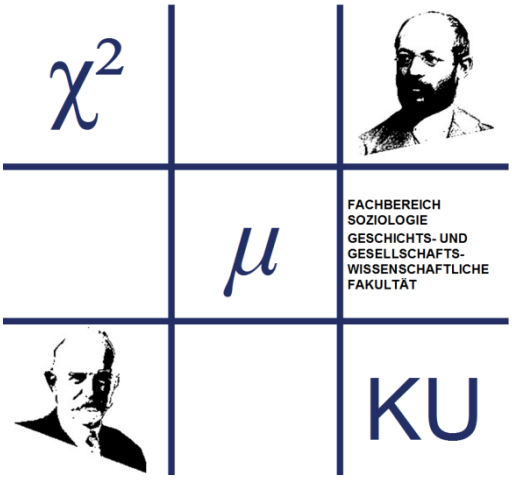
KATHOLISCHE UNIVERSITÄT
EICHSTÄTT-INGOLSTADT

EICHSTÄTTER BEITRÄGE ZUR SOZIOLOGIE

Alienation, Decreation and Kenotic Solidarity: Dialectical Historical Materialism for a Post-Apocalyptic World

Joost van Loon

Nr. 26
November 2024



Soziologische Forschungsberichte,
herausgegeben von Stefanie Eifler, Joost van Loon, Karin Scherschel & Robert Schmidt

Eichstätter Beiträge zur Soziologie

Die Eichstätter Beiträge zur Soziologie erscheinen in unregelmäßiger Reihenfolge mehrmals im Jahr und können unter der angegebenen Adresse angefordert werden. Für die Inhalte sind allein die jeweiligen Autoren verantwortlich.

Redaktion: Anke Regensburger, Sekretariat des Lehrstuhls für Soziologie und empirische Sozialforschung

Kontakt: Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt

Kapuzinergasse 2
85072 Eichstätt
+49 8421 93 21243
anke.regensburger@ku.de

http://www.ku.de/ggf/soziologie/eichstaetter-beitraege-zur-soziologie/

Alienation, Decreation and Kenotic Solidarity: Dialectical Historical Materialism for a Post-Apocalyptic World

Prof. Dr. Joost van Loon

Korrespondenzanschrift / address for correspondence:

Prof. Dr. Joost van Loon
Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt
Lehrstuhl für Allgemeine Soziologie und Soziologische Theorie
Kapuzinergasse 2
85072 Eichstätt
Germany
+49 8421 93 21254
joost.vanloon@ku.de

Abstract:

This paper proposes a dialectical engagement between Karl Marx's reflections on alienation, real abstraction, and proletarianization, and Simone Weil's theology of decreation, to develop a sociologically grounded concept of *kenotic solidarity* as an ethico-political response to ongoing systemic collapse. Departing from utopian/dystopian paradigms that often frame post-apocalyptic thought, this thesis asserts that apocalypse is not an imagined future but a lived present – marked by ecological devastation, social fragmentation, and the disintegration of institutional meaning. In such a context, the task is not to rescue a dying order, but to sustain human community under radical precarity without reproducing the kakistocratic structures that caused its collapse. By re-interpreting Marx through Weil's political theology – and Weil through Marx's historical materialism – the paper offers a non-deterministic, praxis-oriented vision of post-apocalyptic survival rooted in love, attention, and shared vulnerability. Kenotic solidarity is presented not as an abstract spiritual ideal, but as a concrete political practice: a dialectical ethics of mutual aid and reciprocal loss that holds space for a flourishing web-of-life, even under seemingly impossible conditions. In this light, kenotic solidarity emerges as a material counter-power: a deliberate inhabitation of brokenness that refuses both bourgeois autonomy and reactionary nihilism.

Keywords:

Alienation, Decreation, Kakistocracy, Kenosis, Marx, Solidarity, Post-Apocalypse, Weil

Abstract:

Der Beitrag entwickelt aus einer dialektischen Auseinandersetzung zwischen Karl Marx' Überlegungen zu Entfremdung, Realabstraktion und Proletarisierung einerseits und Simone Weils Theologie der Dekreation andererseits einen soziologisch fundierten Begriff kenotischer Solidarität als ethisch-politische Antwort auf den fortschreitenden Systemkollaps. In Abgrenzung von utopischen bzw. dystopischen Paradigmen, die das postapokalyptische Denken häufig rahmen, vertritt er die These, dass die Apokalypse keine imaginierte Zukunft, sondern gelebte Gegenwart ist. Gekennzeichnet ist sie durch ökologische Verwüstung, soziale Fragmentierung und den Zerfall institutioneller Sinnstiftung. In einem solchen Kontext besteht die Aufgabe nicht darin, eine sterbende Ordnung zu retten. Vielmehr gilt es, menschliche Gemeinschaft unter Bedingungen radikaler Prekarität zu erhalten, ohne die kakistokratischen Strukturen zu reproduzieren, die ihren Zusammenbruch verursacht haben. Indem der Beitrag Marx durch Weils politische Theologie und Weil durch Marx' historischen Materialismus neu liest, entwirft er eine nicht-deterministische, praxisorientierte Vision postapokalyptischen Überlebens, die in Liebe, Aufmerksamkeit und geteilter Verwundbarkeit wurzelt. Kenotische Solidarität erscheint dabei nicht als abstraktes spirituelles Ideal, sondern als konkrete politische Praxis: als dialektische Ethik gegenseitiger Hilfe und wechselseitigen Verlusts, die selbst unter scheinbar unmöglichen Bedingungen Raum lässt für ein gedeihendes Netz des Lebens. In diesem Licht erweist sich kenotische Solidarität als materielle Gegenmacht: als bewusstes Bewohnen der Gebrochenheit, das sowohl bürgerliche Autonomie als auch reaktionären Nihilismus zurückweist.

Keywords:
Entfremdung, Dekreation, Kakistokratie, Kenosis, Marx, Solidarität, Postapokalypse, Weil

Introduction

The argument that I seek to develop in this paper is that in a post-apocalyptic society a new kind of social contract is possible. It will not be that of organic solidarity, but of kenotic solidarity. My particular use of the concept of kenotic solidarity is derived from three previous publications (Schmidt and Van Loon, 2024; Van Loon, 2022 and Van Loon, 2024) that all precede Ligita Ryliškytė (2024) seminal essay on "kenotic solidarity as discernment" that was published in the journal Religions in November 2024. Where Ryliškytė situates kenotic solidarity within a soteriology oriented toward redemptive recovery, the present account is sociological and temporal rather than eschatological: read through Marx, Weil and Vattimo, kenosis names the weakening of strong structures, and solidarity the honouring of an unredeemed debt in what I will refer to as "the post-apocalyptic condition". Unlike in eschatological reflections on the "end-times", I treat the post-apocalyptic condition as a suspended "here-now" (of what Benjamin (1968) called "Jetztzeit".

In order to develop this argument, I have chosen to work within an emergent tradition of what Jason W. Moore (2015) has called "World Ecology", which is a dialectical historical-materialist mode of thought that seeks to shift the attention of the critique of capitalism away from a narrow focus on labour relations in industrial production to include the pivotal roles of imperialism and patriarchy. Moore (2016) uses the notion of the Capitalocene to emphasize the role of class struggle at the heart of the ongoing ecological catastrophe, which is thus not separated from, for example, the role of big tech, fossil fuel, nutritional and pharmaceutical industries, nor from what is now becoming an apt term to describe contemporary political culture: "kakistocracy".

Kenotic solidarity is inevitably rooted in a critique of the violence of metaphysics; it is born out of what Gianni Vattimo (1988; Vattimo and Rovatti, 2012 [1983]) deployed as "weak thought" and resonates with what Giorgio Agamben (2014) called "destitutive power". This paper engages with the work of Simone Weil (1951, 2002 [1947]) and her concept of decreation as a remedy for what I think was a mistake in the work of the young Marx. When, in his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, Marx (1975 [1844]) developed the concept of alienation – which itself is a wonderful insight that preceded Freud's (2002 [1930]) and Nietzsche's (2006 [1887]) thoughtful explorations of the dark side of the Enlightenment – he still maintained that – historically speaking – there was once a "self" that was not alienated. This mistake – which enabled many romantic fantasies about human nature – is rooted in Marx's implicit reliance on a philosophical anthropology that already assumed a bifurcation of human being and "his" surroundings. This bifurcation is exactly that which justified imperialism and patriarchy as modes of extraction and abstraction in support of capital accumulation.

Simone Weil's (1951) concept of decreation shatters the illusion of an originary unified self. The illusion of unity is itself a product of real abstraction – rooted in practices of value extraction and capital accumulation – which – at least since the Enlightenment – gave birth to "man [not woman] and his [not her] doubles" (Foucault, 1970 [1966]). However, in the abstract, I skipped over an important part. In linking decreation to alienation I left out Vattimo's (1999) deployment of the concept of kenosis as an emptying-out of any claim to sovereign supremacy. Of course, that is what decreation starts off with, but kenosis adds something important – the stripping off of any illusion of sovereignty is not simply a nihilistic surrender, a self-effacement, but a process of accomplishment. The emptying out of the self is not the goal – it is a means. Nothingness is not nothing; it is like Plato's (2000) khora – a matrix from which new possibilities are born.

Of course, as Simone Weil herself demonstrated during her final political act – a refusal to eat in solidarity with the victims of Nazism that led to her death due to tuberculosis and heart failure in 1943 at the age of 34 – decreation is radical and it is risky. This act of kenosis, however, should not be interpreted as suicide; her death was the consequence of a radical politics of the affirmation of suffering. It was an act of accomplished nihilism. She is most famous for her conception of le malheur, affliction (2002 [1947]), which she also used against notions such as the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as she became increasingly disappointed by the ongoing oppression of life in the Soviet Union. Like Gramsci (1971), her adherence to Marxism as a philosophy of practice focused on supporting and facilitating organic intellectuals, which she herself practised by fighting fascism in the Spanish Civil War.

This paper is therefore an attempt to integrate Simone Weil's critique of a conception of a unified, autonomous self into a broader conception of Historical Materialism through a philosophical interface of weak thought. The purpose is to contribute something to sociological theory, namely the development of a new conception of solidarity: kenotic solidarity.

Unfortunately, we cannot simply do this by imitating Durkheim's work – especially The Division of Labour in Society (1984 [1893]) – because despite the fact that his conception of organic solidarity (as that which had to succeed mechanical solidarity) is quite useful in understanding what his German contemporaries (Simmel 2004 [1900] and Weber (1978 [1922]) called Vergesellschaftung[1], his explanation of the genesis of practices of organic solidarity lacks analytical, empirical and logical rigour. In his later work – The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (Durkheim, 1995

[1] This use of *Vergesellschaftung* is different from its use in political discourse to describe a transfer of private to public or state ownership, i.e. nationalization.

[1912]) – he, with the help of his cousin Marcel Mauss (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963 [1903]), did offer the beginnings of more rigorous thinking, but it was too little too late.

A few thoughts on Durkheim and Organic Solidarity

These days, I often ask myself what the place of sociology might be in a post-apocalyptic world and somehow find myself connecting this to Émile Durkheim's quest for establishing sociology as an academic discipline in France at the end of the 19th century. I wonder if Durkheim's vision of a society built on the ashes of the coal that was burnt to feed the insatiable needs of the industrial machines was also – in some way – post-apocalyptic. Of course, Durkheim believed in scientific positivism as the means to lead France into this new world order. Durkheim believed in enlightenment through (institutional) education; he believed in the power of contracts alongside morality to establish a new form of social contract that he dubbed "organic solidarity".

Rather than regurgitating the ruminations of a dead man on the verge of a world for which we are now writing obituaries, I am interested in the idea – or perhaps better the arrogance – that sociology still matters. Matters to whom?

For too long, sociologists – especially those engaged in societal diagnostics – have asked the question: "in what kind of society do we want to live?" The arrogance of this question is just as obvious as its stupidity. The stupidity is already revealed in a few key words: the most obvious one being the "we". "Society", "want" and "live", however, are also good indicators of a lack of thought having been invested into this question. Can we want to live in a specific kind of society of our own choosing? Does that really matter?

The sociological arrogance of these diagnosticians is not only that they feel able to answer such questions but also that they ascribe to themselves the entitlement that this answer matters to anyone but themselves and the people who depend on them for acknowledgement and recognition. Here, the societal diagnosis becomes a political manifesto, whilst of course not outing itself as such.

Still, the resonance of Durkheim's thesis on organic solidarity remains. In a society with a high degree of functional differentiation, modes of attunement and negotiation – I will call them modes of translation – will take place under the generic condition of strangeness.

Three of Durkheim's contemporaries – Tönnies (2001 [1887]), Simmel (1908) and Small (1905) – all agreed on this. *Spectres of Marx* (Derrida, 1994) were also present, even if these sociologists made their careers out of foolheartedly denying it. Alienation, proletarianization, class struggle, commodity fetish and abstraction enable a very precise understanding of what lazy sociologists call functional differentiation, because they anchor this process in praxis. Where Durkheim only saw the division of labour, the young Marx already identified alienation and exploitation and in *Capital* the old Marx identified the commodity fetish and abstraction (Marx, 1976 [1867]). Yet, when Marx and Engels wrote their manifesto (2002 [1848]) and ended it with "workers of the world unite", they were unable to consider the concrete practices of unification. When, 69 years later, Lenin tried to do so, it ended up in bloodshed, incriminations and mass incarcerations.

I understand Durkheim's notion of solidarity as quite similar to that of Hobbes' (1996 [1651]) social contract: a mainly tacit collective agreement amongst strangers to delegate the maintenance of peace and order to a form of authority that subsequently functions as sovereign imposition. For Hobbes this was the absolutist monarchy, for Durkheim it is "society", which in France – after several crises – was anchored in law as a constitutional (democratic) republic. In both cases, sovereignty is not to be understood as foundational, but instead as performative. There is no reason to ascribe to the social contract any magical properties of self-reproduction.

For Durkheim organic solidarity is realized through abstraction. However, unlike Marx's notion of commodity fetish, Durkheim's notion of abstraction is not conceived as rooted in concrete, historical material, let alone dialectical, practices. Instead, abstraction – for example in the development of religions from animism to monotheism – is pure mental labour. Under conditions of high functional differentiation, people need to imagine their relation to their real conditions of existence (this is exactly how Louis Althusser (1971) defined ideology) in more abstract ways, for example in the form of nationalism. Nationhood binds people across divisions of class, gender, religion and regional-ethnic differences.

The Post-Apocalypse

In Durkheim's framework, the condition of the Post-Apocalypse is the revelation that organic solidarity is no longer functional. The kind of ideological abstraction that was necessary to integrate strangers living under conditions of extreme functional differentiation that "democratic nationhood" provided is collapsing. The fact that an increasing number of "nations" in the world are abolishing democracy either through elections or through a techno-bureaucratic death by a thousand cuts, paired with an increasing hostility towards strangers leading to more (para-)military violence and wars, is a clear indication that the social contract as envisioned by Durkheim no longer holds.

If sociology is to mean anything, it needs to refrain from trying to hold on to the sinking ship of the ideology of democratic nationhood – not because it now believes in something better, but because it first needs to learn not to believe in anything at all. However, this is not a move towards cynicism, but instead, a move towards accomplished nihilism (which Gianni Vattimo (2002) associated with the life work of Friedrich Nietzsche). If sociology ceases to function as the scribe of the ideology of nationhood, it may still be able to recognize the demise of organic solidarity as a dialectical process; the success of nationhood as a container of organic solidarity is the cause of its demise, because it was always already rooted in a contradiction. On the surface, this contradiction manifests itself as the problem of the stranger, which Carl Schmitt translated into the fundamental question of the political as the separation of friends and foes. Schmitt recognized that separation as arbitrary. After exposure of the horrors of the Third Reich, the UN also recognized that separation as arbitrary, which led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and to the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951. It is exactly through the figure of the refugee – the stranger that cannot be subsumed under nationhood – that an attempt was made to legally expand organic solidarity beyond that of the social contract.

Universal Human Rights were understood to be an aspiration and never really functioned as a legal imperative. Six months before the declaration, the Nakba took place in Palestine. Seventy-eight years later, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine has been nearly completed. In order to achieve this, the (mostly western) allies of the state of Israel have been successfully undermining the aspirations of universal human rights as well as the actual attempts to anchor them in international law. In fact, international law itself has completely

collapsed. The undermining of international law had started at the very moment the declaration had been signed. Evidence of this can be found, for example, in the ways in which nation states have treated refugees over the years or whenever the "right" of states to exist is being prioritized over the right of human beings to exist.

A Dialectical Turn to Dignity

A dialectical thesis on the demise of organic solidarity eludes both Durkheim's limited positivist framework and his Kantian understanding of reason. It is something, however, that Historical Materialism has no difficulty with. Organic solidarity – for example in the form of nationalism – amplifies that which it suppresses: an animosity towards strangers. This is because it is generated out of an interplay between alienation and proletarianization on the one hand and abstraction and commodification on the other hand.

However, and this may sound like sacrilege to hardcore Marxists, I do not want to suggest that this is the end of the story on solidarity and the social contract. The question we need to ask is simply, what kind of solidarity may emerge from the collapse of nation-state-democracy? This collapse, which I refer to as "the post-apocalyptic condition", is of course still ongoing. The entire point of calling it apocalyptic is not to wait for total planetary destruction, but to understand the demolition of the current social contract as nihilistically accomplished. Rather than arrogantly proclaiming an ideology of reconstituting a new social contract, under the imaginative authority of a sociologist playing philosopher-king, it should be treated as a minor observation from the shadows by a witness whose insignificance has allowed her/him to go under the radar.

This minor observation by an insignificant witness revolves around the question whether we can still live with dignity in a post-apocalyptic world that is being ruled by the worst, i.e. a kakistocracy. The spectacular collapse of international law centred on universal human rights has been a major symptom of the rise of kakistocracy, which itself evolved out of an encounter between (neo-)liberalism (a.k.a. kleptocracy) and social chauvinism (plutocracy), most of which has eluded mainstream political and social sciences because they were too busy chasing after research funding opportunities from the state.

Unfortunately, Historical Materialism has had very little engagement with concepts such as dignity, primarily because it implicitly relied on philosophical anthropology rather than

political theology, for example, when considering issues related to alienation and proletarianization. As I have already invoked Carl Schmitt as having provided the final verdict on the impossibility of a politics of organic solidarity, it is perhaps necessary to invoke his ideological opposite to focus on a post-apocalyptic notion of dignity. For me, the complete opposite of Schmittian political theology is provided by Simone Weil.

What is therefore at stake in this minor observation is not a theory of redemption after collapse, nor a rescue mission for a dying social order, but a praxis of survival-with-dignity in conditions where the infrastructures of meaning, justice, care and life itself have already disintegrated. There is no point in speculating about a possible future, as we are experiencing an already-apocalyptic present.

This thesis departs deliberately from the prevailing frameworks that imagine the apocalypse as a dramatic rupture yet to come – typically portrayed through either utopian rescue or dystopian despair. Instead, it aligns with thinkers who understand "the end of the world" not as an event, but as a structural reality already underway: evidenced by ecological devastation, the erosion of social cohesion, the normalization of kakistocracy (as inevitable), and the corruption of institutional life. The future has collapsed into the present, and with it, the myths of linear progress, rational governance, and universal uplift that undergirded modernity. Under such conditions, the most urgent question is not "what comes after?" but "what becomes possible within?" What form of community can be built – not in spite of collapse, but through it? What kind of solidarity can be sustained without re-inscribing the violence of domination, instrumental reason, and coerced belonging? And more provocatively: can there be an ethos of a life of shared loss – a way of being-together that does not seek to restore what has been broken, but to inhabit brokenness without despair?

To answer this, the paper turns to two thinkers whose works are rarely brought into dialogue, but who both offer deep resources for confronting the spiritual and material crises of modern life. Karl Marx, in both his early writings on alienation and his later analysis of real abstraction and proletarianization, exposes how capitalism systemically disfigures the human subject by transforming social relations into abstract economic forms. Simone Weil, writing under the shadow of fascism and war, articulates a theology of decreation – a paradoxical act of self-emptying that becomes the ground for truth, grace, and the ethical life. Where Marx offers a diagnosis of alienation as the structural expropriation of

subjectivity, Weil offers a practice of voluntary unselfing that opens the self to something beyond domination, even in extremis.

The key conceptual move in this thesis is to read alienation and decreation as entangled responses to the question of human dignity under systemic duress. Alienation, in this reading, becomes a form of forced decreation – an involuntary emptying-out of selfhood driven by capital's logic of extraction, abstraction, and commodification. Decreation, by contrast, becomes a conscious counter-power (a destitutive power as Agamben (2014) calls it): a form of self-emptying that does not negate the self in cynical nihilism or even martyrdom, but reorients it toward relationality, attention, and shared vulnerability. That is, the starting point is not some kind of complete human being that has fallen into a state of lack, which – at least since the Enlightenment – has morphed into a paradoxical notion of subjectivity as at once subjugation and agency. What Marx – perhaps naively – referred to as "alienation of oneself" (or "alienation of one's species") does not mean that before entering into the capitalist mode of production, human being was not alienated from itself.

Decreation is a process of anamnesis, a genealogical working backwards to discover that there never was an original unity of "selfhood". Thus, the process of alienation within the capitalist mode of production is effectively the invocation of a mythology of original unity (very similar to the Christian mythology of the Fall). Whereas most Marxists have read alienation in terms of a humanist lament, leading to a romanticization of archaic modes of production, Weil's concept of decreation destroys that naiveté.

The exposition of the emptiness at the heart of the experience of alienation is the accomplishment of decreation and a necessary inoculation against the violence of metaphysics. It is for this reason that I connect Weil's concept of decreation with Vattimo's advocacy of weak thought, which was also directed against the violence of metaphysics (Vattimo, 1988). For Vattimo, weak thought enables a conception of a mode of existence that in Greek would be called kenosis (Vattimo, 1999). Kenosis is not self-destruction, but self-emptying, a destitution of power, status, or form (Vattimo (1999) also used the term abasement). Here, I will use it in the sense of entering into a mode of existence that starts with relationality (rather than treating relationality as an extension of an already-existing form, such as "the self").

Decreation is thus conceived here as the first step towards kenosis, because it removes the illusion that there was once a self that is now in need of restoration. Instead, there is a sense of nothingness that, however, is not nothing. To equate nothingness with nothing is to agree with Schmitt that the inaugural violence of self-assertion (as sovereign) does not owe anyone any debt. The nothingness that becomes the illusion of self is, however, everything that the self is not. Following Jason W. Moore (2015, 2016), this can be called "the web of life". Thus, whereas Schmitt's inaugural violence is that of the constitution of the sovereign power, Weil's act of decreation is the destitution of sovereignty itself. Sovereignty is the illusion.

Whereas decreation empties out the illusion of the primacy of a unitary self, kenosis empties power of possession. Being the first step, decreation teaches us that we are always-already in debt. We were never sovereign to begin with. That which is thought of as being property is being exposed as possession. This experience of "being possessed" is the basic form of alienation in the young Marx's philosophical writings. Thus, kenosis is a process that accompanies the anamnetic work of decreation, namely an orientation towards an ongoing engagement with destitutive power which enables one to accept and live with the consequences of being indebted.

Vattimo's concept of kenosis teaches us that Weil's spiritual radicalism, on its own, risks becoming untethered from material analysis. Without a historical analysis of how capital reshapes human experience at the ontological level – through proletarianization, commodification, and abstraction – decreation risks being reduced to quietist virtue or spiritualized stoicism. After all, Simone Weil ended her life as the accomplishment of decreation, suffering from tuberculosis and malnutrition in solidarity with the victims of Nazism. Kenosis may accomplish a self-annihilation but is not a complete annihilation of existence, as one can live without a unitary sense of self. Kenosis gives suffering a purpose as relations of affliction.

This is why Marx must remain central: not only for his critique of alienation, but even more for his later insight into how real abstraction erases the particularity of life through the violent imposition of equivalence, exchangeability, and productivity. Historical Materialism enables an understanding of how the illusion of selfhood accompanied the processes of real abstraction and proletarianization. It enables us to show how commodification, for example, obfuscated the fundamental relationality that enables the web-of-life. Today,

now more than ever, the age of kakistocracy has apocalyptically exposed the reality of this obfuscation, as capital is now directly poised against life, leading Slavoj Žižek (1994), Mark Fisher (2009), Frederic Jameson (1994, 2003) and others to proclaim that it is easier to conceive of the end of the world than of the end of capitalism.

Dignity, therefore, can only be retained if we first acknowledge the illusion of the self and the indebtedness of existence. Instead of sovereignty, life thrives on relationality. This acknowledgement, however, must not be framed as some kind of ethical or moral appeal of a disembedded political theology. Instead, it is a mere observation enabled by the post-apocalyptic condition.

Kenotic Solidarity

The post-apocalyptic condition is the realization that the social contract based on organic solidarity has been irreversibly broken. In true (negative) dialectic fashion, the means by which organic solidarity had been established – disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977 [1975]), legal-rational authority (Weber, 1978 [1922]), money (Simmel, 2004 [1900]), habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), etc. – are all derivative of one and the same process: real abstraction. Of course, this does not mean that they are superfluous or invalid; quite the contrary, each of these concepts reveals important aspects that help explain how modern, industrial society could establish and maintain order. In fact, empirically speaking, they all relate to concrete practices of real abstraction. What Historical Materialism, however, offers this theoretical plurality is a way of understanding how they are connected and bound by real abstraction (Sohn-Rethel, 1978).

This also makes clear that at the heart of organic solidarity there is not free consent but (class) struggle. Concrete struggles involving concrete incompatible interests (labour versus capital) required modes of settling disputes, not just through legislation, administration and jurisprudence as modes of objectification (e.g. via repressive state apparatuses), but also through pre-emptive modes of subjectification (e.g. democracy, markets, ideological state apparatuses).

Struggle is experienced as relations of affliction (affliction is not individual but relational). This is what imperialism often hides: it is understood as a one-directional imposition of

suffering by the conquerors onto the conquered. However, imposition is also a prehension. As we can see in what used to be the country of Palestine, settler colonialism has turned the victims of genocide into the perpetrators of genocide. Antisemitism is a prehension, but so is Jewish Supremacism, and they are linked by the myth of Jewish Exceptionalism: the latter is the medium of affliction that binds both and both were exploited by the Zionist movement in pursuit of very specific interests. Likewise, Patriarchy is often presented as an imposition of male authority on women, but instead it is a relation of affliction. As the most extreme form of masculine imposition, femicide is at the same time also its most extreme annihilation. The prehension of patriarchy, in, for example, toxic masculinity, reveals not its success but its failure as those under its spell cease to function in a sustainable fashion, doomed to descend deeper and deeper into a spiral of violence and rejection (Federici, 2004).

To place Weil and Marx in dialogue, then, is to hold open a space for kenotic solidarity – a mode of collective life that refuses both bourgeois autonomy and nihilistic collapse. It is a form of solidarity grounded not in triumph or identity, but in the shared condition of loss. It affirms a dignity that does not depend on possession, mastery, or recognition, but on presence, attention, and the deliberate refusal to abandon one another. Such a vision of solidarity is especially urgent in a world where the old coordinates of political action – liberal individualism, revolutionary determinism, technocratic optimism – have been exhausted. If we are to inhabit the ruins without becoming their echo, we must learn how to act from a place of shared precarity, not as victims or saviours, but as co-sufferers who metabolize suffering through relations of affliction rather than denial.

This may easily be misconstrued as some kind of moral appeal, perhaps even as an educational programme. Too often, sociology has become just that: a soft, liberal advocacy of some kind of social contract that requires education to be accepted by more people and thereby become reality. However, we should resist this, simply because it is not good sociology. If sociology has a place among the social sciences, it is because it can explain processes without relying on implicit moralizations.

Relations of affliction that constitute kenotic solidarity are not imaginary; they are manifestations of class struggle. Kenotic solidarity is a mode of existence one is being thrown into, subjected to. It is political, it is perhaps even moral, but it is above all affirmative.

When Silvia Federici (2019) advocated for “commoning”, this was not some kind of idealist political programme but derived from practices of commoning that people, many if not most of whom are women, have actually engaged in, with varying degrees of success.

Following Federici, I understand commoning as practices of place-taking and of place-making. They are often localized but also interlinked. What characterizes practices of commoning is, on the one hand, a very realistic understanding of the pervasiveness of class struggle as framed by the unholy trinity of capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy. On the other hand, practices of commoning do not appeal to an imaginary, benevolent state as their saviour. Commoning establishes a social contract that recognizes relations of affliction and thereby supports forms of solidarity that are rooted in debt, not moral sovereignty.

Elsewhere, Kerstin Schmidt and I (Schmidt and Van Loon, 2024: 15–17) have argued that solidarity should not be understood as a gift, but as an acknowledgement of a debt that has already been incurred. Understanding solidarity in terms of debt immediately links to both David Graeber’s (2011) insightful analysis of the relationship between debt and money, as well as Alfred Sohn-Rethel’s (1978) powerful thesis on the role of real abstraction – derived from coinage – in the development of modern philosophy (but this should be extended to the whole of the western metaphysical tradition). It is only by forgetting debt that solidarity can be conceived of as self-sacrifice and thus become subjected to forms of moralization that elevate the self.

Kenosis is thus a remedy against self-valorization. Kenotic solidarity is neither a form of philanthropy nor pedagogy (e.g. sharing is caring). Once the self has been dethroned as a misrecognition of relations of affliction, once nobody can safely claim the position of pure innocence derived from pure victimhood, at that very moment, kenotic solidarity becomes possible. Kenotic solidarity is an antidote to all expressions of slave morality.

Kenotic solidarity, however, is by definition not all-inclusive. Those who reject being in debt, those who reject their prehension (cf Whitehead, 1978 [1929]) in relations of affliction, for example those who continue to pursue identity politics and engage in forms of social chauvinism, those who immunize themselves against kenosis, will continue to replace debt with guilt and cling to justifications of self-preservation and therefore cannot engage in commoning. This is not a political decision – made from a point of authority –

between inclusion and exclusion, but a de facto reality. Kenotic solidarity is exclusive not by choice but by default, as it stems from debt, not guilt, and focuses on prehension, not appropriation.

Being prehended by kenotic solidarity is to accept relations of affliction as those of debt, for example just as receiving hospitality is the very opposite of territorialization (modes of appropriation to assert sovereignty). To lose one's claim to a unified self is to enter into relations of affliction. These are not all harmonious; some of them are actually quite painful, because this is what struggle means. Although kenotic solidarity has a clear bias towards non-violence, it is not dogmatically non-violent. Existential struggles as relations of affliction can also inflict pain and even death onto others. However, this is not justified in terms of self-preservation, not even in terms of the greater good.

Postscript on the Post-Apocalypse

The Capitalocene is led by a death cult. Its unfolding cannot be peaceful. War, ecological catastrophes, pandemic diseases and organized crime are all interwoven into the death cult, which should be referred to as kakistocracy. There is no point in pretending that we are in a pre-apocalyptic phase, as the future has already been revealed to us. The Last Generation, which is perhaps the final desperate effort to stop climate change, has been vilified, criminalized and partly incarcerated. Siding with the short-term interests of capitalism, mainstream political parties and mainstream media, the mouthpieces of the state, have thereby made it absolutely clear that the ending of the world as we know it is now irreversible.

The end of the world as we know it has already happened. The cynical, callous, continued western support for ethnic cleansing and even genocide by the Israeli state has revealed that which was already known: international law has been a lullaby that nation states have sung to themselves in bad faith to appease the collective guilt of centuries of imperialist violence culminating in the death camps of the Third Reich. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the Genocide Convention of 1948 (adopted in 1951) and the Refugee Convention of 1951 (in force from 1954) unequivocally expressed a moral baseline that is not difficult to understand, but also very easy to breach, as there is no legitimate enforcement. The Israeli State has shown time and time again that international law is a

toothless tiger. All western nation states have shown very little interest in stopping this. In fact, many actually function as cheerleaders for the genocide.

A third sign of the post-apocalypse is the fact that many governments operate as major crime syndicates. Their modes of doing politics are primarily based on bribery and extortion. Thanks to Netanyahu, Putin, Erdoğan, Orbán and Trump, among many others, we can now see crimes being committed in plain sight. The intersections between trade in arms, drugs, underage prostitution and cryptocurrencies with legislation, law enforcement and jurisprudence, including extra-judicial operations by military and paramilitary forces, also flow into how asset managers control stock markets and how the military-industrial complex, fossil fuel industries, big tech industries, multinational food production and big pharmaceutical industries can control the establishment regardless of more generic public interests (including life itself). "Kakistocracy" is the surface appearance of these networks of interests, but effectively combining relentless entertainment with gaslighting and with incredibly narrow-minded articulations of interests of a very small proportion of the population.

A final sign that we have entered the post-apocalyptic condition is that we have de facto already all become Palestinians. We have been collectively disempowered and face the abyss of existential risk, perhaps not (yet) with the dramatic immediacy of people in Gaza and the West Bank facing genocide and ethnic cleansing. However, the Israeli State has effectively sown the seeds of the complete erosion of the social contract in many western states. In many countries – the USA, Canada, Australia, the UK and Germany are just a few examples – the criminalization of anti-genocide and pro-human-rights voices is very similar to how Palestinian voices have been criminalized and delegitimized since the Nakba in 1948. The expansion of the label 'terrorist' to demonize opposition to *Staatsräson* is exactly following the Netanyahu playbook: using the language of risk and insecurity to destroy democracy, civil liberties and due process.

Gaza has to be understood as the front line of the ongoing class war. It is the junctural zone where capitalism and militarism are exposed as one and the same: a death cult of a few billionaires hiding behind cynical politicians and media enterprises. This is why it is absolutely certain that climate change is going to accelerate and this is also why pandemics are going to expand, as they intersect with the collapse of public health, nutrition, drinking water, etc.

Conclusion: Sociology After Sovereignty

What this text has attempted is not a reconstruction of Durkheim, nor a rehabilitation of sociology as moral guide, prophet, or engineer of a new social order. It has instead traced the conditions under which sociology might still remain *intelligible* – and perhaps necessary – once the ideological infrastructure that sustained organic solidarity has collapsed beyond repair. The post-apocalyptic condition does not mark the absence of order, but the exposure of the order that was always there: one grounded in real abstraction, class struggle, and the systematic displacement of relational life by sovereignty, property, and identity.

Durkheim's organic solidarity now appears less as a solution than as a historically specific containment strategy – one that temporarily stabilized relations among strangers by abstracting them into the imaginary unity of the nation. Its demise does not announce chaos, but the exhaustion of abstraction as an integrative force. The contemporary resurgence of authoritarianism, militarism, and social chauvinism is not a regression to pre-modern forms, but the terminal phase of abstraction turning violently against life itself. In this sense, kakistocracy is not an anomaly but a revelation.

Against this background, the wager of this text has been deliberately modest. It does not propose a new social contract, a new universalism, or a new political subject. Instead, it has sought to identify a mode of solidarity that does not reproduce the violence of sovereignty, moral innocence, or metaphysical selfhood. Kenotic solidarity names neither a programme nor a virtue, but a condition: the lived recognition of indebtedness within relations of affliction, once the illusion of sovereign selfhood has been dismantled.

By bringing Marx and Weil into dialogue, the text has argued that dignity cannot be grounded in autonomy, rights, or recognition alone – especially once the institutions meant to secure them have become instruments of domination or indifference. Dignity, under post-apocalyptic conditions, emerges not from mastery or entitlement, but from the capacity to remain present to others without recourse to innocence, heroism, or redemption. It is sustained not by law, but by practices of commoning that metabolize struggle rather than deny it.

If sociology has a task here, it is not to prescribe futures or educate subjects into compliance with a new moral order. Its task is diagnostic, genealogical, and relational: to make visible the structures of affliction that bind lives together even as abstraction insists on their separation; to refuse the false comfort of neutrality while resisting the seductions of moral sovereignty; and to bear witness to forms of solidarity that already exist beneath the radar of institutions, funding regimes, and state-sanctioned reason. To write sociology after the end of organic solidarity is therefore to write without guarantees. It is to accept that there will be no universal inclusion, no final reconciliation, no innocent standpoint. But it is also to affirm that something persists amid the ruins: not hope as projection, but dignity as practice; not unity as identity, but togetherness as shared exposure; not sovereignty, but debt.

In the end, the post-apocalypse does not demand that we imagine a new world. It demands that we learn how to inhabit *this* one without deceiving ourselves.

References

Agamben, G. (2014) What is a destituent power? *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32(1): 65–74.

Althusser, L. (1971) Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (notes towards an investigation). In: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. B. Brewster. London: New Left Books.

Benjamin, W. (1968) 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', trans. H. Zohn, in Arendt, H. (ed.) *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken, pp. 253–264.

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Derrida, J. (1994) *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Trans. P. Kamuf. New York: Routledge.

Durkheim, É. (1984 [1893]) *The Division of Labour in Society*. Trans. W.D. Halls. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Durkheim, É. (1995 [1912]) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Trans. K.E. Fields. New York: Free Press.

Durkheim, É. and Mauss, M. (1963 [1903]) *Primitive Classification*. Trans. R. Needham. London: Cohen & West.

Federici, S. (2004) *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia.

Federici, S. (2019) *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Fisher, M. (2009) *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books.

Foucault, M. (1970 [1966]) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Tavistock.

Foucault, M. (1977 [1975]) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. A. Sheridan. London: Allen Lane.

Freud, S. (2002 [1930]) *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Trans. D. McLintock. London: Penguin.

Graeber, D. (2011) *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. New York: Melville House.

Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Ed. and trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Hobbes, T. (1996 [1651]) *Leviathan*. Ed. R. Tuck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jameson, F. (1994) *The Seeds of Time*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Jameson, F. (2003) Future city. *New Left Review* 21: 65–79.

Marx, K. (1975 [1844]) Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844. In: Marx, K. and Engels, F. *Collected Works*, vol. 3. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Marx, K. (1976 [1867]) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1. Trans. B. Fowkes. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Marx, K. and Engels, F. (2002 [1848]) *The Communist Manifesto*. Ed. G. Stedman Jones. London: Penguin.

Moore, J.W. (2015) *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. London: Verso.

Moore, J.W. (ed.) (2016) *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2006 [1887]) *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Ed. K. Ansell-Pearson, trans. C. Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Plato (2000) *Timaeus*. Trans. D.J. Zeyl. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Ryliškytė, L. (2004) Kenotic Solidarity in Discernment. *Religions* 15 (12), 1453 https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121453.

Schmidt, K. and Van Loon, J. (2024) Introduction. In Schmidt. K. and van Loon, J. (eds.) *Herausforderung Solidarität*. Bielefeld: Transcript, p. 9-30.

Schmitt, C. (2005 [1922]) *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Trans. G. Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schmitt, C. (2007 [1932]) *The Concept of the Political*. Expanded edn. Trans. G. Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Simmel, G. (1908) *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*. Berlin.

Simmel, G. (2004 [1900]) *The Philosophy of Money*. 3rd edn. Ed. D. Frisby, trans. T. Bottomore and D. Frisby. London: Routledge.

Small, A.W. (1905) *General Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sohn-Rethel, A. (1978) *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*. London: Macmillan.

Tönnies, F. (2001 [1887]) *Community and Civil Society*. Ed. J. Harris, trans. J. Harris and M. Hollis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

United Nations (1948a) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III), 10 December.

United Nations (1948b) *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. General Assembly Resolution 260 A (III), 9 December.

United Nations (1951) *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. Geneva, 28 July.

Van Loon, J. (2022) Humility and Humilitation: A Sociological Analysis of “Catholics for Trump”. – In: Kirschner, M.; Stauffer, I. & Fritz, A. (eds.): *Transformationen in Zeiten religiöser und gesellschaftlicher Umbrüche. Dieselbe Welt und doch alles anders.* Baden-Baden: Nomos, S. 407 – 422.

Van Loon, J. (2024) Performing Christianities, Christofascism and Becoming-Palestinian: Gianni Vattimo’s concept of Kenosis. – In: Van Loon, J.; Katharina Karl & Martin Kirschner (Hrsg.): *Performing Christianities. Differenzfähigkeit des Christlichen in planetarem Kontext*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, S. 359 – 375.

Vattimo, G. (1988 [1985]) *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*. Trans. J.R. Snyder. Cambridge: Polity.

Vattimo, G. (1999) *Belief*. Trans. L. D’Isanto and D. Webb. Cambridge: Polity.

Vattimo, G. (2002) *After Christianity*. Trans. L. D’Isanto. New York: Columbia University Press.

Vattimo, G. and Rovatti, P.A. (eds) (2012 [1983]) *Weak Thought*. Trans. P. Carravetta. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Weber, M. (1978 [1922]) *Economy and Society*. Ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weil, S. (1951) *Waiting for God*. Trans. E. Craufurd. New York: Putnam. [incl. 'The love of God and affliction']

Weil, S. (2002 [1947]) *Gravity and Grace*. Trans. E. Crawford and M. von der Ruhr. London: Routledge.

Whitehead, A.N. (1978 [1929]) *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Corrected edn. Ed. D.R. Griffin and D.W. Sherburne. New York: Free Press.

Žižek, S. (1994) Introduction: The spectre of ideology. In: Žižek, S. (ed.) *Mapping Ideology*. London: Verso, pp. 1–33.

Bisher erschienene Eichstätter Beiträge zur Soziologie

Nr. 1: Knut Petzold, Thomas Brunner & Carlos Watzka: Determinanten der Zustimmung zur Frauenquote. Ergebnisse einer Bevölkerungsumfrage (12/2013)

Nr. 2: Joost van Loon & Laura Unsöld: The Work and the Net: a Critical Reflection on Facebook-Research Methods and Optical Mediation (02/2014)

Nr. 3: Stefanie Eifler: Projekt „Zusammenleben in der Stadt" - Methodendokumentation (03/2014)

Nr. 4: Basil Wiesse: Intercultural Atmospheres – The Affective Quality of Gift Situations (09/2014)

Nr. 5: Florian Mayr: Gibt es Krisen, und wenn ja wie viele? – Theoretisch-konzeptionelle Überlegungen zu einer Soziologie der Krise (12/2014)

Nr. 6: Ramona Kay: Delinquente Opfer und viktimisierte Täter? Eine Analyse des Offending-Victimization-Overlap mit Hilfe der International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD-2) (Working Paper) (05/2015)

Nr. 7: Stefanie Eifler, Natalja Menold & Sara Pinkas: Metrische Eigenschaften des Semantischen Differentials zur Messung von Selbst- und Fremdbeschreibungen (11/2015)

Nr. 8: Rémy Bocquillon & Joost van Loon: Soundlapse: The Will to Know as a Matter of Concern (05/2016)

Nr. 9: Joost van Loon: Geworfenheit und Intensität: Ein Ansatz zum monistischen Denken mit Heidegger (11/2016)

Nr. 10: Franziska Hodek: „Das is' Matip, mann!" – Empirische Ideen zu Effekten von *Accounting* im Profifußball (02/2017)

Nr. 11: Stefanie Eifler, Ramona Kay & Sara Pinkas: Projekt „Zusammenleben in der Stadt" – Eine Sozialraumanalyse aus der Perspektive der Theorie der sozialen Desorganisation (05/2017)

Nr. 12: Simon J. Charlesworth: Merlau-Ponty: Devaluation and Competence (11/2017)

Nr. 13: Edda Mack: *fremd* vor dem Anderen: Ein Versuch der Herauslösung des Anderen aus dem Fremden (05/2018)

Nr. 14: Hannah Bucher: Soziale Erwünschtheit im Faktoriellen Survey. Eine empirische Analyse der Präsentationsform von Vignetten (11/2018)

Nr. 15: Moritz Wischert-Zielke: Schwarzer Block in Hamburg: Busfahrgäste in Angst. Eine Online-Teilnehmer*innenvideo-Analyse (05/2019)

Nr. 16: Miryam Verbeek-Teres: Visuelle Stimuli in der Umfrageforschung. Ein Überblick über die Anwendung von Fotografien in Befragungen (11/2019)

Nr. 17: Heinz Leitgöb, Stefanie Eifler & Julia Weymeirsch: Ein Instrument zur Erfassung allgemeiner Moralvorstellungen (ALLMOR) (05/2020)

Nr. 18: Hannah Schwarzbach & Stefanie Eifler: Einflüsse der Präsentationsform eines faktoriellen Surveys zur Erfassung von Sicherheit im öffentlichen Raum (11/2020)

Nr. 19: Stefanie Eifler, Knut Petzold & Miryam Verbeek-Teres: Presentation Format Differences in Factorial Surveys (05/2021)

Nr. 20: Sandra Balbierz: ‚Theory in the Making'. Von der Spurensuche zum experimentellen Theoretisieren (11/2021)

Nr. 21: Hannah Schwarzbach & Stefanie Eifler: A Visual Factorial Survey to Measure Feelings of Safety in Public Places (05/2022)

Nr. 22: Adrian Jakob & Stefanie Eifler: Projekt „Leben in Frankfurt am Main". Methodendokumentation (11/2022)

Nr. 23: Julia Weymeirsch & Stefanie Eifler: Projekt „Alltagsleben in der Pandemie". Methodendokumentation (05/2023)

Nr. 24: Joost van Loon: Entfremdung und Schwangerschaft: Ein soziologischer Versuch zur Neugestaltung politischer Subjektivität (11/2023)

Nr. 25: Joost van Loon: Kanonisierung der Risikosoziologie als Sozialtechnik im Zeitalter der Kakistokratie (05/2024)

Nr. 26: Joost van Loon: Alienation, Decreation and Kenotic Solidarity: Dialectical Historical Materialism for a Post-Apocalyptic World (11/2024)