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ANARCHISM AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

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Introduction

We live in an era characterised by the domination of humanity over the earth, which we are reshaping at a rate and scale never experienced before. This creates challenges and problems that are fundamentally new from traditional ones and that therefore require fundamentally new strategies and solutions. Our most common tools of action and approaches are challenged by the radical circumstances of this new period of human history and we find ourselves disoriented and often paralysed. The possibility of effective and significant human agency is itself put into question. In such a scenario active thinking and practical experiments are needed in order to devise alternatives and possible solutions. In this thesis I propose that anarchism, in the declination proposed by David Graeber, coupled with some of the main ideas from John S. Mill's essays *On Liberty*, can provide valuable guidance to take action in the Anthropocene (the name proposed by some scholars to define this new epoch).

1.1 The Anthropocene

The term Anthropocene has been introduced in the 1980s by the ecologist Eugene Stoermer but has become widely known only in 2000 with an article cowritten by Stoermer and Nobel prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen. It refers to the idea that we entered a new geological era, following that of the Holocene, in which the main force of geological and biological evolution is humanity. Although not yet accepted by the ICS¹ (International Commission on Stratigraphy) due to the lack of strong stratigraphic evidence, the concept of Anthropocene is still of great use in environmental discussion since it precisely depicts the current relation we, as a species, have with planet Earth. There is indeed widespread agreement among scientists that human activities are leading to durable, irreversible and often catastrophic transformations on our planet. Climate change, produced by the unnaturally high concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere, is surely the most significant one, due to the crucial role climate plays in the geological and biological spheres. However, the carbon cycle is only one of the many altered by human activities, together with the nitrogen, phosphorus, sulphur and water cycles all of which are of extreme relevance to ecosystems².

When discussing the Anthropocene and therefore the impact of humanity on the earth system, two dimensions need to be underlined in particular: scale and rate.

Although we have always, since hunters and gatherers times, exploited natural resources without much consideration for their preservation and we have always reshaped the environment according to our needs, the scale at which we have been doing this has increased dramatically over time. The industrial revolution marked a turning point in this process and it is commonly regarded as the starting date of the Anthropocene. The systematic exploitation of fossil fuels brought production and consumption, human enterprise and energy use to levels never experienced before and together with them their well-known consequences for the environment. The industrial revolution also set in motion the urbanization process that has not yet reached a conclusion. 54% of the global population lives in urban areas today and

¹Di Paola, Marcello and Jamieson, Dale “Political Theory for the Anthropocene”, in P. Maffettone and D. Held (eds) *Global Political Theory* (Cambridge, Polity Press 2016), 257.

²Steffen, Will; Grinevald, Jacques; Crutzen, Paul; McNeill, John “The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives” *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. A* (2011): 843.

forecasts suggest this figure will rise to 68% by 2050³. With cities consuming over two-thirds of the world's energy and accounting for more than 70% of global CO2 emissions⁴, rising urbanization levels contribute greatly to the increase in scale of human imprint on the planet. Finally, when discussing scales, a figure that is of particular interest is that of world population growth. Global population quadrupled during the last century and it continues to increase with forecasts predicting we will reach 11 billion people by 2100⁵. Also in this case, the industrial revolution marked a turning point: until 1700 the rate of growth has been on average of 0.4%, while since 1800 the world population increased seven-fold⁶. The implications for the environment are great, especially when we think about how much each of us has an impact on it as compared to what we used to do in the past. Indeed, many argue⁷ that population growth is not itself the problem⁸ but the kind of population we (at least in the "west") have become: a population of mass consumers not of average humans. This becomes even bigger of a concern when such way of living and consuming is extending beyond the privileged west to emerging economies, primarily China and India, where roughly one third of the global population lives. Increased standards of living in these countries are with no doubt to be regarded as a positive and necessary development but the consequences in term of human imprint on the environment will be serious. These, together with other well-established trends (deforestation; accessible surface water usage; land exploitation) leave us with little doubt that we live in a human-dominated planet⁹, as argued in a well cited scientific report published already in 1997.

³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2014). World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, Highlights (ST/ESA/SER.A/352).

⁴ C40Cities, "Why Cities" http://www.c40.org/why_cities.

⁵ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241.

⁶ Max, Roser and Esteban, Ortiz-Ospina (2018) - "World Population Growth". OurWorldInData.org. '<https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth>'.

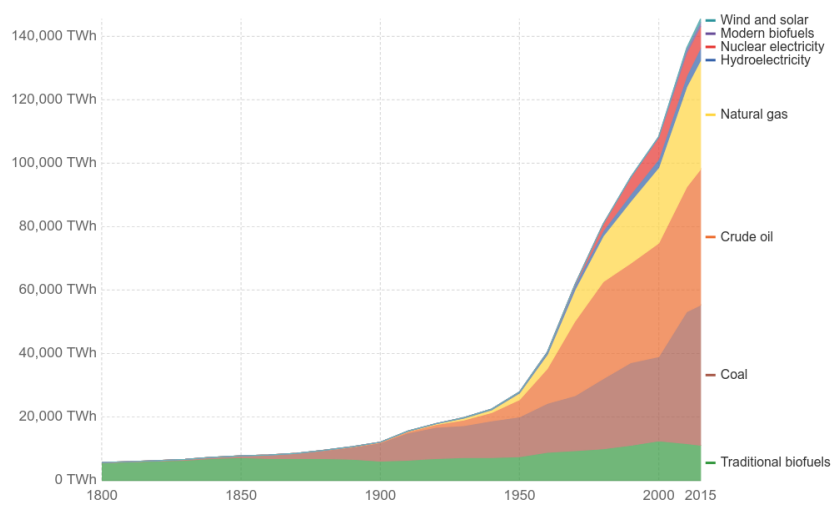
⁷ Graham Purchase, *Anarchism & Ecology: The Historical Relationship* (Petersham: Jura Books, 1994), 50.

⁸ For example, when it comes to food security: the world produces 17% more food per person today than 30 years ago, but close to a billion people go to sleep hungry every night and 98% of them live in developing countries. source: <https://www.oxfam.ca/there-enough-food-feed-world>.

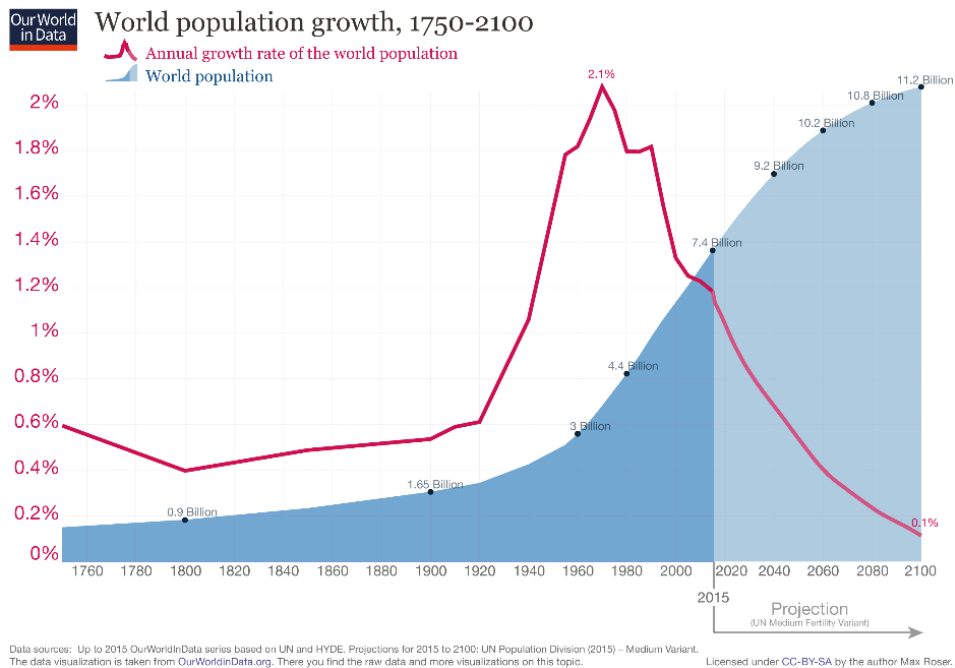
⁹ Vitousek et al. 1997, 494.

Global primary energy consumption, 1800-2015

Global primary energy consumption by source, measured in terrawatt-hours (TWh).

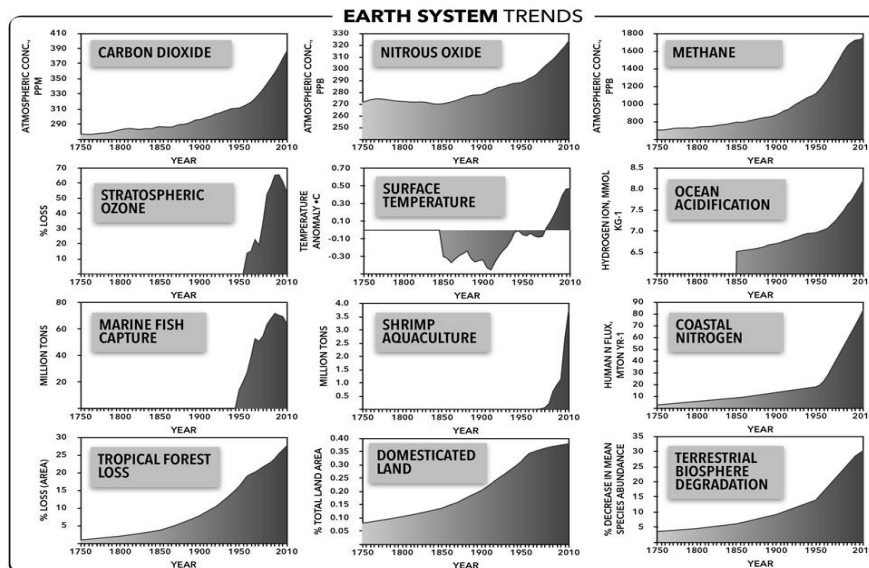


Energy consumption levels started to increase around 1800 and since 1950 the growth accelerated significantly.



Although the rate of growth reached a peak a long time ago, the global population started to increase more significantly around 1800 and accelerated significantly in the 1950s

The second relevant dimension is that of rate. Especially since 1950s, with what has been defined as the Great Acceleration¹⁰, the rates at which the phenomena we mentioned occur, started to increase. Moreover, new trends appeared, such as mass consumption, increasing globalization, and intense petroleum usage, which all speed up the rate at which we are transforming the earth system.



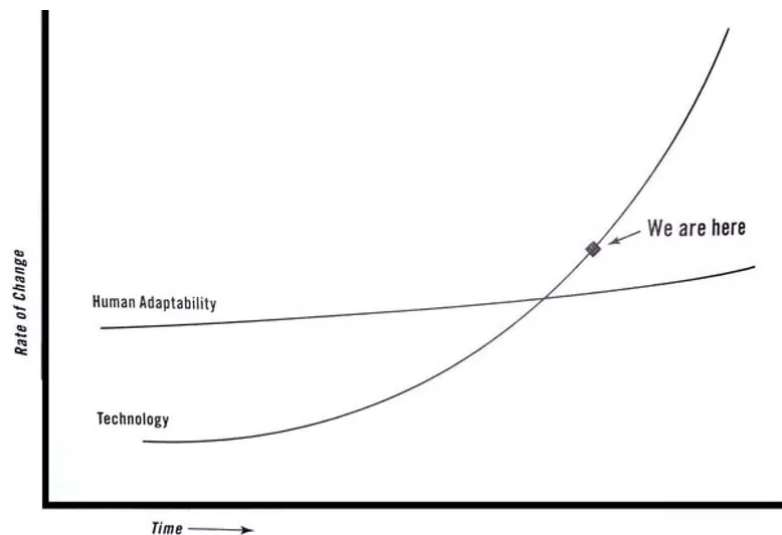
Most of the trends in the image started with the industrial revolution and then experienced the Great Acceleration. The remaining represents new trends, started with the GA.

An important force that needs to be mentioned in this context is technology. It obviously plays a crucial part in all human activities and it is thanks to the development of increasingly powerful technologies that we have been able to come to dominate the planet. What we are witnessing in the Anthropocene is a rate of technological innovation that challenges and possibly exceeds our adaptive capacity¹¹. This produces several detrimental effects. Firstly, we become unable to fully benefiting from new technologies. Secondly, it produces a sense of disorientation and frustration on a cultural level. The majority of the people do not feel as being active part in the changes that occur and that ultimately affect everybody in society. Finally, and most importantly, we run the risk of creating technologies that we are unable to control and to put at best use for our human purposes. This is a typical feature of humanity in the Anthropocene: an era

¹⁰ Steffen; Grinevald; Crutzen; McNeill, "The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives," 849.

¹¹ Thomas Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late*, (Penguin, 2016), 31.

characterized by some of the biggest challenges ever faced, which at the same time are the unwanted effect of our own action on this planet. An era in which humans dominate nature more than ever before, while lacking the means to control the consequences of this same domination.



The world is moving increasingly faster and all the trends we highlighted, together with many we did not mention, constitute undeniable evidence that we are reshaping the planet, thus supporting the Anthropocene hypothesis or at least its relevance in appropriately framing our current condition.

1.2 Problems in the Anthropocene

A crucial aspect that needs to be stressed when discussing the Anthropocene is that its characteristic problems and challenges do not stand in isolation but constitute a dense network in which they influence and typically augment each other. Furthermore, such problems display qualities that differentiate them from most of the problems we faced in the past and that consequently make them particularly difficult to address. The problems of the Anthropocene are typically multiscale and multidimensional, they can be framed in different ways, leading to different strategies of action, all possibly rational and useful, none totally effective and comprehensive. Their consequences are often indirect and invisible thus being virtually impossible to impute to somebody, producing confusion on responsibility and liability. They are global, intergenerational as well as intragenerational, challenging spatial and temporal borders as well as our traditional categories of

accountability and morality. They are wicked problems¹², and the bad news is that we cannot solve them; we can effectively manage them, we can adapt to them, but we cannot eradicate them.

1.3 The failure, so far, to effectively address them: why it has been so difficult

Making the picture even more discouraging is the reality that we have not been able so far to effectively manage them, despite the numerous efforts and a lot of talking. Intergovernmental cooperation has been the main tool employed to address issues like climate change, with an almost five-decade-long history¹³ of international conferences which produced, if any, marginal results. The problems of the Anthropocene are indeed cooperation hungry¹⁴, being brought about by large scale/collective action they need to be collectively addressed. This need for cooperation increases the cost of obtaining it from each relevant party, thus making the task even more difficult to achieve. In a classical prisoner dilemma scenario, unilateral defection represents the dominant strategy, individually. This is especially the case because cutting environmental costs may lead to slower economic activity if no sustainable path to growth is identified, and this constitutes a very challenging task, given that our current model of growth is highly unsustainable. This trade-off between growth and sustainability becomes even more crucial for developing and emerging countries, which can refuse to cut emissions and to take action on at least two main legitimate grounds: they are not as much historically responsible as the developed world for the current environmental condition and have therefore not equally benefited from it; secondly, they still have a long way to go in terms of marginal utility of economic growth, which represents a greater and more imminent goal than the long-term, not ensured, preservation of the environment. A further problem that makes effective intergovernmental cooperation hard to achieve is the continuous democratic tension that governments face between being accountable before their electorates and achieving effective international agreements. When it comes to environmental issues this tension is augmented because a significant portion of the public opinion (44% of the US

¹²Dale Jamieson; Marcello Di Paola, "Climate Change and Global Justice: New Problem, Old Paradigm?" *Global Policy* Volume 5. Issue 1. (February 2014), 105.

¹³ The first international conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm in 1972.

population is not worried about climate change and 14% argue it is not actually happening¹⁵) does not consider them to be a priority or in the worst of the cases totally deny their existence. These negationist attitudes are brought about by several factors. Apart from a general misinformation and lack of education, there are aspects, some of which we have already mentioned, peculiar to environmental issues that make them subject to what could be defined as a case of collective oblivion. Their perceived insolvability is certainly playing a role, fostering resignation. Another central factor resides in the fact that effectively addressing such issues requires a radical change to the ways we produce, consume and ultimately live. This is a scary reality and it is easier to dismiss it than to face it, at least until we will not be forced to do so. This aspect of our psychology is well captured by the Giddens paradox which states that since the threats in the Anthropocene are often not tangible or immediate, the majority of the people will take no action about them yet, waiting until they become visible and acute will, by definition, be too late¹⁶.

¹⁵ Yale Climate Opinion Maps – U.S. 2016, <http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us-2016/>

¹⁶ Anthony Giddens, *Politics of Climate Change*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 2.

2. Agency in the Anthropocene

In the previous section we tried to give a sense of how the Anthropocene presents us with challenges, which often appear as dilemmas and that are fundamentally challenging our traditional categories of morality, as well as jeopardizing the effectiveness of our most common tools of action. Their novelty and complexity hinder our responsiveness to them and lead to a crisis for human agency, whereby we feel unable, unsuited or unwilling to take action. Loss of agency and dissolution of responsibility are the two main ethical challenges we face in the Anthropocene. Furthermore, both moral and political agency, in the forms we are used to understand them, come under pressure in the circumstances of the new era.

2.1 Loss of Agency

The issue of loss of agency is brought about by several conditions of the Anthropocene. Firstly, environmental problems are typically caused by actions on a large scale. This makes individual action irrelevant both as a cause and as a solution to such problems. When an individual drives his car, the emissions he produces contribute to increase the levels of GHGs in the atmosphere. However, taken individually, this contribution is negligible, since in such context it is the aggregate that matters. The same applies to the more environmental friendly choice of not driving my car: there are no additional emissions, but climate change will happen nevertheless. Such phenomenon of causal fragmentation leaves individual agents with a sense of powerlessness in the face of environmental issues and in many cases comes to constitute a sufficient justification for inaction. Moreover, causality in the Anthropocene is not only fragmented but also typically indirect and non-linear. This leads individuals to perceive their actions as environmentally innocuous because they do not experience or see their effects, which will nevertheless be felt in some distant part of the globe, or by future generations. Finally, most of the individual actions that contribute to global environmental issues are deeply embedded in our everyday life, they are virtually unavoidable, unless one is willing to isolate his/herself. Our whole society is built on and works thanks to a number of practices that are environmentally detrimental, that lead to antagoals, which are out of our control. This contributes to the sense of loss of agency, because in many cases we have no choice, but to engage in them. An effective way to

summarize the circumstances of individual actions in the Anthropocene, is to view them as having a double life¹⁷. On one hand they display an episodic character: they are performed because embedded in our way of living and have no immediate or identifiable harmful consequence. On the other hand, they are systemic, in the sense that they are enabled by and contribute to broader structures of our society and especially of our global economy. This poses something close to a dilemma, since the episodic life of our actions is innocuous, irrelevant, free from responsibility, while their systemic component makes them environmentally detrimental, significant, and constitute a legitimate ground for claims of responsibility. In such a condition we are not fully and clearly responsible of any particular harm, neither are we passive, innocent agents. This leads us to the second central ethical problem we face in this new era: dissolution of responsibility.

2.2 Dissolution of Responsibility

Arguably, the biggest incognita in the Anthropocene lies on issues of responsibility. Different factors and mechanisms typical of the new epoch lead to a phenomenon of responsibility dissolution, which in turn exacerbates the difficulty we face in implementing effective responses to current challenges. The already mentioned fragmented and indirect causal relations, typical of environmental issues, clearly contribute to dissolve responsibility. Moreover, the multiscalar, multidimensional, cross-national character of the Anthropocene problems, all augment the difficulty in assigning responsibility to individual actors. A crucial point when discussing responsibility in the Anthropocene lies in the multitude of agents that mostly affects its dynamics. These are numerous and highly diversified: MNCs, NGOs, cross-border criminal cartels, supranational institutions, global financial networks. All of them are key actors, definitely more influential than individuals, and in many cases also than nation states. This poses problems when trying to assign responsibility, because they are new types of actors that fall outside traditional categories of agency. Furthermore, the fact that they develop and acquire high influence in relatively short periods of time, makes it hard for national and international legal

¹⁷ Marcello Di Paola, *Ethics and Politics of the Built Environment*. (The International Library of Environmental, Agricultural and Food Ethics 25 Springer International Publishing AG, 2017), 24.

systems to keep up with their evolution, leading to lack of regulations and to an even larger scope of action for these new actors. Jurisdictional stratification and confusion, which result from the multidimensionality of the new global problems, furtherly jeopardize the effectiveness in assigning responsibility and contribute to its dissolution.

2.3 Moral Agency

The necessary and arguably sufficient condition for an action to be moral is usually expressed by Mill's no-harm principle, which states that individual action is morally legitimate and should not be interfered with as long as it causes no harm to others. At this point of the discussion it appears obvious how such a notion cannot be sufficient in the Anthropocene. Firstly, given the non-linear, fragmented, and invisible links between causes and effects, it is virtually impossible to identify if and to what extent a particular action produces some harm to others. Secondly, the central distinction between what is public and what is private is largely blurred by the circumstances of the Anthropocene. The private realm constitutes a sort of bubble, where, again at the condition of inflicting no harm to others, one should be free to act as he/she best prefers. In the Anthropocene, however, the double character of our actions brings what is private (e.g. driving to work), directly into the public realm (producing emissions that affect everybody) thus making such distinction much less relevant to the definition of moral agency. All of these issues challenge our traditional understanding of morality and ask for the formulation of new principles and standards. In conclusion, a final argument needs to be made when talking about morality. This is that the latter is fundamentally relative and often contingent, although guided to different extents by some basic principles. What I would like to suggest is that, Mill's no-harm principle represents one of the cornerstones in the formulation of moral judgements, but culture and personal preferences exert a great deal of influence on what we judge as morally acceptable. Therefore, some action might well not harm anybody, still be deemed morally wrong by society, or some parts of it. What would be needed from this perspective, then, is a cultural change, the formation and spread of new sets of values, that incorporate environmental concerns over, for example, those related to the assertion

of the all-western right of consuming with absolute freedom, pursuing what as been defined as creative consumption¹⁸.

2.4 Political Agency

Many of the conditions that challenge our moral agency and that lead to agency loss and responsibility dissolution, also contribute to hinder effective political agency. There are two main types of challenges faced by the political realm in the Anthropocene: governance challenges and legitimacy challenges¹⁹.

Governance challenges are triggered, once again, by the peculiarities of the current problems: multidimensional, multilevel, cross-national, intergenerational, the kind of relevant agents. All of these characteristics clash with the traditional tools and mechanisms of governance. We already mentioned how and why international cooperation and the nation state framework are unsuited to and have failed so far to effectively tackle new global challenges. An additional obstacle is posed by the fact that most countries, or at least the most environmentally relevant ones, are liberal democracies. These display features that make the achievement of effective action even more difficult. Firstly, they are particularly subject to veto-players. These are defined as agents that are able to prevent departures from the status quo in a given political system²⁰. This is obviously a needed and valuable role when adherence to the status quo is desirable. In the Anthropocene however, the status quo is completely unsustainable and unable to deal with new challenges and dynamics, causing the need for radical change of structures and responses. Strong veto players in liberal democracies, therefore, hinder their capacity to adapt to and tackle new issues. Liberal democracies are particularly problematic also with respect to the private/public distinction. It is assumed that action in the private sphere should be free from interference. Since most of environmentally detrimental actions at the individual level actually occur in the private realm, governments are unable or unwilling to regulate them. For instance, it would be unconceivable to impose a specific diet, environmentally sustainable, to citizens of a liberal democracy. All

¹⁸David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), 100.

¹⁹Di Paola, *Ethics and Politics of the Built Environment*, 136-143.

²⁰Di Paola, *Ethics and Politics of the Built Environment*, 138.

these factors lead to ineffectiveness or at worst to inaction, which in turn contribute to the second main political challenge: legitimacy. In democratic theory the two typical sources of legitimacy are consent and beneficial consequences. While it is assumed, and it actually normally occurs, that there exists a certain harmony and reciprocity between the two, this easily fails to be the case in the Anthropocene. Consent stands rarely at the basis of governments' actions. It is expressed only at times of elections, then actual political choices are made unilaterally by representatives under the influence of powerful actors different from the electorate: sectors of the economy, lobbies, interest groups. Therefore, lack of popular consent poses questions on the legitimacy of political action. Beneficial consequences, on the other hand, also lack as a source of legitimacy, given the inability of liberal democracies to deal with the new global challenges. Increasing frustration is experienced by citizens who feel they have no voice in politics and at the same time only see inefficiency, ineffectiveness and inaction by their governments.

A further problem which affects political agency and legitimacy in the Anthropocene is brought about by the so-called agency presupposition. This entails that in a democracy, the relevant political community be identified, which is the one supposed and entitled to conduct political action, which in turn should be aimed at promoting the interests of the political community itself. Clearly this is done, indirectly, through representatives, nevertheless what they are supposed to do is act on behalf and in the interests of those represented. In the Anthropocene this becomes problematic: the effects of environmental threats will be felt mainly by distant subjects, spatially (the global poor) and temporally (future generations), as well as by all other living species. The fact that, at least in theory, liberal democratic governments should act in the sole interest of their own citizens, clearly represents a huge obstacle to initiate effective environmental action while preserving legitimacy.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

From what has been said so far, it seems that in the Anthropocene most of what used to be true, is not anymore. Due to the quantity and variety of challenges posed

to human agency by the new era, we run the risk of becoming moral ghosts²¹, unable to take responsibility and action, to fulfil our moral obligations and to be politically significant. Confronted by novelty, uncertainty and complexity we feel paralysed and we tend to too easily opt for inaction, passiveness and resignation. Such attitudes are detrimental both for the larger society and for individuals themselves. In the first case it is obvious why: if everybody stops looking for options and solutions, problems are deemed to stay and become worse. Individuals, on the other hand, lose much in terms of well-being: feeling powerless, overwhelmed by dynamics bigger than us and unable to escape them, hinders our capacity to achieve happiness and satisfaction. What we need, in a time where everything seems to be new is exactly the opposite of passiveness and scepticism. We need to experiment as much as we can, in ways that allow us to regain agency, assume responsibility, pursue morality and be politically relevant. In order to do so we need to be active and optimistic, we need to engage in new practices and adopt a utopian outlook that would help us to aim at improving our condition.

Inspiration and guidance in understanding the value and hopefully in putting into practice such an approach can be found in a recent work of David Graeber, as complemented and reinforced by some of the ideas of John Stuart Mill.

²¹Di Paola, *Ethics and Politics of the Built Environment*, 93.

3.1 David Graeber's Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology

David Graeber is an anthropologist and anarchist activist, among the founders of the Occupy Wall Street Movement. In his pamphlet *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* he attempts to outline a social theory for anarchists, intended as those willing to bring about a freer kind of society, where people are capable of governing their own affairs. Such a theory, he argues, should be a Low Theory (as opposed to High Theories), a set of broad principles that identify purposes and can guide action, but that set no limits to the number of possible forms such action can take. Once common principles are outlined, and different applications are implemented, no winning option needs to be identified. The range of possible alternatives, coexisting one next to the other, is indeed what is valuable in itself. This is the case because they can positively influence and improve one another, in a spirit of cooperation and mutuality, enabled by the common theoretical background, with no need for competition and exclusion.

Graeber claims that an anarchist social theory should be based on at least two fundamental assumptions. Firstly, the belief “that another (better) world is possible²²”, or a utopian attitude. Such optimism, Graeber argues, represents a moral imperative: since we cannot know if a better world is possible, we must commit to find out, and in order to do so we cannot keep on passively accepting, thus reinforcing, the present order but we must engage in ways of thinking and acting that question and ultimately oppose it. The second point onto which any anarchist social theory should base itself is the conscious rejection of any kind of vanguardism and therefore of elitism. Both are inherently contrary to the spirit of anarchism, which instead requires to look at all viable alternatives, already put into practice, understand where their value resides and then try to spread such value, make it available to everyone willing to appropriate it, not as a commandment but as a piece of advice, a recommendation, a hint. This second starting point, together with the utopian assumption, already appear well suited and useful to tackle some of the agency problems that arise in the Anthropocene, especially in the effort of contrasting scepticism, resignation and inaction.

Graeber goes on by analysing the concept of counterpower. In typical revolutionary discourse this is defined as “a collection of social institutions set in opposition to

²² Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 10.

the state and capital". It is the attempt to resist whatever source of power and hierarchy is perceived as oppressive and to eliminate the source of oppression from daily life. This, he argues, is properly revolutionary²³, where the notion of revolution is grounded in revolutionary action, understood as "any collective action that rejects and therefore confronts some form of power and domination, and in doing so reconstitutes social relations in that light"²⁴, therefore actually producing some change. What Graeber asserts here is that in order to be revolutionary, a change does not need to be catastrophic, in its etymological meaning of *overturning* [the status quo]. Revolutionary action does not need to succeed in and not even to be aimed at overthrowing current structures, like the state or the capitalist economy, it is sufficient that it stands against them, that effectively rejects them, by creating viable alternatives. Once again it is clear how such an understanding of anarchist revolutionary practice can bring a contribution to action in the Anthropocene. Where the structures (primarily the global capitalist economy) that are among the main sources of problems are strongly entrenched and perceived as permanent, the idea that we can effectively oppose them without necessarily overthrow them is extremely valuable, because it partly restores our capabilities and agency.

The following logical step in this line of reasoning is to understand what such alternatives would look like in practice. In order to do so a thought experiment is needed aimed at blowing up walls. The walls Graeber refers to are the walls that exist and have been built in our minds by society. Obviously, our categories of thought are largely imposed on us from the outside-in and since they are deeply entrenched and actually prevents us from looking at reality in different ways, we need to blow them up if we want to start thinking differently and ultimately create effective and viable alternatives. In particular, the walls that need to be teared down are those that make us look at the current prevailing arrangements and binomial combination of nation state and capitalist economy as the inevitable state of affairs. Put it in such terms this might sound like a hyperbole but in reality, we do consider such institutions as the best available option, which ultimately renders it the sole one. Now if we manage, at least up to a certain degree, to free ourselves from such structures and categories, we come to the realization that they are neither natural nor optimal. A case in point is the nation state, which appears to us as the necessary

²³ Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 33.

²⁴ Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 45.

and natural form of organization for societies all over the world. We actually tend to identify societies themselves with the nation states in which they are located and become unable to discern the two. However, if we stop and think more carefully about the concept of nation state, it is clear that there is nothing necessary or natural about it. As Graeber points out, the nation state is the totality par excellence²⁵. Totalities are tools of thought that we create to make sense of and organize the chaotic reality outside us. They are in this respect useful, probably necessary and valuable, but they are mere instruments and the value of instruments resides in the functions they serve, not in the instruments themselves. Therefore, the nation state is useful because it allows us to organize reality, but it is valuable insofar as it serves its functions, when it becomes unable or unfitted to effectively do so, we must bear in mind that other options are available and that it is our role to think about them and ultimately implement them. When it comes to the Anthropocene and its challenges, we already mentioned how the nation state in particular seems unfitted to be effective. This kind of thought exercise that allows to blow up walls can thus provide a significant contribution and guidance to deal with issues in the Anthropocene, given their fundamental novelty and the related need of fundamentally different approaches and strategies.

Once we accept that, even assuming the possibility of dismantling the state and capital, this constitutes no aim for revolutionary practice, the most logical and effective strategy to employ in order to oppose them is that of exodus or engaged withdrawal²⁶. These two concepts identify a practical response to the need of opposing societal structures that are perceived as oppressive, wrong and therefore unjustifiable. Individually and collectively, through non-institutional cooperation and networking, the aim is to exit them as much as possible, to disregard them in all possible ways, by simultaneously creating viable alternatives that fill in the gap created by such exodus. The hope is that ultimately, the alternatives created be so effective and positively different from current practices, that the latter come to be perceived as obsolete and undesirable, pushing an ever-larger portion of the population to engage in the same practice of withdrawal. In this way, without any (bloody) “revolution”, a real revolution would result: a gradual, consensus-based, slow but real and significant shift of structures. This is certainly much needed and

²⁵ Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 65.

²⁶ Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 60.

possibly attainable, in the circumstances of Anthropocene. Indeed, numerous and diversified experiments of this kind are already being proposed and implemented, among them: urban gardening, local alternative currencies, surplus food restaurants and cafés, community-owned energy companies²⁷.

3.2 John Stuart Mill's On Liberty

In his essays *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill, one of the fathers of Liberalism and Utilitarianism, provides one of the most passionate and logically accurate defences of individual liberty, which, although representing a building block of liberal thinking and of its capitalist economic expression, can nevertheless be interpreted as being, in some of its elements, not as far from (Graeber's declination of) anarchism as one could think. Some of Mill's arguments can actually be seen as significantly complementing Graeber's claims especially when both are put together and linked to the agency problems in the Anthropocene.

All of Mill's discussion is based on and aimed at asserting one fundamental and very simple principle, known as the no-harm principle, which states that any interference with individual liberty is rightful and justified only to prevent harm to others. Or to put it in Mill's words "the only part of the conduct of any one, that is amenable to society, is that which concerns others"²⁸. What is, in particular, still extremely relevant today is Mill's concern and passionate defence of individual liberty from the interference of society: the liberty of the individual against the majority. Mill criticizes -what himself calls- the social tyranny²⁹ that is exerted on the individual and is mainly expressed into value judgments on the ways each person decides to conduct his/her life, especially if he/she does not stick to generally accepted social norms. It is in our nature to expect others to act according to what we consider right and valuable and we tend to negatively judge those who do not meet this expectation. We irrationally apply our own values and standards to everybody else, without feeling the need to provide any reasonable explanation, being unable to see that our standards and values are only ours and the result of our

²⁷ Rob Hopkins, 21 Stories of Transition (2015 Transition Network Totnes).

²⁸ John Stuart Mill, *On liberty*. (Sweden: Wisehouse, 2016), 180.

²⁹ Mill, *On liberty*, 85.

personal preferences. This Mill calls the magical influence of custom³⁰ which constitutes the main source of social tyranny.

The other characteristic of human nature, which is in this case augmented by social tyranny, is the tendency to passively adhere to the costumes and expectations of the society we live in. In doing so we fail to exercise our faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feeling, mental activity and moral preference³¹ because, as Mill argues, these are set into motion when we make choices and being moved by the sole reason of following customs does not amount to one.

Such inclinations of human nature have several detrimental consequences both for the individual and for the wider society. The former misses the possibility to design his own path of living according to his own preferences and desires and becomes unable to achieve a true state of well-being, which, -as positive psychology teaches us- depends largely on meaning, engagement and accomplishment. The latter, on the other hand, also suffers greatly from the loss of individual liberty because it is from and through such liberty that new ways to look at things and new ways of doing them are introduced and this is what constitutes the true source of progress within society. If people simply mime others and their practices, society stagnates in what Mill calls “collective mediocrity”³². We settle for what is already being done, for what everybody else is doing, for what has been already widely accepted by the larger society. While we become prisoners of our own habits and costumes, societal development idles as a result of our passiveness. Therefore, Mill strongly advocates for the free pursue, on the part of each individual, of his own desires and preferences and, on the part of society, for the end of the despotism it exercises on individuals, being it in the form of moral judgements or of laws. If individuals were let free to shape their own lives, they would, in many cases, bring about changes whose worth would be assessed a posteriori on practical grounds and, if valuable, could then be employed by others, working as advices, inspirations and stimuli. Individual experiments in living should be implemented so that there would be “as many possible independent centres of improvement as there are individuals”³³. Once again, the contribution that such an understanding of individual liberty and

³⁰ Mill, *On liberty*, 106.

³¹ Mill, *On liberty*, 975.

³² Mill, *On liberty*, 1102.

³³ Mill, *On liberty*, 1174.

creativity can bring to action in the circumstances of the Anthropocene appears obvious.

3.3 Mill and Graeber

Graeber and Mill's views can be brought together to build a perspective on individual as well as on collective agency which can address some of the agency problems posed by the Anthropocene. Indeed, although ideologically and temporally very distant, some of the authors' arguments can be interpreted as complementing and reinforcing one another.

Although through different paths, Graeber and Mill come to the same fundamental conclusion about the necessity of implementing many different experiments in living. The concerns that bring them to launch such an appeal are on the other hand slightly different: for Mill the full realization of the individual and his/her creativity, coupled with societal progress; for Graeber the need of opposing in feasible ways oppressive structures and institutions. The recipe is nevertheless curiously similar: thinking out of traditional categories, refusing habits and customs of our society if they do not fit our preferences or values, engaging in experiments and new practices, possibly failing while doing so and hopefully, finally managing in creating alternatives that are viable and effective, capable of challenging mainstream practices which in turn become obsolete and irrational in the face of the new ones. When this happens, progress is realized, both collective and individual while undesirable and problematic elements of the status quo are eliminated.

The thought experiment aimed at blowing up walls required by Graeber's reasoning comes really to being also the natural conclusion of Mill's critique of the magical influence of custom and of social tyranny: think and act free from external constraints.

The anarchist appeal for consensus-based decision-making mechanisms and the claim that new practices should be shared and spread as suggestions and additional available options and not prescribed or imposed, basically amounts to Mill's argument in favour of individual liberty and creativity whereby each individual should look at how people before and around him live and act and from the existing

range of options choose what best fits his own character, while reserving the crucial possibility of not choosing among the available options but to create a new one.

This amounts to asserting your freedom and pursuing your wellbeing and it also amounts to engaging in revolutionary action because in performing the former two one necessarily opposes structures of power and domination being them economic, social or political.

The final fundamental point here is that this engaging in experiments and creating alternatives is not an end in itself but is functional to the introduction of real, hopefully durable, changes in society, because history shows us that the continual accumulation of such revolutionary acts, whatever their initial sphere of influence, “can change (almost) everything”³⁴.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

As pointed out before, what is needed in the Anthropocene are ways for individuals and associations of individuals, to regain agency in a morally and politically relevant dimension.

The loss of agency experienced at the individual level, coupled with the ineffectiveness of national and international policies, causes frustration and resentment, which, in most of the cases, lead individuals to exclude from their concerns problems that do not strictly and closely affect them, thus excluding all the environmental problems proper of the Anthropocene. While frustration and resentment are not truly resolved and eliminated, but just temporarily forgotten, action that aims at tackling environmental challenges fails to be taken, bringing us increasingly close to the realization of the above cited Giddens’ paradox. Through experiments in living, possibly guided by environmental concerns, individuals should be able to retrieve some of the agency they appear to have lost, by truly exercising their decision-making capacity, thus also gaining in terms of well-being. At the same time, if effective, such experiments would also contribute to face new challenges and provide solutions. Such contribution should be brought about at a

³⁴ Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 45.

feasible scale for each individual, or association between them, being suitable to one's needs and capabilities.

Moreover, by partly withdrawing and experimenting, individuals could be able to fulfil some of the new moral obligations they feel they have and which, if one remains totally embedded in current economic and social structures, are virtually impossible to pursue. What appears to be a dilemma (e.g. the impossibility to avoid certain kinds of environmentally detrimental behaviours which are an integral part of our everyday lives) becomes at least a manageable issue, if, through experiments and failures, one is able to find a better alternative, which with all probabilities will not amount to a solution but will certainly constitute a better option than inaction and possibly a durable shift of practice, extendible to and employable by larger sectors of society.

This last point suggests that experiments, even at a small scale, can become politically relevant if properly implemented and networked. The fact that governments are unable to take effective action and the resulting popular frustration, should set in motion a popular response whereby people disregard governments and personally take responsibility and action, notwithstanding the poorer means and lower scale, to show governments that action can be taken and hopefully inspire them to do the same. Instead of limiting ourselves to the sole weak tool of voting, we should parallelly engage in the same kind of change we would like our representatives to realize. Therefore, experiments should inspire other individuals and sectors of the civil society, but also governments³⁵, at the national and especially at the more easily reachable local level. Institutions could, once an alternative is created and suggested, contribute to its diffusion, incentivize its application and facilitate its implementation. If such a scenario is realized, effective political agency is retrieved.

³⁵ Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (The Anarchist Library, 1848), 6.

4.1 One Current Experiment

In this last part I would like to show, taking as an example the Transition Network, how indeed many experiments are already being successfully implemented, constituting viable alternatives to common practices, which we often consider as unavoidable.

The Transition Network is a grassroots “movement of communities that come together to reimagine and rebuild our world”³⁶. It is extremely open and participatory: everyone around the world can propose an initiative and enter the network. It is guided by principles of social justice, inclusivity and subsidiarity and it aims at fostering respect of limited resources and resilience, through creativity, cooperation and practice. For the COP21 in Paris in December 2015 the Transition Network produced a document³⁷ sharing the ideas and principles of the project and twenty-one stories of transition, among which: transition currencies; community owned energy companies; community gardens; surplus food cafes. Many more stories are available on the Network’s website, but I will present here the interesting case of transition currencies.

Transition currencies are local currencies that exist parallelly to official ones. The aim is to sustain the local economy thus cutting distribution chains and reducing dependency from fossil fuel intensive transport infrastructure. Environmental benefits are therefore immediate and clear. Apart from them, social benefits are also brought about, since people at a community level sustain each other’s activities and in doing so get into closer contact with each other. Moreover, changing money means changing a part of our everyday life that its (almost) unavoidable and that is often perceived as being totally out of our control, as people/citizens. The point is that while using local currencies individuals are consciously making some change, opposing and exiting some structure that they perceive as imposed on them and oppressive (the international monetary system) and they are doing so in a positive and constructive way, by supporting their own community.

Transition currencies represent a relevant and already existing example of what is meant by experiments, alternatives, and withdrawal that can effectively oppose the

³⁶ <https://transitionnetwork.org/>

³⁷ https://transitionnetwork.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/04/COP21_21_Stories_email_Eng.pdf

structures that are source of environmental challenges in the Antropocene, thus addressing the agency problems we face in this new epoch.

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ANARCHIA E ANTROPOCENE

Il termine Antropocene, introdotto per la prima volta dal biologo Eugene Stoermer negli anni ottanta, si riferisce all'idea di una nuova era geologica, successiva a quella dell'Olocene, in cui la principale forza di cambiamento biologico e geologico è rappresentata dall'umanità. Pur non essendo ancora stato formalmente accettato dalla Commissione Internazionale di Stratigrafia, il concetto di Antropocene assume particolare rilevanza nella discussione sui problemi ambientali in quanto cattura in modo particolarmente adeguato la relazione che, come specie, intratteniamo con a Terra. La comunità scientifica è infatti largamente concorde nell'affermare che le attività umane stanno provocando cambiamenti durevoli, irreversibili e spesso catastrofici sul nostro pianeta. Due dimensioni dell'impatto che l'umanità ha sull'ambiente richiedono particolare menzione: vastità e velocità. A partire dalla Rivoluzione Industriale (generalmente considerata l'inizio dell'Antropocene) l'impatto umano sulla terra assume dimensioni mai raggiunte fino a quel momento. Questo soprattutto a causa dell'utilizzo sistematico di combustibili fossili, del fenomeno dell'urbanizzazione, iniziato con la Rivoluzione Industriale e non ancora giunto al termine (le città sono oggi i principali centri di attività umana, responsabili per il 70% di emissioni di gas serra a livello globale) e infine del significativo aumento della popolazione globale. Quest'ultimo punto assume ulteriore rilevanza in quanto l'aumento numerico della popolazione è accompagnato dal crescente impatto che individualmente ognuno ha a livello ambientale; a questo proposito le popolazioni del cosiddetto occidente e, in modo crescente, delle economie emergenti -in particolare Cina ed India- sono meglio definibili come composte da consumatori di massa e non da semplici essere umani. La seconda dimensione da sottolineare è, come si è detto, quella della velocità. Gli anni cinquanta sono presi come punto di partenza per quella che è stata definita la Grande Accelerazione: a partire dal secondo dopo guerra la velocità alla quale i trend e le attività umane, introdotti dalla Rivoluzione Industriale, avvengono, ha iniziato a crescere in modo esponenziale. Nella discussione sulla velocità, una forza che bisogna analizzare è la tecnologia. Essa rappresenta chiaramente la fonte necessaria per lo sviluppo dell'uomo e delle sue capacità ed è grazie ad essa che siamo arrivati a rappresentare la maggiore forza di cambiamento geologico.

Tuttavia, una caratteristica centrale dell'Antropocene risiede nel fatto che, in possesso di straordinarie tecnologie che si sviluppano ad una velocità sempre maggiore, l'umanità domina il pianeta ma non è in grado di gestire i problemi che derivano da questa dominazione. Si tratta di un paradosso per cui l'uomo sviluppa tecnologie a cui non è in grado di adattarsi perché lo sviluppo tecnologico è ormai più rapido della nostra abilità di adattamento. L'incapacità di usufruire delle nuove tecnologie genera frustrazione negli individui e impedisce a livello generale di beneficiare a pieno delle stesse; infine corriamo il rischio di creare strumenti che sfuggono poi al nostro controllo e non possono dunque essere utilizzati per realizzare i benefici per i quali erano stati ideati.

Un'altra caratteristica fondamentale dell'Antropocene è la peculiarità delle sfide e dei problemi che esso presenta. Questi non possono essere intesi individualmente ma come una densa rete nella quale si influenzano e accrescono reciprocamente. Le sfide della nuova epoca sono tipicamente multidimensionali, senza barriere temporali né geografiche, fondamentalmente diverse dalle sfide che l'umanità ha affrontato in passato e richiedono dunque soluzioni radicalmente nuove. La loro complessità permette di descriverli e capirli in diversi modi, che portano a strategie d'azione differenti, tutte ugualmente valide e potenzialmente utili, ma nessuna in grado di portare un contributo definitivo e completo. Sono sfide e problemi che non hanno in realtà soluzione, ma possono solo essere gestiti più o meno efficacemente, limitandone i danni e riducendone la gravità.

Ad oggi sembra che anche questo obiettivo non sia stato raggiunto. La cooperazione internazionale, che è stato lo strumento prediletto per affrontare le sfide ambientali, è del tutto inefficace. Il fatto che siano problemi che richiedono cooperazione a livello globale, proprio a causa della loro vastità e complessità, rende trattati e conferenze particolarmente problematici in quanto, nel tipico scenario del dilemma del prigioniero, la defezione unilaterale costituisce la strategia più razionale dal punto di vista individuale. Ad aggravare la situazione è convinzione diffusa che tagliare i costi ambientali ammonta necessariamente ad un rallentamento della crescita economica, che spesso è identificata con il bene assoluto. Inoltre, alcuni tra gli stati più popolosi e con maggiore impatto ambientale sono economie emergenti, ancora caratterizzate da alti livelli di povertà e sottosviluppo, che chiaramente identificano come priorità la crescita e non il perseguimento di migliori condizioni ambientali. A tutto questo si aggiunge il diffuso scetticismo, che spesso prende la

forma di puro negazionismo, nei confronti delle tematiche ambientali. Esso è determinato da mancanza di educazione e di informazione, ma anche dal fatto che questi problemi richiederebbero un cambiamento radicale al nostro modo di vivere. Questa realtà spaventa ed è quindi comprensibile come spesso si preferisca ignorarla, almeno finché gli effetti dei problemi che stiamo causando non arriveranno a toccarci personalmente, a quel punto, per definizione, sarà troppo tardi per cercare una soluzione.

Le circostanze appena descritte pongono a livello etico due problematiche centrali: perdita della capacità di agire e dissoluzione di responsabilità. Inoltre, sia l'azione morale che quella politica diventano considerevolmente più difficili da perseguire efficacemente nella nuova epoca. La capacità di agire in modo efficace per l'individuo viene minata in diversi modi. La prima difficoltà risiede nel fatto che gli attuali problemi ambientali sono causati da azioni su grande scala mentre la singola azione, presa individualmente, è irrilevante, sia come causa che come possibile soluzione a tali problemi. La frammentazione delle relazioni causa-effetto nell'Antropocene produce un senso di impotenza e rassegnazione, che in molti casi giustificano la passività. Inoltre, le relazioni causa-effetto sono non lineari. Questo porta gli individui a considerare le proprie azioni come innocue da un punto di vista ambientale, perché le conseguenze di esse sono a loro invisibili. Infine, la maggior parte delle azioni, che hanno effetti negativi sull'ambiente, sono profondamente inserite nella nostra routine e nella nostra società. Questo rende estremamente difficile evitare di compierle, nonostante si possa essere consapevoli delle loro conseguenze e pronti a fare qualcosa in proposito. Anche in questo caso è virtualmente impossibile, per esempio, fare a meno di accendere la luce, prendere un treno o possedere un telefono, se non si vuole, completamente o quasi, estraniarsi dal proprio contesto. Il secondo problema centrale è come, si è detto, la dissoluzione delle responsabilità. Questa è prodotta innanzitutto dai rapporti causa-effetto non lineari e frammentati. A peggiorare la situazione è la complessità dei problemi tipici dell'Antropocene: multidimensionali, intergenerazionali, internazionali ecc., tutte caratteristiche che rendono l'assegnazione di responsabilità ad attori individuali, estremamente difficile. Un'altra condizione determinante in questo contesto è la vastità e la diversità degli attori rilevanti nelle dinamiche dell'Antropocene. Questi sono spesso nuovi attori (ONG, aziende multinazionali, organizzazioni criminali internazionali ecc.), che non rientrano nelle tradizionali categorie e che per questa

ragione sono difficili da controllare e sanzionare. Per quanto concerne la moralità, una dei principi base che utilizziamo per definirla è l'idea di John Stuart Mill secondo cui un'azione individuale è morale e per questo non deve essere in alcun modo contestata, quando non produce alcun male agli altri. Dati i rapporti non-lineari, invisibili e frammentati di causa-effetto, questo metro di giudizio appare, evidentemente, inadeguato. In questo contesto nuovi standard devono essere introdotti nella nostra concezione di moralità. In ultimo, riguardo l'azione politica, due tipi principali di sfide sono posti dalle circostanze dell'Antropocene: di governance e di legittimità. Abbiamo detto come la cooperazione internazionale sia estremamente inadatta ed inefficace. Inoltre, le democrazie liberali sono caratterizzate da una serie di circostanze che le rendono particolarmente vulnerabili e incompetenti di fronte ai nuovi problemi. L'incapacità dei governi di fronte alle nuove sfide scatena ovviamente una crisi di legittimità, dato il fatto che una delle fonti principali di quest'ultima è la capacità di produrre circostanze positive per la società. Il consenso, l'altra fonte tipica di legittimità, viene anche a mancare poiché raramente i cittadini esprimono il consenso per una politica prima che questa venga realizzata. Da tutto quello che si è detto finora sembra che molto di ciò che un tempo era considerato certo e solido, nell'Antropocene non lo è più. L'incertezza, la complessità e la novità che caratterizzano questo periodo spesso provocano una sorta di paralisi che non porta a nulla di positivo. Soluzioni possibili ai nuovi problemi non sono ricercate abbastanza e a livello individuale, si produce un senso di impotenza e frustrazione. In una situazione del genere, dove tutto è nuovo e diverso, quello che serve più di ogni altra cosa sono esperimenti, idee che si trasformano in pratiche, radicalmente diverse da quelle tradizionali, come radicalmente diversi sono i problemi che dobbiamo affrontare. Per pensare e realizzare alternative una condizione necessaria è uno spirito ottimista, quasi utopico, che mantenga viva la speranza che soluzioni e migliori modi di vivere sono possibili e praticamente realizzabili. Le idee di John Stuart Mill e David Graeber possono in questo contesto fornire guida e ispirazione.

Nel suo pamphlet *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* Graeber si pone l'obiettivo di delineare una teoria sociologica per anarchici, intesi come coloro che auspicano una società nella quale ognuno possa essere libero di vivere come meglio desidera e in cui la popolazione sia in grado di autogestirsi. Una tale teoria deve basarsi su due assunti fondamentali. Il primo è la convinzione che un altro mondo,

migliore, è possibile. Graeber afferma che tale approccio alla realtà è un imperativo morale in quanto, non sapendo se tale mondo sia in effetti realizzabile, abbiamo il dovere di tentare di scoprirlo. Il secondo assunto è rappresentato dal rigetto, consapevole e totale, di ogni tipo di avanguardismo e di elitismo. Entrambi sono fondamentalmente contrari allo spirito anarchico, il quale richiede invece di osservare e studiare tutti i contributi e le alternative già esistenti, tranne il valore a livello generale per l'intera società e cercare di diffondere questo valore e renderlo disponibile a chiunque voglia parteciparvi. La competizione e l'elezione di un'alternativa vincente non interessano, ciò che serve ed ha valore di per sé è la varietà di possibilità che coesistono pacificamente, ispirandosi e migliorandosi a vicenda. Graeber continua analizzando il concetto di *contropotere* e di rivoluzione. Questi sono intesi, in sintesi, come pratiche, basate sul consenso, pensate per contrastare strutture e istituzioni ritenute fonti di oppressione e dominazione. Quando queste pratiche riescono a diffondersi in una parte significativa della società e, dunque, a produrre in essa un cambiamento reale e duraturo, allora esse costituiscono *rivoluzione*, intesa appunto come pratica rivoluzionaria. Appare chiaro a questo punto come l'ottimismo, il rifiuto di avanguardismo e la rivoluzione intesa come pratica che coesiste di fronte e contro le strutture opprimenti della nostra società sono tutti elementi di estremo valore se messi in relazione ai problemi che l'azione umana riscontra nell'Antropocene. Ottimismo che ci salva dalla rassegnazione; coesistenti pratiche alternative nessuna delle quali rappresenta una soluzione definitiva (che come abbiamo detto non può essere trovata), ma che insieme possono produrre dei risultati e dei cambiamenti reali; pratica rivoluzionaria che non mira a capovolgere improvvisamente le istituzioni ma a creare reali alternative che si oppongano in modo propositivo e attivo. A questo punto Graeber sostiene che al fine di creare alternative rivoluzionarie di questo genere è necessario abbattere i muri nella nostra mente. I muri di cui egli parla sono le categorie e le strutture di pensiero che vengono imposte nella nostra mente dalla società. Esse limitano la nostra capacità di osservare e capire la realtà esterna, impedendoci di concepire modi alternativi di vivere e pensare. Questo esercizio di pensiero – come Graeber lo chiama –, mirato ad abbattere queste mura, ha un valore inestimabile nell'Antropocene, dove le strutture sociali, politiche e soprattutto economiche, che rappresentano parte della causa dei problemi che abbiamo delineato, sono talmente radicate da sembrare quasi naturali e necessarie e, dunque,

destinate a non cambiare mai. Soffermarci ad analizzarle meglio e a capirne l'origine e la ragione d'essere ci permette di vedere la loro contingenza e dunque la loro reale precarietà. In conclusione, Graeber propone, come pratica di opposizione contro le strutture di dominazione come stato e capitale, quella dell'esodo: ignorare tali istituzioni e vivere al di fuori di esse il più possibile, pensando ad alternative pratiche e realizzabili che possano sostituire ciò che venga a mancare come conseguenza di questo esodo.

John Stuart Mill, nel suo saggio *On Liberty* propone una serie di idee e spunti che possono essere interpretati in modo da completare e rafforzare gli argomenti sostenuti da Graeber. Lo scopo fondamentale di Mill in questa opera è quello di difendere la libertà individuale da quella che egli definisce la tirannia della società, quindi della maggioranza sopra l'individuo. Mill sostiene che l'azione individuale non deve essere giudicata o limitata fin quando non reca male agli altri, all'infuori di questa circostanza l'individuo è da ritenersi completamente libero di perseguire i propri desideri e le proprie aspirazioni. Purtroppo, però esistono delle tendenze nell'uomo che pregiudicano questa libertà. In primo luogo, la tendenza a giudicare gli altri e le loro azioni a seconda delle proprie preferenze e dei propri standard morali, senza alcun tipo di spiegazione razionale. Dunque, quando uno non rispetta le nostre aspettative o i nostri valori allora lo giudichiamo moralmente reprimibile. Questa prima caratteristica tipica dell'essere umano è fonte della tirannia sociale. Dall'altra parte, risultato di quest'ultima è la tendenza umana di conformarsi alle aspettative degli altri e della società, invece di pensare e decidere per sé. Questo, dice Mill, ci porta ad una mediocrità collettiva, nella quale tutti seguiamo più o meno lo stesso percorso all'interno del quale pochi sono in grado di svilupparsi pienamente. Tutto questo ha grandi ripercussioni negative sia a livello individuale che collettivo. Nel primo caso la mancata possibilità di perseguire e realizzare i propri desideri impedisce una vera realizzazione del potenziale individuale e quindi mina il raggiungimento di un pieno benessere psicologico. Allo stesso tempo, la società perde l'opportunità di beneficiare dei possibili contributi che gli individui potrebbero portare se lasciati liberi di pensare ed agire. Mill spiega che se ognuno fosse realmente libero la società avrebbe un numero di potenziali fonti di progresso uguale al numero di individui presenti nella società stessa. Applicato all'Antropocene questa idea assume enorme rilevanza: vista la complessità e la fondamentale novità delle sfide correnti, nuove idee e nuovi modi di fare risultano

estremamente necessari. Lasciare dunque liberi gli individui di sperimentare e realizzare alternative che possano poi rivelarsi valide ed applicabili a porzioni più ampie della società rappresenta un elemento fondamentale dell'individuazione di risposte alle nuove sfide.

Mill e Graeber quindi, per quanto ideologicamente e temporalmente distanti, nonché mossi da preoccupazioni diverse, propongono soluzioni curiosamente simili, che assumono enorme rilevanza per gestire i problemi che l'azione umana si trova a fronteggiare nell'Antropocene. Entrambi richiedono di pensare e agire fuori dagli schemi, liberi dai limiti imposti dalla società e dal costume. Entrambi sostengono che la libertà degli individui che porta poi all'esistenza di tanti e diversi modi di vivere è qualcosa che ha valore in sé e che la coesistenza di alternative pratiche è una condizione desiderabile nella società perché porta al progresso e all'eliminazione di vecchie pratiche, indesiderabili e obsolete. Questo costituisce cambiamento rivoluzionario in quanto l'ordine preesistente è superato e cambiato in modo reale e durevole, tramite l'esercizio della libertà individuale e di gruppi di individui, senza imposizioni ma sulla base del consenso e del merito. Ciò rappresenta qualcosa di altamente necessario nell'Antropocene, al fine di riacquistare la capacità di agire in modo efficace, di assumersi responsabilità, di rispondere ai nuovi obblighi morali che la nuova epoca di pone e, infine, di riacquisire rilevanza politica in quanto popolazione attiva.