

# Ethics as Power and Moral as Servitude

*by Luiz Fuganti*

At the first sign of the word *ethics*, what commonly jumps to the attention of the ordinary citizen is a calling for him (or her), on pondering its more frequently used and ordinary sense, to attempt to rise to a posture of living and behaving that, in principle, would place him/her <sup>1</sup>on the path of Good, whether that be from a spiritual nature, or from a Good for humanity, or simply from a willingness upon the part of '*whoever is qualified*' through having such ethical attributes, to assume a behavior that would tend towards the so publicized (or vulgarized) common good of the society in which we live.

All that is required for this is to simply follow the benchmark of Law, with the ideal of placing oneself on a par with ones purest form, and introjecting its universal paradigm. However, while this conception of common-sense is shared for its being that which best guides the individual to a just and responsible way of living, giving him the right to a kind of assisted liberty on the outside while monitored within (like a panopticon), relative to the degree of liberty that society itself could support without threatening its constitution; the counterpoint to this –one of a subtle and inaudible anti-personification– installs itself, to the same degree; one which submits and deviates as much the desire as whoever adheres to it, in the hope of reward or gain, in the morally useful manner of being. [ i.e. -of moral servitude]

The manner [or means] that aggregates the individual to the body of society, through a dichotomy of willingness or unwillingness towards and with the body of laws, which provides the individual with returns in the form of reward or punishment, dates back to the birth of the State. But it is not just the archaic State that cultivates this type of code. This way of codifying its members

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<sup>1</sup> From here on, any reference to either Man or the Individual – i.e. he/she; him/her; his/hers etc. Will be reduced to the simple forms he; him; his etc. In order to facilitate the reading and flow of the text

through the relationship of obedience and transgression belongs to the very nature of the State itself. Indeed, it is for this reason that the State is a great stimulator and reproducer of sad passions, as Espinosa said. It is from a fear of punishments and hope of rewards that the individual submits himself to a power that separates him from his very own capacity to think and act freely, hence making him desire his very own servitude. Furthermore, that manner feeds –through pure belief– upon the subjective investments of an individual who is accustomed to the daily battle of survival, dissimulating agreements and making real supportive relationships nonviable or- for purely utilitarian and objective convenience – upon investments of desire (for power) - not in the least disinterested (contrary to what is invoked by the subject legislator of Kant) revealing itself, as such, as its counterpoint – a behavior of a kind of entirely subservient life, sucked into a vicious circle, as if into a black hole, constantly feeding again and again on the loss of capacity to create the very existential conditions of effecting of its [own] powers. And thus we fall. By taking the bait [hook, line and sinker] of “our” interests – interest in our very “I” [or self], we fall prey to a moral that imposes a duty to an exterior instance such as the State, Goodness, the Law, or – in short – to values that come from [or belong to] a time in which, despite their being created by a determined and historically formed society, they are published and become established as [being] both universal and perennial; thereby transcendent of the time and space in which they emerged.

Expressed in speeches that set out to represent and justify the so-called “good customs”, backed up by self-qualifying scientists, set up as being truths in themselves or pure forms of knowledge, these values block and separate the individual from his immanent capacity of thinking and acting from his own free will, disqualifying his local and individual knowledge as [being] mere beliefs or opinions and stripping them of their autonomous powers which create their very modes of effectuating. And it is thus that weakened individuals, through passions of fear and hope, start a clamor and call for a heteronomous order that will save them from all the chaos, impotence and misery; as, for example, in the extreme case of Nazism. As Wilhelm Reich said, the Germans were not simply deceived, they [actually] wanted Nazism.

It is from such values, those to which a supposedly *Human Will* must bow, that one curiously extracts an intrinsic meaning; the real substance, all the while, forming within and orienting Man to speak in a *Hegelian* way. Designing a plan of such a transcendental order to nature, stuff taken as chaotic, the investment in such values attributes the Law with the ironic task and infinite credit of piously saving Man, assuming that, by rising above nature, it would further become immune to the perverse tendencies of a decadent human nature, forever at odds with goodness and truth, too foolish in the passions of the body and soul. It is, therefore, through this way of instituting values

and ties that infinite and unpayable debts are founded, where no other alternative remains to “citizens” but to indefinitely roll over the principal of the loan and interminably pay off the interest on it. That is how a debt of power, unpayable by nature, becomes a debt of existence. Thus it is down such bizarre paths that one arrives at wishing for ones very subjection, as if ones very liberty depended on it. And so, when we we wish to educate our citizens, we invest in anti-personification. That is the total cynicism of the modern idea of liberty.

However, it is from the modes of micro-physical relationships of power, immanent in the very type of social formation, that ones really sees how this nihilism is both installed and indeed triumphs – this negation of the nomadic qualities of life, turning societies purely reactive and conservative from a low form of existence. Thus, the constitution of the belief in closed metaphysical forms as such, which are in reality generated and cultivated within by the very kind of social formation and development – would consolidate a purely transcendental plain, upon which everything that happens in society could be judged, rescued or condemned. It is on this plain that the generally innocent conscience is at once determined and made into an accomplice, as it corroborates truths which it takes as being just and neutral, eternal and external – that is to say, doted with a transcendency, which would logically and morally justify its legislative rationale. In a kind of co-action of mutual interest, the just forms are set out and normative limits prescribed as authenticating models of just ideas and unified discourse, of balanced actions and of responsible behavior. Nevertheless, perhaps the most symptomatic transposition of this moralizing process appears in the ideal of an aspired unification of the power, which both stands out from and controls a civil society submitted to its own interests. Consequently, the power will produce the sham of a conciliation, a leveling or dissolution of the differences.

Naturally, from the political point of view, the maximum incarnation of unification would effect itself in the figure of the National State –pushing the political aspect of its particular ideologies or “flags” into secondary consideration, in other words, of those who control it– operating invariably in the service of private interests or partially so, while further in the name of a sham, a mockery of a universal concept of something public, always outstanding in society. The most important thing would be to overcome the state of nature, which, in Hobbes' view, leans toward discord, dissolution and war, and to substitute it, in practice, with forces capable of dominating, controlling and stemming the wound of individual disputes. It is thus, for example, that Hobbes conceives the fiction of unity and of civil peace, as one deriving from overcoming the state of the natural law of man, which would feed, in all its diversity, the war of *everyone against everyone*, and a transition to a state of civil law, where the individual delegates part of his natural rights and receives, in

exchange, rights of civility which guarantee him security, development and peace. In this sense, the individual would be submitted to a network of rights and co-extensive duties towards this unifying instance of society; once divided and now pacified into what is denominated as the State.

For us, all this vision of Law, of common Good and of Obedience to a plan of organization of rights and duties that would regulate conduct and would lead to an allegedly universal order, in other words, everything that constitutes the (in the real sense of the word) *Moral* attitude in the relationship of the individual with society, needs to be clearly distinguished from another attitude; the posture we call Ethics.

Contrary to the devout and moral way of being, the ethical way of life instigates, not an obedience to a set of rules and values predetermined by the foreign power, interiorizing forms and incorporating attitudes that come from outside, so that we may share from the benefits of the power or the advantages which are, in the end, merely goading us; and neither [does it instigate] the way of being of the good types of legislators, guardians of Judgment and of abstract Law, of Good, or of the transcendent values of everyday life.

It comes from another place [or realm] – not one of dominance and subjection; it is from a high point or pinnacle occupied by the power to assert the very constituent differences of beings or a point of view of life in the process of differentiation, that the ethical way of life installs itself. The model of ethics is not that of free arbitration for Good coming from the free refusal of Evil. Good and Evil are equally and fictitiously founded upon the same illusion of consciousness. And this supposed liberty is nothing other than the ignorance of the causes that determines or rejects this or that choice. The originality of Espinosa did not consist of asserting that Evil, albeit a substance, had no reality, but of exactly that which the West most revered: Good in itself, as a substance of being, also lost all reality. However, as Nietzsche would say, beyond Good and Evil does not mean beyond good and bad. These adjectives qualify, here), not only attitudes and consequences, but also and, above all, types or ways of life, manners of existing. Evil is everything which feeds upon sad passions, from sadness, and even that which asserts and conserves its power or separates the potency of life from its conditions of affirmation, that is to say, from those that can. Thus, evil things, for Espinosa, are not just the tyrant that only manages to reign over other people's impotence but also the very slave that feeds the necessity of the tyrant as his supplier, as well as a third type that lives off the misery of the two and extracts spiritual power from it: the priest. This is the trinity of the tyrant, the slave and the priest – the three heads of resentment that would be at the base of all power. On the subject of this triad, Epicuro, Lucrécio, Espinosa and Nietzsche say practically the

same thing. They denounce all that requires Sadness, impotence and other people's misery, in order to triumph.

Ethics, to the contrary, are founded on a way of living that is signaled by joy. The ethic problem arises out of the comprehension that, as Espinosa would say, everything in nature participates in a common order of encounters. Good and evil encounters, that is the crux of the ethical question. Everything is composed and decomposed in nature from the point of view of the parts that constitute it. Thus, in order to explain the nature of evil, Espinosa utilizes an immoral modal rather than a fed or natural one. Evil is always an evil encounter that, like the taking of poison, decomposes either partially or totally the elements that are under the characteristic relationship that constitutes our existing being and diminishes or destroys our power (potency) of existing, acting and thinking, either saddening or [indeed] killing us. Good, on the other hand, would be like a food that composes with (or feeds) our body – thereby constituting a good encounter, in the measure that it increases our power (potency) of existing, acting and thinking – producing, in consequence, feelings of joy.

However, just as with food and poison, not all that is bad (evil) at a given moment for a given individual in a given place, [is necessarily so in or for another], which it would necessarily have to be if one of the elements of the encounter varied – such as the place, the time, the individual, body or idea. As such, what poisons me at a given time or place, might feed me in another given time or place; just as what is food for one may be poison for another. Evil is not prohibition, unless it be so for a man who is a prisoner of his own conscience or imagination. Evil always means an evil encounter that decomposes my nature for either ignoring or not sharing its laws; not the human or divine laws decreed by some Lord – words as orders or sentences, but rather laws of nature that simply make us understand the way that nature itself functions by itself, from itself and for itself and that these laws also affects us in as much as we are part of nature itself and we act and think by these same rules.

It is, therefore, from a very diverse attitude that one promotes a Manner of Living in accordance with the criteria of immanent conduct to the very being of desire, of life, of society, of nature (all of this is one and the same thing within the being, notwithstanding its modal distinction or difference of regime). A set of freely singular differences do not permit themselves to be reduced by or fixed into contractual, legal or institutional relationships, which would simply seek to silence the social conflicts or extract more value out of them. Because it no longer holds to the idea of an atomized individual –divided between the impotence of affirmation on the one hand and the redeeming

obedience on the other, or from the personal “I”( ones self) -prisoner of constituent attributes of the subject as a moral or rational instance– the concept of a liberating citizenship is conceived from a multiplicity of singularities as autonomous powers, or with a tendency towards autonomy. The social field starts to be comprised of, or constituted by, a set of related forces and no longer by an aggregation of atomized forms, closed off by moral limits and captured by utilitarian or final values. The social *Will* becomes truly plural, an authentic field of virtual multiplicities or powers of updating (with repulsion towards unification and totalitarian closings), thereby making itself truly autonomous and open.

But how, can an agent of intense and really supportive civil relationships, while being a citizen, turn himself into a pluralist power?

Everything that by itself, or just from within itself – in an immanent manner – creates and conditions modes of composition between individuals and elements that cross (or pass through) it (using the capacity of asserting and differentiating, which is incorporated into each happening, as a selective criteria for what happens in society) constitutes a filter or a plain of composition and a generator of free realities, and further constitutes a field of attraction and consistency as an autonomous power.

In the deepest depths of our being and on the uppermost superficial layer of our surfaces of being, we are not a unit or formal identity as an “I”, but rather singularly unique multiplicities without subject Nevertheless – what power, what differentiation, what generosity in these individual and singular ways of being! The links that we establish with ourselves, with others, with the social multiplicities that update themselves and affect us, in short – with nature, are catalysts of happenings, are conditions of encounters and transmissions of reality; they are the bow and arrows that not only bring on the future, but further redeem the past and make the present a veritable field of experimentation and innocent production of reality.

We are individualizing powers that select and extract from these encounters or relationships that which really shares in the pure affirmation of everything that differs, creating intensifying singularities of life, as if we reached a double reality in each happening, a real virtue that inflames the current existence and accelerates the processes that precipitate the generation of the new. We are irreducible to average forms of equalization. We participate in the affirmation, therefore, of creating differences that permit the expansion of life in society, thus surpassing the limits we seek to overcome.

We call ethics not a duty to and with the Law or Good, neither to a power to segregate or distinguish the pure from the impure, the wheat from the chaff, Good from Evil, but rather [a duty] to the capacity of life and thought that passes through us in selecting, within the encounters that we produce, something that makes us overcome the very conditions of the experience conditioned by society or the power, and towards a liberating experience, as in a continual apprenticeship. Making the differences coexist, connecting them to the chance of spaces and moments that mix them and by making their meetings both contingent and necessary within a common plain of nature alongside the social field, (as life does not exist outside the encounters and happenings that it results from), we can assert what is fatal about these encounters, something which is like the higher sense of everything that exists. Because it is by wanting the happening within the very happening that we liberate something that stands out from the simple everyday events.

The appropriation and creation of rules and codes that command the interpretation of happenings by interpreters of power, whether from a political, economic or media-centric point of view, impose what one should think, how one should act and in what or whom to believe, under the guillotine (axe) of prizes or punishment for Good or Evil, through what is useful or harmful, legal or illegal, always in line with, conforming with the dominant sense given by the power in question. The invention of facts – or of what should be highlighted – held up as being historical or having a relevance, such as what makes [or does not make] the news – is always present in the way in which the power takes charge of the events and confers significance upon them, in such a way that this truth, produced by the power, becomes the truth of the power.

We encounter something differential from the facts within the happenings of a society and in that which really happens to us, for the simple reason of our living in society, being capable of experimenting for ourselves and apprehending or capturing that which constitutes the occurrences, in the same way that we constitute the occurrence. We become occurrences, happenings! We find something that duplicates our sensitive and casual experience in the necessary living of and experience of thought, that is to say, something like an active sense which leads us to contract and anticipate the future, thereby gaining speed and liberty. Thus, a nomad culture is built, with a virtual memory of the future that distances us from the crystallized present and makes all life-paralyzing power flee, and through this sense of living outcome that does not allow itself to be fixed or captured when it is rebuffed over the factual plane or from the dominant significations of the constituted power.

From this point of view, how might one create authentic social agents, that's to say, true modifiers or creators of new social conditions of existence? How, then, to create free citizens in the fullest sense of the word?

As Nietzsche would say, without the lion destroying NO, we can not generate the condition for the big child creating YES to install a wheel that turns by itself, a new start, a new innocence. For this reason there is a necessity for criticism. It is necessary to start by denouncing the traps that withhold from us the values established by the powers that then detach themselves only to return against the social field. The States, while being machines for submitting the set of social relationships, correspond to the investment that society itself makes in order to remain cohesive, but which ends up turning upon society itself.

Are we capable of inventing other modes of social relationships or are we fed up with the tiresome repetition ?

To answer that question, we need to consider the nature of the relationships that constitute the current fabric of our societies and the way in which they are reproduced. We are prisoners of a "prejudice" or of an image that lies within the innermost layers of our history and of the collective unconscious and that which coexists in the current way of transmitting material, be it energetic or spiritual content. We are prisoners of the myth that says that every social relationship pre-supposes an exchange that is consecrated by means of an equivalent, that is to say, by means of an abstract value capable of axiomatizing or equaling any relationship, stripping it of all and any singularity that might differentiate it and assert it as an autonomous and unsubstitutable value. Thus it is not just material products that are transformed into merchandize, but all spiritual processes of human singularization and subjectivation that fall into the delirious axiomatic whirl of the economic field – given that the first axiomatization is that of time – and which reduce all the elements with minimum units that are equivalent and interchangeable among themselves. It is not the Money that constitutes the privileged form of the capitalist merchandize, it is the manner of the production of subjectivity or of the processes that constitute the fundamental generating condition of all the stuffing or padding, or a breeding ground for the existence and successful reproduction of Capital itself.

Subjectivity is the merchandizing excellence of our societies. It is the creation and the reproduction, by the power, of a territory that will never stop lacking of itself, feeding thus the endless insufficiency of being: always filled by the buying "power", always frustrated by the insurmountable illusion of ideal consumer spending that escapes us the moment we reach it; always

reproduced in its lack of territory, abysmal shortage, real impotence of conquering the “coin”

–currency– that is capable of everything but always digs a deeper hole from its two-faced schizophrenia, the hole in the existential divide. An unbridgeable rift.

We have entered [a new world with] new environments. Capitalism has manufactured for itself new and even more complex atmospheres. As Deleuze would say, no longer the disciplinary mole, but the fluid controlling serpent. Subjectivity is no longer simply produced by the old disciplinary machines. The steam engines and coal-fired engines have given way to silicon machines of the third generation. The modus operandi of disciplinary power, closed off and segmentized in time and space as Foucault described, giving way to the magnetic digital codes that connect and shift the flows of energy in open space and uninterrupted control.

Both the power and the production of its stuffing – subjectivity – are now carried out by open controlled modulations of flows – infinitely changeable channels in permanent communication as a means of producing channels and added channel value, of flows and added machine value, of ideas and added value in knowledge and power; control within a space that has become simultaneously open, both in its interior and exterior, and at an absolute speed in time which constitutes us as [being] simultaneously communicating codes.

Nevertheless, in the same fashion that power has become more subtle with its new machines and ways of working, so life - the active outcomes of life – has (have) also found new, never before seen, unheard of and powerful opportunities to react, create and make the unexpected happen; the fresh air of new outcomes and the powers of new compositions in the very heart of its cybernetic machines of control.

Life in its most recent form, its latest instance does not allow itself to be exchanged or evaluated from an abstract axiomatization of energy transmissions. Indeed, it is life which evaluates and makes the non-measurable surpluses of the intense mode go away, excesses through which the constitution of new types of relationship become possible. Indeed, in reality, nature or life itself, which is a means of producing nature, is that which produces reality and therefore, through [having] this capacity of generating excess, allows new means of relating within society to become at once both possible and necessary. These new manners of being or means of relating are characterized by the capacity of making the non-codifiable surplus, the non-measurable intensities, the quantities of non-axiomatizable energy go away.

We can make ourselves into an ever differential element and differentiating generator of new outcomes, an imperceptible if somewhat eccentric agent in constant mutation, lord of modifications that make relationships into propulsory alliances of a social life in full expansion. It is only through the excesses that we become able to give and to be generous. It is only under these conditions that we will become capable of creating and building a field of consistency and composition of a libertarian social fabric: truly free men – with strength enough to resist and exorcise the interferences from alien powers to the field of immanence of a civil society – free from a model of accumulation and consumption of dead energy and from the production of exchange (swap) relationships or abstract transmissions, which separate men from their own capacities of acting and thinking. Free because they are bonded to their own power to produce and assert their creating outcomes.

It is from the way in which one produces and transmits energy, no longer as a parasite, but as one that establishes authentic symbiosis, that the conditions of the existence of life will be able to find its means of expansion and expression of joy, the effect of the increase in the capacity to act and think of the Earth, on the Earth, for the Earth.

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