

Frenetic progress: a picture of modern times

Who wants to be a millionaire? One may think it is simply the title of one of the most famous quiz show formats, but let's just stop on the real meaning of this question in contemporary society. Who would not want to inherit a million euros from an unknown distant uncle, as seen on TV? Who would refuse a prize of several hundred thousand euros? Who, in the whole world, would give up the chance to become *rich*? Probably, nobody. It is a phenomenon which Emanuele Severino manages to sum up in one short, easy sentence: "*Being rich, which is, at the beginning, an instrument [for men's life], becomes a purpose*". This transformation of the importance of being rich implies a complete change in what concerns common values to follow. Above morality, ethics, love, affection, honesty, in the past two centuries a new God has slowly risen, and its name is Money.

Precisely, how did these values change so much over the years? Society has experienced loads of transformations, the most important being the loss of the individuals, replaced by an undefined mass. No more room for single and independent thoughts, the society, as one mass, one being, acts and thinks as one. It is, indeed, what Eugenio Montale described and largely criticized in many of his works: borrowing the famous poet's words, modern society is like an "*olla podrida*", a particularly rich Spanish dish where a particularly big number of ingredients makes it difficult to spot and distinguish, both by looking at it and eating it, the single ones. Montale argued that in such a society it would be impossible to make poetry, as it is an art originating from personal thought and reflection; more generally, it is impossible to focus on anything that does not concern work, production. Progress is an endless river, thought Giovanni Verga. It is therefore unstoppable, and can only lead towards new progress and evolution. The two Industrial Revolutions and the one we are currently experiencing are clear examples: there is the constant need for renewal, the impulse of making things always better and better. In this way, the invention of new instruments and the improvement of existing ones led to a complete new of conceiving work and production, the latter setting new global standards for speed and efficiency. At the same time, as Karl Marx remarks in his reflections, this process has completely taken away from the single individual the subjectivity he could project in his work, removing the final product from his control. In this way, work becomes a series of actions which bring the individual in a deep state of alienation, and leave him with the feeling that he has achieved nothing with his work. Of course, the solutions to this problem described by Marx, which basically correspond to the principles of communism, are not effective at all, as the period of the URSS proved. In fact, almost paradoxically, the communist government of the Union forced the workers to a period of extremely intense mass industrial production, in the desperate effort to catch up with the economic progress made by other nations, completely ignoring every sort of human right and the concept of dignity itself, exasperating that same process of alienation denounced by Marx. At this point, one would naturally ask himself: is it worth it? Why sacrifice one's time and individuality, basically one's whole life? For progress' sake, of course. If these processes had not taken place there would not have been any of the technological progress and inventions we know today. That's right: say goodbye to your newest iPhone, to your brand new overly priced car, not even the device on which this essay is being written would exist. Is humanity willing to give up all of these sorts of things in order to regain its old fashioned values? I do not think so, and I would not even want it to be. There are just so many ways in which life is way better than, say, a hundred years ago, and they all are somewhat related or close to the scientific and technologic progress. Would it be so utopic to have the best of both worlds? To keep the progress and, at the same time, to avoid the loss of values happening in the modern world? Maybe, or maybe not. It all depends on how humanity decides to handle it. Feuerbach thought that the attributes normally associated with God (immortality, omniscience, etc.) really belong to humanity, but humans decide to project them towards a superior being. Maybe we do the exact same thing with the God of Money, meaning that we constantly

look for values outside of our subjectivity, while we could pay a bit more attention to the true potential that is inside of us.