

Human development and social justice: necessity and utopia

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Abstract

This article intends to focus on the importance of two kinds of inequality that increasingly characterise contemporary society, where in addition to the widening of the traditional economic gap there is also an unequal distribution of ecological risks. Our thinking on these issues sprang from the consideration of a twofold aspect: a. the analysis of the mechanisms that have created such inequalities and that continue to determine our current model of growth; b. a comparison between the outcomes of the dominant model of development and the expectations that have emerged since the Enlightenment about the capitalist economy's ability to lead to a society based on the general improvement of material well-being and on a gradual process of achieving a "perfectionnement de l'espèce humaine".

As far as the first aspect is concerned, it has been shown that unless the automatic market mechanisms are politically corrected in the direction of a fairer sharing out of resources and social wealth, they tend to accentuate economic inequalities (both within advanced societies and between advanced and backward societies) and to offload the environmental risks onto the poorer areas of the planet. As for the second aspect, the recovery of certain important analytical approaches from the Enlightenment period has revealed major differences between the category of economic and social development, studied by theoreticians like Rousseau, Chastellux, A. Smith, Condorcet etc., and the concept of growth typical of mainstream economics. The rediscovery of the analytical orientations of the Enlightenment (apart from some of their typical limitations) today seems undoubtedly useful in order to bring out a critical attitude to the dominant model of development, to enable the intellectual and political constraints of the "single way of thinking" to be overcome and to establish possible paths towards a "realistic utopia" that can stand up to the challenges of the present.

"If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal."

John F. Kennedy

1. «Finding or inventing a compromise for global justice in a world where riches and risks are shared out unequally [is] though a hard task... a realistic utopia, which every country should help to achieve if only for the sake of its own national interests»¹.

There are three key words in the quote from Beck's *Conditio umana. Il rischio nell'età globale*, on which we wish to focus: "riches", "risks" – in the sense of ecological risks – and "utopia". The latter, described as "realistic", is seen not as an ideal project, a pipedream, but as a possible, achievable idea, since it is based on a

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¹ Beck U., *Conditio Humana. Il rischio nell'età globale*, Editori Laterza, Bari, 2008, p. 6.

rigorous analysis of the limitations of the current model of development: a *utopia-eutopia*, «the good society that is nowhere because it does not yet exist, because humanity which has always yearned for it has not yet managed to adequately achieve it»².

While admiring this definition, we do not want to appear naïve or over-optimistic, giving the impression that this project is easy to carry out or that it can be achieved by simply accepting the “natural way of things” (as the Enlightenment thinkers were wont to say). Indeed, the matter seems to be far more challenging, since it has two levels: the traditional level of social justice and the growing inequality in the distribution of wealth, alongside the aspect that has emerged dramatically in more recent times, of the unequal distribution of global risks. The first question was analysed widely and in great depth during the 1800s and most of the 1900s and focused on the recurrent denunciation of a phenomenon typical of modern capitalism: the misery that “arises from abundance”³ or, to use Keynes’s words, the «paradox of poverty amidst abundance»⁴. Since the second half of the 1900s there has been a widespread belief that processes of growth could be generalised at a global level and that, apart from the unequal distribution of income, poorer areas too would achieve a high enough per capita income to allow the exercise of political liberties, the right to education and health and a standard of living that would enable processes of self-realisation. Today, in view of past experience, it can be said that «none of what was promised has come about»⁵ and that the underdeveloped areas that we treated with the remedies offered by development economics either «have not managed to reach the levels of growth we expected» or «have experienced erratic patterns of growth», with the result that they still contain «a huge proportion of the world’s poor»⁶.

Then there is the second issue that has emerged into the limelight in the last few decades based on increasingly detailed analyses of the irreversible effects of our lifestyle on the environment. There is no doubt that the problem of the environment, in view of the interdependency of vital biological systems, cannot be considered a regional problem confined to only some areas of the world and must be handled with an overall vision and shared approaches, also in terms of economic policies.

We will deal with the two points separately, although in actual fact the two pathways are closely intertwined and are two aspects of a single model of development: «industrial society goes through two different stages of evolution. The first stage is dominated by the question of class, or the social question; in the second stage the ecological question dominates. But it would be an oversimplification to say that the ecological question removes the social question. Obviously the crisis in the environment, the labour market and the economy overlap and can aggravate each other»⁷.

² Colombo A. - Tundo L., *Fourier. La passione dell’utopia*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1988, p. 9.

³ Fourier C., *Le nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire*, in *Ouvres Complètes*, Anastatica, Parigi, 1966.

⁴ Keynes J. M., *La fine del laissez-faire e altri scritti*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 1991, p. 27.

⁵ Easterly W., *Lo sviluppo inafferrabile*, Mondadori, Milano, 2006, p. XVI.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Beck 2008, p. 141.

2. Rousseau in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) said that there are two principles preceding any form of human reason: the interest in our own preservation and well-being and the instinctive repugnance at seeing any sentient being die or suffer, especially our fellow man⁸.

He also stated that there are two kinds of inequality in humankind: a “natural” or “physical” inequality, established by nature and consisting of differences in age, physical strength, health and quality of spirit or soul; and a “moral” or “political” inequality, based on a sort of convention, established or allowed by men, consisting of the privileges (honour, wealth, power) enjoyed by some at the expense of others, who simply obey.

He then went on to challenge the hypothesis of a link between the two kinds of inequality, since such an idea would lead us to wonder whether «those who command are necessarily worth more than those who obey, and whether the physical or spiritual strength, wisdom or virtue, of these individuals is always in proportion to their power and wealth»⁹.

Today it is clear that only the first of the two «principles that pre-exist reason» is still valid, while the second is seriously compromised by the fact that never before this moment in history have so many people lived in conditions of extreme poverty, deprived of the enjoyment of basic rights, well-being or even of the fulfilment of essential needs.

And, in contrast to the thinking of the French Enlightenment thinker, it is precisely the inequalities in terms of power, privilege and wealth that determine the other forms of inequality. Today this inequality is called “global”¹⁰ for various reasons:

- first of all, there is a far more widespread awareness of this issue than there was even a few decades ago (thanks also to the means of mass communication);
- these inequalities are perceived as being profoundly unjust and not “natural”;
- they have attracted the attention of important international organisations like the United Nations – especially the UNDP and the Department of Social and Economic Affairs – and the World Bank;
- last but not least, inequalities within a single country can often be explained by referring to international factors.

The scenario just outlined, incidentally, clashes with the Enlightenment attitude based on the hypothesis that the capitalist society and economy would enable «the elimination of the inequalities amongst nations; increased equality amongst each people» in the process of the «perfectionnement de l'homme» augured by Condorcet¹¹. Underlying this vision was the focus on the traits differentiating the new

⁸ Rousseau J. J., *Sull'origine dell'ineguaglianza*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1983, p. 91.

⁹ Ivi, p. 97.

¹⁰ Gallino L., *Diseguaglianze globali, Il dubbio*, n. II, 2002.

¹¹ Condorcet, *I progressi dello spirito umano*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1995, p. 187. Note that in 1795 Condorcet had suggested using not exclusively economic means to break down inter- and intra-national inequalities: he strongly insisted for example on education as a tool to reduce «the natural difference of the faculties», until all that survived was «an inequality useful to the interests of everyone» (ivi, p. 188), and to «accelerate the march of science» (ivi, p. 198), as well as the

economic system from the previous one, and the importance of the very rapid scientific and technical transformations that it made possible, with increases in productivity that could confirm the hypothesis that the growing material wealth would enable all the citizens' needs to be fulfilled. In addition there was the belief that it was the constant advances in science and technology that made the role of training ever more important and that cultural and civil growth would consolidate the progress implied by the increasing material wealth, making it irreversible.

Chastellux pointed out that the economic and social context was already so dynamic and progressive that poverty could be no longer be considered «un mal nécessaire». What they were still fighting against were the negative consequences of the heritage left to them by the previous social order: «c'est un reste de la barbarie qui nous révolte, et qui ne durera pas long-temps»¹². They were now in a position to act for the gradual elimination of all the factors that become «un obstacle à la félicité du plus grand nombre»¹³, since «les malheurs de l'humanité doivent bien moins être imputés à l'insuffisance ou à l'abus de la raison, qu'à l'ignorance des siècles passés, dans lesquelles se sont formés la plupart des habitudes et des principes qui nous gouvernent encore»¹⁴. The generalization of the scientific vision of the social order allowed him to say that it was «susceptible, sinon de perfection, du moins d'amélioration»¹⁵ and it was legitimate to foresee the emergence and spread not only of processes of individuals getting rich, but also of realistic plans for the convergence of social activities towards a dynamic equilibrium between “individual happiness” and “public happiness”.

On the other hand, Condorcet added, «just as the causes of disparity did not act in isolation» and cumulatively created widespread inequalities, so in the same way the virtuous processes «join together, combine, support each other, and from their combined effects produce a more incisive, secure and constant action». The spread of education, becoming «more equal», would lead to conditions of «greater equality in activities and ... in wealth, and equality of wealth necessarily contributes to that of education; while equality among peoples and the equality established for each of them still influence each other»¹⁶. It followed, due to the endogenous logic of the new economic and social system, that there was a positive link between increased wealth, fulfilment of needs and advances in the process of *perfectionnement de l'espèce humaine*.

History later showed that this beneficial circle of increased riches, education for all and equalising phenomena did not come about in the time predicted by Chastellux and Condorcet. Saint Simon who, while continuing to insist on this Enlightenment idea, realised that the endogenous mechanisms of the economic

elimination of differences between the two sexes.

¹² Chastellux, Marquis de, *De la félicité publique*, Antoine-Augustin Renouard, Paris, 1822, II, pp. 249-50.

¹³ Ivi, II, p. 263.

¹⁴ Ivi, II, p. 285.

¹⁵ Ivi, I, p. 15 e II, pp. 243 sgg.

¹⁶ Condorcet 1995, p. 195.

system promote broad processes of individual and collective accumulation of wealth, the growth of science and its applications, and the spread of education to all, but also growing economic and social imbalances, phenomena of interclass inequality and serious international asymmetries¹⁷. In short, Saint Simon and later the socialist movement underline the fact that the progressive elements in the capitalist system and the phenomena of emancipation of individuals and whole peoples that this makes possible, are accompanied by the genesis and spread of new imbalances and new forms of inequality.

3. This brief reference to a part of the Enlightenment debate seems useful because it highlights the fact that, after more than two centuries, there has been no change in the problematic context concerning the relation between increased wealth, the spread of equalising phenomena and the process of perfecting mankind. The history of humanity has never shown an increase in riches like that of the last twenty-five years and, at the same time, never as in this period has there been «such an explosion of social inequalities, both horizontally (between one social group and another), and vertically (between one individual and another)»¹⁸. As the authors of the *Human Development Report 1992*¹⁹ revealed, «economic disparities between the richest and the poorest people, having doubled over the past three decades, are likely to explode. The income of the richest billion people is 150 times that of the poorest billion, a dangerously large gap. [...] What would be considered politically and socially unacceptable within nations is being quietly tolerated at the global level»²⁰. This gap between rich and poor countries was due, according to the analyses, to the absolutely unbalanced distribution of the global GNP quote (only 1.4% was at the disposal of the poorest 20% of the world population) and to the reduced power to enter global trade on the part of developing countries (1'1%). In actual fact, from this point of view things have not changed much. While the world GDP²¹ between 1981 and 2001 grew by 88 percentage points, only 4.2% was used to reduce the number of the poor living on less than \$2 a day. More specifically, according to London's New

¹⁷ Gioia V., *Conoscenza sociale e riformismo nel pensiero utopico tra il 1789 e il 1848*, in Noto S. (ed.), *Il ferro e il buon governo*, Musumeci Editore, Quart (Valle d'Aosta), 2007, pp. 48-9.

¹⁸ Zamagni S., *L'economia del bene comune*, Città Nuova Edizione, Roma, 2007, p. 25.

¹⁹ Since 1992, the UN Development Programme publishes an Annual Report on development, each time studying more specific issues linked to the process of development.

²⁰ Fukuda-Parr S. – Kumar A. K. S. (ed), *Readings in Human Development. Concepts, Measures and Policies for a Development Paradigm*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, p. 25. The situation in our country is not very different. As a 2006 study on the wealth of Italians showed, «in Italy the 10 richest individuals own an amount of wealth that is roughly equivalent to that of the 3 million poorest Italians» (D'Alessio G., *Ricchezza e disuguaglianza in Italia*, Questioni di economia e finanza, Occasional Papers n.115, Banca d'Italia, February 2012).

²¹ The GDP and the GNP are the standard tools with the longest record of use for the measurement of national and world wealth.

Economics Foundation, the movement of the GDP/poverty ratio²² in two decades reveals that:

- between 1981 and 1990, the GDP rose by 750 billion, while the dollar-a-day poor²³ dropped by 250 million;
- between 1991 and 2001, on the other hand, it rose by 11,200 billion, while the individuals living on less than a dollar a day fell by 130 million.

Independently of this data, the thing that became crucial for the UNDP experts, when they were about to draw up their first report (later to become an annual report), was the view of development not as a merely economic phenomenon but as a process that includes reference to the same “perfectionnement de l’homme” that Condorcet talked about and that cannot be identified simply with the availability of money.

To demonstrate this, the UNDP experts created the Human Development Index (HDI) based on «three key components: longevity, knowledge and income»²⁴. It is well known that this is a weighted index in which the indicators are life expectancy at birth and literacy level, as well as the real value of per capita income expressed as buying power in dollars. This approach reflects in particular the theory of the Indian economist, Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize winner for Economics in 1988.

According to the author, «development consists of eliminating various kinds of unfreedoms that leave men with little choice and few opportunities to act according to reason»²⁵. In Sen’s vision, development does not coincide with the growth of the GDP or with the increase in individual incomes, nor with industrialisation, technological progress or the modernisation of society; development is, instead, a process of expansion of the real freedoms enjoyed by human beings, in which the growth of GDP or of individual income become merely a means, moreover not sufficient, of expanding our freedoms. The latter also depend on other factors of a social and economic kind, starting from the full entitlement to civil and political rights by all the members of society.

In Sen’s vision, closely tied to the liberties seen as development’s primary purpose (with a founding role) and as its main means (instrumental role), there is the concept of *functioning* – whose Aristotelian roots can be found in the thought of the philosopher Martha Nussbaum²⁶ – and that of *capability*: functioning refers to what

²² The GDP/country’s wealth is also interesting. Although between 1965 and 2010 the Italian GDP increased, wealth almost doubled. This means that the wealth deriving from the past, therefore inherited wealth, is more important than that obtained day by day from work and business activity, with not insignificant consequences from the point of view of inequality. (D’Alessio 2012, p. 8).

²³ It should be stressed that one or two dollars a day are not meant here strictly in terms of monetary income, but as the level of consumption including all kinds of resources serving for survival (not only food, therefore, but also housing, medical care, transport ...), obtained in different ways (wages, saving, support, loans, gifts, self-production, but also theft ...).

²⁴ Fukuda-Parr – Kumar 2004, p. 104.

²⁵ Sen A., *Lo sviluppo è libertà. Perché non c’è crescita senza democrazia*, Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano, 2000, p. 6.

²⁶ Nussbaum M. C., *Capacità personale e democrazia sociale*, Diabasis, Reggio Emilia, 2003, pp. 45-52. Nussbaum refers to Aristotle’s man, a being both capable and needy, but also to Marx’s man, who needs wealth of activities for his life to be fully human.

persons may wish to be or do, the kind of life they value, while capabilities²⁷ are the alternative combinations of functionings that a person is able to choose, establishing a range of styles of living.

A person's standard of living does not depend on the amount of goods and services he can access, as much as the capacity he possesses to lead various kinds of existence: special importance is placed on the chosen lifestyle which however would lose its value if the individual did not have other possible options available.

How are *capabilities* intertwined with income inequalities? If the latter exceed a certain threshold, they can compromise the ability to access ways of being and doing, that is, the ways of functioning considered and approved as normal, typical of the citizen of a certain society. If the incapacitation is not compensated for in some way, the individual risks not being recognised as a citizen and becomes the victim of mechanisms of discrimination and social disqualification. This aspect of inequality is not new to the tradition of political economy: Smith, for instance, took into consideration variables such as not being ashamed to appear in public, analysing how the goods necessary for this purpose – clothes, shoes, etc. – changed according to social habits and cultural conventions²⁸. Poverty must not be seen only as the impossibility of buying the essentials for survival or the things that make a citizen's life decorous and acceptable, but in terms of the possibility of participating in social life. In fact, if one cannot take an active part in the life of the community one belongs to, one suffers from a deprivation that has a negative effect on individual development and this is transformed into damage to the community one lives in.

As was shown in the UNDP Annual Report of 1993, whose main theme was participation,

«few people have the opportunity to participate fully in the economic and political lives of their nations»²⁹, while «people's participation [...] must inspire a search for a people-centred world order built on five new pillars: New concepts of human security that stress the security of people, not only of nations. New strategies of sustainable human development that weave development around people, not people around development. New partnership between the state and the market, to combine market efficiency with social compassion. New patterns of national and global governance, to accommodate the rising tide of democracy and the steady decline of the nation-state. New forms of international cooperation, to focus assistance directly on the needs of the people rather than only on the preferences of governments»³⁰.

According to Sen, the approach to human development of the UNDP, does not intend to reduce the field of definition of values only to capabilities; it sees them as just one of the elements to take into consideration if we want to identify the factors

²⁷ *Capability* in the sense of capacity that the society gives to or denies the individual, in contrast to *ability* in the sense of the individual's own capacity.

²⁸ Smith A., *Indagine sulla natura e le cause della ricchezza delle nazioni*, Isedi, Milano, 1973, p. 770.

²⁹ Fukuda-Parr – Kumar 2004, p. 28.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 30.

acting on individual growth (along with income, utility, changes in needs and the conditions of individuals' life).

An adequate conception of development, therefore, must go well beyond the accumulation of wealth. The growth of GNP or of other variable linked to income are useful insofar as they help to achieve what Sen – in his approach of seeing freedom as the *purpose* of the development process, rather than the *instrument* – calls substantial freedoms³¹. They are important not only for the single individuals, but also for the whole society: «greater freedom stimulates the capacity to get by alone as well as to influence the world, that is, processes that are at the centre of the development process»³². The individual therefore becomes the “centre of action” playing an «active role as a member of the society»³³.

However admirable the idea of linking the process of development to the concept of freedom, there remains the doubt that it is possible (and desirable) to measure such a latent variable: «freedom is difficult to define in any way that commands universal agreement: it is even harder to measure. There are many who may question whether it is desirable to measure freedom even if it were possible. The very act of measuring freedom in their view diminishes it»³⁴.

4. The second aspect we wish to reflect on concerns, as we said at the outset, the unequal distribution of environmental risks. This is a question that, despite the limelight of the last few years, does not attract the same attention that is directed to economic and financial crises. This is because the idea of globalization revolves mainly around more strictly economic matters, overshadowing others that are just as pressing, like environmental crises and conflicts over the reserves of natural resources.

Contemporary society appears to the more observant as a “world risk society”, in the perceptive expression coined by Beck. This definition has a twofold significance:

- the risk society does not refer to the first phase of modernity (between the 19th and 20th centuries), but to the following period starting from the mid 20th century and characterised by the perception of risks, which previously had not been adequately evaluated: ecological crises and the social effects determined by the end of the welfare state model, which had guaranteed an acceptable equilibrium between

³¹ There are five main instrumental freedoms, all closely interconnected: 1) political freedoms; 2) economic infrastructures; 3) social opportunities; 4) transparency guarantees; 5) protective security. Sen 2000, p. 16.

³² Ivi, p. 24.

³³ Ivi, p. 25.

³⁴ Fukuda-Parr – Kumar 2004, p. 166; Cohen D., *Tre lezioni sulla società postindustriale*, Garzanti, Milano, 2007, p. 31 ff. Moreover, not infrequently, freedom seems to be a less important value for individuals than equality. According to the data of the World Value Survey (cit. in D'Alessio 2012, pp. 16-7), 49% of the Italians interviewed choose equality as the most important value, compared to 40% who choose freedom (the remaining 11% is undecided). In preferring equality to freedom, Italians come third out of thirty-two countries.

processes of economic transformation and social cohesion³⁵. In this second phase of modernity there emerged man's incapacity to control the dangers produced by modernity itself, not due to failures, but because of its successful advances. «Climate change, for instance, is a product of successful industrialization, which has systematically neglected its own effects on nature and on man»³⁶. In the same way, the high unemployment rate is due not simply to the failures of the economy, but to improvements in productivity, since thanks to them the output of goods is multiplied with less use of manpower³⁷. The fact that we have a number of scientific and technical tools available, unknown in the past, does not mean that the risk is reduced; instead, awareness of its existence tends to be accentuated.

- the systematic and large scale assessment of the effects that man's activity has in a world risk society, in which «global risks bring us face to face with the seemingly excluded "others". They blur national borders and mix the native with the outsider. The repulsed "other" merges – not as a result of immigration, but as a consequence of the global risks»³⁸.

Faced with such a scenario, the first possible comment is of an ontological kind: while until the end of the Fifties, the main, and ideal, unit of analysis for sociology, political science, and to a degree also of political economy was the single nation-state³⁹, today this is no longer the case, because the "container society"⁴⁰ is finished. With globalization – in its most advanced stage – nation-states undergo a process of weakening, of growing fragmentation of their national borders. On the other hand, the seriousness of the problems to be faced makes it impossible for the single nation-states to deal with them successfully. Dangers and risks can no longer be regarded as the State's internal affairs, but must be opposed on a global plane and no country can act in isolation. This supranational context «gives rise to a new confrontational dynamic of social inequalities»⁴¹, because it is interwoven with the environmental "risk". In this sense, such a confrontational dynamic seems "new" because alongside the central question of a fair and dignified existence for all, there is the need not to go beyond the tolerance level of natural systems (the source of survival resources) for waste products coming from production processes.

The ecological crisis brings out the awareness of the biophysical limits of economic growth, based on the simple observation that the non-monetary sources of wealth are not infinite and natural resources are not inexhaustible. All this translates into the need to redefine the conditions for the creation of wealth in the future, adapting the rhythm of growth to the constraints imposed by the environment: «the

³⁵ Beck 2008, p. 15.

³⁶ Ivi, p. 16.

³⁷ Ivi, p. 41.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 29.

³⁹ Mills W. C., *L'immaginazione sociologica*, il Saggiatore, Milano, 1995, pp. 144-6.

⁴⁰ Beck U., *Che cos'è la globalizzazione. Rischi e prospettive della società planetaria*, Carocci, Roma, 2006, p. 42.

⁴¹ Beck 2008, p. 17.

prospect of greater equity can no longer be seen in the sense of continuous growth», since this would lead to the «destruction of the biosphere»⁴².

5. While it is true that natural resources are already, *per se*, distributed unequally among the various areas of the world, it is also true that – in most cases – it is precisely the populations of the countries richest in raw materials that live in conditions of greatest poverty. After a history of deprivation marked by colonialism, these countries today still find their natural resources being shipped out unfairly through international trade⁴³.

It is not only the resources, but also the damages that are distributed unevenly. Even though they are largely produced by the industrialized countries (for example, in the form of carbon dioxide emissions), it is highly likely that it will be the countries that contribute least to cause them that will be affected first and most harshly. Already today the world's poorest regions are those worst hit by desertification due to climate change.

The same can be said for the most polluting phases of production processes: the relocation of European industries to emerging countries translates into a sort of deliberate exportation of the danger and it is becoming more and more frequent. The main motivations are to be found in the permissive standards of some countries: lower wages, lack of any protection for workers and less crippling taxes. With the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, firms in western countries (not always in real difficulty) had an alibi for choosing the path of investing abroad, by applying policies of downsizing (or, more simply, mass firings) in the home factories.

It is obvious that global risks are concentrated on people that are weaker and lack power. To make things worse, non-western countries «have to deal with the collateral effects of global industrialization, while they are still waiting for the arrival of modernity»⁴⁴. It is to be hoped that, to improve their position, these countries will take a different path from that of the countries of the old industrialization, favouring the poor, but also the environment, opting for infrastructures with low emissions and limited use of resources, and cleaner and more efficient products and production systems⁴⁵.

⁴² Sachs W., *Ambiente e giustizia sociale. I limiti della globalizzazione*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 2002, p. 183.

⁴³ Despite the emphasis placed on the potential benefits of a more intense trade of goods and services, in different countries there are different results (also between different components of the same nation). Specifically, some of the so-called developing countries, the *new globalizers* – successfully participating in the process of globalization of markets and production – recorded high levels of growth and converge towards the levels of advanced countries. In contrast, the *least developed countries* – which occupy a marginal position in the world economic system due to a structurally weak internal economy and extremely low or negative growth rates – have moved further and further away from the income levels of rich countries (Acocella N. et al., *Rapporto su povertà e disuguaglianze negli anni della globalizzazione*, Ed. Colonnese l'Ancora del Mediterraneo, Pironti, Napoli, 2003, p. 81).

⁴⁴ Beck 2008, p. 298.

⁴⁵ French I., *Ambiente e globalizzazione. Le contraddizioni tra neoliberismo e sostenibilità*, Edizioni Ambiente, Milano, 2000, p. 62.

«Yet there are alternatives to inequality and unsustainability. Growth driven by fossil fuel consumption is not a prerequisite for a better life in broader human development terms. Investments that improve equity – in access, for example, to renewable energy, water and sanitation, and reproductive healthcare – could advance both sustainability and human development»⁴⁶.

It is a matter of recognising that a model of development still based exclusively on economic growth is now unthinkable: the latter has admittedly enabled a growing section of the population to reach the highest level of consumption, but today this success cannot be repeated, given the scarcity of combustible resources, too greedily exploited, on which it is based⁴⁷.

The western world's standard of living now seems incompatible with the survival of the planet, but it should also be clear that, in the perspective of global social justice, it no longer seems tolerable that there should be such a sharp polarization between the North and South of the world. New solutions must be found. One of these is the conceptual model put forward by Wolfgang Sachs, sociologist and ecologist, that goes by the name of “contraction and convergence”: the industrialized countries can slow down the continuous economic growth that is responsible for the ecological crisis, while the industrially backward countries must be able to access better standards of living, at the same time without adopting the traditional model of western development. In other words, the industrialized countries have the duty to reduce their demand for goods and their unlimited consumption of natural resources, while the poor countries have the right to reach the so-called “dignity line”, a level of consumption of resources capable of ensuring a dignified life for each of their citizens. By reducing the level of consumption on the one hand and making that of the others converge towards it, we would achieve a state of global justice while also respecting the limits of the biosphere.

The hope for a universal levelling of standards of living has so far been bitterly disappointed. The only result of the attempt to westernize the whole world has been to impose the rich countries' standard of living as the dominant category. The leaders of emerging nations felt the pressure to reach it, falling into the trap of western ethnocentrism with very serious consequences: «until today, all the efforts to replace a local value with a universal good have not led to equality, but to a hierarchical modernization of poverty»⁴⁸.

The hierarchy that places the industrialized countries above the emerging countries is also evident in the unequal distribution of risk, not only of resources. The former, which we can call “risk-givers”, offload the dangers of collateral effects on the target countries, making it seem like an accident and not the result of conscious choices that could be avoided. This therefore gives us a glimpse of power relations that go beyond national borders and extend to a global level. On this point, one can

⁴⁶ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2011. Sustainability and equity: a better future for all*, United Nations Development Programme, New York, 2011, p. IV.

⁴⁷ Daly H. – Cobb J., *Un'economia per il bene comune*, Red Edizioni, Como, 1994, p. 39.

⁴⁸ Illich I., *Il lavoro ombra*, Mondadori, Milano, 1985, p. 4.

reasonably talk about a sort of “ecological neo-imperialism” that the western states, with the benefit of having more advanced technical and scientific know-how⁴⁹, exercise over the industrially backward countries. This know-how is not used to improve the material and moral conditions of the entire human race (as Saint Simon hoped), but for man to dominate over man, which has also corresponded to an uncontrolled exploitation of nature.

6. In 1795, in *Perpetual peace*, Kant suggested a plan for global citizenship in which the states would stop acting like monads competing with each other and – through reason and progress – would ensure conditions of equality for all the citizens of the world. In the 21st century, men from all over the earth are linked together, not by parity of rights and duties nor by widespread well-being, but by global risks that threaten everyone’s existence and add another obstacle to «man’s escape from the minority status for which he must blame himself»⁵⁰.

The likelihood that we are facing a catastrophic situation can however take on positive features if we establish «a culture of civil responsibility that goes beyond confines and contrasts»⁵¹ leading to a sort of «forced cosmopolitisation [which] means in fact that the global risks cross borders to activate and unite players who would otherwise not want to have anything to do with each other»⁵².

What is certain is that the global risks produced by the successes of modernity, first and foremost climate change, are essentially impossible to deal with one by one, both in terms of individuals and of single nation-states (to the point where in many cases the latter have handed over control to the economic powers which have ended up engulfing the prerogatives and functions of political power).

It is not realistic to give single citizens the task of completely reversing their life style and the goals to aim for during their whole existence⁵³, without more precise indications of the political and collective tools that should enable the global picture to really change. This task seems even more challenging if one considers that the world order continues to lean in the opposite direction.

⁴⁹ The superiority of westerners’ knowledge compared to that of other populations considered backward, however, remains to be demonstrated. Recently there has been a rediscovery of so-called *Traditional Knowledge*, «the traditional knowledge that many human populations have acquired in centuries of co-evolution with natural systems» (Bologna G., *Manuale della sostenibilità. Idee, concetti, nuove discipline capaci di futuro*, Edizioni Ambiente, Milano, 2005, p. 169). Three hundred million individuals scattered around the world represent ethnic minorities that live in constant contact with nature from which they learn something every day. In places where the traditional agriculture is still practised, farmers have such a perfect knowledge of the species they farm that even genetic engineering uses their secrets.

⁵⁰ Kant I., *Scritti politici e di filosofia della storia e del diritto*, Utet, Torino, 1965, p. 141. Cfr. Shiva V., *The World on the Edge*, in *Global Capitalism*, Hutton W. – Giddens A. (ed.), The New Press, New York, 2000, pp. 112-29.

⁵¹ Beck 2008, p. 93.

⁵² Ivi, p. 101.

⁵³ As for example the theory of degrowth would seem to indicate.

It is indispensable to activate the governments, and here too there must be a close collaboration that involves them all, if necessary by designating supra-national bodies for the management and reduction of global risks.

This raises an unsolved problem. The lack of justice is often exacerbated by precisely the institutions that should guarantee fairness and equality of opportunity⁵⁴. The economic, financial and political institutions are still guided by theories and consolidated practices based on the dominant model of development and that – without a radical reform – will not be able to comprehend needs and points of view that are not compatible with the mainstream. Moreover, to begin to identify a suitable prospect for reflection, it seems necessary to acknowledge the manifold nature of the present world, involving the players that so far have been excluded from discussions, and achieving a new balance of power, so as to be equipped to face the dramatic risks we are running. This may bring out new perspectives of analysis and intervention based on the awareness that the sharing of global risks and the nature of the ecological challenges may be a sort of “new glue of the west or of the world”. Such an approach could give rise to «a cosmopolitical opportunity for the world risk society, that of transforming global risks into realistic utopias for an endangered world; utopias that allow the state and politics to be revived and re-legitimated»⁵⁵.

Similar problems are posed at the level of the responses to give to the present economic and financial crisis. Continuing to insist on the old approach centred on the efficiency of markets and their capacity to achieve solutions that are economically optimal and socially acceptable, means ignoring the problems afflicting the contemporary economy, evading the dramatic questions it poses. The serious crisis in employment, which involves the entire western world, and the explosion of inequalities pose dramatic questions about the sustainability of the dominant model of development. In fact, while moderate economic inequalities seem acceptable when they serve for a growth of the economy designed to involve a growing number of workers in the production process, they are experienced as an injustice if they mark a permanent exclusion of a growing part of the society (and of the younger generations) from productive activity. Basically, wrote A. Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, man «can subsist only in society», so it «was fitted by nature to that situation for which he was made. All the members of human society stand in need of each other's assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries. Where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy»⁵⁶. Reciprocity and the

⁵⁴ Think of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, whose programmes make it clear that they have absolutely different aims compared to the human rights corpus (*International Bill of Rights*) and to environmentalism (*Environment Convention*, *Biodiversity Convention* and hundreds of other single agreements), translating into interventions that ride roughshod over pre-existing regional or bilateral agreements. In addition to this there are some asymmetries and structural limits that make preventive interventions by international organisms difficult. (Cfr. Soros G., *The new global financial architecture*, in *Global Capitalism*, Hutton W. - Giddens A. (ed.), The New Press, New York, 2000, p. 87 ff)

⁵⁵ Beck 2008, p. 105.

⁵⁶ Smith 1966, p. 134.

feeling of a shared social destiny of all individuals are not a luxury or an accidental element, but a necessary ingredient for living together, since it guarantees its continuity through the acceptance of its way of working: «man ... has a natural love for society, and desires that union of mankind should be preserved for its own sake, and though he himself was to derive no benefit from it»⁵⁷. This however must be perceived as a shared ingredient, as acceptance of the “fundamental pact” that J. J. Rousseau talked about and that ties individuals to a common social destiny: «the bonds that tie us to the social body are compulsory only insofar as they are reciprocal; their nature is such that by honouring them one cannot work for others without working for oneself»⁵⁸.

This “fundamental pact” must involve the whole society, independently of the particular ways of working typical of the various fields. As Sen pointed out when commenting on this passage from *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, it is no accident that Smith, in describing the effectiveness of market mechanisms, does not consider the “profit motive” as its only driving force (though its importance is stressed), but also dwells on “prudence”. Prudence is «of all the virtues that which is most useful to the individual [...] humanity, justice, generosity, and public spirit, are the qualities most useful to others». In this sense, adds Sen, there are not just «good ethical and practical reasons for encouraging motives other than self-seeking – whether in a crude or in a refined form»⁵⁹, but also reasons related to the correct functioning of the economy and of markets. In fact, he says, «the nature of the present economic crisis illustrates very clearly the need for departures from unmitigated and unrestrained self-seeking in order to have a decent society»⁶⁰. When inequalities become so widespread and profound that they are seen as being insuperable, in view of the present organisation of the economy and of society, they are simply perceived as an injustice and as Smith pointed out, «injustice necessarily tends to destroy»⁶¹ society.

⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 127.

⁵⁸ Rousseau J. J., *Opere*, ed. Paolo Rossi, Sansoni, Firenze, 1972, p. 292.

⁵⁹ Sen A., *Adam Smith and the contemporary world*, Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics, v. 3, n. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 53-4.

⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 54.

⁶¹ Smith 1966, p. 127.

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