CLARIFYING THE EUTOPIA ARGUMENT: A RESPONSE TO JOHN CAIAZZA

by Manussos Marangudakis

Abstract. The "eutopia" vision of the future, promulgated by technoscientists and libertarian thinkers, could herald the coming of a third axial age that could reshape and reformulate the legacy of the Great Religions and their transcendental moral imperatives, and of Modernity and the democratic imperative of equality of social conditions. A sociological diagnosis of a third, technosomatic, morality, is not a matter of supporting or rejecting such a possibility, but a matter of detecting its rise and regulating its impact.

Keywords: bioethics; biotechnology; Christianity; cultural evolution; self

I read John Caiazza's response to my article (Marangudakis 2012) with great interest for his arguments, and my concerns about my English-speaking proficiency (Caiazza 2012). Starting with the latter, I would like to clarify that it is not Caiazza's *version* of technosecularism that I find "shortsighted" and "psychologically immature," but the *state* of technosecularism itself today that John Caiazza analyzes so convincingly. In fact, I accept his analysis of the present state of technology in social organization and social interaction to the point of incorporating it into my own understanding of the GRIN (genetic, robotic, information, and nano processes) potentiality: thus the metaphor of technosecularism as the "primordial soup" out of which the new axiality will emerge, if at all (Marangudakis 2012, 114).

A second misunderstanding, more to the point this time, is that, allegedly, I welcome the prospect of eutopian axiality. This is a perennial issue of any argument that suggests the coming of a radically new macrosocial pattern since a first impression tends to identify the message with the messenger—thus the ominous fate of the messenger who brings unwelcoming news. Yet, I make clear in the article that "liberation" is envisioned by the promulgators of the eutopian vision, and that the success of the eutopian "program" depends on the ability of this technoideological elite to reshape and reformulate the ontological and cosmological principles of modernity to fit its vision; in other words, to make us see the world

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through their eyes. Judging from past major axial shifts, even if the eutopian vision is actualized, I neither welcome it nor condemn it. Instead, I argue that the new era will be "...a new era of personal freedom and social inequalities, an era of new anxieties and new hopes" (Marangudakis 2012, 115). The latter phrase encapsulates the consequences of every revolutionary social change in history: Liberty from past constraints is not "liberty" in general; social revolutions overcome, to an extent, past dysfunctionalities, internal contradictions, and conflicts, only to generate their own ones (Eisenstadt 2006).

Thus I arrive to the crux of the matter: Is the merging of Athens and Jerusalem possible? To answer this question, I do not resolve to a blueprint of social engineering. Instead, I examine the current social, technological, and geopolitical state of affairs and their dynamics, and compare previous conglomerations of the above trinity to their correspondence with previous axialities to argue that a logical conclusion of the current civilizational path is the partially intentional, partially *de facto* merging of the two Cities. True, "axiality" is a fussy concept, awkward in some respects, that can only be detected at a macro level and only in a comparative, civilizational, perspective. Axiality is unfolded in time that we count in centuries rather than decades, and its impact is detected in long processes slowly infiltrating everyday life and perceptions of reality. The Latin West and the Greek East started in the fifth century CE as a single civilization; yet six centuries later they were strangers in ontological principles, social structures, and technological development; the inworldly Western and the outworldly Byzantine civilization constitute a classic case study of the *longue durée* potential of axial ideals (White 1966).

As for the fate of religion, there is nothing in the article to suggest a possible extinction of it. A maxim that runs through the axial analysis of civilizational evolution is that "nothing is ever lost" (Bellah 2011). Contributions of past axialities are not erased and forgotten whenever a new stage of social development is reached. The religious legacy of the first age of axiality, of the Great Religions, was not lost with the advent of modernity and of modern ideologies such as nationalism, socialism, and secularism—even though the most radical *philosophes* did envision the demise of religion. Indeed, the triumph of modernity, especially in Europe, dethroned the Church from its dominance in matters of state and social affairs. Yet, religion as such was not eradicated; instead it was incorporated in the framework that modernity created, as one among the many institutions that today comprise civil society. The fact that inside religion there developed liberal and fundamental factions and movements manifests the power of modernity to infiltrate religion with modern cultural modes of thought and organization (Casanova 1994).

A new axial age, notwithstanding its specific features, would neither eradicate religion as such, nor modernity for that matter, but instead would

restructure their institutional and social contours in its own framework. If the pattern "nothing is ever lost" continues to operate in the future, and if the eutopian axiality eventually occurs, religion should not disappear, but instead should become more individualistic and technospiritual. The power of religion lies exactly in its ability to adapt to major alterations of social conditions, that is, to reinterpret its principles in new cultural frameworks. The "mysterious duality" of Jesus (Caiazza 2012, 522) could hardly be hurt by an eutopian vision as the latter also envisions and advocates a "higher" duality for humanity; in a sense, from the perspective of technoideologists, the eutopian practice of merging technology and flesh would constitute imitation of Christ with other means.

Undoubtedly this is speculation, though I would like to believe informed speculation. Detecting a certain direction in the Weberian notion of salvation from Heavens to Revolution, and from concern for the soul to concern for the social, and taking into account the promethean importance of science and technology in the West, in the article I suggested a way to detect signs of a possible rise of a third axiality: salvation as concern for the somatic. It is not a matter of liking it or not; it is a matter of regulating its impact and directing it onto a course that will prevent it turning into an all-out dystopia—at least in the West.

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