

## Reflections on Trash-humanism as Performed by Jaime del Val

Yunus Tuncel<sup>1</sup>

In the online event, Metahuman Futures Forum, which took place in August 2022 and was co-organized by Reverso/Metabody and the Posthuman Lab, I had reflected on Jaime del Val's 'Trash-human Enhancement and Planetary Health' and made the following observations, which can be grouped in five parts: a) the place of the body and embodiment; b) relational ethics; c) alternatives and the healing process; d) transvaluation and what the future holds for humanity; e) protestation, resistance and cultural transformation without utopianism.

### The place of the body and embodiment

Del Val's remarks on the damaged planetary health and diagnosis of the atrophied body are reminiscent of Nietzsche's 'ascetic idealism' through which Nietzsche shows the problems of underestimation of the body and repression of desire and instincts.

**The Body as reply:** underlying this millennia long problem of domination and earth appropriation linked to agricultural societies, lies an impoverishment of the body. An impoverished body has been created with an impoverished planet, a culture of atrophied, aligned, immobile bodies—an **Unhanced Trash-human**—with atrophied thoughts, always lacking something, depending on unsustainable systems, feeding a spiral of narrow sensibility and reductive intelligence that interrupts symbiotic evolution (Del Val, 2022, 4).

The 'impoverishment of body' has been the problem of human civilization. Nietzsche diagnoses it as a problem of both the civilizing process (GM II) and Christian (or monotheistic) morality (GM I and III). Del Val rightly emphasizes this problem within the context of our times and transhumanism. Recent dominant technologies perpetuate this impoverishment in the form of disembodiment, attempting to detach intelligence and thought from organic life. Disdain for organic life and the body is clear and has, to the dismay of many postmodern and posthumanist thinkers, stamped itself in contemporary life. That disdain for the body is grounded in ascetic idealism and is related to logocentricity, a problem Nietzsche had started exposing in his early works. Del Val expresses it very well, as the impoverished body in our technological society is linked to the disruption of symbiotic evolution, which entails, among other things, mind/body dualism. The Cartesian project that attempts to establish the hegemony of the mind over the body finds its climax in the transhumanist vision of technology.

Del Val considers the conflict between two conceptions of the body to be significant, a "millennia old war" (Del Val, 2022, 5). Here Del Val portrays the evolution of the old model, 'the impoverishment of the body' and shows how pervasive it is in our world today. Interestingly

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<sup>1</sup> Yunus Tuncel, New York University, United States. E-mail: [yt9@nyu.edu](mailto:yt9@nyu.edu)



enough, this model perpetuates denial of death and fear of death, despite its concomitant belief in after life (in some of its versions). This millennia-old model does, in fact, emphasize self-preservation and dismisses the death drive—the significance of the death drive and its destructive force is not recognized until recently in western thought). The new model proposed by Del Val, on the other hand, emphasizes the Dionysian forces: “In this tradition the body is claimed as irreducible field of forces whose indeterminable dynamism is the very creative force of life that mobilises evolution in a cosmos: an affirmative Dionysian worldview for an overabundant universe” (Del Val, 2022, 6). Affirmation of the body is already in the notion of the Dionysian, as elucidated by Nietzsche in his interpretation of ancient Greek theatre and its origins.

### **Relational ethics**

In opposing isolationist and exclusivist ethics, Del Val proposes a relational ethics. By ‘relational ethics’ Del Val understands the belonging-together of all singular beings on our planet; a belonging that emphasizes the singularly diverse nature of all beings, their mobility and different forms of relationality. This is how he explains the necessity of such ethics:

Furthermore, a relational ethics is needed to overcome the epochal errors of pathocentric ethics that only considers individual suffering, along a pyramid of degrees of awareness and sensation, as ground for ethics. What is missed along the way is the understanding of the dynamic equilibrium of ecosystems and evolution understood as a neverending process of variation, in reciprocal self-organization and emergence of fields of biodiversification, where imposing top-down criteria implies generalised destabilization. The degree of plasticity (which means also openness and indetermination) of ecosystems should be the measure for ethics and how it affords a flourishing of life as emergent diversification process (Del Val, 2022, 8).

Human beings have, for millennia, been at variance with the earth and its ecosystems, as Del Val observes above. Human rational interference has set us away and apart from the earth and we have come to conquer and dominate nature. In this way we have disturbed the dynamic equilibrium that has existed for millions of years on our planet. It is high time to embrace the earth. In agreement with Del Val, but going somewhat further, I would add that the problem does not lie in how we consider ourselves, in our self-knowledge and introspection, as long as that self-understanding is pluralistic and perspectival; the problem lies when we project ourselves onto other beings, when we project qualities that do not exist in other beings. Self-knowledge and introspection about who we are not mutually exclusive with coexisting with other beings in healthy ecosystems. Relational ethics should not dismiss introspection but rather examine the types of our self-understandings and their quality in relation to ecosystems. The last part of the quote above suggests that human beings need to change according to planetary changes and should not make attempts to alter ecosystems. Now, how this can be implemented in practice is a big question: How would humans create habitats without cutting down trees and destroying forests? What should humans do in the face of natural catastrophes? How should humans act in conflicts with animals? These and many other questions remain at the crux of this idea of adaptability to the plasticity of ecosystems. There are no easy answers and solutions in our age of climate crisis.

### **Alternatives and the healing process**

After delineating the problems, we are faced with due to the Planetary Holocaust, which works with different modalities of necropower, biopower and ontopower, Del Val proposes alternatives. “We



urgently need alternatives” in the face of the new master/slave dialectics. The masters are those who perpetuate and expand the planetary crisis and slaves are those who yearn for their lifestyles. “The Trash-human is thus both the master and the slave, and the impoverished planet” (Del Val, 2022, 16). Beyond their seeming differences, both sides agree on and perpetuate the vicious circle of Planetary Holocaust.

Human suprematism and its Planetary Holocaust are leading to the 6<sup>th</sup> Mass Extinction; this is Del Val’s conclusion. The world is upside down; a nihilistic denial of life, as Nietzsche diagnosed in 1880s, reigns supreme. Del Val, however, is not pessimistic, despite the fact that the bell of doom and gloom rings in different parts of this essay. There are ways out of today’s seeming impasse, but one needs to be inventive and imaginative, and there are different ways of being innovative and creative, which address the concerns and needs of our times. “Affirming its inevitability implies sheer complicitness with a destruction of cosmic implications, and a lack of imagination and deeper creativity for inventing other possibilities” (Del Val, 2022, 16).

Planetary health can be recovered through a new intelligence or wisdom if reduction and domination are replaced by variation and symbiosis. By ‘reduction’ Del Val may mean the effacement of diversity under the hegemonic will to truth. However, ‘domination’ is not clear; there are always values that reign, that dominate. Del Val is also proposing new posthumanist values that, in his view, should reign to achieve and sustain planetary health. What values should dominate for a singularly diverse, symbiotic planetary health? This is the question. To this end, to reverse the order of values, Del Val wants to go to the root of metaphysical problems and uncover a new sensibility, new ways of “moving-perceiving-living” (Del Val, 2022, 19), which metaformativity and metahumanism call for and present pathways as to how this reversal can be possible.

### **Transvaluation and what the future holds for ‘humanity’**

To reverse the existing trend, which is a gigantic task for humanity if not impossible, Del Val proposes three actions under a Dionysian politics of life (Del Val, 2022, 20-22): The first one has to do with body enriching. Here we learn how to affirm the earth and the body and thereby learn how to move again. Del Val is not only a theoretician but also a practitioner of movement. We need to learn what movement is and live the body that we are. Sedentary life is not only unhealthy; it is against life forces. Del Val claims that the change proposed will not take away our comfort; well, let it take away some of our comfort. We have become too comfortable. To push this agenda further, we may attack the problem of bodily regimes of movement in three areas: sport and exercise culture, dance and performance, and sexuality. In at least all these three areas, the body has to be uncovered and made to live in motion. The second Dionysian policy has to do with population reduction. Human population has grown from 1 million to 8 billion in 10,000 years, as per Del Val’s figures and diagrams (9-10), while many other species have disappeared. This exponential growth is unsustainable and will bring humanity to extinction. Del Val proposes a gradual but radical reduction to pre-industrial levels (21). For this to happen non-reproductive forms of sexuality should be encouraged and practiced, as Del Val rightly urges. While agreeing with Del Val to a large extent, I must also note that Del Val misses out on the urge most humans have to be a parent, to leave an offspring behind. To address this problem, a limit must be imposed on how many children each person can have, which should be one. This policy was used in China until recent times; the limit there was one child per couple. In my proposal, I am also considering single parents or any type of posthumanist family constellation. Lastly, the third policy addresses the problems of consumption and waste. Del Val considers less consumption almost in all areas of human consumption from

food to clothing and calls for new, innovative technologies that will be in tune with earth, which will entail a radical transformation of our existing patterns of consumption. Del Val encourages us to learn from gatherers and other animals for cultivating a minimalist approach to the use of resources. Produce, exchange, and consume as much as you need, that is, based on your authentic needs, rather than be trapped in the exchange value of capitalism; this seems to be the motto of Del Val. However novel these ideas and proposals may be, Del Val has to consider structural, systemic issues, deeply ingrained traditions, and paternalistic regimes of ruling that are sustained in and through violence. Their transformation may take decades.

### **Protestation, resistance and cultural transformation without utopianism**

In conclusion, Del Val's manifesto as a protestation against the problems of our age and its planetary crisis is timely, although an overwhelmingly majority of humanity, in any position of power, will not heed such wisdom for different reasons. Those who are in ruling position, especially in closed, autocratic structures are not open to such suggestions, because they will upset their ruling. On the other hand, a big portion of humanity lives in poor conditions and can hardly survive. They are not in any condition to take these suggestions into account and implement them. Unfortunately, they are the ones who suffer the most or who have the least resources to combat and remedy the effects of planetary crisis. Those others, the few who can heed such words of wisdom, must be careful in not falling into any strict prescriptions in finding remedies; conditions are different in different parts of the planet. We must consider specific contexts and find remedies creatively and innovatively, as we learn from Del Val's studies, reflections, and stance on the crisis of our planet today.

### **References**

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