



Antonia De Vita, La Creazione Sociale. Relazioni e contesti per educare (literal translation: Social Creation. Relations and Contexts to Educate), Rome, Carocci, 978884305144 1, 2009, pp. 173

This fine essay (saggio) by the University of Verona scholar, Antonia De Vita, provides us with an erudite exploration of the conditions which permit the kind of atomised individualistic approaches to life and its bearing on the capitalist world as well as explores alternative conditions, embedded in alternative social relations, that allow for different and more humanistic types of social relations and social creation. These alternative conditions have the potential to usher in an alternative world which is less exploitative, less predatory and less inhuman. It is intended to foster a form of social and economic organisation which has love and solidarity at its core.

This is no ‘wishy-washy’ hippie argumentation. On the contrary, the essay is steeped in a very thorough knowledge of different philosophies and theological insights, including feminist philosophy. In this regard, it is theoretically very grounded and draws on works by Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Jürgen Habermas and Luisa Muraro among others. It also demonstrates a very deep knowledge of late medieval mysticism ranging from the Franciscan notion of poverty and its ramifications for economic activity as well as women’s mystic movements in the same period. All this is geared towards an alternative vision of social and economic practice based on what indigenous movements would call the ‘web of life’ and which the English romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, cited in this volume with reference to his popular ballad, ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, calls the ‘One Life’ in his other poem ‘The Eolian Harp,’ a concept that connects with the sentiment expressed in the excerpt from the long Mariner poem. It is the notion of people being rooted in and at one with nature.

The discussion is not without an appreciable dose of political economy and provides grounded examples of different forms of social creation taking place in Italy, especially in

the Veneto area where the author, originally from Puglia, works and lives. These include groups providing different (from the mainstream), including feminist, approaches to Philosophy, centering around the group Diotima (taken from Plato's account, in the *Symposium*, of Socrates' reference to this ancient Greek female philosopher of love). The experiences described indicate a different approach to learning which is not time or credit conditioned and neither competitive but which is characterised by sharing and co-investigating knowledge and by that sense of 'public time', as opposed to 'corporate time' (see Giroux and Searls Giroux, 2004). It is this sense of learning through public time that would be conducive to what another Italian pedagogue, Don Lorenzo Milani, refers to as 'la pedagogia della lumaca' (the pedagogy of the snail).

The survey, in this volume, of alternative practices includes groups involved in community revival work in the ancient quarter of Veronetta in the medieval city of Verona as well as highly educated persons engaging in agricultural production. This kind of production is characterised by self management approaches which cuts out intermediaries and is meant to bring the products of the earth straight to a broad array of people rather than serve as products for a captive niche market of well to do persons who could afford what would otherwise be a 'luxury'. The voices and learning experiences of these protagonists in new forms of social creation are foregrounded in long excerpts from interview transcripts. They all provide fresh insights into how transformations in social relations can provide pockets of alternative resources of hope for a better, more human world characterised by democratic and community oriented, rather than atomised individualistic oriented relations, of living and production.

This all points to a different way of conceiving of politics and political activity centering around humanised social relations based on cooperation and complementarity rather than competition, on the conceptions of persons and species as being relational (comprising human-earth relations) and in communion with the rest of the cosmos as exemplified in the work of contemporaries such as Thomas Berry, Vandana Shiva, Edmund O' Sullivan and Metchild Hart and such venerated figures from the past as Francis of Assisi with his 'Canticle of the Creatures' and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The volume also shuttles between philosophy and economics in the direction of a social solidarity economy.

According to the RIPPES (international network for the promotion of the social solidarity economy), this type of economy fosters “respect for men, women and the environment.” It returns money to its rightful place, namely as an instrument that facilitates exchanges rather than financial speculation. It is said to pioneer new forms of exchanges.ⁱ There are many people working in this field and I am aware of several Italian authors/activists who are strongly committed in this regard. In many ways, this book makes a very important contribution to the social solidarity economy movement. It does so in a manner that is expansive, embedding this alternative economic vision in a larger vision which is spiritual, cosmic and communal. This vision exalts the notion of love of humanity and the rest of nature in the sense described by Paulo Freire and others (see Darder, 2002). It is a vision geared towards imparting that sense of positive energy for people to continue engaging in acts of social creation that suggest, in the slogan of the World Social Forum, that another world is possible.

ⁱ I am indebted to Professor Alesio Surian, from the University of Padova, for this point.

References

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Giroux, H & Searls Giroux, S (2004), *Take Back Higher Education, . Race, youth and the crisis of democracy in the post-civil rights era*. New York & Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave-Macmillan.