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**Article**

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Economic and Environmental Studies (E&ES)

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Opole University

*Suggested Citation:* Veisland, Jørgen (2013) : Waste: The debris of a post-political global society, Economic and Environmental Studies (E&ES), ISSN 2081-8319, Opole University, Faculty of Economics, Opole, Vol. 13, Iss. 3, pp. 235-237

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/93205>

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# Waste: the debris of a post-political global society<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The author gives some philosophical reflections on the issue of ever increasing amount of waste in the context of the believe that technology can solve any problem, while itself being one of the sources of the problem.

**Keywords:** waste, environmental philosophy

Technical solutions to the waste problem are non-logical and non-practical. They do not solve the problem of the steady increase in all forms of waste around the globe; rather, they magnify the problem by obfuscating it. They are in themselves part of the problem because they, qua being solutions of a technical/chemical nature, may be interpreted as extensions of the linear sociocultural model which has persisted in the West since the end of the 19th century, and which is now spreading to the rest of the globe owing to the forces of globalization. This dissemination of linearity has to do with the predominance in our culture of an erroneous belief - even a fanatic faith - in progress and in measuring progress, or quantifying it. The belief in progress and evolution, i.e. the amelioration of society and its progress towards ever higher production and consumption and ever higher standards of living, originates in a cultural paradigm that concentrates human interest on external, material goals, and on devising methods to depict these goals, visualize them, embody them so to speak in physical terms; that is, the psychology of materialism is a sign and a symptom of the fallacy of the human mind and spirit; it is at the same time the result of a tendency that has been predominant since the 1800s and earlier in Europe:

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<sup>1</sup> This article was published in *Economic and Environmental Studies* 2003/3: 113-115.

The tendency to subject the human subject to a process of objectification (which Karl Marx called 'alienation', or *Verfremdung*) through positing everything human, as well as nature itself, within a scientific perspective governed by Reason. The advance of the sciences, including those that deal with 'the clean-up' of the environment, may be interpreted as the progressive de-subjectivization, or de-humanization of the human subject. This process involves depriving the human subject of direct access to the Universal, in the Hegelian sense; according to Hegel, the Universal - read, Universal Truth, Universal Rights etc. - is split between an abstract and a particular from the beginning. The Universal, in other words, changes all the time; it is not stable, constant or eternal. Rather, it is defined and conceived by each particular case, i.e. each 'subject' that claims access to it. A good example of this is the multicultural society where 'Universal Right' is defined anew each time a minority claims access to it.

The blocking out of this access to the Universal is a process that is ongoing in global society. In a way, it IS globalization; for globalization, i.e. the dissemination of capital, thrives on the consumer model, for the consumer/production model is totally subservient to and dependent upon standardization and objectification of human desire. We all desire something more than what we have, and if the mind and the spirit are left behind in the race for progress, the logical result is materialism. This process in turn also invades the world of politics. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard spoke of 'the teleological suspension of the ethical' as being necessary for the true subjectivization of our relation to God; only the individual subject may achieve this relation. It is not subject to any socio-cultural forces or political ideologies. Likewise, I would like to speak of 'the political suspension of the ethical' as being necessary if we are to practice politics once again; for it seems to me that consumerism has annihilated dialectics and opposition in politics. The logical consequence of this is that each individual in her/himself must act in a political sense, without party membership, and make her/his own choice as to what is right or wrong in every political situation. Schematization, formalization and organization in politics and in culture are obsolete methods of achieving progress. Progress is not linear, anyway; it is internal only and cannot be measured.

The ever-growing accumulation of waste in the world as a whole may be described as human, spiritual 'debris' in the sense that all this waste is the left-over of the failed production, or creation of the human psyche. Our desire is spiritual, internal by nature and manifests itself as something intangible. The need for systems will perforce repress the mind's natural tendency for

expansion in direction of the unlimited and the metaphysical. That which is untangible even to the spirit itself, once subjected to the rigidity of systems and organizations, will necessarily become embodied, materialized as a grotesque, superfluous 'spill-over' of that surplus-creativity which the human mind is always capable of and always striving for. This grotesque, almost surreal 'spill-over' is the mental debris I am speaking of; it is the exact equivalent of actual, tangible waste, being profligated all across the surface of the planet as excrement. Spiritual excrement - can we imagine anything more absurdly contrary to the striving of the human mind? Yet, this is what we have, and we have more of it every day. To cope with it we need to envision the recovery of the human spirit as a new individualization beyond economics and politics. That would, perhaps, require opening up to Eastern philosophies and practices; not in the form of a 'sixties revival', but in the form of a protest against consumerism and materialism. If such a protest were to occur globally - as it is, in a way, as I write - then we might be able to curb waste. Absurdly, waste is produced from within and must therefore be terminated from within.

*Odpady: pozostałości post-politycznego społeczeństwa globalnego*

*Streszczenie:*

Autor przedstawia pewne filozoficzne refleksje, dotyczące kwestii wciąż rosnącej ilości odpadów, w kontekście przekonania, że technologia może rozwiązać każdy problem, podczas gdy sama stanowi jedno ze źródeł problemu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** odpady, filozofia środowiskowa