Guest Editor's Preface

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"Power and violence" is a dyad that is definitely taken for granted, almost a tautology. If power, either in exercise or attribute, implies an imposition of a condition of superiority (with consequent subjugation of others, or identification of the "non powerful", "less powerful", or "powerless"), there is an inevitable slide towards the idea of singling out individuals, abuse, and subjugation, and thus a display (more or less consciously) of force that easily transforms into violence. But in the disturbing depths of Günther Anders' (1902-1992) thought, the relationship between the two concepts becomes more complex, they become inter-tangled, are redefined and, without any form of contradiction, they even manage to become inverted.

The current human condition is the focus of his observations, conducted using original and incredibly effective stylistic means[1]. The determination of the position of man in the world (but noo of his "nature", it is important to underline) forms the backdrop for the ethical and social commitment of one of the most acute and socially dedicated intellectuals of the last century. Trained in the phenomenological school, sensitive to existentialist themes, he was also open to the assertions of the newly developing anthropological philosophy, Anders proposes philosophical pathways that express denunciation in various ways of "human deficiency", of a "defect of humanity" in contemporary man. This deficiency takes concrete form in behaviour unworthy of man, of his (self-conceived) excellence and superiority, a behaviour that, most of all, distances him from any sense of responsibility.

The "Promethean gap" is a basic concept coined by Anders to indicate this condition of inadequacy and "outdatedness" of humankind, a condition that betrays a "culpable" renunciation, a genuine surrender of humanity, and the exoneration of an entire living species from the responsibilities and ideals that in a very recent historical period, the romantic-bourgeoisie era, they proudly attributed to themselves as inalienable characteristics. The concept of the Promethean gap thus had both a historical-theoretical and moral significance.

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[1] See G. Anders' explanation in the introduction to *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* II.

The first involves the position of contemporary man in the world, very different from that of archaic man (pre-technological). It involves the need of human beings to compare themselves with an "other" that was previously unimaginable, a extremely advanced and effective technology beyond comparison with what in the past was referred to as "technical means". The second significance, instead, recalls the responsibility of a free being, which by the very nature of being free must take a stance in relation to themselves and the world.

In the face of the extraordinary potential of technological products, their functionality and durability, human nature appears weak, delicate, and fragile. The term "Promethean shame" denotes the (bland) awareness of an almost imperceptible but nevertheless incredibly ferocious violence that generates subjugation. The power of technology, translating into efficiency and "progress" (it remains to be seen whether real or illusory), exceeds all human potentialities, exposing the inferiority of humankind's "ontic equipment" on any level and from any point of view. However, the technocratic system does not involve only the economic dimension of human life, it is also rooted into the social and political organization, transforming it into a "megamachine". The totalitarianism of Nazi Germany is a dazzling example: the "monstrousness" that it generated led to the extermination of entire populations, combined with an almost complete indifference to their fate. Unfortunately this indifference is no less obvious as regards another product of technocratic over assertion: the killing of tens of thousands of people in a single blow that occurred with the dropping of the "latest product" of the technology of the 1940s on Hiroshima. The atomic bomb represents the extreme outcome of technological power and of an unchallengeable superiority: before demonstrating the capacity to destroy all forms of life on Earth, enjoying the privilege of subtracting oneself from its foreseen concrete effects. At the same time, like all technological products, it demonstrated its power of imposition, because what we have at our disposal cannot fail to be (automatically) utilized. The products of technology cry out to be used.

Over the last few centuries, and above all in recent decades, the existential situation has thus radically mutated, and mankind, overwhelmed by his "technical" context, invasive and at least partially autonomous, must also deal with new and exceptional situations on an ethical level. The second significance of the "Promethean gap" concept, as already said, applies to the moral plane: a man that is no longer capable of controlling the direction and the development of his own products; a man that kneels before his own machine, delegating all responsibility; a man that is no longer present, who repudiates his ethical role in the face of modernity, is a being that, certainly offended and violated, has to recover within himself the capacity for emotional response. Encouraging imagination and experiencing human feelings is the only effective antidote against the poisonous effects of passivity and dehumanization.

That it is really possible to bridge this gap remains uncertain, but in Anders' view we have a duty to try, at very least in order to oppose the multi-faceted violence underway. On the themes of "power" and "violence" he provides extraordinary compulsion and provocation. Power and violence paint the scenographic background for the stage upon which contemporary man plays out his existence. The exile, the worker, the businessman, the criminal, all act out the same scenes, but they have (must have) the option of opposing themselves. Those who want to rebel, that want to exit from the role enforced by the power of the system (political and/or technocratic), to follow a different script (or perhaps to revert to an older script) that assigns to man the part of a human being, might be obliged to brutally offend the status quo, and resort to violence, the most appropriate weapon against violence itself.