

BOOK REVIEW

Umberto Galimberti
L'ETICA DEL VIANDANTE
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The Nietzschean quote from “Human, All Too Human”, which Galimberti uses to inaugurate his latest book, establishes its prevailing tone: the apex of human reason’s freedom takes the form of a wanderer, progressing toward an undefined path as a concrete goal cannot be individuated.

Just as Nietzsche is a controversial thinker and, at the same time, a philosopher who continues to captivate new generations, Galimberti himself has faced public accusations of appropriation of others’ ideas, however, his book “L’etica del viandante” is hailed as having “all the prerequisites to become a classic of contemporary philosophical thought”. While Galimberti may not be Nietzsche, let’s explore what he brings to the table.

In the book, he provides an overview of the historical development of Western thought, starting from its two sources: Greek culture and the Judeo-Christian tradition. Despite their differences, Galimberti identifies a common thread between the two: the pursuit of order and stability. Greek thought is tied to nature, an immovable backdrop witnessing human endeavours. This is linked to a cyclical understanding of history, which lacks an ultimate goal but sees death as the conclusion of individual efforts.

The awareness of death leads to the ethics of limits, warning humans not to exceed their boundaries. The fact that man is mortal and just a part of nature combined with the quest for truth and rational knowledge leads to dualism, where man consists of both body and soul.

At a certain point, Greek philosophy encountered the ideas of Judeo-Christianity. The cyclical view of time was replaced by eschatological time, tracing its path from Earth to heaven in anticipation of salvation. This vision replaces nature with God and shifts the focus from the past to the future.

Such a perspective dominated until the modern era, with the realization that Earth revolves around the Sun, which has no inherent purpose which lead to the acknowledgment of the relativity of all motion. The world loses its enchantment, and the dominant narrative sees humanity's goal as mastering nature. The mastery of nature was supposed to contribute to human emancipation, freeing individuals from religious beliefs and superstitions. The use of reason allows the replacement of divine laws, which previously governed lives, with the laws of mathematics. If mathematics is the language of nature, then nature can be understood. Man, now at the centre of history, can overcome all negatives like ignorance, poverty, and disease, achieving complete liberation. However, even this faith in science begins to waver—Freud explores the role of the subconscious, and Mach, Hilbert, and Planck question the previously laid foundations of science.

Nevertheless, the final blow to faith in the science nurtured by modernity was dealt by Nazi ideology. The collapse of faith in universal reason led to the end of modernity and opened the doors to postmodernity, bringing cultural relativism and the complete dominance of individualism.

Galimberti's insights into our time, that he calls the technological age are perhaps more intriguing than his historical reconstruction. He believes that technology has now taken on the role of a subject, not just a means of human action. It is not just a subject but also the ultimate goal.

He criticizes the idea that technology can liberate us, help us overcome obstacles as it once seemed. "Are we truly free today not to use a computer or a mobile phone?", Galimberti asks. The author argues that we are not; we cannot choose another means to communicate with, for example, the government or a bank. Technology is not just the application of scientific results; it is the essence of science. Of course, this has significant moral implications. Technological experimentation is not conducted in the safe conditions of a laboratory but throughout the world. If we add to that the

idea that today the human ability to do something is much greater than its ability to foresee the consequences of what is done, the future can be worrisome.

In the pre-technological era, man dominated nature through the use of technological tools; today, technique dominates man with its rationality, which does not recognize anything beyond itself. In the technological age, humanism is lost, not because technology is not yet developed enough, but because it does not concern itself with it at all. Technology does not strive for a goal, does not promote meaning, and does not open possibilities for salvation; it simply acts, prompting questions about concepts like individual, identity, freedom, truth, meaning, morality, politics, democracy, and others. For example, ethics in the technological age becomes powerless due to the technological imperative to know everything that can be known and to do everything that can be done.

Again, the goal of technology is work, production, which no longer stems from human rationality but from the rationality of the machine. Traditional ethics is no longer applicable because it cannot transcend its anthropocentrism and regulate knowledge and power beyond the space of the planet and the time of human life. Ethics once could guide us on how to act, how to use technology, but today, it has no influence because action is inhuman. Consequences are no longer the product of human decision and conscious action but the result of a process. The idea of human responsibility for one's actions is behind us. In the technological age, responsibility concerns only the proper performance of the machine's action. Technology feeds itself and leads to consequences independent of any direct intention.

Therefore, Galimberti calls on us to return to the ancient virtue of measure. Giving oneself measure becomes urgent. To achieve this, we need the ethics of the wanderer, who, without using a map, faces difficulties one by one as they come. This is our limit. Ethics cannot be prescriptive; it must try to catch up with technology. We can no longer speak of a goal, but anyone focused only on the goal does not enjoy the journey. They travel to arrive, not to travel. To achieve this, we must abandon deeply rooted beliefs; we must not appeal to rights but to experience and the observation of its diversity.

In the elaboration of his planetary ethics, the author brings concrete examples of the dangers that technology brings, mentioning global warming, the consequences of genetically modified organisms, and nuclear energy. He also cites ozone holes, water pollution, and glacier melting. They testify to the development of scenarios that do not unfold due to the

power humans have over nature but due to the power that technology has over humans and nature.

To prevent a scenario in which progress approaches catastrophe, it is not enough to reduce the use of technology. We need to radically change the paradigm that guided the relationship between man and nature, moving from anthropocentrism to biocentrism. The wanderer knows this; he knows that life belongs to nature that preceded man and that will exist after him. Such ethics can be called planetary because the life of the Earth becomes the measure of all things.

However, it does not forget man. To ensure that all living beings live under suitable conditions, brotherhood, a sense of unity among people, needs to be fostered. We need to abandon the idea that one culture is superior to others, and for peace to reign, we need to give up on states because the peace they want to achieve within themselves leads to war with others. To achieve this, education is needed, teaching us from an early age that we are all equal. Just as individuals renounce some of their freedom to be part of society, nations must now renounce some of their interests to join an ecological culture.

To achieve this, cultural evolution is needed to tear down divisions between races, religions, nations, and states. Furthermore, we need to replace the logic of the enemy with the logic of brotherhood. This brotherhood includes not only humans but all living and non-living things on Earth. The wanderer does not see Earth as a source of resources but as a value to be preserved, and we all must strive to be like him.

Certainly, only the rough outlines of Galimberti's ideas are presented here, and I certainly hope that the most important ideas have been covered. What can we say about them? Although the message of universal ethics that applies to all beings on Earth, including the Earth itself, is attractive and I believe in the correctness of such views, its feasibility remains uncertain. According to the author we should become wanderers, nomads, aware of our transience and equality with others that do not look for goals or prescribed norms. However, if we reject all known ethics and their prescriptiveness, how will we act in specific situations? What will guide our actions if not an awareness of the universality of our rationality and moral sense? And if we talk about universality, are we not talking of a goal? Isn't the fraternal society that Galimberti calls for a goal in itself?

The author himself points out the difficulties and contradictions of today's capitalist system, which goes hand in hand with the technological age but presents it as subordinate to technology. Perhaps it would be good to

reverse the story here. Critiquing and pointing out the enormous shortcomings of capitalism as the dominant system of values is necessary, but if we support a cyclical view of history, as the author does, things could fall into place on their own. Perhaps we should not do anything? Contrary to that, Galimberti argues that we should let go of the ideas of states and nations. Calling for the abolition of states and nations, as noble as it may sound, is unrealistic because it is contrary to the human need for association. If it not feasible, as idealistic as it sounds it is not a solution.

Furthermore, is his personified portrayal of technology, as something greater than man, as something that governs human lives, one that leads to a feeling of helplessness? I would argue that it is. How, as individuals, as wanderers, do we confront such a Goliath? Aren't we the ones who created technology and the ones who still control it? Keeping that in mind we should be optimistic in our hope to use it for good, since technology itself is amoral.

When we look at the examples of technology that the author offers, we may be surprised at how little space is provided for presenting their threat. In the last decades discussions about, for example, genetically modified organisms or nuclear energy have been numerous, and their advocates are not only technology enthusiasts but also those who believe that these technologies can bring benefits to humans and nature.

In conclusion, we can say that Galimberti's heart is certainly in the right place, and any reflection on the contemporary world and its future is more than welcome. Still, perhaps proposals for its improvement should be based on a broader and more nuanced approach to its understanding.

