships, communications, activities, and everyday life of the modern human being who acquires the characteristics of a global human being. Changes which the modern world experiences in its communal, personal, institutional, and everyday aspects, are being analysed. Social change is becoming a source of renewal, as the ability for transformation is the best way to meet challenges facing people, groups and the world community.

The global world today is structured under the influence of new universal categories that go beyond personal, local, and national dimensions. Globalization is, in its essence, a free exchange of goods, information, and knowledge. This mutual exchange is a consequence of the growing needs of economies, individuals, and societies, because science, language, arts, and religion enter into constant interaction and acquire the marks of universality and globality. They influence and tolerate each other, they acquire new features, but they belong to the world community and that makes them supranational.

The new universal way of communication, in its essence, acquires the markers of digital communication, which restructure all forms of connection that have existed so far. The development of computer technology, the internet, and the creation of the global network, allow billions of people to connect and exchange information in a new and unprecedented way. Thanks to computer connections, the global network, and the development of innovative technologies, prerequisites are created for the exchange of business, knowledge, and ideas. The whole process leads to new ways of thinking and behaviour.

In the existing global world, we can find many contradictory things and options, such as the clash of civilizations, but also their homogenization. We are witnessing ecological catastrophes, but also ecological solutions; we see economic prosperity, but also extreme poverty, as well as dealing with

divisions and creating new conflicts; we overcome old limitations and traditions but create new values and moral principles.

All these in their diversity, difference, similarities and opposition, internal accumulations, and modification, permeate modernity. The global world is associated with new risks and dangers, and pandemics are just one example. In this sense, the biggest challenge we face is finding solutions that mitigate the negative consequences and minimize threats.

Different points of view and approaches, which are influenced from practical and ideological positions, can be found in the understanding of the global world. One of the important things is the understanding that the openness of the world has become its dominant characteristic, which passes through all dimensions and aspects of globality, and this openness can hardly be transformed.

This book focuses on the study of the characteristics of global thinking. It also explores the ethical, axiological, and religious dimensions of global consciousness. A special emphasis is put on the challenges of COVID-19 and the forms of communication, digitalization, and changes in social communities, in the context of globalization and the psychological problems that the world poses to the individual. In this sense, the book is a field for presenting different positions – the basis for expressing intellectual and value identification of the authors themselves. The authors of this publication are mostly from the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" – Blagoevgrad in Bulgaria, and their partners and colleagues from organizations with which the university maintains active contacts and collaboration, who share close views. The majority of the book's chapters were presented as papers at the International multidisciplinary conference "Transformations and Challenges in the Global World" which took place at the South-West University on 15-17 October 2020. The event was dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Faculty of Philosophy. The Faculty consists of the following majors: Sociology, Philosophy, Psychology, and Political Science. The authors in the book represent different areas of knowledge in different national contexts.

The methodological approaches in the book theorize the world with analytical reasoning, which shows the ontological characteristics of the universe; a historical approach to the genesis of processes; and qualitative and quantitative methods in various research fields.

The structure of the book includes several parts which are aimed at problematizing various aspects and visions of the global world and the changes it faces.

Part One: *Globalization and its Challenges* traces some meta-theoretical conceptual approaches to globalization and the global world, the problems

of man and machine, of artificial intelligence, of political configurations and modalities, of the constellations of the universal ethos, and of the changes that are taking place in social communities and groups. The idea of this part is to trace some of the most general and fundamental dimensions of the globe.

Part Two: *Social Crises in the Contemporary World* reveals the specifics of the crises themselves in the form of refugees and refugee waves, poverty and crime, deviant behaviour, the role of law and its manifestations, the COVID-19 pandemic, and reactions to it. Each of the described conditions and cases represents a specific situation of collision, and the difficulties and cataclysms experienced in individual, community, national, and international plans.

Part Three: *Dimensions of Social Transformations* traces new understandings of transdisciplinarity of research, environmental issues, national themes and figures, volunteering and its specifics, the visibility of art in the everyday world, and digitalization and its projections in the media environment. Each of the listed issues shows a specific micro-world of life and its constant intertwining on many levels.

Part Four: *Religion and Modernity* is focused on the changing faces of new religious movements and traditional religiosity, interculturalism seen through the religions of European globality, globalisation and cultural practices in India, and the significance of religion in the prevention of negative phenomena in Kosovo.

Part Five: *Psychological Aspects of Personality* focuses on children with cognitive disabilities and the role of music in their inclusion; the self-efficacy and burnout of Bulgarian teachers; reflection and the formation of competencies, and personal coaching.

The main thread in the book is the topic of COVID-19, which is present in many parts, and viewed from different perspectives – political, everyday, and educational, which makes this topic sharp and challenging for today.

The book is a colourful and diverse palette of topics, thoughts and temptations of the global world and researchers in it. The book recreates the problems faced by modern people, their thinking, evaluations, perceptions, and biases. It is valuable because it shows the issues that modern researchers are thinking about in the early 2020s, such as what is relevant and alive, but at the same time worrying and risky.

Key findings are related to the conclusions that the modern world has an increasing interdependence between different identities (religious, cultural, ethnic, and racial), which have been unknown until now. The problems in the modern world are complex and multilateral. They are caused by social

crises, digital technologies, environmental threats, intercultural dialogue, the attitude towards the Other, etc.

The book contributes to the dialogue of the challenges facing modern society. It reflects social dynamics, and analyses strategies for choice and personal integrity, as well as exploring forms of adaptation and coping with the challenges of globality.

PART ONE:

GLOBALIZATION AND ITS CHALLENGES

CHAPTER 1

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND UTOPIAS – THE HOPE WE CANNOT DO WITHOUT[1]

BORIS MANOV

> Utopias are dreams. Utopian energies are vital for people.
> The sentence written by Oscar Wilde more than
> a hundred years ago applies to them:
> "A map of the world in which the country of Utopia is not marked,
> does not deserve attention" (Maresh 2006, 7-8).

Introduction

The basic premise of the present study is the understanding that the main essential defining characteristic of social transformation,[2] its *differentia specifica* within the framework of 'change in general' of the existing, is its 'spiritual predestination' - the creation (mental, emotional) of an idea, goal, image (picture), plan, etc., of a more or less complete ('utopian' or 'scientific') concept for the transformation of what 'is something' into 'something new', expressing the ideas and goals embedded in the concept.

Without going into the big problem of the nature of 'scientific', it should be noted that:

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[1] The resemblance to a famous song written by Alexander Petrov is not accidental. "It is not easy, it is not easy to return home, to return homeless [...] And poorer than a beggar, and richer than a king. I walk and give away hope". (*The Love We Can't Live Without* 1982). All original texts of songs and all other quotations in this chapter are from Bulgarian publications in the Bulgarian language. All quotations have been translated into English by the author Boris Manov and the editor Mario Marinov.

[2] The chapter accepts the perception of social transformation as a change (usually related to large-scale social reforms or covering the social system as a whole), leading to the improvement of society, based on a new collective consciousness and implying the establishment of a new social context and paradigm of social processes.

a) The attitude to utopia/utopias, both historically and in the contemporary postmodern communication world, is ambivalent - unconditional rejection (mainly by those who justify the 'scientificity' of social knowledge and the practice based on it) or unconditional acceptance (mainly by thinkers creating utopian projects);

b) The following exposition will present several innovative theses for the protection of utopias as a motive and horizon for the progressive changes of society.

Utopia is 'eternally' inherent to human (spiritual and practical) adoption, and transformation of reality

The first is the perception of an understanding of Utopia which is different from the traditional, which limits utopias to the 'classical' understanding, in which the Utopian is inextricably linked with the human, and where the Utopian embraces the existing, and the place of the human being in it, and considers this both a prerequisite for and an expression of 'becoming' a human being. This introduces the idea of the formation of the 'human' nature of man - socially coexisting and transforming, creating himself and the surrounding world as an individual/collective being. Utopias[3] are 'eternal' companions, the everlasting means by which man creates a new picture, containing the hope (intellectual and emotional) of existence and the possibility of reaching this better place, where people are (will be) different, better, and happier, as its main element and the motive for individual and social action.

Thus understood, Utopia is the eternal spiritual prerequisite for social transformation. It is a rationalized hope and faith in/for a better world and a happier human destiny, and is future-oriented. It is the ideal state of Plato, the eschatological anticipation of the Second Coming, and the establishment of God's city on earth; the discovery of the non-existent country, Utopia, the victory of communism, etc. In a relatively comprehensive form for the first time in European history, this rationalized hope is presented in Plato's dialogues, and mainly in the dialogue *The Republic*. Here, in the spirit of the cosmological-theological paradigm,[4] Plato proposes a comprehensive

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[3] Utopia (from Greek) 1. A distant dreamed country, where everything was in order and prosperity. 2. *Utopia* 1973.

[4] The cosmological-theological paradigm sets the initial framework for the formation and evolution of European philosophical and socio-political thought. As a complete thought model, it was built and established during classical Greek antiquity (5th – 4th century BC) and covers a long historical period until approximately the 15th – 16th century AD. Its most important essential-constitutive

radical project towards the 'perfect', following the ideal model of the world of ideas, and of a harmonious social and political structure of society. With this project, he created one of the most enduring and influential theoretical models in philosophy and socio-political knowledge, later called 'Utopianism'.

The New Time and the Enlightenment - the 'classical' stage of the development of Utopia

The second thesis substantiates the idea that 'classical' Utopias are established as an independent written (literary, theoretical, conceptual) form (in content and temporal terms, the rise of Utopias) with the formation and affirmation within which Utopias are the collaborators of the socio-humanistic paradigm in the period of the New Time and the Enlightenment in the 16th – 18th centuries in Western Europe.

This is because the main idea of this paradigm is to place man at the centre of the universe, to raise the idea of the 'humane' (human,/humanized) nature of the existing. Man is no longer just image and personification, he is both the centre, and the top, of the world. He, through his reason and action, is present in, creates, and spiritualizes this being. This creates the basis for the formation of a new activist position on the place of man in this world. At the forefront of the doctrine of man is the idea of free will, the idea that in a world created by God, man is not just a link in the sequence of God's predestation, but was created free to choose, i.e. to decide for himself what is good or evil, what to do and how to do it, and to determine the content and direction of his existence.

Scientific knowledge has an essential determining role in the realization of the creative mission of the earthly man. Scientific knowledge becomes a means and a symbol of human power, it gives courage and self-confidence, serves as a 'guiding star' in mastering and creating reality.

On this basis, the thesis is substantiated that the socio-political structure of society is an expression and a result of reasonable human free will, that

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characteristic is the consideration of the existing as built on the basis of primary and eternal harmony, as 'cosmos' (kosmos), a pre-established order of the world, which predetermine the elements, structure and laws of origin, existence, development, and death, of everything, building this cosmos. Christian teaching, although it takes God out of the world and puts him above it, does not essentially change the pagan view of the harmonious structure of the world - the harmony, 'cosmicness' of this world is preserved, but their predestation is already in the almighty, eternal, and transcendent God. For details on the paradigms in European socio-political thought, see: Manov 2014, 371.

man, based on scientific knowledge, can, and should, build a socio-political system ensuring freedom and equality of people, protecting tolerance, justice and the security of each individual member of society, and society as a whole. Given the unlimited possibilities of the human mind, man can, and must, manifest himself as a sovereign master, as an 'Earth God', creating and governing the present and future of the 'best', the perfect political and social order. Therefore, it is within this paradigm that socio-political thought not only develops as 'scientific', but is inextricably linked with Utopianism, an expression of which is not only the construction of the very term 'Utopia', but also the constant creation of theoretical models of the ideal society - from Thomas More, Tomaso Campanella, and Francis Bacon, 'Utopian socialism' by Henri de Saint-Simon and Robert Owen, 'scientific socialism' by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, to the Utopianisms of the 20th century - for example, the neo-Marxist Utopianism of Erich Fromm, the futuristic Utopianism of Alvin Toffler, and now the 21st century Utopia, the modern communication society.

Utopia literally means 'non-existent place' - from the Greek *u-topos*, (non-place), and in a broader context, a distant, perfectly organized country or dream, an unattainable dream of a perfect society. And if Plato's project is 'peripheral', rather complementing or illustrating his philosophical system, then classical Utopias form the core and build the overall content of theoretical and ideological systems, from the time of Thomas More to the present day. In the famous *Utopia* published in 1516, in Leuven, Belgium, Thomas More sharply criticizes the existing socio-political system. He proposes a theoretical project aimed at creating an ideal' state, completely different from the previous economic, social, legal, and political principles. It enables the fullest development of all-round human, physical, and spiritual, forces. It ensures the achievement of a truly happy life and equality between people. It leads to the emergence of the 'new man', who will be willing to give up all possessions and offer selfless service to his neighbour. In it, this perfect society is transferred either to some obscure place in the world, or to the near or distant future of humankind.

Utopia is neither scientific nor unscientific; it is the inevitable 'useful' precondition for social transformation

The third thesis focuses on two main points: a) that after the period of 'rise' in scientific and popular consciousness, since the middle of the 19th century, a 'condescending' or negative attitude towards Utopias (the fall of Utopias) was established; b) on the fact that even including the modern period,

Utopias, considered through a new, four-dimensional formula, can be, and are, an invariable companion of the progressive development of society.

The negative attitude towards Utopias is the result of two major groups of reason: practical and theoretical.

The practical reasons are expressed in the so-called 'failure of utopias', which in general, can be presented as 'early' and 'late'. The early stage covers all attempts which, to a greater or lesser extent, in one form or another, fail in their implementation in social practice. This starts with the fate of Plato and his project during his stay in Syracuse, and goes on through the desecration of Christianity and the collapse of social colonies in the first half of the 19th century, such as the R. Owen Colony of New Harmony in the United States. The late stage is reflected in the catastrophic results of the realization of the various modifications of Soviet socialism in the 20th century and the threat of environmental (and humanitarian) disaster, which reached alarming proportions in the late 20th and early decades of the 21st century.

Theoretically, the most important, albeit based on different methodological premises, are Marxism and the views of Karl Popper, and what unites them, for the socio-humanistic paradigm claim to scientific social knowledge, is the 'natural'. Central to the position of Marx and his followers is the presentation of Utopia as an unscientific fantasy. This position is explicitly stated in Engels' "*Transformation of Socialism from Utopia to Science*" and in his assessment of Marx's historical contribution to the development of social knowledge, according to which the creation of a materialist understanding of history, at the heart of which is the scientific theory of socialism is one of Marx's two great discoveries in social science. Decades later, Karl Popper developed a critique of Utopianism, saying that Utopias were not only unscientific, but also dangerous, with their comprehensiveness and aestheticism, because they doomed society to great senseless sacrifices and led to totalitarianism and the establishment of dictatorship.

Therefore, in Popper's opinion, it is necessary to reject global Utopian political projects and to establish a rationalist and practically evolutionary approach in politics connected with significantly more limited goals and resources. The approach of 'phased social engineering', allows the progress of society to provide social experiments which are observable in historical time and space, and which are susceptible to more timely and painless adjustment, both in the goals pursued and in the methods and means by which they are carried out.

It is a historical fact that despite the large-scale collapse (practical and theoretical) of Utopias, Utopian thinking does not perish, but instead conquers new territories. Within the many reasons and factors for this, the most important in philosophical-theoretical terms (and not offered so far in the literature) is the perception of Utopias through a new, three/four-dimensional formula of adoption of the world by human beings, which is different from Plato's. The idea of this new formula exists in one form or another in the philosophy of Marxism and pragmatism, but in an explicit form it is formulated in the views of the most prominent representative of the Italian philosophical thought in the 20th century, Benedetto Croce. Croce complements Plato's tradition of the existence of three basic spiritual values - beauty, truth, and goodness, with a fourth - usefulness.

The introduction of the fourth element of the 'system of the spirit' - the 'usefulness' in clarifying the nature of Utopias - makes it possible to derive their most important characteristic, which is their role as a link between the human spirit and the practical change of the existing. It is a unit which vitalizes and revitalizes the ideological (cognitive, aesthetic and moral) socio-political constructs by formulating and emphasizing their social usefulness (achieving or building a better, more perfect society and a happier life for its members) and in this way, mobilizing the individual and collective social actors to strive for, and to act for, the transformation of a happier/the happiest life for people, into a reality.

Utopias of the 21st century – a formula for social transformation in the era of transition to the noosphere, and achieving harmony between 'human' and 'cosmic'

The fourth, concluding, thesis, formulates the view that despite the prevailing negative perception and attitude towards Utopias, that they are illusions, dreams, etc.,[5] adopting the presented four-dimensional model of Utopian thinking, the unity of truth-goodness-beauty-usefulness, is the spiritual humanistic foundation for finding and developing concepts for the present and future of mankind, which are adequate for the contemporary period. Among these concepts, 'noosphere' stands out. This concept is an expression of the new cosmological-humanistic paradigm emerging from the middle of the 20th century. The main thing in it, is that it formulates a qualitatively different goal of humanity in its deepest sense: the goal of overcoming the desire for unlimited power over the surrounding world, to

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[5] "Utopia". In: Online dictionary of the Bulgarian language. Utopia - (noun) utopianism, chimera, fantasy, dream, daydream, ideal, unreality.

form a new approach that seeks and finds ways to establish an equal and harmonious interaction between society and nature. Among the authors who 'built' this paradigm are V. Vernadsky and P. Teilhard de Chardin, as well as E. Fromm, D. Bell, and A. Toffler, representatives of the so-called 'Club of Rome', A. Peccei and E. Pestel, and in the first decades of the 21st century, Pope Francis. What these concepts have in common is the emphasis on the fact that the basis for the progress and future of the modern world is the humanistic-ecological development and application of science within the whole existence and activity of humankind, leading to the creation of a new geological-cosmic reality, defined by Vernadsky and Teilhard de Chardin as the 'noosphere'. According to various theories, despite the existing diversity, the noosphere is considered the highest stage in cosmo- and biogenesis, in which the Earth acquires a new 'shell' - that of the mind, which is a kind of 'thinking layer' above the biosphere (from the Greek *noo* (reason) and, 'sphere' (a globe, a shell)). The most important characteristics at this stage are the achievement of harmony within society, between society and the biosphere, and in the long run, between society and space.

The result of uniting people and the comprehensive use of the mighty power of scientific knowledge (Teilhard de Chardin and Pope Francis also add faith and love of God and among people),[6] will be harmonization, which will give humanity the means to achieve a free and lawful social order, ensuring the happiness of all people.

(Instead of) Conclusion: The 'meaning' of Utopias

What is the meaning of such a (scientific, philosophical, theological) concept? Is it illusion and fantasy, and empty ideology? Alternatively, is it a reality, which contains something positive, providing the prospect of a better future for humanity? What does it give way to: pessimism or optimism? Despite the fluctuations caused by the messages of common

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[6] The ideas (united in the doctrine of 'integrated ecology') and the work of Pope Francis related to the establishment of a new model of civilization, are extremely important because they, together with the program "Sustainable Development" (E. Pestel, M. Mesarovic, Gro H. Brundtland), not only express and develop (directly or indirectly) the concept of the noosphere, but also have a power resource to take practical action, which, as the Holy Father points out, by uniting science and religion, can empower science, humanity to be united, not only with itself but also with the surrounding nature, realizing the "need to promote harmony on a personal, social and environmental level, which requires a conversion - personal, social and environmental" (Manova 2020). On the question of the teachings and activities of Pope Francis, see: Manova 2021.

sense, and the contradictory development of human history, all thinkers who created, and create, this and related concepts, give a clear, positive, humanistic answer: The doctrine of the noosphere is an optimistic theory of the future of the existing world; the space, the biosphere and their 'crown' – the human being. It makes the 'great choice' by choosing 'Good', 'Love', and 'Hope'. This concept, as Teilhard de Chardin points out (and this is particularly important), is not only knowledge and faith, but, like all true knowledge and established faith, it also has practical value – which, when adopted by people, becomes a program for the future. Once perceived in this way, humanity will arm itself in its activities with a magnificent goal, and a line of precise movement,[7] with a hope it cannot exist without.[8]

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[7] Teilhard de Chardin (2003, 303).

[8] "Hope […] without you, how shall I live? Hope [...] without you the world is empty". ("Hope").

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CHAPTER 2

GLOBALIZATION AND THE ISSUE OF CHANGE

ANTOANETA NIKOLOVA

Introduction

The global world challenges individuals in many aspects. One of them is the necessity of coping with rich opportunities of variabilities. In many cases, a chaotic mixture of different options leads to a 'risk consciousness' that "is inseparable from the ideas of probability and uncertainty" (Giddens 2000, 40). We live in a time of constant change and transformation that makes "individuals and groups more ontologically insecure and existentially uncertain" (Kinnvall 2004, 741). What, however, does 'ontological insecurity' mean? What are the ontological bases for this feeling? Do they vary in different cultures?

Although the concepts of change and transformation are widely used in debates about contemporary world situations, their philosophical meaning is rarely considered. Usually, they are understood in terms of the systems of thought established in Western culture. One of the features of the global world, however, is the possibility of access to the visions and world attitudes of different cultures.

Therefore, this article focusses on the main ontological premises of the attitude to change in the context of the European thought, comparing it with possible alternatives from Asian culture, where glimpses of new thinking and attitudes to reality that our time requires are still vital (Poggeler 1987, 58). This approach contains two *innovative* aspects. First, it seeks to outline the philosophical premises of the commonly used concept of change. Second, it presents them in a comparative mode.

The *methodology* is in tune with the aim of the chapter: philosophical analysis and comparative analysis.

The European vision

As Martin Heidegger points out, the European perception of reality is in terms of Parmenides' wondering that "there is being". Parmenides gave the first explicit formulae of the concept of being, describing it as single, homogenous, boundless, eternal, unchangeable, and immovable.

In Ancient Greek philosophy, the concept of being has two counterparts. One of them is 'non-being'. For Parmenides, non-being is unthinkable and impossible; it has no ontological validity and meaning in itself, and functions only in order to outline the characteristics of being.

The counterpart is the concept of 'becoming'. According to Parmenides, change is mere appearance, an illusion. Only being is real. Another great Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, however, considered change as the real nature of the world, and presented the reality as all-embracing permanent transformation.

According to Plato, being and becoming are combined in the Universe. Being, *ousiae,* however, is permanent, lasting, perfect, and existing; while *genesis* is impermanent, changing, imperfect, and non-existing. The former is true and real, the latter is connected with opinion and "is always in a process of becoming and perishing and never really is" (Plato 2019, 28).

Although in the history of the European mind there are many different versions interpreting being, becoming, and their relation, the Parmenides notion of being determines the Western understanding of reality. This understanding is at the core of a metaphysical "distinction between the sensuous and non-sensuous…form and matter, essence and attribute, substance and properties, mind and body, truth and appearance", which gives rise to "the hierarchical view that one side of the distinction was worthy, good and true, while the other was at best a hindrance with which one had to live, or at worst something evil that was to be eradicated if we were ever to find the Truth" (Burik 2009, 11).

This vision of being as the highest good is presented in Christianity as well, where God is understood as "the fullness of being and of every perfection" (*Catechism* 2019, 58).

The Indian alternative

At the core of Indian culture are the Vedas, in which the true reality is described simply as "That One" (*Tad Ekam*). That One is beyond all ontological characteristics; it precedes both being and non-being: "There was neither non-existence nor existence then" (Rig Veda 10, 129). The Sanskrit terms that are used here are *sat* and its negation, *asat*. Like the term

'being' the term 'sat' is a derivative form of the copula 'to be'. There is, however, a clear difference between the concept of 'being' and the Indian concepts. While in Parmenides' vision, there is only 'being' and its opposition is impossible, 'That One' in the Indian version is not describable in ontological terms and *sat* and *asat* are thought of in their mutual connection.

What is the place of change within this all-embracing notion of oneness? In Indian thought, this is the important issue about the relation between 'One' and many. In Hinduism, it takes the form of a question about the relation between Brahman and the world. Brahman, the highest ontological principle that corresponds to That One, transforms itself into the world. It does not create the world. This transformation is conducted through *maya*, perceived either as a creative power or as an illusion. In the former case, the transformation is ontologically real, in the latter it is ontologically illusionary. In both cases the nature of Brahman does not change. According to some schools, Brahman gradually transforms itself into many: "Therefore He became the creation" (Brh 1.4:5). Therefore, substantially, essentially, and quantitatively, there is no difference between the One and the result of its transformation, the many. There are only stages of this transformation: non-differentiation and differentiation: "[…] all this universe was then undifferentiated. It became differentiated by name and form" (Brh IV, 7). In Advaita-Vedanta, on the other side, there is no ontological transformation of One into many, there are only differences in perception. Change and plurality of the visible world are a false perception provoked by the One itself, who playfully hides itself in multiplicity.

According to another important orthodox Indian school, Samkhya, which divides the reality into realms of souls (*Purusha*) and realms of matter (*prakriti*), there is change, but it concerns only the material world while the principle of individuality remains unchanged. Movement and the ability to transform are the main characteristics of *prakriti*. All the diversity of the visible world unfolds from it through a series of successive manifestations. The transition from potential to actual state, however, does not reveal something really new. All consequent phases are only manifestations in due time of the potentials that already exist in the previous state.

As an Indian teaching, Buddhism also asserts that reality itself cannot be described in ontological terms, and the truth is beyond poles of opposites. Buddhists call reality *Shunyata*, which is translated as 'emptiness' or 'void'. At a first glance, it resembles the Greek notion of non-being. It, however, is not a nihilistic nothingness or a negation of being but rather a zero point, "a disappearance of the notions of being and non-being" (Nagarjuna 2007, 42). If That One precedes being and non-being, *Shunyata* transcends them. As

Sprung points out, "There is no third modus of 'is-ing.' The truth of all things is given to the wise man in the middle way. And that 'way' is not midway between 'is' and 'is not'. It is to be grasped in non-ontic terms. In the middle way there are no causes or effects, actions or consequences, before and after […] the vocabulary of 'is' and 'is not' and all its variants does not apply; it has lost its validity" (Sprung 1978, 135).

When reality is understood as void, nothing has its own nature; there are no substances or essences. Therefore, nothing is lasting or durable. Everything is new at every moment. One of the main peculiarities of the visible world, the world of *samsara*, is instability (changeability, variability, mobility and mutability) which we perceive as suffering. The enlightened mind, however, sees the suchness (*tathata*) of reality and understands that "there is not the slightest difference" (Nagarjuna 1995, 19-20) between the world of movement and change, or *samsara*, and the world of peace and tranquillity, or *nirvana*.

The Chinese version

At the core of the understanding of reality in Chinese culture there is the notion of change. According to the *Ijing*, the *Book of Changes*, everything in the world is in constant movement and change. '*Change*', *yi*, 易, is a general and all-embracing concept that in many senses is a substitute for the category of 'being' in Western thought. According to this vision, the universe constantly modifies and transforms; and even *is* modification and transformation. Change is not only a characteristic of the world, it is the world itself. Therefore, dynamism, flexibility and openness to different possibilities are among the main features of the world. Since they are inherent within it, there is no ultimate or outside driver of this dynamism. The world is unfolding in a constant process of self-transformation and modification that is not guided by a higher and/or external force. It is open, free and – in accordance with Daoist terminology – natural, 自然.

In the important Daoist treatise *Daodejing*, there are concepts that are usually are translated as being and non-being, namely *wu*, 無, and *you*, 有. While, however, the concepts of being and non-being in Indo-European languages derive from the verb 'to be' and are therefore connected with the issue of existence, the Chinese terms *wu*, 無, and *you*, 有, mean 'to have' or 'to have not' and, therefore, "refer to the area of possessing not the area of being" (Kobzev 1994, 517). These two pairs represent two different viewpoints, and two different approaches to reality, from the position of the subject (in the case of being and non-being) and from the position of the object (in the case of *wu*, 無, and *you*, 有). As Graham points out, "in

Chinese, one approaches existence from something outside […] which has, in which there is, the thing in question". Western thought, on the other side, is grounded in Greek and Latin and "has generally approached the question from the opposite direction, from the thing which 'is' or 'exists'" (Graham 1959, 81). This different perspective – from the position of the object or from the position of the subject – is, in principle, a crucial difference between Far Eastern and Western thought. While the viewpoint of Western thought is from the position of the observer, i.e. from within out, the Far Eastern perspective is inverted: from outward to inward. Regarding the problem of being, "the object of *you (*有) is the subject of 'is'" (ibid.).

As *sat* and *asat* in Hinduism, *wu* and *you* in Daoism are regarded in their mutual connection. The important term in Daoism, however, is not a concept of being or of oneness, but of *dao*.

The literal translation of *dao* is 'way', but there is no idea of a fixed, predicted, and ready, path waiting to be achieved or traced. *Dao* is a provisional name pointing to the dynamic of the world that is ever new, and unfolding with every concrete and unique process. Therefore, Ames and Hall translate it as "way-making" (Ames & Hall 2003, 13-14). *Dao* pulsates on the elusive edge of 'in-between': in-between 'there-is', 有, and 'there-is-not', 無, absence and presence, the "harmonising non-differentiation and differentiating actualisation" (see Jullien 2000) and is open to unfolding in every direction. Therefore, in Daoism "there is a bottomless well of the virtual, a potent potentiality at the source of things" (Allen 2010, 465) and it could unfold in a diversity of ways.

As Ames and Hall note, "As a parody to Parmenides, who claimed that 'only Being is', we might say that for Daoist 'only beings are', or taking one step further in underscoring the reality of the process of change itself, 'only becomings are'" (Ames & Hall 2003, 13-14). Malyavin points out that, "The real reality for Daoists is the very transformation. Daoists do not think in terms of essences, entities or ideas, but in terms of relations, functions, and influences" (Malyavin & Vinogrodskii 1994, 2). They do not distinguish 'things' but recognise 'processual events' that are open, flexible and dynamic: each of them is "some unique current or impulse within a temporal flow", and all of them "are porous, flowing into each other in the ongoing transformation" (Ames & Hall 2003, 15).

Although Daoism explains the world in terms of constant transformation, its aim is also to achieve the unmovable centre among the circles of change, the so called 'pivot of *dao*' – a specific zero position of pure potentiality where no actualisation is yet realised, and all the transformations are ahead and possible:

As soon as one finds this pivot, he stands in the centre of the ring (the circle of the processes) where he can respond without end to the changing views; without end to those affirming and without end to those denying. (Zhuangzi, 2)

Conclusions

In the history of the human mind, there are many alternatives in understanding reality, and many attitudes to change.

The European mode presents being as the most essential concept for describing true reality, and opposes it to becoming and to non-being. Western dialectics finds interconnection between opposites but, nevertheless, Western metaphysics splits reality and sees duration, stability, constancy, and permanency as its more valuable aspects.

Asian cultures understand reality in terms not of division but of non-duality. Hinduism understands the true reality as one which is stable, constant and durative like the being of the early Greek philosophy but equally includes being and non-being. The Buddhist understanding of reality is in terms of void or non-duality that is beyond being and non-being. Daoism calls reality 'way' or 'change' accentuating its fluid, dynamic character. Therefore, its vision is closer to the concept of becoming or even of becomings.

All the three Eastern paths insist that the true reality cannot be adequately grasped in ontological categories. They outline that every concept has its counterpart, and should be regarded only in connection with it. Their separation is impossible. The vision of non-duality and of mutual connection between opposites is at the core of the vision of the wise or enlightened human being. None of the poles of an opposite can be regarded as isolated from the other one. This concerns the vision of change as well. Stability and instability, peace and movement, change and constancy are in mutual connection. Buddhist and Chinese schools accentuate the necessity of balance, a middle path or zero point that should, and could, be revealed in the midst and vortex of every change and transformation.

Are all these visions too different? The point is that the answer depends exactly on the different ontological premises that underline every vision. The aim of this article was not to give a single answer to this question, but to point out that there were various possibilities, and that the human mind has created different attitudes to reality. The challenge, as well as the advantage, of our time is the fact that we have the possibility of choice.

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