

## IDEAS, REFORMS, AND THE ALTERNATIVE

### EDITORIAL

During the 1970s, the question of the alternative was thought to be fundamental. Following Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, intellectuals engaged in an inquiry as to the possibility of a political alternative to the contemporary state of affairs. Already at that time though, their imaginings clashed with the widespread impression that the social and economic machine was moving forward of its own and it was not truly possible to affect its functioning. Next came the years of Margaret Thatcher and her 'TINA (There Is No Alternative)-dictum. Finally, the end of the 1990s saw the great digital revolution. In short, the revolution was carried out neither by political groups nor by nation states; rather, the revolution simply happened, as something unpredictable and unforeseen. The world today is certainly completely different from what it used to be, yet not in the sense that it constitutes an alternative to the capitalist system.

Whereas intelligence – as collective and especially as artificial intelligence – has been the real subject of change, (political, philosophical, and religious) ideas have followed in train and have played no actual role in effecting any change. Neither intellectuals nor political parties or religious leaders seem to have impacted the transformation of the world. On the contrary, when a transformation guided by these subjects has taken place, it has often been of a negative and regressive kind (as an example, one could think of the tragedy of religious fundamentalism). We are therefore faced with the following questions: Can (philosophical, religious, and political) ideas still play a role and, in particular, a transformative role within society? Or have they rather become forms of superstition, historical relics, incapable of driving change when they are not even responsible for hindering and blocking it? Should we say goodbye to ideas in the name of knowledge? If such is the case though, what is left of the freedom of thought? Can there still be differing ideas? Or can ideas differ only in fields that ultimately depend on superstition, vagueness, and confusion? How does this process affect the political question of the alternative?

Increasingly often, the “Brussels bureaucrats” call on the EU member states to “make *the* reforms.” This expression, with its stress on the definite article, would have been unthinkable up to ten or fifteen years ago. Society seems to have become similar to an energy-inefficient house, whereas *the* reforms are tantamount to installing PVC windows and doors.

There is no real space for ideologies, everything is simply a matter of improving the machine, and technology alone has a say in the matter. Not only have we therefore given up the revolution and have become reformers, but we have also surrendered the idea of *free* reforms and embraced instead the idea of *necessary* reforms.

Is this really the state of things? What is left of “the alternative”? *Spazio Filosofico*, which investigates concepts under shock in the public sphere, is strongly interested in rethinking the concept of “the alternative” within the changed international scenario.

Are alternatives planned or do they simply happen? Are they a one-way street (an *Einbahnstrasse*, as Walter Benjamin would have put it) or do they provide a really significant space (and which one?) for freedom of thought and for different spiritual and ideal orientations? Is an alternative really such or is it simply a development? What is the relation between the concepts of “alternative” and “novelty”? What is or what would be a real novelty? What is, above all, the role of ideas, political-religious conceptions, worldviews, and cultural “identities” in designing/producing an alternative? Or is there simply no alternative on the horizon (perhaps because novelty has already happened, and it does not depend/has not depended on our freedom)? Have “ideas” become a simple ornament, a bow that embellishes the dress of capitalist society, an ornament to which people attribute great importance (to the point of war or intolerance) but that in reality counts for nothing? In short: Which is the alternative, if any? And how do other aspects (if any) of the concept of alternative connect with those here highlighted?

The '70s are fashionable again. Yet, could the invocation of that era be, in the end, simply an admission of powerlessness?

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(translated from Italian by Silvia Benso)