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# A HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY IDEAS

**A reading of the process of secularisation**

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# Needs the Introduction

# PART I

# THE ROOTS OF MODERNITY

The idea of *Secularization* has pride of place among the traits considered typical of the Modern Era. It is often said that the modern world is a secularized world, and the medieval world Christian. This is a simplistic statement. Some distinctions are required to prevent an excessively black and white outlook on History. Grandiose approaches to interpret history usually leave out huge gaps that miss out on real facts. Factual reality never comes in pure colours, but rather with a full array of hues.

The process of secularization is not univocal. Secularization is not the same as dechristianisation. The progressive establishment of the autonomy of temporal affairs may coincide with a process of *de-clericalization* - understood as a process that would purify the historical concretions of Christian inspiration of elements foreign to said inspiration-, but it can also lead to claims of the absolute independence of temporal realities from any transcendence.

The concept of *Christendom* is also ambivalent. In the following pages I understand it as the socio-political organisation that was created in Western Europe through the Low Middle Ages (11th century to mid-15th century). Christendom was one of the possible social specifications of Christianity, but there is no reason to consider it as the Christian socio-political organisation *par excellence*, even if there was such a thing. Medieval Christendom resembles Janus, the two-faced god of the romans: a Christian face -therefore deeply human- that gave men the chance to provide a sensible solution to the more important questions of human existence. At the same time, it gave rise to social manifestations that were the keep safe of undying values, such as universities and hospitals. We call the other face of Christendom clerical, often confusing the natural and supernatural orders; this led to wrongly identify two sets of different realities: on one hand spiritual and political power, and on the other being part of the City of God and of the earthly city.

The problem of medieval Christendom is a political problem. If spiritual and temporal powers have the same origin and the same end, it is fair to identify them, and the separation is not necessary. But if there is some difference either in the origin or in the end, there is no excuse for either be absorbed by the other: it would amount to an abuse of power.

How the problem of medieval Christendom is approached can vary. If we want to maintain the socio-political status quo we will adopt a clerical outlook: the solution to temporal problems would be -more or less- in the hands of those who have the *munus regendi Ecclesiae*, that is, the ecclesiastical hierarchy: the idea is that the temporal power of the prince derives from the spiritual power. If this attitude is taken to the extreme, we encounter traditionalism: the starting point would be to consider medieval Christendom as the specific manifestation of the essence of Christianity *in terra*, it aspires - *desideratum* - to return to medieval society and its vision of the world.

Those who maintain that the remote origin of both powers is the same -God- but their respective ends are different -the supernatural common good in the first case, and temporal common good in the other-, would be developing a process of secularization understood as a becoming aware of the relative autonomy of the temporal domain. It is a relative autonomy because, according to this understanding, the temporal sphere, by its very origin, is anchored within a transcendent perspective.

Finally, there are those who assert that temporal power - and generally the world of man - not only has a different end, but it has no transcendent element in its origin, are promoting a process of secularization that gives absolute autonomy to the temporal sphere. This approach can be identified with a term introduced in the 19th century: *laicism*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Secularization does not mean loss of the religious sense. If the process of secularization is understood in its strong form, it leads to *disenchantment*, the famous concept of Max Weber. During the modern epoch there is a crisis of faith manifested in the de-mythification and rationalization of the world, in a growing loss of transcendence beyond what can be seen and grabbed. We could say, using Kahn’s words, that the crisis of faith “means losing the image of a unitary and secure world, where all the parts are related to a centre: it is therefore the loss of the centre. In so far as we inherited this image of the world with the certitude of a centre, we can certainly talk of a “disinherited mind”[[2]](#footnote-2). If faith in a personal and transcendent God disappears, the religious sense inherent in the human spirit finds other centres that become absolute: earthly elements become the foundation of substitute religions. This process is evident in contemporary ideologies, but it already happened in the first stages of Modernity. We only need to think of the enlightened reason, the Romantic feeling or the absolute self of German idealism.

We will begin the study of the roots of Modernity analysing the new spirit that rises in the mid-15th Century in Western Europe: the Renaissance, so rich in content that it does not admit simplistic views. On the other hand, the discovery of America is a *feat that creates an epoch*. It sets the change from one historical reality to another, which we call *structures or units of historical understanding*. Looking at them from the perspective of this book -the history of ideas- we will attempt to assess how the discovery of America influenced the process of secularization that typifies the transit from medieval Christendom to Modernity. A two-faced secularization, just as Christendom was also two-faced. We will then consider the role of the protestant reformation -another “feat that creates an epoch. In the following two chapters we will briefly outline the most important features of the Old and the New Regime, in order to capture the differences between these two periods of Modernity, split by the revolutions of the late 18th century. In successive chapters we will spend some time studying the philosophical and ideological origins of the New Regime, and highlight the assessment of the Enlightenment, which is the principal source of the ideological Modernity. The second part of the course is dedicated to the ideology of Modernity. The first part ends looking at Romanticism and the German idealism, where we will find traits that will be an integral part of the ideological Modernity.

## I THE RENAISSANCE, THE NEW WORLD AND THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

A series of historical facts between the 15th and 16th centuries point to the end of a world -the Middle Ages- and the beginning of a new one -the Modern era. The fall of Constantinople to the hands of the Turks in 1453 ends the one-thousand-year survival of the Roman empire. This event had serious consequences for the new configuration of the world. Many theologians, philosophers, writers, and philologists from Byzantium will leave their home and migrate to Italy -mainly Florence-, thus strengthening a return to the classic forms of culture: it will be called Renaissance or Humanism. The closure of the commercial route to the East caused by the fall of Byzantium will be a key factor in the progress of science and navigational techniques in the second half of the 15th century. These developments opened the gates to new routes to India and China. Some of these attempts will lead, providentially, to the discovery of America, and thus broaden the European vision of the world. In 1513, shortly before Magellan began his circumnavigation of the world, and Cortés reached the gates of Mexico, an Augustinian monk in Wittenberg, Martin Luther, begins to preach against Rome. The end of medieval unity of Christendom caused by the disputes between Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists and Anglicans will have massive consequences, just as those caused by the entry of the new American continent in the world scene.

Renaissance, discovery of America and protestant Reformation gave rise to many new ideas; their rapid spread was possible thanks to an important technological development: the discovery of the press by Johannes Guttenberg in the middle of the 15th century.

The 15th and 16th centuries are a kind of hinge between two historical structures: medieval Christendom (11th to mid-15th century) and the Ancient Regime (17th and 18th centuries). A time marked by change, where modern novelties co-exist with persistent medieval realities. We will pay particular attention to the elements that show the beginning of the process of secularization, as described earlier: affirmation of man’s absolute autonomy, and de-clericalization, or awareness of the relative autonomy of temporal realities.

### 1. Renaissance and anthropocentrism

The term Renaissance designates a series of cultural processes that took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but whose first signs can already be found in the fourteenth century. Perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of the Renaissance spirit is a return to the classical culture. The arrival of Greek humanists in Italy favoured the studies of Greco-Roman antiquity. The meticulous analysis of the sources and the effort to understand the texts in their historical context gave life to this revival of the classical culture.

During the Middle Ages, scholastic theology used many classical sources as instruments for giving a systematic exposition of the faith. But in the Renaissance, the focus was assessing the very sources themselves: philological, rhetorical, and linguistic studies brought Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Cicero back to academic interest. Humanists emulated Greco-Latin eloquence, surpassing the decline of the low-medieval stylistics.

A similar process took place in the visual arts. Using ancient Mediterranean architecture, paintings, and sculptures as examples for models, many Italian artists gave a classical reminiscence to their work throughout Europe. It suffices to mention the names of Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael, Botticelli, and Titian, to understand the importance of the Renaissance in the emerging modern world.

The new-found interest in the origins of European civilization also manifested itself in a renewed impulse to study the origins of Christianity. During the Renaissance, numerous editions of Sacred Scripture were published that sought to replicate the original text of the Bible more accurately than that which was offered by the traditional Vulgate edition, deemed to be riddled with errors. At the same time, the Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam and other authors began to write about the Fathers of the Church, who were revered as the most authoritative testimony of early Christian life

In the area of science, the astronomical discoveries of Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, and Kepler introduced cosmological theories that later changed the world’s understanding of the universe. However, their new vision would take years to gather popular acceptance. Major technological developments were also achieved in navigation, military art, mining, etc., Although these developments relied on medieval inventions, they were considered very advanced for their period and paved the way for a more sustained, revolutionary and technological development in the seventeenth century.

It is not possible to detail everything in these pages. The Renaissance has many rich facets of diversity, and it is not feasible to adequately address the effects that such a movement had on modern consciousness. But a cursory analysis might give the following first impression: The Renaissance rediscovered the classical world in its radical anthropocentrism, in sharp contrast with the theocentric medieval Christian tradition. From the fifteenth century onward, the transcendent vision of life was abandoned for a new focus on the intrinsic value of natural things. Obviously, this brief description may be accused of being simplistic; a more thorough and precise analysis of events would be necessary.

When we speak of the philosophy of the renaissance, it is evident that the intellectual environment is different from the medieval scholasticism of the low middle ages, at least regarding style, methods and topics. Renaissance philosophy is not a unified block: there are platonic currents, mainly in Florence, that attempt to integrate classic thought and Christianity. Other schools have a tendency towards naturalism. In the Plato inspired schools, the main topic is man, understood as a microcosmos in harmony with the universe, who contemplates God’s perfection as the model that man ought to imitate. *Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494)* or *Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)* could be considered anthropocentric, not in the sense of denial of transcendence, but simply because the study of man is key in their work. But we are talking about a man who would be inconceivable without reference to God. Other more naturalistic renaissance currents will set the basis for the view of man’ absolute autonomy, such as the aristotelic school of Padua, that denies that the immortality of the soul can be demonstrated with rational arguments. In general terms, we can say the platonic influence permitted harmonious syntheses between the classical culture and a Christian outlook of man, whereas the aristotelic schools tended towards an autonomous naturalism that would clash with some religious truths.

In the field of the arts, the Renaissance witnessed a proliferation of a secular aesthetic, involving mythological themes and sensual representations, as well as an exaltation of the Christian faith through buildings, paintings, sculptures, and musical compositions. In fact, renaissance architects combined both tendencies when they utilized materials of classical ruins when constructing the most important churches of Christian Rome. The common element among the several artistic expressions of the Renaissance is an appreciation of nature, embodied in new techniques that gave a predominant role to the human body and that used the laws of perspective to reproduce artistic space. It ought to be mentioned that this common appreciation of creation and earthly life is not necessarily opposed to a transcendent vision of human existence. Leonardo da Vinci (1425-1519) asserted the predominance of the sense of sight when he coined the expression “the eye is the most dignified of the senses,” which was to become one of the traits of Modernity: the primacy of the experimental over oral tradition (transmitted through hearing from authority). The other trait was the tendency to establish the logic of man’s mastery over nature, later highlighted by Galileo, Descartes and Francis Bacon.

The desire to go back to the sources of Christian life, namely Sacred Scripture and the Fathers, did not imply an out-and-out criticism of religion as such, but rather a yearning for a purification of Christian living that identified and purged elements of superstition and merely human customs that had settled in over the centuries. The philological studies of Lorenzo Valla, for example, disproved the “Donation of Constantine,” which allegedly was a decree of the Emperor that bequeathed all of Constantine’s temporal powers over central Italy to the Pope, as a medieval invention devoid of historical foundation. Sometimes the humanists were driven by mere academic interest, but in many cases too, philological studies were motivated by a sincere desire for moral reformation, as with the works of Thomas More, Juan Luis Vives and, to some extent, Erasmus of Rotterdam.

The reassessment of the classical age at times presented a temptation to “overcome” Christianity, offering models such as the stoic-epicurean life, as in the case of libertinism. But that same reassessment also opened a possibility of presenting Christianity as the culmination of what is truly human, as that which perfects and completes the deficiencies of man understood in a classical view.

The Renaissance’s anthropocentrism secularizes in various ways, so it is necessary to distinguish the various paths lest we fall into a maniquean outlook. We can certainly observe a strong secularizing trend - as in asserting man’s absolute autonomy- in one of the central doctrines of the Renaissance, that had a great influence over the following centuries: the political theory of Nicholas Machiavelli (1469-1527). The doctrine he developed radically split politics from religion and morality. According to Machiavelli the classical political tradition had set its eyes on man as he ought to be. Thus, the Greco-Latin and medieval political solutions were very abstract, far away from the reality of facts. The historical circumstances of Renaissance Italy will lead him to look further down and to contemplate the real man, trapped in his existential contradiction. The ultimate end of the prince should be to hold on to political power. In order to do this, one needs to know human passions and play with them. According to this pragmatic approach, any means that allows to hold on to power becomes licit. Politics enjoys a particular autonomy, where the rules of natural morals and the truths of revealed religion are no longer absolute, and they become means for the conservation of the State, which is identified in some of his pages with the strength of political power.

Machiavelli was probably not aware of the consequences that his theory would have in a far distant future, when other political theories based on force and violence appeared in the stage of world history. The secularization of politics, among other consequences, proclaims State reason as the ultimate goal of national states. Cardinal Richelieu in the 17th century, and Otto von Bismarck in the 19th will be the main followers of this theory within the sphere of international relations, thus setting the groundwork for the great tragedies of the 20th century. These theories will be the object of our study in the second part of the course.

The intellectuals of the Renaissance were acutely aware of the dawn of a new era. Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), painter and art historian, was the first to use the term “modern”[[3]](#footnote-3) when he referred to the new styles in painting, architecture and sculpture, considered to excel even above the classics. Francis Bacon talks about a “third period”, after Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and asserts that “this third period will exceed the cultural patrimony of Greece and Rome by a long way”. In 1559 Mathias Quadt declared: “what in former times could only be assimilated by a few, selected minds, is now understood by ordinary, mediocre people, with precarious learning. A day will come when all the secrets of nature will be accessible to the human mind.”[[4]](#footnote-4) In the same period, Jean Fernel praised “our era, which sees the arts and sciences triumphantly reborn after twelve centuries of neglect.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Thus came into being the self-referential concept of modernity, with its affirmation of human capacities, and pitted against the previous period, which they labelled as Gothic and barbarian.

### 2. Discovery of America and secularization

The contact that Europeans had with the American continent brought about a large number of consequences. As we concentrate on those that had an influence in the process of secularization, we will consider the criticisms levelled at medieval theocracy, based on the events in American lands, and the making of a new anthropological figure that will serve as a basis for the revolutionary doctrines of the end of the 18thth century: the vision of the primitive man as the noble savage, who lives in perfect harmony with nature.

#### a) The Just Titles and the secularization of medieval theocracy

When Columbus returned from his first trip, the Castilian crown quickly negotiated with the Holy See to obtain a number of privileges on the recently discovered lands. This was the usual practice in Europe in the 15th century, as it still was morally united under the authority of the Roman Pontiff. With four ‘Bulls’ Pope Alexander VI, in 1493, donated the kings of Castile the lands already discovered and others to be discovered, for the purpose of evangelizing them. Behind this donation lay the idea that the Roman Pontiff had the ultimate spiritual and temporal power over the whole world, and could, therefore, donate lands populated by infidels to a Christian kingdom, by reason of its evangelization. The *Indian question* - the doubt of the Christian conscience regarding the right to occupy America- soon appeared. The in-principle declarations of the kings of Castile and the legislation enacted in defence of the America aborigines -free vassals, good treatment, humanitarian labour laws- are based on the assumed substantial validity of the pontifical donation. The theoreticians of the Burgos Junta of 1512, which gave rise to legislation in favour of the indigenous people, remained convinced that the medieval theocracy approach was correct: the Roman Pontiff had universal power, not only spiritual but also temporal. Therefore, the title of possession of the king over the Indies was none other than pontifical gift. This can be gleaned in the work of the Dominican Matias de la Paz, *De dominio Regun Hispaniae super indos*, and in the work of the lawyer Palacios Rubios, *De insulis oceanis.*

Other authors, such as the nominalist master Maior and the humanist Ginés de Sepúlveda, combined the theocratic arguments with Aristotle’s theory of slavery as a natural condition. Bearing in mind that the Indians were barbaric, it was licit for the Christian princes to subject them to servitude, because this is what they were called to by their very nature[[6]](#footnote-6).

It was not until 1538 that these theories were put to rest once and for all. This particular piece of sorting out became a milestone in the process of secularization, a feature of the Modern era. Its author was a Castilian Dominican, the founder of the Salamanca School, Francis de Vitoria (1492-1546). His *Relectio de Indis* is a short piece, delivered verbally to the faculty of the University of Salamanca. It has three sections. In the first part Vitoria asks whether the Indians were the true owners -in other words, whether they had the power of mastery- before the Spaniards arrived; in the second section he examines seven titles used by the Spanish colonisers to justify America’s occupation; Vitoria does not rate them at all; in the third and final section he proposes seven titles that could legitimize the mastery of the Crown over the Indies, and an eight title which he considers is only probable.

The features of this work would make you think that Vitoria belongs fully in the medieval scholasticism. But the presentation of his novel arguments is so forceful that becomes the founder of modern international law, and puts medieval theocracy in a state of crisis. Vitoria opposes a tradition followed by many authors -mostly theologians and canon lawyers- who had established solid juridical principles that fully identified the natural and supernatural orders, and transposed the attributions of temporal power to the spiritual sphere.

The issue of the effective mastery of the Indians over American lands and goods prior to the Spaniards’ arrival is the historical chance that Vitoria has to formulate what would be known today as a personalist view, based on the anthropology of St Thomas Aquinas. In opposition to the Armacano, John Wyclif and the Waldenses, “who held that the title of mastery was the state of grace”[[7]](#footnote-7), he holds that the Indians are effective masters of their goods, because “mastery is based on the image of God”[[8]](#footnote-8). Being the image of God is something proper to man, because of his rational nature, not because of grace. It pertains to the natural order. Man enjoys mastery over his actions thanks to his rational powers. Vitoria quotes St Thomas, “a person is master of his actions when he/she can choose this or that”[[9]](#footnote-9). Man’s capacity of mastery stems from his personal condition -self-mastery- and therefore, no sin or infidelity can prevent man from being master of his goods. Sin and infidelity result in loss of supernatural goods, but not from being a person.

Vitoria rejects both the theory of grace as a title of natural mastery -which he says is “pure heresy”- and Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery, which was held by several medieval authors. He showed an open mindedness surprising for his time, far removed from an ethnocentric attitude, when he states that Indians, “in their own way have the use of reason. This is obvious because they have a certain order in their arrangements. Indeed, they have cities, which require order, and institutions such as marriages, magistrates, lords, laws, tradesmen, markets, all of which need use of reason. They also have some kind of religion, and they do not make mistakes in those things that are evident to others, which indicates their use of reason. On the other hand, most men have God and nature; but reason is man’s main feature, and a potency that does not result in act would be useless” [[10]](#footnote-10).

The idea of mastery based on the nature of the human person, without any supernatural argument, may appear virtually self-evident, a simple truth. However, we need to bear in mind that in 1538 it was a novel doctrine. It was not an absolute novelty, because St Thomas Aquinas and his best commentators, such as Thomas de Vio and Cardinal Cajetan, had already remarked on the distinction between the two orders. Vitoria manages to present a consistent doctrine and applies it to a very hot topic at the time. If the Indians were indeed masters, the legitimacy of pontifical donation was no longer tenable.

In the second part of the *relectio*, Vitoria makes a list of the false titles alleged by the Spaniards to justify America’s occupation. We will not make a detailed comment on Vitoria’s arguments. We will only mention that the approach of the Dominican to criticize the theocratic medieval tradition was a real revolution.

Those who held the universal dominion of the emperor or of the pope as valid juridical titles use the same identical theoretical principles, although they might appear to belong to opposite political fronts. The idea of the universal empire is very old – one can think of the great Eastern Empires - but in mediaeval Christendom this idea has special characteristics. The *imperium mundi* becomes the *Sacrum Imperium*, headed by the Pope, who in turn delegates to the Emperor the universal temporal power which is deposited in him. The crowning ceremonies of the Emperor by the Roman pontiff show in a graphic and obvious way the political theory that underpins it. In some cases, the imperialist theory would not accept that the temporal power derived from the spiritual power, but to the contrary, that the Emperor received his universal power directly from God.

Vitoria held that neither the universal dominion of the emperor nor the universal temporal dominion of the pope - if such existed - are valid juridical titles to legitimize the occupation of America by the Spanish crown. According to the Dominican professor, all men are free and equal by nature. In the specific institution of public powers, besides its foundation on the social nature of man, free human wills and positive law are also involved. The distribution of nations that took place throughout history almost spontaneously, and in the process of its formation the consensus of the members of the group was a decisive factor[[11]](#footnote-11). Vitoria, arguing against jurists of the category of Bartolo di Sassoferrato, finds no title, natural, divine or human right capable of attributing to the Emperor dominion over the whole universe.

When the Dominican analyses the second non-legitimate title -the Pope’s universal dominion- he does not spare arguments because, using his own words, those who consider the supreme pontiff to be the monarch of the whole world also in temporal matters do so “with arrogance”[[12]](#footnote-12). Arguing against Enrique de Segusio, Antonino de Florencia, Agustín Triunfo de Ancona, Silvestre Prierias and other mediaeval and renaissance authors, Vitoria asserts that “the Pope has no temporal and civil power over the whole world, in a strict sense (…); if the Supreme Pontiff had such secular power in the whole world, he would not be able to transmit it to secular Princes (…); The Pope has temporal power with regard to spiritual things, that is, in so far as it may be required to administer spiritual matters (…); the Pope has no temporal power over those barbarians nor over other infidels (…); even if the barbarians did not want to acknowledge any dominion of the Pope, no one can wage war against them nor take possession of their goods” [[13]](#footnote-13). Vitoria’s antitheocratic conclusions are based on arguments of reason and on the testimony of both Sacred Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. The Christian humanism of the Castilian Dominican priest allowed him to sift the elements proper to Christian doctrine from spurious elements. The latter were the result of human political traditions, which could have had a circumstantial historical value, but which were not part of the deposit of revelation. Vitoria opens a clearing in the jungle of theological and canonical arguments. After his criticism the light appears: the rights of the natural order, are not suppressed by the supernatural order, rather they are incorporated and raised by this very supernatural order.

The very defence of the natural order, together with the assertion of the absolute gratuitous nature of the supernatural order, allowed Vitoria to establish the need to avoid coercion in matters of faith.” Although the faith may have been proclaimed to the barbarians in a probable and sufficient manner, and they have not wanted to receive it, there is no reason to wage war against them nor dispossess them from their goods”[[14]](#footnote-14). Believing is a free act, and faith is a gift from God. Picking up the Thomistic tradition and that of many other medieval authors, Vitoria warned against the temptation to impose the Christian truth by force, thus violating the intimate tabernacle of personal conscience.

When he analyses the titles which give Spain the right to occupy America, Vitoria abandons the critical vein, to make room for a constructive spirit, which will become the basis of a rational theory of international law. The affirmation of natural sociability, the existence of a community of nations that must tend towards the universal common good, the moral obligation of what we would call today “humanitarian intervention” are elements of Christian humanism espoused by the Spanish Dominican.

Vitoria holds the view that there is an international community - which he calls *Totus Orbis* - made up of all nations with equal rights. In this manner he surpassed the vision of Christendom limited to the Christian nations of western Europe. The laws of that community are those of people’s rights, directly derived from natural law.

The only titles that would justify Spain’s presence in America are based, first of all, on the natural right of communication. In so far as both Indians and Spaniards are part of the same mankind, the latter can settle in America provided that they do not injure any of the barbarians’ rights, just as those could settle in Spain if they so wished. “Friendship among men -argues Vitoria- appears to be a matter of natural law, and it is contrary to nature to reject the company of other men who cause no harm”[[15]](#footnote-15). If the Indians resisted the natural right to communication, they would be committing an injustice.

Vitoria goes on testing other possible just titles, and finds them in the freedom navigation and trade - freedom derived from people’s rights - right to equal treatment and reciprocity, the right to take up nationality and the right to preach the Gospel - but respecting the Indians’ freedom to convert or not- etc.

The concept of “humanitarian intervention” appears in the development of the fifth title, in different words: “another title could be the tyranny of the barbarians themselves, or tyrannical laws against the innocent, such as those that command the sacrifice of innocent men, or the death of men without guilt to eat them”[[16]](#footnote-16). Above the positive laws of a nation are the laws of humanity, that fall within the scope of natural and divine law, “because God commanded everyone to take care of their neighbour, and they are all neighbours: therefore, anyone can defend them from such tyranny and oppression”[[17]](#footnote-17). The Spanish could intervene, on behalf of the international community, to defend the innocent from unjust death. But such intervention should cease when the injustices that caused it ceased.

Vitoria’s is a Christian humanism. What does this mean? Vitoria, although fully inserted in the Thomistic scholastic tradition, is also tied with the currents of thought of his time. He drinks from the Spanish humanists Antonio de Nebrija and Pedro Mártir de Anglería, but he always contrasts with the humanist environment of Paris, Europe’s intellectual hub. Vitoria’s humanism places man at the centre of philosophical speculation, but rather than falling into anthropocentrism, underlines the created nature of man and his transcendent existential roots. It is a Christian humanism, rid of theocratic adherences foreign to the deposit of faith; it also brings into harmony the natural and supernatural elements of man called to live the life of grace.

Vitoria and the School of Salamanca represent the introduction of a world that is both modern (acknowledgement of temporal autonomy) and Christian (acknowledgement of the dignity of the person as the image of God, and of the universal call to faith and grace). In his work *Relectio de Indis* Francisco de Vitoria brings something novel regarding the relationship between the natural and supernatural orders and between temporal and spiritual powers: with his approach he goes beyond the historical views of medieval theocracy, and presupposes a secularisation that establishes the legitimate authority in temporal matters, without severing its transcendental roots. The *Relectio de Indis*isone of the gates to pass from the medieval world to the modern world.[[18]](#footnote-18)

#### b) The myth of the noble savage and the European utopian visions

We have seen so far how the discovery of America brought about an awakening of natural law doctrines in Spain, and a progressive secularisation of political theory. It was, somehow, a process that went in the direction America to Europe. We now must consider a second process, which moves in both directions. This is the current of thought that arose in Europe with the arrival of utopian visions of the American reality. The picture of an American paradise and of an indigenous world both pure and naïve bred new anthropological trends that would, down the centuries, feed the revolutions of the 18th century. These new anthropological trends became part of a liberal political philosophy and travelled back to America; there we find them again at the origin of the American emancipation process.

Paul Hazard, in his classical book *La crise de la conscience* *européenne* analyses how the arrival of news and stories from the world outside Europe encouraged the intellectuals of the Old Continent to consider a number of vital matters of great importance. The different customs and religions, quite unlike the Christian religion, political systems that had little to do with absolute monarchy, became a leaven that little by little eroded the solid convictions that stood at the foundation of the European vision of the universe. [[19]](#footnote-19)

Besides, it is easy to pick from Antiquity a constant feature in the history of thought: the tendency to create myths, in many cases a true psychological escapism from the harsh and painful reality. The presumed *golden age* of mankind’s infancy, or the future *millennial Kingdom* where everything would be better, appear in the most diverse civilisations and cultures. There exists in human nature a *utopian vein*, which is a sign of the hunger for transcendence that man feels when he faces limiting vital circumstances.

In 16th century Europe was, with both its greatness and failings, a fertile culture medium for utopian visions of America, fed on the news of the supposed wonders that came across the ocean. The initial bearers of the American novelty reached immediate notoriety and publicity in Europe. They were none other than Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci. Columbus, in his *Letter announcing the Discovery* draws an Eden-like American picture: naked men, with no malice, no material interests, living in harmony with nature. The Admiral will state: “They are the best people in the world, and the meekest”.[[20]](#footnote-20)These people live surrounded by untold riches. So much so, that Columbus promises the Catholic Kings “as much gold as they may need”[[21]](#footnote-21).

It all happened at once: the letter reaching the Court, quick translations and the news spreading throughout Europe. Classical utopias found a *real* story, not false or simply imagined. The shock of the news from Columbus were confirmed by the accounts of Amerigo Vespucci. In his letters to various noted people in Tuscany, the man from Florence tells of the paradisiac lands he travelled through. In one of the letters, dated 1503, he writes “It is fair to call these lands the New World (…) the air is is milder and more than any known region”[[22]](#footnote-22). It is the same land that Columbus, in a letter written to the Catholic Kings after his third trip, assures that it coincides with Paradise. [[23]](#footnote-23)

In addition to Columbus and Vespucci, others will also write, like Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, promptly translated to English, French and Flemish, because his complaints of the injustices committed by the Spaniards in the Indies were very well received by Spain’s rival nations. Las Casas will depict the American Indian in total agreement of what will become the European vision of the *bon sauvage*. He is definitely overwhelmed by the possibility of Spain accepting the concept that the indigenous people would fit the aristotelic notion of natural servitude. Fray Bartolomé describes the Indians in glowing terms: “God created all these infinite peoples to be the simplest of all, without evil or duplicity. Obedient, most faithful to their natural lords or the Christians whom they serve. They are not quarrelsome, spiteful or vengeful. Besides, they are more refined than princes and they die easily from work and illnesses. They are also extremely poor, they have not and do not wish to have material possessions. Surely these people would be the most blessed in the world if only they knew the true God.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

Arturo Uslar Pietri, the Venezuelan essay writer puts it nicely: “America set Europe to think and dream. She offered a new and unknown world to measure against and compare. It provided Europeans new topics and motives to express their dissatisfaction with the existing world order. The social utopias of the Renaissance, so full of critical and reformist leaven, have their inspiration in America. Rather than based on knowledge, they are based on a vague feeling of the American novelty and goodness”.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Uslar Pietri correctly remarks that the vision of America in non-Spanish Europe is based on feelings rather than on the real knowledge. It only became clear after a few years of contact with the American indigenous people that the version given by Columbus in his letter announcing the discovery was distorted, at least from an anthropological point of view. Indians belonged to the common human nature -the point that Vitoria made to advocate for natural law in the American case- and therefore virtues and vices, successes and errors, heroism and cowardice existed in the New World as much as they did in Europe. But that first vision of America -the New Eden, the Golden Age revisited- would keep on encouraging utopic dreams and outlooks.

The first political thinker to use the word *utopia* - the Greek origin means “nowhere”- was Saint Thomas More, the Lord Chancellor of England. In his *Utopia*, published in 1516, More describes an ideal society, characterised by the search for happiness and freedom, with a community of goods as the foundation of the economic system, and a strong family structure as the linchpin of social cohesion. Does this work have anything to do with America? A lot. The holy chancellor, when he has to find a specific location for his Utopia island he does not hesitate: it is in the recently discovered continent. In fact, his fictional character, Raphael Hytlodeus, tells of the ideal society in his adventures during a recent voyage under the command of Amerigo Vespucci. In a pleasant get together the navigator will describe the ideal society, allegedly on the other side of the ocean.

More was not the only one whose imagination was triggered by the news that came from America. *La città del sole*, written by the Calabrian *Tommasso Campanella*, is another classic work of the utopic political thinking of the time. On this occasion the ideal society is located in the far away island of Sumatra. However, in this case the traveller is a sailor from Genoa. The fertile imagination of Campanella identifies him as a companion to Columbus.

When Thomas More wrote his *Utopia* the great American conquests -Mexico and Peru- had no yet taken place. However, when Miguel de Montaigne writes in the outskirts of Bordeaux, the American geography was known almost in its entirety, and Europe was increasingly aware of the physical and human dimensions of the New World.

The *Essais* of Montaigne questioned a series of certainties that had been received by tradition. They created an attitude of scepticism. Later, the two main French thinkers of the 17th century -Descartes and Pascal- will have to refute this attitude in their writings. Montaigne uses the existence of diverse cultures and civilisations, and the subsequent differences in the religious and political institutions, and social customs to argue the ultimate relativity of any received certitude. For Montaigne, the news from the other side of the ocean were precious testimonies to feed his radical scepticism.

Instead of reading Columbus or Vespucci, Miguel de Montaigne reads two works from Francisco López de Gómara: his *Historia General de las Indias* and *Historia de las Conquistas de Hernán Cortés*[[26]](#footnote-26). He also has the direct testimony of a man who had been in the *France Antarctique*, one of the first French settlements in America. And although Montaigne has greater knowledge of the situation in America -much greater than More- he keeps Utopia linked to the New World.

“Our world has found another -writes Montaigne- so new and young that we can still learn its first letters. Less than fifty years ago there were no letters, weights, measures, clothes, wheat or vineyards (…) this new world will come to light when ours disappears”[[27]](#footnote-27). The people who live in this new continent had “greater devotion, observance of the law, liberality, loyalty, frankness” than the Europeans. This natural goodness was indeed the cause of their fall” [[28]](#footnote-28).

Montaigne condemns the work of the Spaniards in America, because they were the bearers of all the vices, aberrations and cruelties from Europe. The Frenchman presents refined, soft Mexican and Peruvian societies, ruled by wise and virtuous monarchs, against the greed of the Spanish hosts[[29]](#footnote-29).

According to the story of the Frenchman who came from America - “a rude and simple man, the appropriate requirement to make a testimony truthful”[[30]](#footnote-30)- the Americans he saw were still close to their natural naivety, they are still governed by natural laws (…). What we see from the experience of these nations surpasses not only the pictures that poetical descriptions embellished to a golden age and all the discoveries imagined by peoples in a happy state, but also the very understanding and purpose of philosophy. We cannot imagine such pure and simple naivety (…) nor can we fathom a society that exists with so few artificial means (…) There is no trade of any kind, no understanding of letters, no science of numbers, no mention of magistrates or political ascendance, no servitude or riches or poverty, no contracts, successions or sharing (…) the very words suggest lies, betrayals, dissemblance, greed, envy, detraction, forgiveness, they are useless”[[31]](#footnote-31). Montaigne quotes Seneca - “men come out of the hand of God” - and Virgil - “Nature has imposed their laws from the beginning” - in order to give the reader the impression of a new Eden on earth[[32]](#footnote-32).

Montaigne’s scepticism is clearly seen in the following words: “I do not find anything barbarian or savage in these peoples, according to what I have been told, but rather anyone calls barbarism what is not his custom; it is also true that our vision of truth and reason is the example, opinions and mores of the country where we have been born. There you always have the perfect religion, the perfect politics, the perfect habits and customs in all things” [[33]](#footnote-33).

Montaigne’s work would not easily be forgotten. This vision -the new utopic and idyllic vision- of the American Indians would later influence other non-Spanish thinkers, among them Jean Jacques Rousseau, the citizen from Geneva.

The philosophical path of Jean Jacques begins with *A Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, the winning entry of an essay competition conducted by the Academy of Dijon in 1750. The debate topic was to establish whether the development of sciences and arts had facilitated the purification of customs. Rousseau’s answer is well known: Sciences and arts have contributed to the creation of an artificial society which has ended up alienating man from his true nature. He will develop this basic principle of the Rousseau-like system further in his *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men*, and in *On the Social Contract*, but the essential elements of his argument are already presented in the short pages of his first discourse.

Rousseau picks up Montaigne’s tradition in his very first composition. Jean Jacques brings up several examples of ancient or non-western societies where life was closer to nature than in 18th century France. In one of his notes on the principal text he writes: “I don’t dare speak of those happy peoples who do not even know the name of vices that we suppress with so much energy, those savages in America, whose simple and natural government Montaigne favours without any doubt, not only before Plato’s laws, but also anything that philosophy may ever imagine more perfect for governing the people. He quotes so many examples that impress those who can admire them”[[34]](#footnote-34).

We are already in the 18th century, and knowing in much greater detail the American cultures has not removed the utopic vision of the 16th century. Rousseau would be the thinker destined to transform the affirmation “man is born good, but society makes him evil” into a cliché; and he will present in *Du contrat social* a society where the noble savage may recover, at least partially, the rights and the goodness he had lost when incorporated to the artificial society of the *Ancien Régime*.

The noble savage, a literary figure that attempted to reflect the utopic visions of America in the Europe of absolutism, had an important role in the theoretical foundations of the revolutionary processes of the 18th century, which signal the beginning of the New Regime, both in the Old and the New Worlds. It offered Europe many points for reflexion, and became the anthropological basis for the making of a new political system.

### 3. The Reformation and Modernity

The discovery of America contributed to the process of secularisation - in the two meanings explained earlier- with the affirmation of natural law and the myth of the “bon sauvage”. If we look at the history of the Church, a narrower scope, parallel developments mark the passage from the Low Middle Ages to the Modern Age: the concepts of protestant Reformation and catholic Reformation (or Counterreformation).

Humanism, Renaissance and Reformation are historiographic terms used to indicate cultural processes of change. At the base of these processes we find a common denominator: the desire for renewal. “Renovation” is originally a religious concept: being born again, dying to the old man and being born to the life of grace. It was a return to the origins. In the strictly religious sphere, it meant a purification effort to make the Gospel a reality of living faith.

The requests for internal reformation if the Church had been felt ever more frequently since the 14th Century. The reformation *in capite et in membris* was a manifestation of both the desires of vast sectors of the Church to live the faith with greater intensity, and the profound unrest originated by customs that were presented as anti-testimonies, within the Church. In books as different as the *Dialogue* of Saint Catherine of Sienna or the *Book of Good Love* of Juan Ruiz, Archpriest of Hita, one can glimpse the absence of evangelical witness in some members of the Hierarchy on one hand, and on the other the desire for an efficacious reformation of discipline. The demand for a general reformation was so spread that in some areas of Germany, at least during the initial years of Martin Luther’s preaching, he was thought to be carrying out the longed-for reform, not realising that they were being taken away from Catholic orthodoxy[[35]](#footnote-35). The Catholic Reformation would be developed from the Council of Trent, as a reaction to the protestant movements. We will first look at the ideas of the reformers, and later study the catholic Reformation.

The protestant Reformation is not a homogeneous movement; the very dynamics of the reformed ideas makes the diversification of doctrines an unavoidable phenomenon. We will refer mainly to the ideas of Luther and Calvin, because they were the main contributors to the configuration of the modern world.

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)* was born in Eisleben (Thuringia) on the 10th of November 1483. In 1505 he enters the Augustinian convent of Erfurt, where he professed as a religious. Three years later he begins teaching in the recently founded University of Wittenberg. He had severe scruples in his spiritual life, and his main concern was about his own eternal salvation. He felt incapable of carrying out meritorious works -although in an autobiographical account he described himself as an observant religious-. And bearing in mind that man cannot carry out actions that can lead to his salvation, he then develops his doctrine on justification, the substantial principle of theological Lutheranism. Luther begins his reform in 1517, when he makes public 95 Theses on the Indulgences of the Roman Church. In 1520 he publishes some of his ideas. In the booklet *On the freedom of Christians* he develops his theory of justification by faith alone and the consequences it has for the understanding and organisation of the Church. This work must be completed with two others -*To the Christian nobility of the German peoples* and *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* - to understand the influence that the ideas of Luther had in the origins of Modernity.

The principle of justification by faith alone, based on St Paul’s words “the just man lives by faith”, attributes justification to God’s initiative, who does not impute the sins to the believer. It is a fiducial faith: in other words, a faith that trusts in God fulfilling his promise of salvation. Lutheran justification is external: God does not heal the sinner, rather declares him just, because he covers his sin with his mercy. Melanchthon, a disciple of Luther, talks of a forensic justification (from forum, tribunal), where God does not impute the sins of the faithful who trust in his promises.

We must add another fundamental principle of Lutheranism to justification by faith alone: the *sola Scriptura*. Rejecting many basic elements of Tradition and Magisterium of the Church, held by Catholicism, Luther asserts that each member of the faithful must read Sacred Scripture, and that the Holy Spirit will provide assistance to interpret it correctly. If justification by faith alone is the formal principle of his doctrine, *sola Scriptura*, also called “free examination” is the material principle. It is fair to say that the reformers soon realised the potential for anarchy that could derive from this principle, and there was a tendency to set limits to biblical interpretation. Luther’s catechisms and some of Calvin’s writings became a new “magisterium”, but the most radical reformers, the anabaptists, applied the principle of free examination to its ultimate consequences.

All that has been said so far had vast consequences for the Lutheran understanding of the Church. It became a congregation of faithful, with no hierarchical structure, its sacramental life reduced to baptism and the Eucharist, and its defining element the preaching of the Word of God. Luther denies the existence of the sacrament of orders, which is replaced by the common priesthood of the faithful. The ministry of preaching is the function of some faithful, particularly gifted, but it does not constitute an ecclesiastical state different from that of the simple faithful. All this has a repercussion not only on the Church but also on civil society: if in the Catholic Church authority resides in those who have received the ministerial priesthood, Luther, consistent with his postulates, transfers this power to the laity. This transfer implied a role for the lay princes: they were responsible for stopping the abuses of the roman curia and for reforming the Church.

In the religious sphere Luther identified freedom with autonomy from the ecclesiastical authority. The denial of the hierarchical authority derived extreme interpretations, like the denial of any authority on earth by the anabaptists. The theoretical background of the farmers revolt of 1524-1525 is anarchism. The chaos that ensued from these extreme interpretations forced Luther to insist in his petitions to the German princes to take the situation into their hands and proceed to reform the Church. It is within this context that Luther calls the princes “bishops by necessity”. The ex-Augustinian friar sees in political power the sword of God that punishes a humanity corrupted by sin. Christian freedom is relegated to the interiority of the soul, while passive obedience to the representatives of God is imposed in external activity. They guarantee order and rule the national churches which are now subject to the political power. One can see obvious voluntarism in this approach. Luther, who considers himself a disciple of Ockham, rejects natural law, because human nature cannot be established as a moral norm after sin, because it has been corrupted without remedy. Thus, there only remains the divine will, which operates in this world through the lay princes. A double moral law was thus established: the Sermon of the Mount belongs in the spiritual domain, where God governs with his mercy; but in the kingdom of this world God rules through the sword of the prince. A Christian must submit to the sword to fulfil the will of God.

Gonzalo Redondo remarks that the ultimate consequence of Luther’s political position restricts the principle of the free examination to the princes. This was a decisive step in the consolidation of the absolute power of modern monarchies. This decision of Luther was officially acknowledged in the religious peace of Augsburg (25/9/1555), that was only achieved when it became obvious that the Reformation could not be stopped by armed forces. There the freedom of the princes of the German empire to choose their religion was recognised. Their decision would be law in their territory. Those who rejected it had the right to migrate elsewhere. The modern confessional State was thus born with the principle *cuius regio, eius religio*.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Let us now stop to consider the doctrine of John Calvin (1509-1564), the other main character of the Reformation. He was born in Noyon (France), and he studied law in the universities of Orleans, Bourges and Paris. From 1533 onwards, he begins to manifest opinions contrary to the Catholic faith, and has to flee from France. From Strasbourg he travels to Basle, where he finishes his most important piece of writing: *Institutio doctrinae christianae.* After a brief stage in the north of Italy he goes to Geneva. He tries to impose his religious ideas, but is expelled in 1538. He returns in 1541 to the city that will give him fame, called to restore order to a city divided by factions. He was the soul of the city to his death in 1564. He instituted an extremely rigid political-religious system, where political law was inspired in Sacred Scripture, and where any doctrinal dissent was persecuted, even with condemnation to the stake.

Calvin was less mystical than Luther; he had a solid background in law, and was very methodical. He agrees with Luther about the absolute centrality of Holy Scripture, but he equates the Old Testament with the New, because both are Word of God. Hence, we find in Calvinism a strong presence of Old Testament elements, such as the prohibition of images in worship, considering material prosperity as an external sign of the election of the just, the battles in defence of the true faith, etc. Predestination is a central doctrine for Calvin. It is included in the issue of salvation, which had obsessed Luther. According to the French reformer, predestination is an eternal decree from God, by which he decides what he wants to do with each human being. Some are destined for eternal salvation, others for eternal damnation. The mercy of God shows itself in the decision to save some individuals regardless of their merits. Salvation is beyond human power, and man can do nothing to modify God’s decree. However, says Calvin, there are signs in this life that permit us to glimpse our own destiny: for instance, accepting the Word of God.

The doctrine of predestination will hold an ever more important role in later Calvinist theology, especially under the influence of Theodore of Beza. From 1570 onwards, predestination was looked at from the perspective of God’s choice of a particular people, without neglecting the doctrine of individual predestination. Just as in the past God chose Israel to be his people, now God chooses the reformed communities. God’s choice is revealed by a “covenant of grace”, where the obligations of God for his people and of his people for God are established. Calvinism spread rapidly in Switzerland, the Netherlands, Scotland, England (puritanism is the English version of Calvinism). It set up compact communities, conscious of being “chosen by God”, and with a tend\ency to messianism derived from the knowledge of being the new chosen people. These religious ideas go a long way to explain the actions of the puritans that migrate to America in the 17th century, where they established the colonies of New England. For the puritans America is the new promised land, and the community settled there must live according to the “covenant of grace” with their God.

This also explains the exclusivist and intolerant attitude of the Puritan colonies, unlike the other colonies established in North America by Anglicans, Quakers or Catholics.

Contemporaneously with the events of the Continent, the Anglican schism takes place in England, when Henry VIII declares himself the Head of the Church of England. Although the theological foundation of Anglicanism, initially at least, does not differ from Catholic doctrine - with the exception of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff -, with the passage of time Anglicanism becomes more protestant. Bearing in mind the expansion of the British Empire in the following centuries, the split from Rome would have an enormous impact in the contemporary world.

The theological ideas of the Reformation had a huge influence in much of western culture. The principles of justification by faith alone and the free examination [of Scripture] highlighted the subjective nature of religion. These principles will undergo a process of secularisation, and will become, already in the 18th century, freedom of conscience, which holds that the individual judgement of conscience is the ultimate source of morality. It is no longer a matter of being docile to a particular light from the Holy Spirit, but rather the free exercise of reason would provide the key to acting justly, without reference to any authority above reason.

The reformed criticisms of the medieval spirituality, identified with the precepts of monastic life and its *contemptus mundi* (rejection of the world), gave life to a growing appreciation for temporal affairs. We often find in Luther and Calvin references to the positive aspects of work and daily life, areas where God calls to consistency in Christian life. This positive development of the Reformation -a work ethic was developed in countries of protestant majority, not found in countries of Catholic tradition- shows however some inconsistency with its theological premises. Indeed, if man is incapable of carrying out meritorious actions because his nature is corrupted by sin, he cannot really sanctify ordinary life. Luther does not deny the need for good works, which he considers to be a consequence of fiducial faith. But he does deny that they have any merit in the eyes of God. In fact, the pessimistic Lutheran anthropology, taken to its ultimate consequences, led to a growing separation between human action - always determined by sin - and God's saving plans. The obvious examples of high moral standing among reformed men and women throughout history point to the fact that it was difficult to accept literally the doctrine of justification by faith alone, excluding meritorious works.

The development of capitalism is linked to the work ethic, that some intellectuals of the 20th century related to Calvinists ideas. The best-known theory - which was lately cast into doubt - was proposed by *Max Weber* (1864-1920), in his book *Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism* (1904). He stated then that modern capitalism owes its propelling force to Calvinist ethics. No doubt capitalism is a phenomenon totally independent from the Reformation - there were capitalist forms in the 15th century - but Calvinism did influence a specific historical manifestation of capitalism. As we have seen, Calvinism asserts the existence of an absolute transcendent God, who has predestined each one of us to either salvation or eternal damnation, and our works cannot modify the preestablished divine decree. God has created this world for his glory, and man has the duty to work for the glory of God and to create the kingdom of God on this earth. Calvinists saw a sign of predestination to salvation in the worldly success of their profession, and therefore the individual feels inclined to work to overcome the anxiety produced by the uncertainty of one’s salvation. On the other hand, Protestant ethics commands the believer not to trust the goods of this world, and prescribes an ascetical behaviour. Therefore, the capitalist does not spend what he has earned in his business, but reinvests it. Protestant ethics would provide an explanation and justification to a behaviour characterised by seeking the maximum benefit not to enjoy but to reinvest.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The Reformation will also influence political doctrines. We have already said that the modern confessional state depends to a great extent on the political ideas of Luther. The wars of religion were the breeding ground for the emergence of new doctrines. Between 1562 and 1598 there were in France at least eight wars of religion, extremely violent, like any Civil War. The theories of the realists, who were in favour of the divine right of the king, are developed within this historical context. Subjects should passively obey the king, as the representative of divine will, and there is no higher authority that can depose him because his right cannot be revoked. This doctrine was held by faithful of the different Christian denominations, both Catholic and reformed, although the doctrine of passive obedience responded more to the positions of Luther and Calvin then to those of the Catholic tradition. We will talk in the next chapter about the divine right of the kings.

The Monarchomachs were the people that reacted to this extreme posture; they held that the power of the King derives from the people and as a consequence a community could depose the king in certain circumstances. In many cases it was argued that defence of the true religion -whether Catholic or the different reformed churches- was a valid reason to resist the power of the King. In other cases, they insisted in the traditional medieval freedoms which would invalidate the absolute power of the King. This current produced a great number of booklets and libels - the most famous being the *Franco-Gallia* (1573) by Hottman (1524-1590) and *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*, attributed to Hubert Languet and Phillip de Plessis-Mornay - mostly of Calvinist authorship. Although Calvin asserted the necessity to obey passively the political authority, some of his passages open the possibility of resisting against power. Evidently this reading of Calvin was carried out in the countries ruled by non-reformed monarchies. A typical example of this posture was held by *John Knox* (1505-1572) in Scotland. In the Catholic camp Monarchomachs doctrines were also upheld. The most famous case was the Jesuit *Juan de Mariana* (1553-1624), who even justified tyrannicide in extreme circumstances.

### 4. The Catholic Reformation

The much-awaited reform in *capite et in membris* became a reality in the Catholic church with the Council of Trent (1545-1563). All the doctrines questioned by the reformers were clarified systematically by the conciliar fathers, who clearly established the truths of the Catholic faith. At the same time, they proceeded to an efficacious disciplinary Reformation, which will leave its mark on the life of the church until the 20th century. If we only consider exclusively the topics that we’re interested -the history of ideas-, Trent offers a vision of man who regains moral freedom, overcoming the Protestant anthropology of the complete corruption of human nature after sin. In the process of justification, man does not remain merely passive, but he should cooperate with God’s grace by virtuous acts, assisted by divine help. Jesus Christ has effectively redeemed mankind, and really forgives the sins -original sin and personal scenes- of the faithful who have the right dispositions. Original sin has wounded human nature, but has not corrupted it completely. Through the grace of Jesus Christ, man is capable of carrying out meritorious works, with regard to his eternal salvation, and can fulfil the commandments of the law of God by virtue of divine assistance. Human nature is a fallen nature after original sin, but it has been redeemed by Christ and raised to the supernatural order; man is *capax gratiae*, has the capacity to receive the grace of God who saves him.

The Tridentine anthropology returned man to the dignity of a free person. A creaturely, limited freedom, that had to deal with the weakness of a sinful nature, but which could cooperate with God in his plans of salvation.

Receiving the Tridentine doctrine in the nations with a Catholic majority had several politico-social important consequences. Mirroring the effect of the confessional Protestant states, Catholic confessional states were consolidated in the Catholic areas. However, although they admitted the theological content of the Council where the moral freedom of Christians is respected, they did not acknowledge the consequences of such freedom in the social and political areas. The growing power of the national states resulted in a vision of religion as an element of social cohesion and political unity - hence the expulsions of Jews and Moriscos and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in France, which suppressed religious tolerance - , and “officially” Catholic policies were promoted from on high. They subjected the Church to a relentless institutional control. The consciousness of possessing the religious truth led to think that the multiple social, political and economic problems demanded a unique “Catholic” response to organize relations in society. The Spain of the Habsburgs, the vast catholic areas of the Austrian empire, the France of the Bourbons, were authentic confessional monarchies, based on the alliance between Throne and Altar. The tendency was to give social solutions from on high, with little participation of the people. The presence of numerous members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in positions of government and decision-making show the background of clericalism of these social organisations. The Catholic Church will attempt to maintain her independence from the “Catholic” political power, but when the revolutions of the end of the 18th century erupt she will find herself in a compromised situation with the institutions that erroneously had been identified with Catholicism. As we will study in the fourth section of this book, this confusion will be the heavy price the Church had to pay, and the difficulties she had in her dialogue with the world after the liberal revolutions.

## II FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW REGIME

We have stated in the previous chapter that the 15th and 16th century were a period of change. The 17th century comes across with a more stable panorama, with the consolidation of states that have tried to solve the problems caused by the religious divisions and are in a better position to reinforce their respective political powers and social control. The Old Regime will last until the end of the 18th century, when the time of the revolutions arrives. In this chapter will address the study of the ideas that served as the basis for this regime and we will later focus on a short presentation of the principal traits of the new regime, to highlight the differences. The passage of the Old to the New Regime implied a deep ideological change, which develops over the two centuries and which we will consider the following chapter.

### 1. The Old Regime

The socio-political reality that preceded the first revolutionary outbursts of the late 18th century is often referred to as the old regime.It is difficult to find a precise starting date for this historical period. Generally, we could say that its traits can be identified from the end of the 16th century in Western Europe.

In the ideological aspect, the old regime is marked by great homogeneity and firm convictions. The mind of the 17th and 18th century is sure of many things; to be sure, fewer than in the 13th century, but many more than in the 19th century. God’s existence, the divinity of Christianity -whether it is the Catholic Church or the different Protestant denominations- is admitted by the great majority of people. The existence of an eternal and immutable moral law enjoys the respect of the population. The union between Throne and Altar, between monarchy and religious faith, is accepted without particular criticism. Moderate gains in economic activity is a set moral standard. Ultimately, that is in the ancient regime a high degree of certainty, there is a cosmos of ordered ideas that sustains a stable social organisation. Admittedly, there were critical spirits, but at least at the beginning they were the exception rather than the rule.

From a political point of view, absolute monarchy enjoys good health. In the 16th century French lawyer, *Jean Bodin (1530-1596),* develops a doctrine of political power capable of safeguarding national unity over sects and parties. As we will see, such theory reinforced central power. Later on, the doctrines of the divine right of the kings and the social contract would give theoretical consistency to the absolute power of the monarch.

#### a) Towards the absolute monarchy: the political theory of Bodin

Bodin published in 1576 his most important work: *Les six livres de la République*. Written during the period of religious wars in France, it tries to give a solid foundation to the power of the King through a doctrine on sovereignty. For Bodin, sovereignty is the essential element that distinguishes the state: there is a state where citizens are subject to the law of a common sovereign. The citizens of a state may be divided by their customs, by their language or by their religion, but they are joined by dependence on the same supreme power or sovereignty. For Bodin, sovereignty is a perpetual power, not limited in time, not delegated - or delegated without limits or conditions - inalienable, not subject to prescription and not limited by laws, since the sovereign is the same source of law. The prerogatives of sovereignty are the power to dictate laws without the need of any consent from others; to declare war and peace; to appoint the principal officials of the State; to pass judgement without right of appeal; to grant favours; to mint currency and impose taxes.

The sovereignty of the State is always one and indivisible, but there are different forms of government - monarchy, aristocracy and democracy - that make up the apparatus or means to exercise sovereignty. Distancing himself from Aristotelean doctrine, Bodin denies that there may be mixed forms of government, because in all three forms there must be unity of power, or sovereignty. A well-ordered state demands a single sovereign power. As one could expect, Bodin leans toward a monarchical form of government, because it guarantees the greatest unity of action.

Bodin, however, admits that there are some restrictions in the exercise of sovereignty. Firstly, the sovereign should always respect divine law and natural law. Afterwards, he must respect the all Constitutional and Customary Laws of the kingdom. Finally, the sovereign finds a limit in the inviolability of private property of the family, which is an institution prior to the state, and which is its foundation and principal member[[38]](#footnote-38).

#### b) The divine right of the kings

The bases for the absolute monarchy, the political model of the old regime, were prepared by means of the doctrine of sovereignty. The absolute power of the King was theoretically based on two principles which had different ideological origins, but an identical practical purpose: to safeguard its property of absoluteness. The two principles were the divine right of the king’s power and the social contract.

The divine origin of power is a constant element present in the history of political doctrines. It can come true in the divinisation of political power, as was the case with the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hellenistic and Roman empires, or simply consist of the assertion that political power, like all creation, has its remote cause in the Creator. This appears to be the position of St Paul, when he affirms that “all power comes from God” (Rom 13:1).

In Christian tradition, the Pauline doctrine was interpreted in different ways. The more widespread interpretation understood that the divine origin of power did not imply that God appointed the ruler directly. The example of the people of Israel was simply an exception to the rule, given the very particular nature of the history of the chosen people. It was rather thought that the approximate cause of power was the political community, or the historical circumstances -a victory at war, an alliance among people, etc-. Thus, the Aristotelian-Thomistic current - Saint Thomas Aquinas, Francis de Vitoria, Francisco Suarez, etc. - admitted that God was the remote origin of political power, but the proximate cause was the entire community.

In the 16th century, in the heat of the doctrinal-religious disputes, some theories arise that stress the direct intervention of God in the appointment of the ruler. Such a position, which considered the king as “God’s lieutenant”, demanded passive obedience on the part of the subjects, thus safeguarding order and peace. The most extreme representative of this position is the King James I of England, who published in 1598 the book *True Law of Free Monarchies*. We have already referred the Lutheran and Calvinist opinions in this regard.

In France of the 17th century the doctrine of the divine right of the kings became increasingly widespread and popular. Although it was not a very elaborate theory, but rather a conglomerate of feelings, intuitions and principles acquired acritically, it is possible to state its principal elements. For this purpose, we will use the work of *Jacques-Benigne Bossuet (1627-1704)*, bishop of Meaux and tutor to the dauphin, *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l’Ecriture Sainte*. Finished in 1679, it was designed for the formation of the son of Louis XIV. It is not, therefore, a scientific treatise, but a pedagogical work which would serve the awareness of the Sun King’s heir of his dignity and responsibility;

Bossuet considers that God is the ultimate end of man’s life. Men are made to live in society, but original sin separated us from God, and prevented the peaceful coexistence among men. Hence the need for a ruler to guide us and prevent our mutual destruction. The kings that appeared in the beginnings of history, whether by consensus or legitimate conquest, ruled over people who were already used to obeying, because the idea of command and authority derives from paternal authority.

For Bossuet, the monarchy is the most common form of government, the oldest and the most natural, especially if it is hereditary by male line. Throughout history there have been other forms of government that have been accepted by God. But Bossuet has no doubt to be thankful to Providence that God has wanted to give his nation the government which best fits human nature: all men we are born subjects, because we are subjected to paternal authority. There is a hierarchy between the sexes, and women are destined to obey. Hereditary monarchy, as the paternal authority of the nation, is the most natural form of political government.

In the pages destined for the formation of the dauphin, Bossuet presents the characteristics of a well-constituted monarchy. Firstly, monarchy is sacred. The Princes act as ministers of God, and are his lieutenants on earth. The king is Christ in the sense of being anointed. But even if he had not been anointed in the coronation ceremony, the King is sacred by virtue of his position, because he represents the divine majesty and has been charged by Providence to carry out its designs. Hence the obligation of the subjects to respect and obey the kings, even when they are not just, as was the case of the first Christians with regards to the pagan emperors.

Besides being sacred, the monarchy is absolute: the king should not render an account to anyone under him; he is an unappealable judge; coercion against him is not possible. In other words, the power of the king is invincible, because if anyone could curb the public power and hinder it, no one in the kingdom could feel safe. Like Hobbes, as we will see, Bossuet considers it indispensable that the power of the monarch be absolute: without that authority he could not do good or repress evil.

Bossuet admits that there are people who consider the term “absolute” heinous and unbearable. But they do not realise that the monarch has a counterweight to his power: the fear of God. The divine and natural laws are the limit of power. If the monarch did not respect them, the power would be arbitrary and tyrannical. The king carries out the function of the father of family for the entire country: “the name of king is the name of father”. For this reason, in a position opposed to Machiavelli, Bossuet considers that royal power is “sweet”, and that monarchs are made to be loved.

The tutor of the dauphin does not forget to remind the monarchs of their obligations, because the monarchy must be reasonable: it must not impose unbearable burdens, it must behave fairly, since absolute power is not identified with arbitrariness. The king cannot dispose of the life and goods of his subjects as if they were slaves. The property of legally owned goods is inviolable. Absolute government means legitimate government, where people are free under the public authority.

Bossuet ends his manual with a chapter dedicated to the “majesty” of the monarchy. We are in full swing of the reign of Louis XIV: “consider the prince in his palace. From there come the orders that coordinate the magistrates and the captains, the citizens and the soldiers, the provinces and the armies of sea and land. It is the very image of God, who, seated on the highest throne of the heavens, regulates the functioning of the whole nature. Look at an immense people gathered in one person, look at this sacred, paternal and absolute power; consider the secret reason that governs the whole body of the State, contained in a single mind: you will see in the kings the image of God, and you will have the image of royal majesty”[[39]](#footnote-39).

But in spite of the fact that kings are images of the deity, he does not forget to remind the human condition of the earthly kings: "I repeat, you are gods, that is, you have in your authority and carry on your forehead a divine character ... But, oh gods of flesh and blood, gods of clay and dust, you will die like men ... Greatness separates men for a little while; a common end makes all equal. Oh kings! Exercise, therefore, your power boldly, because it is divine and healthy for the human race, but do it with humility. It has been given to you from without. Deep down it leaves you weak, it leaves you mortal, it leaves you sinners, and in front of God, it makes you accountable with one of the heaviest accounts”[[40]](#footnote-40).

The political doctrine of Bossuet makes an exaggerated reading of the Pauline doctrine on the divine origin of power. If we bear in mind what was said in the introduction to this section of the book, the divine right of the kings belongs not in the Christian tradition but in the clerical tradition, because the natural and supernatural orders and the political and spiritual powers are not sufficiently distinguished. Such confusion would produce serious consequences in the relationship between the Church and the New Regime; we will have the chance to study it in the fourth part of this book.

#### c) Hobbes’ social contract

*Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)* tells us in his autobiography that his mother brought him to the world prematurely, because she was overwhelmed by the terror caused by the arrival of the Invincible Armada on England’s shores. Half-jokingly, half seriously, our philosopher writes that the *fear* is his twin brother. Indeed, Hobbes' ultimate goal is the establishment of peace and order among men, in such a way as to remove the danger of violent death. To understand this purpose more thoroughly, it is necessary to bear in mind the English political-social circumstances of the 17th century, where internal dissensions conditioned the daily life of the British.

The theory of the social contract was used by Hobbes, whose political work *Leviathan* represents the most polished rational foundation to explain absolute power. He starts from a nominalist conception of human nature, and considers that man is not a social individual. Before forming part of society, man lives in a state of nature. Hobbes is not the first to speak of this pre-social state: it is a *locus communis* of the Roman and medieval legal tradition. The English philosopher describes this state of nature with vivid colours, revealing the materialistic bent of his anthropology.

For our philosopher, every man, in the state of nature, has a right to everything: *Natura dedit omnia omnibus*, nature has given everything to everyone. This fact is the cause of a general state of war among men who, driven by their instincts, demand for themselves all the goods of nature. It is an all-against-all war - *bellum omnium contra omnes.* This creates a state of contradiction of man against himself and against others, in the sense that the universal right of one individual goes against the same right of another. Therefore, *homo homini lupus*, man is a wolf for man, the individual becomes the declared enemy of the others.

From what has been said we can reach the conclusion that Hobbes identifies right with power. Man is essentially thirsty for greater power. "So in the first place, -writes Hobbes in the *Leviathan* – I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to, or that he cannot be content with a moderate power, but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more”[[41]](#footnote-41).

According to Hobbes the state of nature is not necessarily a historical state of mankind. Rather, it is a theoretical attempt to explain the natural condition of men considered in themselves, regardless of specific historical circumstances. We must bear in mind, as we have already mentioned, the historical context in which Hobbes elaborates his doctrine, marked by civil war, religious confrontations and the tensions between the crown and the parliament.

The best way to maintain peace is for everyone to renounce one’s own rights and one’s freedom - to one’s power – to the extent that such renunciation establishes peace among men. A pact can be stipulated, that will make the state of war of the state of nature cease. The pact is not only a renunciation, but a mutual transfer of the right of every man to all things.

The social pact is necessary but not enough to establish peace. It is necessary to institute a power above the parties. The original pact of Hobbes has a peculiar nature: “This is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner as if every man should say to every man: I authorise and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition; that thou give up, thy right to him, and authorise all his actions in like manner”[[42]](#footnote-42).

The transfer of individual rights converts the mass into unity, and gives rise to the state, called Leviathan, configured as a mortal god. The State is a single person, called sovereign; other people are subjects or citizens. The power of the sovereign is absolute, and irrevocably preserves the rights of citizens, because Hobbes wants the State to be a genuine guarantee to safeguard peace. “The State - says Mario D'Addio - is the force that constrains the wolfish nature of man to become social, through the fear that such force must instil in men, so that peace can be maintained, and security guaranteed. This is the reason why the State must be conceived by Hobbes as a mortal god, to whom man, after the immortal God, owes his earthly life"[[43]](#footnote-43).

The absolute nature of the sovereign power derives from the sum of the individual powers that men have surrendered through the pact. This surrender is irreversible - otherwise it would be impossible to preserve peace - and therefore no right to resist the political authority remains, unless that authority does not guarantee security and order. Civil laws are the will of the sovereign, only and supreme legislator. The sovereign power also holds the administration of justice, the appointment of all public officials, the right to reward or punish the subjects and the possibility of conferring dignities and honours.

According to the anthropological conception of Hobbes, in the state of nature there was no criterion to decide what is just and unjust. In that state, man had every right to use all the means he considered suitable to defend his life. After the pact that gives rise to the State, the criterion of justice is established by positive laws. The strength of the sovereign power determines through norms and the corresponding punishments, what is just and unjust. In this area the Hobbesian doctrine of property is inserted: sovereign power recognizes private property conditionally, since it retains absolute power over all things.

For Hobbes, in the civil state " right is the freedom that the law allows us"[[44]](#footnote-44). The sovereign power determines the extent of individual freedom: the individual only has full freedom in those actions where the laws say nothing. On the other hand, Hobbes considers that an excessive number of laws is not appropriate. Thus, despite the absolute character of political power, vast areas for individual freedom are guaranteed.

The absolute nature of the State also extends to the religious sphere. In the state of nature man can venerate God according to the way he thinks is most appropriate, but once the social pact is established, the individual surrenders this right to the State. In the society of Leviathan there can be only one religious worship: the diversity of religions is a continuous cause of unrest and controversy. According to Hobbes political and religious power are identical in Sacred Scripture. For Hobbes, obedience to God shows in obedience to human law. The political authority Is a religious mediator. The civil sovereign will be the head of the Church, and will decide on doctrinal disputes and the canonicity of Scripture. Clearly, England’s historical-religious circumstances in the 17th century weigh heavily on this last aspect of his doctrine.

If we labelled Bossuet’s doctrine clerical, here we find in Hobbes a theory that denies society of any transcendent foundation. In this regard, and bearing in mind what was said in the introduction to this section, Hobbes represents an important step in the process of secularisation, understood as the affirmation of the absolute autonomy of man, and it consolidates juridical positivism: it considers just only what has been established by the sovereign power, with no reference to higher sources of moral power[[45]](#footnote-45).

#### d) The social structure

Absolute monarchy was the form of government that most identified with the moulds of the Old Regime, whether it was based on the theory of the social contract or the divine right of the kings. But before we finish this rapid sketch of this structure, we will refer briefly to its social organization.

It is characterized by a class structure, justified by the division of functions: society presents itself to us as a network of services provided by one class to the others. The clergy distribute the means of salvation and exercise their teaching and care work; the main and original function of the nobility is war. With the passage of time, the ministry or service to the monarch is added to the military function. Both classes have a privileged status, shown in their exemption of taxes.

We now have to talk about the third estate, the plain state. We must define it negatively: it is made up of those who do not belong to the nobility or the clergy. It is easy to imagine the variety in the make-up of the plain state: farmers, merchants, artisans, etc. Indeed, we can find among the clergy and the nobility different sub-groups: high and low clergy; provincial nobility, courtesan, toga. But it is also true that the plain state is a Pandora's box: in it we find from miserable beggars to wealthy bankers. The greatest numbers in this group are the peasants. But the bourgeoisie will undoubtedly be the main actor in this group.

Etymologically bourgeois is the one who lives in the borough, in the city. Since the late Middle Ages the bourgeois rise in number and social status: they monopolize commercial activities, take over the public service, excel in intellectual tasks and in teaching. The bourgeoisie make the rhythm of historical time tick ever more rapidly: it is the strength of men who aspire to be something more, to be *someone*, and who can do it, because they exercise financial power - which is not the deciding factor but facilitates the means to do it - and the intellectual capacity to take the initiative of events and pull others along.

### 2. The New Regime

If we now try to draw a sketch of the main features of the New Regime, the first thing that comes to mind is the collapse of that structure, with a watertight combination of beliefs, absolute truths and established principles. Pluralism takes over: everything has become relative. Dogmas do not sit well in the new order. What reason has shown is universally accepted. In everything else, the principle of tolerance prevails: the coexistence of diverse and often opposed actions is thought to be beneficial in the new system.

Certain principles, however, replace the absolute truths of the Old Regime: the sovereignty of the people, the rights of man, the constitutional system are untouchable. In the public sphere the good and the bad are identified with the constitutional or the anti-constitutional, because in the field of morality such ideas begin to be part of the personal private sphere.

In politics, the change is profound and definitive. Absolutism is replaced by a new political philosophy, which we can call *liberal*, philosophy that includes notions such as the sovereignty of the people, the separation of powers, constitutionalism and the legal recognition of the rights of the citizen. Democracy does not break through yet, if we understand it as the political system that adopts universal vote. Liberalism maintains the census vote: citizens with the capacity to vote - they will always be an elite - enjoy all civil and political rights, while the rest of the population has only civil rights, which establishes that all are equal before the law.

In the institutional sphere, rationalization and centralization are enforced. The old institutional chaos, the product of confirmed privileges and customs, is replaced by a centralized organism, where each public function has its rationale. At the same time, all the government in the State is centralized, and the dependence of the local authorities to the central power is tightened.

The social structure undergoes deep changes: the aim is to achieve society where all are truly free and equal: birth privileges are eliminated. Before the State, all men have the same status: all are citizens. The equality of the New Regime is above all legal, because the laws do not make distinctions or discriminate people. It did not prevent, however, inequality of functions: only some, the best qualified, because of their profession or economic power, enjoy all political powers. Liberalism was elitist, and it is fair to say that the well-off bourgeoisie took over political power[[46]](#footnote-46).

There are remarkable contrasts between the Old and the New Regime: there have been changes, transformation, and their cause must be attributed to historical events so crucial that they managed to crack the crust of history’s surface and modify it substantially. These events were the revolutions.

Recent historiography likes to speak of the *Atlantic Revolution* in reference to the changes that took place in Europe and America between 1770 and 1850. The French Revolution, the emancipation of the English colonies of North America, and the independence of South America a few decades later would respond to the same historical process[[47]](#footnote-47). The source of their unity would be the same theoretical principles, heirs of the European Enlightenment, that we have called liberal. We will refer to this ideological background below.

## III THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Throughout the most distinctive centuries of the Old Regime -17th and 18th centuries -, under the apparent stability of a structure based on ideological homogeneity, currents of thought developed that would undermine it. Some representatives of these currents called themselves "freethinkers," to highlight their differences from the dominant ideology. The non-conformist intellectuals will be lumped together under a common name, the Enlightenment. In the end they will change the cultural and institutional face of the western world.

Although the Enlightenment is the paradigmatic manifestation of modern philosophy, we cannot identify it *tout court* with all the philosophical thinking of Modernity. Therefore, we have decided to present briefly the main modern philosophical currents, and later analyse the enlightened ideas. We finish the chapter with the presentation of the Kantian system as a synthesis of the philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries.

### 1. General characteristics of modern philosophy

Modern philosophy can be distinguished as a philosophy that makes the subject and subjectivity the focus of reflection and interest. This statement is one of the central theses, or rather, a perspective never abandoned by modern philosophy. We could say that as Modernity advances, this idea becomes ever more obvious, and cultural and philosophical consequences unprecedented in Western culture are drawn from it. In fact, both rationalism, developed above all in continental Europe, and empiricism, developed mainly by British philosophers, have that common perspective: the subject as a radical philosophical topic. This common dimension does not mean, however, that rationalism and empiricism are simply philosophies of the subject; neither can it be said that they are two aspects of the same philosophy. Rationalism and empiricism are diverse because of their theoretical developments and the theses that derive from either of them. They also have different philosophical interests, although at the end of the XVIII century both schools up led to a synthesis of great speculative depth: Kant’s.

The 17th century is the century of Descartes and Bacon, but also the century of Galileo. Modern science begins to gather importance to the point of making an impression on the period we are studying. The *discovery* of the mathematical model applied to the study of nature is in sync with the spirit of the time. Rationalist philosophy grows and develops fundamentally within a systematic approach, and as such, it is analogous to the mathematical method; on the other hand, empiricist philosophy puts the emphasis of its research on the observation of factual data. These two aspects are also traits of empirical science: system, method, observation, experience. For this reason, the dialogue between philosophy and culture is remarkable intense, and there is a constant exchange of theses mainly about the world of nature and human knowledge. Another typical factor of the philosophy of this period is the religious interest shown by the different philosophers of these centuries. Just as it is difficult to find between the Middle Ages and Modernity a specific point in that indicates the change of period, and instead it is easy to observe a clear continuity of historical, philosophical and cultural elements, it can also be said that the medieval interest in theology does not disappear with the advent of Modernity. There is a change of perspective, but no omission. The problem of God for thinkers such as Descartes, Pascal, Malebranche, Spinoza and Leibniz is present with remarkable force, and the source of important speculation. The English empirical thinking is less metaphysical, and therefore the problem of God, though present, appears from a different perspective. There are other cultural movements, such as libertinism and some currents of the Enlightenment, that call themselves atheist. But it is clear is that modern philosophy does not identify *tout court* either with libertinism or with the atheism of some currents of the Enlightenment.

Political philosophy is another area where modern philosophy has made great innovations. A central idea for several authors is the social contract - we have already seen it in Hobbes. This idea reveals the search for a dynamic principle of organization of society. On the other hand, it also displays an anthropology that reflects a conception of man biased towards the individual, which is consistent with modern recognition of the autonomy of human affairs. During this period modern states are strengthened. Absolute monarchies meet their end after the revolutionary events, and modern democracies appear for the first time in history. These first forms of democracy will have a very strong individualistic inspiration. The question of *tolerance* first appears in the 17th century, along with the first steps of the theory of the social contract: it is really a political-religious question due to the presence of different religions in Europe. Until the beginning of the 16th century the only existing religion in Western Europe was Catholicism; from the time of the Lutheran and Calvinist reform, and the Anglican schism, the problem of the coexistence of diverse religious beliefs appears: the wars of religion create a political situation that leads some thinkers to propose tolerance as a way of peaceful coexistence.

The two most important philosophical trends of the 17th and 18th centuries are continental rationalism and British empiricism. Both currents place the knowing subject at the centre of philosophical speculation. In this sense, rationalism and empiricism are essentially modern currents of thought, although in so far as intellectual attitudes they are constant throughout the history of Western philosophy. The differences between the two are metaphysical and epistemological. However, rationalism and empiricism are not separated by insurmountable barriers. In Hobbes, for example, we find a vast use of Galileo's method; Locke receives the influence of Descartes, Berkeley of Malebranche.

Rationalism develops an authentic metaphysics, which to a large extent is related to the great ancient and medieval metaphysical tradition. It is not simply a sequel, but a new attempt to understand man, the world and God. The Cartesian starting point, the *cogito*, is also a metaphysical point of view. After Descartes, with Malebranche, Spinoza and Leibniz, philosophy has a common platform, the Cartesian approach. The search for certainty, the clear and distinct ideas, the problems derived from the separation of thinking substances from ones with extension, will be the most characteristic themes of rationalist metaphysical development. In addition, we must say that Descartes is, to a certain extent, the creator - with some precedents in the scholasticism of the 15th century - of the *spirit of system* that runs through all modern metaphysics: truth as logical coherence, deductive and mathematical method, clarity and distinction, unity, are basic concepts in the idea of a philosophical system. Together with all that, a certain contempt and distancing from lived experience and sensible experience; the rationalist metaphysician is more a deducer than an observer, he is more interested in accurate and precise definitions than on the description of real phenomenon.

Empiricism, on the other hand, is interested not so much in classical metaphysical problems, but in gnoseological problems, although it shares the pursuit of certainty with the rationalists. The first problem the empiricist philosopher wants to address is not that of being, but that of how, from *experience*, one can achieve *knowledge* of reality. This research is carried out with a great analytical spirit, the object being human experience of knowing and of affectivity. In any case the empiricist philosopher is always bound to *a type* of experience, sense experience, in so far as he holds that any idea must always rely on sense data. With this approach, there is no consideration of the metaphysical dimension of intellectual capacity, inasmuch as all abstraction is judged by empiricism as a mere product of imagination quite separate from experience. Empiricist *ideas*, which are nothing but images, representations or reflections of sensible phenomenon, are always particular. Universality - empiricists prefer to speak of generality -, refers to names, to terms, but never to ideas or concepts. Empiricism in this regard is consistent with nominalism, which is at its foundation. Logically, the method of the empiricists could not be the same as that of the rationalists. Instead of mathematical deduction, empiricism holds that induction is the preferential scientific and philosophical method. Therefore, if rationalism has a clear spirit of system, empiricism has an analytical and observant spirit of experience and of its epistemological presuppositions.

Empiricism undertakes the task of judging the cognitive capacity of man from a reductionist conception of the cognitive experience itself. This attempt remains a theoretical possibility that will be taken up by Kant. On the other hand, metaphysical rationalism, in opposition to empiricism, presupposes that the human cognitive capacity is able to know the objective truth in a deductive way, without questioning its own rationality. This theoretical attitude earned him the name of *metaphysical dogmatism*.

The artificial nature of the rationalist systems, the lack of contact with sense experience, the adherence to arbitrary definitions rather than the reality proposed by common sense will all be the criticised by the enlightened. Above all, Condillac and Voltaire will accuse rationalism of being an artificial and imaginary construction. The 18th century Enlightenment will look to the British empiricist philosophy, although not exclusively. But this direction of thought will end in scepticism: metaphysics as the ultimate knowledge of the reality of things will only be a chimera; theology as a science, a contradiction; objective morality will become a hedonistic and utilitarian ethic.

If we bear in mind the guiding thread of this book - the process of secularization - rationalism and empiricism move towards a biased affirmation of the absolute autonomy of man and his isolation from the Creator and creatures. Although the cartesian *cogito ergo sum* had metaphysical aspirations, it locked the subject in his own consciousness, and presented obstacles difficult to overcome in order to reach the reality of things. The same is true of empiricist gnoseology: to be consistent it should stop at mere subjective sensation. We will have to wait until the 20th century to find philosophical answers that, accepting the starting point of Modernity - subjectivity -, recover the scope of being. This will be the task of contemporary spiritualism and personalism. In their approach the subject is not identified with consciousness, but is a being at same time. The synthesis of the philosophy of being with a subjective perspective frees traditional philosophy from objectivism of which it has been frequently accused - with good reason -, and at the same time opens the subject to the richness of communication with the Absolute and with other created beings.[[48]](#footnote-48)

### 2. The Enlightenment: An Introduction

*Enlightenment,* *Aufklärung*, *Illuminismo*, *Les lumières*, *Ilustración*, are words used in different languages to identify a cultural movement, a way of seeing the world, a *Weltanschauung* that while containing obvious philosophical elements exceeds the strictly philosophical realm.

Chronologically, the Enlightenment belongs to the 18th century, and is a predominantly European cultural phenomenon, its most important developments occurring in England, France and Germany. The historical period marked by the Enlightenment was full of intellectual and philosophical stimuli but at the same time it lacked a figure that can be considered an obligatory reference point. In this sense, it is analogous to the Renaissance period. There was a philosophical environment that encompassed everything: in this lies its specificity: the enlightenment was an environment, a way of thinking.

Immanuel Kant tried to define this new state of culture. In a pamphlet entitled *What is the Enlightenment?* Kant answered the question as follows: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s understanding without direction from another. This immaturity is self-imposed, when its cause lies not in the lack of understanding, but the lack of resolution and courage to use one’s own understanding without direction from another. *Sapere aude*! Have courage to use your own understanding! So, this is the motto of the Enlightenment.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

As we can see from the definition of Kant, the theoretical key to understand the Enlightenment is the role given to reason. But what is reason? It is not the rationalist reason of 17th century metaphysics, even if the Enlightenment inherited its optimism in the powers of reason. It is rather the idea of reason of the British empiricists: an adherence to the data of the senses and the results of experiments. Reason in the Enlightenment is no longer the *place* of spirits, the *reservoir* of innate ideas, but a faculty, understood as the capacity to know. It is an inexhaustible capacity or force, which will lead us to the knowledge of the unfathomable mysteries of nature. The attachment of 18th century reason to sensory experience will promote the development of the natural sciences: botany, chemistry, zoology, natural history and medicine.

On the other hand, faith in the ability of reason is manifested in another key concept for understanding the Enlightenment: the notion of *progress*. The intellectuals of this period thought that the Enlightenment would lead to a more humane, prudent and comfortable life. The Enlightenment would be the first time in history in which a new discipline emerged: *Philosophy of History*. With it, men undertook an analysis of the history of man from a universal and progressive standpoint. History is seen as the development of reason, which takes man out of medieval darkness and into the light of rationality.

This optimistic and progressive vision of history is closely related to another feature of Enlightenment reason: the rejection of tradition. For the Enlightenment, all social or spiritual phenomena that cannot be explained by human reason are myth or superstition. Thus, the anti-traditionalism of the Enlightenment is embodied in the rejection of revealed religion, especially Catholicism, and in the theoretical construction of deism, a religion without mysteries, cut to the measure of reason; it is enough to affirm the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and the afterlife. The enlightened attitude towards religion will become manifest in Germany with the process of the rationalization of dogmas; and in England and France with the defence of tolerance; in this period religious indifferentism will often be the starting point of tolerance.

Along with the rejection of revealed religion came the desire for social change. The hereditary transmission of power, social inequality dependent on the circumstances of one’s birth, the colonial pact of different lands, appear to the Enlightened as inexplicable from a rational standpoint. Thus, the Enlightenment, inspired by Locke’s political theory, would present a liberal and democratic political program. In France it would be identified with the revolutionary program.

Unfortunately, the alliance between Throne and Altar, typical of the *Ancien Régime*, did not help people to understand the difference between the historical circumstances and the divine aspects of the Catholic Church. Attacks against the established social order — which were largely necessary and just, in defence of the dignity of the human person — were directed against the Church. As a consequence, and because of the misunderstanding between one party and the other, the political and social philosophy of the 18th century bears the stamp of anti-Catholicism. There were, however, important exceptions.

Law and morals, two basic areas of human knowledge, suffered major changes in this period. Enlightened morality is secular, that is, it has no relation to transcendence, and in fact it shows significant utilitarian elements. At the same time, natural law, which the second scholasticism presented as united to the transcendent destiny of man, would also be secularized. The new natural law would tend towards the affirmation of the absolute autonomy of temporal affairs. Rationalist systems of law would arise, based on a strongly voluntarist vision of positive law.

The Enlightenment was an elite cultural movement. The bourgeoisie was the social group where the new principles developed most vigorously. After some time, the categories of Enlightened thought would spread throughout Europe and America, setting up a pattern of popular thought.

The belief in progress links the Enlightenment and positivism; the concepts of morality and politics link up with liberalism and utilitarianism; the universal vision of history and the affirmation of rationality in its development bring the enlightenment’s attitude closer to Hegel and in a sense, to Marx. Nevertheless, the increased awareness of some aspects of the dignity of the human person reveal the Christian *humus* that served as the basis for modernity, although such a *humus* is often hidden under the strong forces of secularization, understood as total and absolute autonomy of the temporal with respect to the transcendental.

### 3. The English Enlightenment

In England, the Enlightenment basically focused on the areas of religion and morality. This does not mean that the Enlightenment did not have other concerns, especially in the area of empirical sciences. Moreover, a most important intellectual figure in the British Isles during this period, who would have a decisive influence on the development of European philosophy, particularly in Kant’s system, was not a philosopher but a scientist: Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727).

#### a) The Physics of Newton

Newton completed the worldview proposed by Galileo, Copernicus and Kepler; he is considered to be the father of modern physics. Among his most famous works *Philosophia naturalis principia mathematica* (1687, 1713 and 1726) and *Optics* (1704) must be mentioned. Newton rejected the Aristotelian doctrine of the distinction between the laws of terrestrial and celestial bodies and proved that it was false. Then he successfully applied his scientific method to various fields of research, which assumed that all phenomena of motion in nature can be deduced mathematically from the principles of mechanics. However, Newton did not agree with Galileo regarding the mathematical structure of reality. Mathematics is a methodological tool, but the scientific method is based on experience: we must first discover the laws of mechanical nature inductively, starting from experience, so that we can proceed by way of deduction.

Newtonian science is a science of phenomena: “All that does not proceed from phenomena should be defined as a hypothesis; and hypotheses, both metaphysical and physical, whether their qualities are either occult or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy. Propositions are inferred from phenomena and generalized by induction. This was how impenetrability, mobility, the momentum of bodies and consequently, the laws of motion and gravity, were discovered.”[[50]](#footnote-50)

Although Newton rejected the use of assumptions, there are two concepts in his physical system that were assumptions themselves. These were *absolute time* and *space*, of which he gave a theological interpretation. These authentic “speculative hypotheses” form the field in which things move. The world of Newton is still a mechanistic world. At the same time, it is a world where God is involved not only with its creation and preservation, but also actively, by correcting any imperfections in the movements.

#### b) English Deism

The topic of religion was a privileged field of speculation of the enlightened English court. By Deism we mean a movement of religious thought which, in spite of a certain uniformity, presented a variety of theoretical attitudes.

The predecessor of the 18th century deists is *Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648)*. Among his works we can mention *Tractatus de veritate* (1624), *De causis errorum* (1645) and *De religione gentilium* (1645, 1663). Cherbury believed that all men have common notions, which are *a priori*, universal and certain. They are impressed by God in man, and man knows them through natural instinct. Sense knowledge would not be possible without resorting to these concepts. Some of these common notions are the basis of the so-called *natural religion*. For Cherbury, the five truths that are or should be supported by all religions are: the existence of a supreme being; the obligation of all men to worship this being; moral life is the most important religious cult; vices and sins must be expiated by repentance; lastly, the existence of another life where reward or punishment will be given according to one’s behaviour. Lord Herbert of Cherbury wanted to achieve a *pax religiosa*. Bearing in mind the historical circumstances of the wars of religion in Europe, Cherbury did not reject the possibility and usefulness of revelation. Rather, he considered reason as the ultimate judge of revealed truth.

*John Locke* wrote *The Reasonableness of Christianity* in 1695; this work clearly showed a strong tendency towards the rationalization of dogma. Many British intellectuals followed in Locke’s footsteps. However, *deism* strictly speaking radicalizes this trend. Copleston wrote concerning it: “Deists were rationalists who believed in God... Eighteenth century Deism meant the de-supernaturalising of religion and the refusal to accept any religious propositions on authority. For the Deists, reason, and reason alone, was the judge of truth in religion and of everything else.”[[51]](#footnote-51)

The most important authors of this movement are *John Toland (1670-1722)*, associated with the origin of freemasonry, with his work *Christianity not Mysterious: A Treatise Shewing That there is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason* (1696), and *Matthew Tindal (1657-1733)*, who wrote *Christianity as old as the Creation, or, the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature*. Another author worth mentioning is *Henry St. John, Viscount of Bolingbroke (1678-1751)*, who presented Christ as God’s instrument to confirm natural religion.

*Samuel Clarke’s (1675-1729)* intellectual attitude was different. He was an Anglican priest who sought to demonstrate the rational nature of the faith in open controversy with Hobbes and Spinoza. By means of twelve propositions, Clarke showed the existence of God and of some of the divine attributes. An admirer of Newton, he related Newtonian absolute space and time to the divine existence, an issue that would provoke a controversy with Leibniz. But he moved away from the deists as he affirmed the moral necessity of revelation, given the current state of humanity. Within revelation there are truths that are beyond the capacity of reason, yet do not contradict reason.

The Anglican Bishop *Joseph Butler (1692-1752)* strongly opposed the deists. Author of the book *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, he wanted to show that the belief stating that Christianity is true is not unreasonable and, if it were, then the belief systems about nature would also be unreasonable. There are always difficulties to accept revelation or some natural truths, like the immortality of the soul. However, there are also analogous difficulties in the field of knowledge of nature’s system, and this is not a valid reason to reject knowledge of the natural world.

#### c) Moral Philosophy

Moral philosophy is the other field of study typical of the English Enlightenment. The two great exponents of English ethical thought of this period are *Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713)* and *Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746)*.

Ashley-Cooper is known for his *Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit*. He believed that man has innate moral ideas that incline him to seek his own good, which must be harmonized with the good of society. Taking up the polemic with Hobbes, he did not think that men are evil by nature. Benevolence is an essential part of morality; its roots are in human nature. Every man also enjoys a *moral sense*, which makes it possible to distinguish between right and wrong behaviour. Morality, based on virtue, is autonomous with respect to religion. Virtue must be sought for its own sake. This, however, does not mean that Shaftesbury rejected transcendence. True virtue includes piety towards God. Therefore, “the perfection and elevation of virtue is due to faith in God.”

Meanwhile, Hutcheson followed in the footsteps of Shaftesbury. He proposed ideas with a utilitarian bent, which would be taken up in the 19th century by Bentham and by John Stuart Mill: “Comparing the moral quality of actions in order to provide a criterion for our choices among the various actions proposed, or to find which of them has the highest moral excellence, we are led by our moral sense of virtue to judge in this way: to equal degrees of happiness which we hope will follow the actions, virtue is in proportion to the number of people to whom happiness will be extended... so that action is best which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, and the worst action is that which causes unhappiness to the greatest number.”[[52]](#footnote-52) In Hutcheson we find a rather hedonistic sense of happiness, and a tendency to identify morality with aesthetics: men have the aesthetic sense together with the moral sense. Influenced by Butler, Hutcheson tried to unite morality with metaphysics and theology, but he will be remembered in history as a forerunner of the utilitarianism of Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

### 4. The French Enlightenment

We tend to think that the Enlightenment was a typically French phenomenon, but we shouldn’t forget that its first followers were English. The profound influence of the English Enlightenment on the French must be added to this historical fact. The popular image of the French Enlightenment — *les Lumières* — is due to the radicalization of some theoretical enlightened attitudes which in the British Isles appeared under the mantle of moderation. Excesses have always had a greater resonance in the collective memory; materialism, atheism, the attacks on the Catholic Church and the horrors of the revolutionary Terror are typical elements of the popular image of the French Enlightenment.

Although these elements are true, not all manifestations of 18th century French thought can be forced into this scheme. There is a common family air within but we must make distinctions. In the following pages we will try to provide an overall picture of these *philosophes*, who are important not so much because of the depth of their ideas, but for the influence they had on popular categories of thought.

#### a) Pierre Bayle, the Precursor

*Pierre Bayle (1647-1706)*, is considered by most historians as the main precursor of the *philosophes*. Bayle introduced a set of theoretical principles which would be extensively developed during the 18th century. The author of the *Historical and Critical Dictionary* believed that the theological disputes between Catholicism and Protestantism and between Catholic schools of thought, are all confusing and useless. The cause of these disputes is the lack of clarity in judgments and the presence of prejudices. Basically, all agree on the fundamental things. If theological controversies are so frequent, metaphysical disputes are even more so. Whatever one may say concerning the rational demonstration of the existence of God or the immortality of the soul, there will always be arguments to prove the opposite. In addition, there remains the problem of evil in the world, incompatible with the existence of a powerful, infinite and omniscient God.

Faced with metaphysical and theological disputes we are left with no option but the practice of tolerance. *Tolerance* is the only rational response to the various points of view on things beyond the power of reason. Furthermore, it is necessary to separate religion and morality. According to Bayle, the life lived by men of all time shows that there is no inextricable link between religious belief and moral practice. So, he did not see any problem in asserting the possibility of a society of atheists who act in a morally upright manner.

Criticism of the intellectual attitude of Bayle, considered by some as akin to atheism, arose from everywhere. In his controversy with Bayle, Leibniz attempted to give a response to the problem of the relationship between divine omnipotence and the existence of evil. However, tolerance as the basis for civil coexistence — which in Bayle has strong connotations of indifference — and the separation between religion and morality are the inheritance Bayle left for future generations.

#### b) The Encyclopedia

If there is almost complete unanimity among historians to consider Bayle as the great forerunner of the Enlightenment, the same can be said of the importance of the *Encyclopédie* as a symbol of the new current of thought. The *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des arts et des métiers* was the work of many authors, under the guidance of Diderot and D’Alembert. The latter retired from editing in 1758. The Encyclopedia consisted of thirty-five volumes, published between 1751 and 1780. It was not easy to do the editing work, because the French government considered some items as detrimental to both political power and to the authority of religion. Like any other work in which many minds intervened, the Encyclopedia as a whole is uneven from the philosophical and scientific standpoint. Authors such as Montesquieu, Turgot, Rousseau and D’Holbach appeared alongside others who are virtually unknown. However, what interests us most when dealing with the Encyclopedia are not matters of detail, but the basic spirit and purpose of this work. The purpose was to provide the reader of its time with a body of information on the elements of the past and present, and to lay the foundations of a future society that would be more humane and rational. It was not a purely scientific or instructive aim: in the end, the encyclopaedic project maintained a rationalist ideology that questioned the certainties received by tradition, and critiqued, although moderately for reasons of political prudence, the very foundations of political power and of the Catholic Church.

As a child of its time, the Encyclopedia must not be seen only as an anticlerical manifesto. This would not be fair since there are articles concerning faith written with sufficient orthodox standards. Moreover, the Encyclopedia served as a positive reappraisal of popular arts and crafts. Indeed, for the first time, the curious reader was offered an almost complete picture of manual trades, agricultural techniques, and the various complicated processes of craftsmanship. Empiricism, which is at the origin of the Enlightenment, along with many elements of rationalism and mechanism (the consideration of the material universe as a vast machine), served as an adequate theoretical framework for the rehabilitation of the technical trades.

The two main promoters of the Encyclopedia, as we have already mentioned, were *Denis Diderot (1713-1784)* and *Jean Le Rond D’Alembert (1717-1783)*. Diderot was influenced by Shaftesbury. He wrote an *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu (Essay on merit and virtue)*, which is a translation of Shaftesbury’s work, with personal additions. He was in Russia, where he engaged in philosophical conversations with his protector, the Empress Catherine II. As regards his religious attitudes, he went through different stages, which included elements of deism, pantheism and atheism. Diderot did not present a stable philosophical system, and in order to obtain an overall picture of his thought we ought to combine the materialism of his *Le rêve de D’Alembert* (*The Dream of D’Alembert*) with the moral idealism of some of his articles in the Encyclopedia.

The thought of D’Alembert seems to be more consistent. Besides being a philosopher, he was a great mathematician and physicist. From the point of view of his philosophy, the Preliminary Discourse of the Encyclopedia has special importance. D’Alembert considered Locke as the father of scientific philosophy and welcomed the progress of philosophy in the Age of the Enlightenment. At the core of his philosophy there is a firm phenomenalism, which is an authentic positivism *avant la lettre*: both the philosopher and the scientist ought to describe and relate the phenomena observed empirically. To go beyond the phenomenon is to go beyond the capabilities of knowledge. As regards morality, D’Alembert thought that it is based on awareness of one’s duty towards others. This awareness is a support for the establishment of civil society founded on the agreement between one’s own interest and the ends of society: happiness and the common welfare.

#### c) Materialism

If the symbol of the French Enlightenment is the *Encyclopedia*, the two most interesting theoretical developments — one because of its radicalism and the other because of its vast historical consequences — are materialism and socio-political theory.

Regarding materialism, its most classic representative is *Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751)*. In his famous book *L’homme machine (Machine Man)*, and also in his *Histoire Naturelle de l’Âme (Natural History of the Soul)* and *L’Homme Plante (Plant Man)*, he developed a materialistic base that made everything, including ideas, depend on sensitivity. The key to understanding what man is resides in the physiological processes. The difference between man, animal and plant is only one of degree. An agnostic in the religious field and a hedonist in morals (one of his works is entitled: *L’Art de Jouir (The Art of Enjoying)*, this physician-philosopher proposed a possible radical development of enlightened empiricism.

Along the same materialistic lines, we find Baron *Paul d’Holbach (1723-1789)*. He was born in Germany, but his education was French. D’Holbach wrote the most important text about materialism in the 18th century: *Système de la nature ou des lois du monde physique et du monde moral* (*The System of Nature, or Laws of the Moral and Physical World*, 1770). This author professed a certain atomism: all things are the result of a conjunction of atoms structured in different ways. The principles of motion are not external, but rather internal to things: attraction and repulsion between atoms. In the case of man, these two principles are called love and hate. Man, like all other things, tends to preserve his own existence. Self-love, therefore, is the main driving force of human life. This tendency is not incompatible with the search for general welfare. As an enemy of all forms of religiosity, D’Holbach believed that ignorance and fear are the origin of the notion of divinity, and that religion increases anxiety and fear. Once religion is eliminated, we can change the political system of the *Ancien Régime*, and replace it with something more rational. It is clear that d’Holbach did not advocate for a violent revolution.

*Etienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715-1780)* was not a materialist strictly speaking, but his radical sensism relates him to this school of thought, though in his system he gave room to the spirit and transcendence. Condillac published in 1746 *Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines* (*Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*), which showed him to be a faithful disciple of Locke. For him, all knowledge has an empirical origin, whether it is a simple or a complex idea. Condillac, however, developed his own thought and arrived at personal epistemological positions. In the *Traité des systèmes* (*Treatise of Systems*, 1749) he strongly criticized the metaphysical systems of the 17th century: Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza and Leibniz started with definitions, and then using a geometric method, arrived at conclusions that are arbitrary. We certainly have to systematize knowledge, but we must start from phenomenal data provided by the senses.

In the *Traité des sensations* (*Treatise on Sensations*, 1754) Condillac veered away from Locke to assert that even mental operations like judgment, wanting and comparing are only transformed sensations. To convince the reader that our only source of knowledge is sensation, Condillac proposes an analogy: imagine a statue that is deprived of all knowledge. Based on one of the crudest senses, the sense of smell, Condillac reconstructs the whole process of knowledge to arrive at intelligence itself.

In a later work, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he explained that the will is determined by an illness of the spirit; it feels the need for a good that is absent. This discomfort or concern is the first principle of all the habits of our soul. This same argument is developed in the *Extrait raisonné* (Reasoned Summary), subsequently added to the *Treatise on Sensations*, and the *Treatise on Animals*. For this reason, there are voluntarist interpretations of Condillac’s system, since all passions and ideas depend on the determination of the will.

Despite appearing as a thorough materialist, this French philosopher categorically affirmed the existence of God as supreme cause, and the existence of the immaterial and spiritual soul. The soul is not a set of sensations, but a single centre that unites them. Moreover, regarding the existence of bodies and their qualities, Condillac maintained a cautious position: “Everything that could and should be reasonably inferred is that bodies are beings that cause sensations in us, and have properties of which we know nothing for sure.”[[53]](#footnote-53) In short, as noted, Condillac’s materialism is *sui generis*, open in a sense to the spirit and transcendence.

The materialism of *Claude Adrien Helvetius (1715-1771)*, however, seems to be less open to transcendence. In his book *De l’esprit* (*On Mind*) he reduced all human capacities to sensory perception. This reductionism applies also to the ethical life, where the fundamental principle of behaviour is the pursuit of pleasure. Education should teach men to harmonize their personal interests — the pursuit of pleasure — with the general interest of society, which would ultimately lead to greater pleasure. For this process of education to be effective in society, political freedom must prevail, and natural religion should be generalized.

#### d) Social and Political Theory

The other speculative line that has attracted the attention of historians is the social and political philosophy of the French Enlightenment, where three philosophers and their ideas have succeeded in changing the way ordinary people think. We are referring to Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau.

*Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689-1755)*, went down in history as the great defender of political freedom and the separation of powers. A historian, public servant and a man with a curious spirit, his first book came out in 1721 under the name of *Lettres persanes* (*Persian Letters*). There, Montesquieu criticized the religious and political institutions of France, through a satirical view that the author attributed to a Persian traveller.

But the most important work of the philosopher of Bordeaux is *De l’esprit des lois* (*The Spirit of the Laws*) published in 1748 after seventeen years of preparation. Montesquieu made a comparison between different societies in this voluminous work. Following an empirical-inductive method, he intended not only to present a vast collection of data, but he also wanted to understand the cause of the diversity of institutions and ways of life. Thus, our author came to establish general laws of society. The systems of positive law are different, and the reasons for these differences are many. Among these, Montesquieu pointed out the character of a people, the climate, geography, commerce, and the forms of government. All these circumstances form the spirit of the law.

From the analysis of specific data provided by the study of each society, Montesquieu could establish a theory of law that, in a certain sense, approached the classical doctrine of natural law: for the French philosopher there exist laws of nature, “so called because they derive from our being.”[[54]](#footnote-54) Montesquieu admitted the existence of a natural moral law that precedes the system of positive law. He also affirmed the existence of a God, Creator and Preserver of the world, who established fixed rules of justice.

The best-known part of his work, which will actually influence subsequent political philosophy to a great degree, concerns the forms of government. For Montesquieu, the forms of government are three: *Republican*, which can be democratic or aristocratic depending on the number of people involved in the direction of the supreme power, *monarchical* and *despotic*. The difference between the last two is the fact that, in the case of a monarchy, the king reigns taking into account some fundamental rules, while in the despotic state, the despot governs by caprice.

Any form of government is ruled according to a principle. In the republic, the guiding principle is civic virtue; in the monarchy, honour; and in despotism, fear. “There is this difference between the nature of government and its principle; its nature is what makes it be such, and its principle, which makes it act. One is its particular structure, while the other is human passions that set it in motion. However, the laws must be relative to the principle of each government and to its nature.”[[55]](#footnote-55)

In addition to the classification of the forms of government, which shows the relationship between the thought of Montesquieu and classical political thought, another concept will endure: the separation of powers. “Freedom can consist only in being able to do what we should do, and not being forced to do what we should not want”.[[56]](#footnote-56) This freedom entails the separation of political powers. The legislative, executive and judiciary powers should be independent of each other, in order to avoid despotism and the tyrannical abuse of power. Montesquieu admitted that he got this idea from the English constitution, whose main purpose was to safeguard political freedom.

If these ideas of Montesquieu had a vast influence in Europe and America, the critical attitude of *François Marie Arouet*, better known as *Voltaire* (1694-1778), also enjoyed great popularity. Voltaire wrote a lot and very effectively, with an elegant French satirical style. He did not have a system, but in his writings, there is a common spirit: the *criticism* of tradition, which runs throughout his work.

Voltaire argued that the 17th century metaphysical systems were artificial, and that Cartesianism leads to Spinozism. However, he thought that Newton leads to true theism, where we recognize a supreme God who created all things. Moreover, he thought that Newton rediscovered final causes, and final causes are the most valid proof for the existence of God.

Very close to Locke in his epistemological empiricism, Voltaire doubted the spirituality of the soul, and he identified freedom as a term that men have invented to designate the known effect of any unknown cause. While rejecting freedom in a psychological sense, he was an avid advocate of political freedom, not in the democratic sense (Voltaire always despised the masses) but in the sense of freedom for philosophers. Voltaire intended to replace the dogmas of the Church with the principles of Enlightenment philosophy. He went to extremes to defend religious tolerance, and ended his writings with the phrase *Écrasez l’infâme* (Crush the loathsome thing), where the loathsome thing was the Catholic Church.

Voltaire was not a deep philosopher, but he achieved something few philosophers achieve: to mould the categories of thought for broad intellectual sectors. Confidence in the progress of the enlightenment and a consideration that faith is an obstacle to this progress would be the *leitmotif* of subsequent thought.

Regarding *Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)*, the last of the exponents of the triad mentioned above, we face a historical classification problem. This citizen of Geneva was not exactly a man of the enlightenment. He declared himself against the attitude of the *philosophes*, whom he described as “zealous missionaries of atheism, and even more, dogmatic tyrants.” His revaluation of the inner feelings, the consciousness that man is not only reason, but mainly heart, represent a theoretical exit from the Enlightenment and a bridge to Romanticism. But at the same time, the rationalist construct of his *Social Contract*, the revolutionary political theses he proposed, and the milieu in which he developed his doctrines allow us to classify him within the field of the Enlightenment.

He was born in Geneva in 1712, the son of a watchmaker. Rousseau received a poor education because of the absence of his mother, who died shortly after birth. He spent his early childhood in Geneva, and then afterwards he went to Piedmont and France, where he stayed most of his life. From Calvinism he converted to Catholicism; but he later on decided to embrace a natural religiosity.

Rousseau was sentimental, passionate, and contradictory. The author of *Émile* or *On Education,* he had several children out of wedlock, whom he abandoned to an orphanage. He provides enough interesting features for a psychological study. In the last years of his life he seemed to have suffered from a mental illness, manifested in a persecution complex. He died in Ermenonville in 1778.

Among his most important works from the point of view of the history of ideas, we must mention the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts (Discourse on the Arts and Sciences, 1750)*, the *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes (Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men, 1758)*, and three books published in 1762: *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse (Julia or the New Heloise)*, *Du contrat social (The Social Contract)* and *Émile*. Works of an autobiographical nature, which showed his pre-Romanticism, are: *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques*, the *Confessions*, and *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire (Reveries of a Solitary Wanderer)*.

Rousseau did not have a system, although he defined his work as a *système du cœur* (system of the heart) However, it is possible to single out a basic principle of his philosophy: nature has made man good and happy, but society has degraded him and has made him miserable. In his *Discourse on the Arts and Science*, Rousseau tried to give an answer to the question about the positive influence of culture in the ways of men. The Genevan considered the 18th century man as denatured and alienated, since he no longer responds to himself, but depends on the opinion of others. The society of the *Ancien Régime* denatured European man: it is necessary to return to the origin, “listen to nature,” Rousseau wrote.

The *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men* was an attempt to rediscover authentic human nature. Through its pages, Rousseau introduced the *homme naturel* that is, original human nature. In the thinking of the Swiss philosopher, nature and culture are contrary concepts: culture is artificial, the unnatural; nature is identified with the original and the spontaneous. Rousseau artistically described man in the state of nature: “If we strip this being, thus constituted, of all the supernatural gifts he may have received, and all the artificial faculties he can have acquired only by a long process; if we consider him, in a word, just as he must have come from the hands of nature, we behold in him an animal weaker than some, and less agile than others; but, taking him all round, the most advantageously organised of any. I see him satisfying his hunger at the first oak, and slaking his thirst at the first brook; finding his bed at the foot of the tree which afforded him a repast; and, with that, all his wants supplied.”

The Rousseaunian natural man - and in this he reflected the influence of ethnographic readings that considered non-Europeans as being in harmony with nature - is still a pre-rational being, happy and kind; we understand this natural goodness to mean everything that can contribute to the preservation of his life. Being asocial, enjoying the chance to satisfy all his material needs, all men were equal and free: freedom is based on a pre-rational internal sentiment. Therefore, freedom and equality are natural rights of men.

The circumstances outside of the state of nature changed; man developed his rational faculties that were in potency; in order to meet his needs, now unsatisfied because of the changes from the original state, man slowly moved away from the state of nature. The origin of 18th century society is a social contract, based on economic inequality, which tramples on basic human rights. We must re-establish society; but since a simple return to the state of nature is impossible, we must lay entirely new foundations, which are in line with the original rights of men.

*The Social contract* is Rousseau’s political proposal. After analysing original human nature and finding out the changes undergone by the influence of culture and unjust social institutions, Rousseau arrived at the constructive moment: “The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect, with the whole common force, the person and goods of each associate, and in which each — while uniting himself with all — may still obey himself alone and remain as free as before.”[[57]](#footnote-57)

The theoretical purpose of the political formulation of Rousseau is to safeguard man’s original freedom and equality. For this to be achieved, it is essential to observe a clause in this contract: “the total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community.”[[58]](#footnote-58)

In the society of the contract, natural freedom is transformed into civic freedom. The power that arises from the contract — the sovereignty or general will of the people — is made up by the rights of all the citizens. In this sense, the popular will that legislates is the citizen’s will, because all of them form part of the power, that is, of the community, which safeguards the individual’s rights and is erected as sovereign. This correlation is freedom, which is defined as the “obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves.”[[59]](#footnote-59)

For Rousseau, freedom is autonomy, self-legislation. This idea will be taken up by Kant, who will put it at the basis of his moral system. Equality becomes legal equality. The law is the declaration of the general will and is the same for all.

While it is clear that Rousseau’s ultimate intention was to defend the rights which he considered an integral part of human nature, some of the institutions he proposed tended towards totalitarianism. Rousseau explained that as men come together in society for the common good — the defence of freedom and equality — the general will that arises from the alienation of the rights of individuals would necessarily tend towards the same common good. Moreover, Rousseau added that nobody wants to harm himself. However, the lack of a concrete content of this common good which is oriented towards the general will makes Rousseau’s system end up in formalism, capable of receiving different institutional configurations. The only real content of this common good is freedom as self-legislation and legal equality, which are formal rights. In *The Social Contract*, on behalf of an absolute, indivisible and infallible general will, the right of association and freedom of education are denied, and religious freedom is reduced. It was the price to pay for the rediscovery of some natural rights, not sufficiently founded on a notion of human nature able to justify not only its origin, but also its transcendent purpose.

### 5. The German Enlightenment

In Germany, the Enlightenment went through several stages. The breadth of interests of the German Enlightenment, the prestige obtained by the main universities and the influence that some theses had, made the *Aufklärung* [Enlightenment] the precedent of the golden age of German philosophy and literature, which has among its leading men Kant, Goethe and Hegel.

The first phase of the German Enlightenment is represented by two legal philosophers: *Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694)* and *Christian Thomasius (1655-1728)*. They developed a doctrine of natural law with a rationalist bent, where the precepts of justice are deduced from general and rational laws and principles. Both philosophers, but more specifically Thomasius, separated natural law from metaphysics and theology. The metaphysical analysis of man, carried out by the second scholasticism to give foundations for natural law, was replaced by a psychological analysis of human tendencies and passions.

The second phase of the German Enlightenment began with *Christian Wolff (1679-1754)*. He was a university professor at Halle and the archetypal representative of the philosophy that a few years later Kant would call dogmatic. Wolff’s aim was to create a complete philosophical system. Being a disciple of Leibniz, and taking metaphysical elements from the second scholasticism, particularly Suarez’ essentialism, his system was a gigantic, logical-formal, complete and consistent construct, although removed from sensible reality. In this system, logic played a key methodological role. The principle of non-contradiction and sufficient reason formally constitute the bedrock of all knowledge. Science can be rational or empirical and each has a theoretical aspect and practical applications. Not having great originality, we can say that Wolff is an eclectic. He left philosophical posterity with a terminology that would enjoy great success. After Wolff the term *ontology* would be used to refer to metaphysics; *critical theory* would refer to the theory of knowledge: and *theodicy* would replace natural theology.

Wolff was both a sincere believer and a rationalist. So he did not hesitate to consider reason as a judge of the faith. This theoretical position earned him the opposition of the Pietists, who carried Wolff into exile, although he returned to his homeland under the protection of the king. This fact of Wolff’s life allows us to move on to the more specific area of the *Aufklärung*: philosophy of religion and in particular, the relationship between faith and reason.

In 18th century Germany, there was a religious group called the Pietists. Originally Lutheran, Pietism stressed the importance of the inner aspect of religion: faith is manifested primarily in sentiment and in personal religiosity rather than in dogmatic truths. Although this attitude may seem contrary, or at least not very favourable, to the *Aufklärung*, pietistic mistrust against all types of metaphysics and scholastic theology managed to unite two seemingly antithetical movements.

The third period of German Enlightenment takes place in the latter part of the government of *Frederick the Great (1712-1786)*, King of Prussia, a friend of English and French philosophers, and protector of Voltaire. The king himself wrote some philosophical works, such as the *Essay on Love of Self considered as the Principle of Morals* (1770).

The introduction and translation of some books of the English deists Toland and Tindal favoured the development of a current of German deism. In this intellectual environment we must mention the Jewish *Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768)*, a strong advocate of natural religion. In a work published posthumously by Lessing, titled *Apology and Defence of the Rational Worshipers of God*, Reimarus maintained that the only divine revelation was the natural world itself. The supernatural revelations were only human inventions, and the very same miracles were an offense to God, who wanted to create a world organized and governed by a rational system.

Another Jewish philosopher with deist convictions was *Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786)*. He did not share the hostility of Reimarus against supernatural revelation. Mendelssohn was interested above all in the relationship between religion and political power, advocating for tolerance and the non-intervention of the State in religious matters.

*Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781)* is the most important philosopher in the field of philosophy of religion during the German Enlightenment. This author will also be important as the link between the aesthetic ideas of Baumgarten (a disciple of Leibniz), and Goethe’s aesthetic theory. As regards his philosophical thought, he did not fully agree with Reimarus, even though he arranged the posthumous publication of his works. Lessing did not believe that a body of doctrine could be demonstrated rationally and universally, although it may have strictly natural truths. The absolute and final truth belongs only to God. Lessing’s attitude to the truth is evidenced by this famous quote: “If God had in his right hand all the truths, and in his left hand only the motivation to always aspire to the truth, with the possibility of erring always and eternally, and he were to tell me, ‘Choose’ I would humbly kneel to his left and say, ‘Father, give me this! Pure truth is reserved only to Thee.’”

According to Lessing, we cannot despise revealed religions. The value of all revealed religions should be measured by the social consequences that they bring. His interpretation of Christianity, made from the perspective of the social and moral consequences it has produced, were more positive than those held by other deists. Despite this positive assessment, Lessing was very far from orthodoxy. The German philosopher held a vision of human history where Christianity was just a phase. World history passes through three periods, corresponding to the stages of the psychological development of man. The first stage, parallel to that of human children, is symbolized by the Old Testament. The second stage is youth: it corresponds to the New Testament, which preaches the immortality of the soul and God as universal Father. At this stage of history, Christians added speculative theological elements that are not entirely negative, but need rationalization. Finally, the third stage, parallel to psychological maturity, is the stage of the eternal Gospel, in which man will do what is good for the love of good, and not for the sake of reward or punishment. Lessing presented this theory of history, but he partly re-proposed some elements taken from Joachim of Fiore in a work entitled *The Education of the Human Race*.

\* \* \*

The Enlightenment represented the centrality of man, the supposed triumph of reason over faith, progress over tradition. Its prophets announced a future full of light, once the medieval darkness was defeated. But lights and shadows are always mixed in the history of mankind, and continued to be mixed in subsequent centuries. The Enlightened Man rediscovered some values that were hidden under customs that could be considered superstitious, but he also lost something of great value, by rejecting the supernatural and the transcendent.

Man's autonomy professes to be absolute, and will attempt different ways to affirm its centrality. These paths will end up being self-justifying ideologies just as the professed absolute autonomy was also self-justified.

### 6. The Kantian system

The figure of Immanuel Kant appears in the 18th century as that of a real giant. One could think that philosophy before him had been a preparation for Kantianism and philosophy after him a dialogue with the philosopher of Konigsberg. While this is not exactly true, the historical importance of the Kantian philosophical project is without doubt.

Kant faces the two lines of thought typical of 17th-century philosophy -rationalism and empiricism-, he observes carefully the development of physics with the theory of Newton and he lives together with the principal exponents of the Enlightenment. He will see the fall of the *Ancien Régime* after the events of 1789.

The transcendental philosophy of Kant will be an attempt to provide a global response to the new problems faced by the European man of the end of the 18th century. How to coordinate Hume’s scepticism, Newtonian science and the rationalist faith in the ability of reason? Following the criticism of the principle of causality, will science and metaphysics be possible? What can man know, and how? If the criticism that the empiricists make of the rationalists is true, will the demonstrations of the existence of God, of the metaphysical systems of the 17th century and the morals based on transcendence survive? Those questions reach the depth of human concerns - God, freedom, conscience-. Kant borrows elements both from empiricism and rationalism, but his work will provide an original, systematic and revolutionary answer.

"The starry heaven above me and the moral law within me”[[60]](#footnote-60) were the two objects of Kantian wonder. A knowledge of nature, although we can only know its phenomena, through theoretical reason. The categorical imperative as the law of morality, through practical reason. After the sceptical crisis of Hume, God, freedom and immortality are recovered, but only as postulates.

Post Kantian thought had to face the 'scandal of the thing itself', a reality that, whilst not cognizable by reason, was affirmed as necessary. Fichte, Shelling and Hegel will give different answers to Kant, but those answers presupposed the philosophy of the master of Konigsberg*.*

#### a) Life and works

He was born in Konigsberg (at that time Eastern Prussia) in 1724. He received a very refined education from a moral point of view, and through his mother, he was formed in the spirit of pietist Protestantism. From 1732 on he studied in the *Collegium Fridericianum*, where the theologian Schultz was the rector. However, the discipline was too rigorous and the excessive number of activities of piety drove him away from religious practice.

From 1740 Kant studied at the University of Konigsberg. He encountered the theories of Newton and he studies physics, mathematics and philosophy. In 1746 he finished his studies with the essay *Thoughts on the true estimation of vital forces*. Between 1746 and 1755 he works as a tutor in several households to earn a living, as a consequence of his father’s death.

In 1755 he published *History of nature and theory of heaven*, he obtained his doctorate with a *Thesis on fire*, and presented his teaching dissertation with the following argument: *New explanations of the first principles of metaphysical knowledge*. Kant’s university chair will not only deal with philosophical topics: he also teaches biology, geography and pedagogy. Between 1762 and 1763 he published four essays which already prefigure his mature philosophical system.

In 1770 he held the chair of logics and metaphysics at the University of Konigsberg. In that year he published the dissertation *On the form and principles of the sensible and intelligible world,* which marks the beginning of his intellectual evolution. Eleven years of deep meditation follow his *Dissertatio* of 1770. The result of this period will be the *Critique of pure reason*, published in 1781; a second edition in 1788 was to be as famous as the first one.

Between the first and the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant published *Prolegomena for all future metaphysics* (1783) and *Foundation of the metaphysics of customs* (1785) in 1788 he publishes the *Critique of practical reason*, and in 1790 he completes the critical trilogy with *Critique of judgement.*

The only academic problem that Kant encountered in his university life was the controversy that took place after the publication of *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason,* in 1793. Kant was accused of holding views contrary to Holy Scriptures. He decides not to talk about religion anymore, but he would change his opinion after the death of King Frederick William II, when freedom of the press was re-established.

In the last years of his life Kant worked on political philosophy and philosophy of history. When he witnessed the fall of the *Ancien Régime*, he became enthused with the French Revolution, but he will condemn its excessive violence. In 1795 he published *Project of perpetual peace* and, in 1797, *Metaphysics of customs*. In that same year he forgoes university teaching and began a revision of his philosophical system. The annotations that he makes during this period were gathered under the title *Opus posthumous*, published in 1920.

After 18 years of a methodical life dedicated to study and philosophical research Kant died in Konigsberg, his birthplace, in 1804.

#### b) The Critique of pure reason

The sceptical crisis provoked by empiricism -particularly Hume’s- appeared to have shown that metaphysics was impossible. and at the same time cast doubts on the very feasibility of science. The purpose of the *Critique of pure reason* is to examine the ability to reason in relation to the knowledge that can be obtained outside sense experience. In other words, according to Kant it is a matter of ascertaining the possibility of metaphysics as scientific knowledge. Pure reason in this context means not contaminated by sense experience.

In a position analogous to Descartes’, he witnesses the progress of the physical and mathematical sciences and asks himself whether the problems of metaphysics could be caused by using an incorrect method. The *Critique* is thus a treatise on the method that metaphysics ought to follow. Kant finds himself in an intellectual environment where many have denied the possibility of metaphysics. According to our author, one needs to find out whether there is a function in our knowledge that reaches the unconditioned, that transcends experience. This research is not only theoretical: we seek the unconditioned as the basis of morals. Therefore, the *Critique of pure reason* is a preliminary work - not only in a chronological sense - to the *Critique of practical reason*. The totality of philosophy according to Kant should respond to the following three questions: What can I know? What should I do? What am I allowed to expect?

According to Kant there are two types of knowledge, sense and rational knowledge. Sense knowledge is always particular and contingent -we have no experience of necessary universal themes- and it is expressed in synthetical judgements *a posteriori*. What does synthetical *a posteriori* mean? A synthetical judgement adds new knowledge to the subject; *a posteriori* refers to the fact that it happens following experience. This posteriority means that the added knowledge will be particular and contingent.

Rational knowledge is *a priori* of experience, universal and necessary, but adds no further knowledge to the subject, and is expressed in analytical judgements. These judgements are necessary because the relationship between subject and predicate is one of identity or belonging.

Kant asks himself whether synthetical *a priori* judgements -which are necessary as the foundation of scientific knowledge- are possible. In other words, we need to verify the possibility of uniting the necessity and universality of analytical judgements to the increased knowledge that synthetical judgements provide. If so, both the universality and necessity of science would be guaranteed, as well as the progress of research. Therefore, it is necessary to find a judgement that is at the same time *synthetical* -in other words, that adds new knowledge- and *a priori* -and therefore universal and necessary-. According to the Prussian philosopher mathematics and physics can advance because they are based upon this type of judgements. The knowing subject, through experience, receives sensations that arrive in a disorderly fashion. The subject orders the chaos of sensations and through the forms of sensitivity - space and time - that are applied to the object. Synthetical *a priori* judgements are possible in the physics-mathematical sciences: experience provides new knowledge of facts, but they are universally organised a priori from experience through the forms of sensitivity which belong to the subject. Space and time are not elements of the objective world, but rather forms of sensitivity of the knowing subject.

Kant’s Copernican revolution lies in the fact that when he faces the problem of knowledge, he does not address the object but the subject, who builds objects up with subjective cognitive structures. The categories or concepts of the intellect, whose function it is to judge, have to be added to space and time, the pure forms of what is sensed. There are as many categories as there are kinds of judgements. The sensations ordered in space and time are further ordered and unified by the categories. Kant places the transcendental apperception or *Ich denke* at the summit of the process of knowledge. It is the structure of thought common to every empirical subject: that through which every empirical subject is a thinking and conscious subject.

The subject is the decisive factor in the cognoscitive process although it is necessary to highlight that the Kantian subject does not work in a vacuum: sensible intuition, in other words, the passive receiving of sensations, is always the beginning of this process.

The object of sensible intuition is called *phenomenon* -apparition or manifestation-, whilst the thing in itself -*nóumeno*- is not cognizable. In every phenomenon one can distinguish a matter, coming from particular sensations, and as such it is always a posteriori; and the form, which does not come from experience but from the subject, who ordains the multiple sensorial data in specific relationships*.*

The thing itself *(nóumeno)* is not an object of our sensitivity. *Nóumeno* means an intelligible being, because it is an object thought by the intellect. According to Kant the *nóumeno* can be understood in either of two ways: in a negative sense it is the thing as such, abstracting how it can be known; in a positive sense it would be the object of an intellectual intuition. We -Kant follows- can only think of *nóumenos* in the first sense, because intellectual intuitions do not happen. But the very concept of *nóumeno* is problematic, because when sensible intuition is limited to phenomena only, there is a tacit admission a noumenic substratum. In addition, the concept of the thing as such is not contradictory. Moreover, such concept is necessary to prevent the sensible intuition to reach the thing as such, and thus limit the validity of sense knowledge[[61]](#footnote-61). The concept of *nóumeno* is an inevitable *limit concept*, it limits the power of sensation.

Once we have denied the possibility of noumenic knowledge, is there any room for metaphysics? As we said earlier, Kant asserts that it is impossible to go beyond sense experience if we want to have rigorous knowledge. However, reason always tries to overcome that limit, and for this reason it necessarily falls into errors and illusions. This is how reason functions. Kant calls transcendental dialectics “the Critique of the intellect and of reason with regards to its hyperphysical use, for the purpose of uncovering the false appearance of its unfounded assumptions, and to minimize its pretence of discovery and widening of knowledge which she helps to achieve through transcendental principles to the simple judgement of the pure intellect and its preservation of sophistic illusions”[[62]](#footnote-62). We should add that for Kant these illusions are natural: we can defend ourselves from them, but we cannot eliminate them.

Kant calls *reason* the intellect that goes beyond the horizon of possible experience. However, given that this is a natural tendency, Kant will also call reason “faculty of the unconditioned “, in the sense that it shows that there is in man a demand for the absolute. Reason is the faculty of metaphysics, its function is not that of the intellect - that is, to judge - but that of reasoning by means of syllogisms.

There are three types of syllogisms: categorical, hypothetical and disjunctive, that correspond to three ideas: the psychological idea (*soul*); the cosmological idea (*world*) and the theological idea (*God*). Based on these assumptions, Kant develops the critique of rational psychology, of rational cosmology and of rational theology and he concludes that these three ideas are illusions that cannot be scientifically proven. After he has analysed the different parts of the *Critique of pure reason*, we have to follow Kant in his conclusions: metaphysics as a science is impossible because the *a priori* synthesis that would be at the foundation of such science - the ideas of Soul, world and God -would require an intuitive intellect, and transcendental dialectics has shown the errors and illusions of reason as a faculty of metaphysics.

However, the ideas of soul, world and God have a regulatory function: they are useful as outlines to order experience, as if all the phenomena concerning man were dependent on a single principle; as if all the phenomena of nature were dependent unitarily on intelligible principles; as if the all things were dependent on a supreme intellect.

From a scientific point of view, we cannot go beyond sense experience. Therefore, metaphysics is not possible as a science. However, two metaphysical elements remain: the non-contradiction of the *nóumenos* and the regulatory use of the ideas of reason. Kant will approach the world of *nóumenos* using practical reason as we will see later.

We should add that when Kant talks about metaphysics he has in mind the rationalist metaphysics of the 17th century. His criticism does not affect classical metaphysics, which is different from dogmatic metaphysics, since it sstarts from experience, and uses abstraction to reach universal and necessary knowledge.

#### c) Kantian morals

The *Critique of pure reason* answered a question about knowledge: what can we know? However, the *Critique of practical reason*, should respond to a moral question: what should we do? The answer of Kantian morality will be as revolutionary as that of the theory of knowledge.

Kantian morals are morals of duty. Up until Kant, the basic concept of morals was that of *good*, which was related to the ultimate end of man. However, the philosopher of Konigsberg thinks that such conception of morals is in itself immoral.

Kant faces an empiricist concept of good understood as pleasure or interest. With regards to this doctrine Kantian Critique is clear: the tendency towards a good is a selfish, hedonistic and utilitarian tendency. The Critique of Kant however loses strength when it faces rationalistic morals which understand good as an absolute that transcends the sensible or with the classical position that considers moral good as the full realisation ofhuman nature understood in a teleological sense. In any case, according to Kant, the search for happiness can never be the foundation of an obligation. If a man seeks his own good, it means that he has a selfish tendency. And given that this tendency is a habit, a natural need, a natural tendency - therefore necessary and not free - can never be the basis of a moral obligation.

The Kantian opposition between freedom (moral domain) and nature (necessary domain) is clearly seen at this point: no tendency can be the source of morality, because these tendencies belong in the domain of nature, of necessity, and not to the dimension of morality and freedom.

The first revolutionary conclusion of his starting premise is that the morality of a human action cannot be based on its *matter* -in other words, the goods or ends that the action seeks - but on its *form*, that is, in the intention of the agent, bearing in mind whether this intention conforms to the duty that reason dictates.

Between the *Critique of pure reason* and *Critique of practical reason*, Kant publishes *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*. In this work, our author states that the only thing we can call good is good will. What makes good a will is not its deeds or the success it can achieve, but its rectitude, which is the intention to act according to duty: not only acting in accordance to duty, but acting because of duty. What is duty? It is a law that comes *a priori* from reason, and imposes itself on to every rational being. It is a *factum rationis*, which transfers to the conscience through a *categorical imperative*.

Kant makes a distinction between *categorical* imperative and a *hypothetical* imperative. The latter only determines the will conditional to wanting to reach specific objectives: “if you want to get good marks, you must study”. The hypothetical imperative can be a convenient rule or prudent advice. On the other hand, the categorical imperative declares that the action is objectively necessary for its own sake, unrelated to any finality orpurpose. The categorical imperative does not say: “if you want… you must…” but rather “you must because you must”.

The categorical imperative is a practical law, unconditionally valid for any rational being, because it is an objective and universally valid law, independently of any accidental subjective conditions that could be found among men.

In his *Groundwork* Kant outlines three formulations of the categorical imperative:

* “Act in such a manner that the maxim of your will can always serve as a universal law at the same time."[[63]](#footnote-63)
* “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, as an end, never as a means to an end.”[[64]](#footnote-64)
* “Treat the idea of the will of every rational being, as a universal law”.[[65]](#footnote-65)

The third formulation brings up the key concept of *autonomy*. Duty is not imposed from outside the will, because it comes from the reason that makes up man. To submit oneself to a foreign reason would be a *heteronomy* incompatible with the dignity of the human person. For Kant the autonomy of the will is the only principle of any moral law and of its duties. Heteronomy is not the foundation of any obligation, and is contrary to the morality of the will.

In Kantian moral theory, autonomy is closely linked to freedom. Freedom is the will’s independence with respect to natural laws of phenomena. In the negative sense it is independence; in the positive sense, self-determination. The moral law is a law of freedom. We first know the law, duty, as a *factum rationis*, and then we infer freedom as its foundation: “you must, therefore you can”.

Kantian morality is thus configured as a morality which is *formalistic*, *of duty*, *autonomous* and *universal*. It is easy to appreciate a considerable change between the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The former critiques the tendency of reason to disengage itself from experience and work in a vacuum; that’s why *pure* reason is critiqued. However, in his second *Critique*, Kant wants to warn us against the tendency to remain bound to experience in the moral domain. Therefore, pure practical reason is not critiqued, but rather *practical* reason as such, which wants to build morality on the what is sensed.

In the *Critique of practical reason* Kant takes up the same topic of the *Groundwork*, and adds the theory of the *postulates*. The ideas of pure reason – that is, the ideal exigencies that eluded reason, because they represent an unknown noumenic world – become *postulates* in the domain of practical reason.

What does a postulate mean? Kant’s answer: “They are not theoretical dogmas, but presuppositions, from a necessarily practical point of view; therefore, they do not broaden the speculative knowledge of reason, but rather give the ideas of speculative reason in general an objective reality, and authorize concepts of which, otherwise, one could not even affirm their possibility”[[66]](#footnote-66). The thesis of the postulates is a requirement of practical reason, because they are conditions for the moral life.

The assertion of the postulates requires an act of practical faith. Faith, as such, does not add anything to our knowledge. It is a free, voluntary assertion. The three postulates of practical reason are: the immortality of the soul, freedom and the existence of God.

Freedom is a condition for the moral life and, as we have seen, it is based on the law. Kant adds that in the noumenal sphere freedom can be understood as a cause. Thus, man belongs to the phenomenal world of necessity, and to the noumenal world of free causality.

The existence of God is justified as follows: the moral law commands me to be virtuous, understanding by virtue the adaptation of my action to duty. Being virtuous makes me worthy of happiness. Being worthy of happiness and not becoming happy is absurd. Hence the need to postulate God as the fulfillment of happiness, which is never found in this world.

The postulation of the immortality of the soul comes from the fact that the highest good - that is, the perfect adaptation of the will to the moral law - is holiness. Since this goal requires an infinite process towards *complete adaptation*, it is only possible by presupposing an existence and a personality of the reasonable being that endures infinitely, which is nothing other than the immortality of the soul.

At the end of the critique of practical reason we face three moral realities that were ideal demands of pure reason. In a certain sense, the noumenic world is recovered with the theory of postulates. There is, therefore, a supremacy of practical reason over theoretical reason, which shows the moral purpose of the Kantian project. We should explain that this recovery is not of a gnoseological nature: Kant's theory of knowledge never overcomes the barrier of sense experience.

#### d) The Philosophy of religion

For Kant, as we have already seen, God is an *ideal* of theoretical reason, and a *postulate* of practical reason. In his most important work on the philosophy of religion - *Religion within the limits of mere reason* - and in other minor writings, morality and religion are identified. Morality is self-sufficient, and with it comes to a concept of God as Lawmaker. As religion is moralised, it is also rationalised.

Kant distinguishes between *pure* religion, which has only rational content and which commands us to follow an upright conduct guided by the categorical imperative, and a *historical* religion, which mixes rational elements with non-rational ones that can become superstitious. For Kant, the role of historical religion - that which is based on an alleged divine revelation - serves as propaedeutic to pure religion. There is only one God, and therefore one religion, which is the national religion. In this rationalist context, Kant conceives Christ as the personification of the moral law.

In spite of the moralization and rationalization of the philosophy of Kant’s religion, there is one aspect of his religious doctrine that would imply the need for a Redeemer: the doctrine of radical evil. In man there is an inclination towards evil, as a result of the use of freedom. Along with that inclination human nature also has a predisposition towards good. Kant considers that the biblical narrative of original sin is a symbol that represents the evil of man. To move from evil to good, one must radically convert and reach moral purity in one’s intentions. Jesus personifies such purity. The doctrine of radical evil and necessary conversion is possibly the religious residue of his autonomous humanist philosophy.

#### e) Philosophy of law and of history

The topic of law appears constantly in Kant’s work. His most important work in this area is his *Metaphysics of Customs*.

Kant distinguishes clearly between law and morals. The law concerns the external actions of man, while morality deals with inner actions. The law, writes the Prussian philosopher, “is the set of conditions under which the will of one person can be reconciled with the will of others, according to a general law of freedom”[[67]](#footnote-67). The rule of law is found only within civil society, a stage subsequent to the state of nature, which Kant conceives not as historical but as a methodological hypothesis. In the state of nature there is already a certain kind of society, but the passage to civil society entails greater legal security.

Rousseau's influence is evident and profound, both in the Kantian moral doctrine and in politics. For Kant - as for Rousseau -, in the civil state man retains his freedom, since he only obeys the laws to which he has given consent, thus guaranteeing the autonomy of freedom. Kant will add the theory of a universal juridical order, in a text titled *Project of perpetual peace*, where he proposes a world republic governed by universal laws.

The Kantian understanding of history has many enlightened elements. For our author, history is a continuous process towards progress. The historical stages are seen as preparation for an improvement of the human species. There is a rational plan of nature - sometimes Kant speaks of providence - where it seems that the very intentionality of nature is the decisive factor, rather than human freedom. The ultimate goal of history is man himself, not taken individually but as a rational species.

\* \* \*

A general assessment of the entire Kantian system is difficult, especially considering that Kant, in the last years of his life, decided to write a systematic work, which he did not manage to finish. The annotations of this work, fragmentary and disconnected, were published in 1920 under the name of *Opus Postumum*. although it can be said that these annotations do not present a different Kant, there are contradictions and some puzzlement. For example, according to some fragments, Kant speaks of God as transcendent to man, but there are others in which he talks of an immanent God, identified with the moral law.

Leaving aside the doubts that arise from the reading of *Opus Postumum*, we can see in Kant an attempt at universal systematization, only comparable to that of Hegel, in modern philosophy. Kant explores the most important questions of human existence. His answers are not definitive, and we have the right not to share neither his starting point nor the conclusions of his system. But the philosophical-moral project of the thinker of Konigsberg is a necessary reference for all subsequent thinking, and also a challenge for philosophers who wish to walk different paths to Kant’s. Post-Kantian thought had to face the "scandal" of the thing itself, a reality that, while seeming unknowable to reason, was declared necessary. Fichte, Schelling and Hegel will give a different answer to Kant, but it presupposed the philosophy of the Konigsberg master.

The Kantian system played an important role in the process of secularization. In the field of gnoseology, Kant's Copernican revolution places the subject as an object builder - although there is always a link with the world of phenomena that provides the matter of sensible intuition -; in the field of morals, Kant elaborates an autonomous morality, rejecting heteronomy as not worthy of the person. Kantian speculation has a strong ethical resonance, but severs the bridges with transcendence, which is the object of a practical faith without scientific foundation, according to the German philosopher.

## IV ROMANTICISM AND GERMAN IDEALISM

While the enlightened worldview was at its height, critical voices began to emerge in Europe. The Enlightenment was labelled unilateral and removed from life. Little by little a new worldview was developed, partly antithetical to the lights of the 18th century, but just as unilateral: Romanticism. Enlightenment and Romanticism are both found in the roots of contemporary culture - the man of the third millennium retains many elements, at times contradictory, of the two worldviews -. For this reason, we have decided to include the present chapter in the first part of the book, although from a strictly chronological point of view it belongs to what we have called the ideological Modernity.

Romanticism was a cultural, artistic, literary, philosophical and musical movement that developed and spread throughout Europe during the last years of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century. It had its first explicit theorization and its most important development in Germany. Idealism develops in that country, where philosophical speculation reached one of the highest peaks in history. Indeed, in German philosophical circles the idealism of Fichte, who had radically transformed Kantianism by suppressing the thing itself, appeared to the eyes of some intellectuals - writers for the most part-, as the vindication of the infinity of the self and of intuition in the face of the austere Kantian criticism of the limits of reason. Infinity will be one of the central Romantic themes. Romanticism and idealism, however, cannot be identified, notwithstanding the similarities and common features. Fichte, Schelling and Hegel have influenced Romanticism, and have received influences from Romantic authors, but they cannot be strictly called Romantic philosophers.

The themes that are found in German Romanticism will also be present in Latin and Anglo-Saxon writers. Some scholars, like Farinelli, think that Romanticism has a Latin origin, more specifically Franco-Italian. The basis of this theory would be the precedent of Rousseau, and the development of the French literature of this period. Chateaubriand, de Vigny, Lamartine, Victor Hugo reach stylistic peaks not seen North of the Rhine. But in France itself some authors vouch for the German origin of the movement, such as that of the famous writer and essayist *Madame de Staël (1766-1817) (De l'Allemagne)*. In this historical debate there is also room for those who feel that Romanticism is a manifestation of the Slavic spirit. Indeed, the eastern regions of Germany, where many germanised Slavs lived, are the geographical area where the first Romantic expressions emerge. Slavonic soul that manifests itself in nostalgia and messianism.[[68]](#footnote-68)

The word *Romantic* was first used in 17th century England to refer the heroic fantasies of the novels of the time. In France it became synonymous with “quaint, or something that can arouse melancholic feelings”. It was only in the eighteenth century, in Germany, that the word would acquire a clearly positive meaning. The change is reflected in the famous definition of *Novalis* (pseudonym for *Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772-1801*), one of the most important poets of Romanticism: “The world must be 'Romanticized.' Thus, its original meaning was rediscovered. To *Romanticize* is nothing more than a qualitative enhancement (…) When I give a more elevated sense to that which is common, and a mysterious aspect to that which is ordinary, and an infinite appearance to that which is finite, then I Romanticize it.”

Although Romanticism was consolidated as a cultural movement in the early years of the 19th century, this new cultural sensibility was already brewing in some of the thinkers of the last stage of the Enlightenment, when the topics and themes that would become typical of Romanticism began to take shape. An early example of this anticipation is Rousseau’s revaluation of the feeling and of the natural thing, against the enlightened reason. In Germany we find important preparations for Romanticism in the *Sturm und Drang* movement and in the revival of classicism. These cultural precedents are outlined below.

### 1. Cultural precedents of Romanticism

#### a) The “Sturm und Drang” movement

When in France the enlightened spirit thrived, but set the environment that would eventually lead to the French Revolution, a movement began in Germany when Kantian thought was at its peak. It was mainly cultural and literary, but it also had important philosophical elements. Often called *Sturm Und Drang* (storm and momentum)[[69]](#footnote-69), it played a crucial role in the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism. *Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-18032)* was its most outstanding personality and his main point of reference, joined later by *Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805)*.

We should say a few words about Goethe. He did not write specifically philosophical works, but his writings contain many ideas of that nature. Some of his writings, became real symbols for the Romantics, like *Wilhelm Meister*, and above all, *Faust*. His understanding of nature too had an enormous influence both on Romanticism and on some aspects of idealism: Goethe sees nature as a living whole, down to the least of its elements. He proposes an “unfathomable life” as the basis of nature in which, having functions similar to the Kantian thing-in-itself, there are active elements in mutual tension, in a dynamic polarity, such as spirit and matter, attraction and repulsion, contraction and expansion. The sole objective of this internal dialectic is the enhancement of life itself. His understanding of art is also intimately linked to nature. Indeed, Goethe’s “genius" is "nature that creates" and art, like nature, is itself creative activity. His understanding of God is mainly pantheistic, but it has no dogmatic rigidity. He called himself a “polytheist”, as a poet, and a “pantheist” as a scientist. Due to his moral demands he finds a place for a personal God. He has an ambiguous relationship with Christianity, but he tends to reduce its supernatural content to human terms.

With regard to Schiller, we can say that the core of his worldview revolves around the love of freedom in all its essential forms: namely, political, social and moral. The violent consequences of the French Revolution, however, convinced Schiller that man was not yet ready for freedom, and that consciousness was the locus of true freedom. According to him, the highest school of freedom is beauty, considering the harmonizing role that beauty plays in human life. Schiller coined the concept of the “beautiful soul,” which was destined to enjoy great acclaim during the Romantic era. The beautiful soul is one which, moving beyond the Kantian antithesis between sensible inclination and moral duty, managed to fulfill its duty with a spontaneous naturalness, attracted by beauty. The beautiful soul is therefore a soul gifted with a “grace” that is capable of bringing instinct and moral law into harmony. Hegel arrives at this image in one of the chapters of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, a work in which some of Schiller's figures were invoked at important moments of their speculative development. According to Hegel, Schiller had “great merits” for philosophy. We also must note his vision of art as an extension of creation. For Schiller, God is shown in nature: “Nature is God divided to the infinite.” Man must contemplate the beauty of creation, and from this contemplation emerges the production of beauty through the activity of the artist.

Opposition to enlightened rationalism was uppermost in the *Sturm und Drang* movement. Under the influence of Hamann, Herder and Rousseau, these authors did not identify the universal nature of man with reason, unlike the *philosophes* of the Century of lights. They extol feeling and passion against reason, the natural and the instinctive against culture, autonomy and freedom against law and constriction, fantasy and creative genius against the rule. Despite its anti-enlightened stance, the rebellious spirit of the movement kept up the struggle of the Enlightenment against prejudice and authority to a certain extent, although it looked for a more authentic and original anthropological dimension.

The new life ideals were embodied in various archetypes*: the* *rebel*, for his bold rejection of all oppression and authority; *the child*, a model of naturalness and free expression of his feelings; *the genius*, for its demiurgic creative power, by breaking established canons and rules. If these motives or themes led to an exaltation of the free expression of feelings and the natural fruits that life and work produce, on the other they generated a cosmic expansion of human limitations, in its Promethean effort to reach nature, the high, the infinite. It brought about a typical theme of the German soul, the *Faustian spirit*, the continuous search for the impossible, the anxiety and the restlessness of the human soul, not satisfied with anything finite.

The fields of art and religion displayed the most interesting philosophical reflections of this movement. In the area of art they extended Lessing’s controversy against the three traditional units of time, place and action of the tragedy, the emancipation of canons and ties that prevented the spontaneous expression of fantasy, the freedom of language and the creative instinct of the genius and of the artist. A work of art was understood as the absolutely individual and unmistakable expression of a creative subjectivity that imitates in the finite the infinite work of God in the universe. In turn, art was understood as a privileged way to expand finite human existence towards the infinite. Art was joined by religion, given much more importance than in the Enlightenment, not so much in its positive contents, in the dogmas and in cult formulas of historical religions, but above all as a passion for infinity and as a pantheist feel and experience of the divine[[70]](#footnote-70).

#### b) Classicism

Despite the important role it played in this time of transition, the *Sturm und Drang* movement was somewhat chaotic: a juvenile attitude of massive rebellion and an overflowing fantasy that were not translated into concrete artistic and literary achievements, rather ran the risk of breaking from reality and creating a huge void, with the potential of becoming barren and leading to anarchy. Herder, Goethe and Schiller, the greatest exponents of the movement, realised the limits of the movement, and moved towards more balanced experiments.

The discovery of several models was decisive for moving beyond these extremes. They would be very important in shaping the Romantic spirit, and became an essential element of Romanticism. Antiquity was one of them. It was not thought as something already in the past, but as an expression of *the classic*, as a valid example for all times. Goethe and Schiller upheld the need to truly revitalise, not just watch and copy the classical spirit. According to them, the imitation of the ancient meant to regain “the eye of the ancient”, in other words, renewing and recreating their art, letting themselves be led by the classical style, and not by a mere lifeless imitation. This renaissance of the classical spirit would also be crucial for the reviving of German philosophy, partly by recovering the thought of the pre-Socratics, Plato and Aristotle. The protestant theologian Schleiermacher played a decisive role with his translation of Plato’s works.

### 2. The characteristic features of Romanticism

Having seen the background of the Romantic movement, we must embark on an analysis of its characteristic features. Described by a historian of literature as a “Copernican revolution of subjectivization,”[[71]](#footnote-71) Romanticism can be seen as a multifaceted movement—artistic, political, cultural—which is antithetical to the Enlightenment. But, similarly to what happened with the latter, Romanticism is not a school, nor does it have a systematic mindset: it is, rather, a way of interpreting life and the universe.

Although it is difficult to define, it seems easier to establish its differences in comparison with the Enlightenment. If the latter puts reason at the centre of its worldview, Romanticism asserts that man consists not only of reason but also of feeling. Faced with the Enlightenment's faith in rationality, the Romantics are inclined to the mysterious, the unknown, and the irrational[[72]](#footnote-72). If the Enlightened thinkers directed their gaze to the rational future, the Romantics discovered the influence of history on the present and looked towards classical antiquity and to the Christian Middle Ages. If the former are cosmopolitan and emphasize common humanity, the Romantics highlight cultural, linguistic, religious, and customary differences. If the Enlightened worldview is permeated by rational limits, the Romantics open themselves to the infinite, in an attempt to move beyond the bounds of reason. Let us now look more closely at some of these characteristics of Romanticism.

#### a) The revaluation of emotion

The consideration of man as a personality who must broaden himself through a limitless freedom is a crucial element of the Romantic mindset.[[73]](#footnote-73) These limits include social conventions, stylistic rules, and even universal morality. Therefore, the archetype of the Romantic man is not the *philosophe* of the Age of Enlightenment, but the genius artist-creator and the revolutionary hero who breaks with convention.

Although man is conceived as subjectivity and as a “self” both in Romanticism and in the Enlightenment that precedes it, the Romantics rebel against the primacy of Enlightenment reason—cold and abstract—affirming the centrality of feeling. More than rationality, the passions are the driving force that shapes human life. The states of mind, through their instability and restlessness, especially the experience of love, expose human finiteness to the infinite. Man is not a rational animal, but rather a nostalgic and melancholic being, obsessed by the desire for the infinite. This desire is obsessive (*Sehnsucht*), literally “the illness of longing”, because it is aware that the object of desire (the Infinite) is unattainable, but this does not stop him from searching[[74]](#footnote-74). Woundedness, melancholy and unhappiness typify all the symbolic figures of Romantic literature, from Goethe's *Werther* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*), through Chateaubriand's *Réné* and *Atala,* and Ugo Foscolo's Jacopo Ortis (*The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis*).

#### b) The rediscovery of the infinite

Romanticism is thus proposed as a way to overcome the limits imposed by the rationalist worldview, typical of an exaggerated scientific reason. The universe is infinite, and feeling—rather than reason—is capable of grasping this infinitude. As we indicated briefly a few lines ago, feeling, imagination, and intuition are almost infinite forces that can, or may, enter into contact with the totality. The infinite is, therefore, another key element of the Romantic worldview.

This totality that the Romantics postulate is both nature and spirit at the same time. However, this is not a question of two distinct and separate realities, but rather two ways to express the totality. Thus, the yearning for the infinite polarizes the interests of the Romantic spirit in two directions: towards the divine and towards nature. On the one hand, it assists in a general new appreciation of religion as a legitimate source for experiencing the totality that goes beyond reason—in contrast with the deism and atheism of the Enlightenment—and secondly, to a rediscovery of mythologies. At the same time, Romanticism abandons the mechanistic image of nature, replacing it with a vitalistic vision with biological overtones. Nature becomes a living, and even divine, whole, sometimes going so far as to reveal an essentially pantheistic conceptualization. As a result of this paradigm shift, the perfection of the world is no longer compared with that of the mechanism of a clock, but rather with a living body.

#### c) The interest in history and tradition

This vision of the universe as infinite does not preclude a consideration of the particular, of the finite, as something that should be taken into consideration. Finite and infinite coexist: indeed, the finite is the particular manifestation of the universal infinite. If the finite-infinite dialectic is the cornerstone of Fichte's idealistic system and, above all, that of Hegel, this same dialectic gives rise to the Romantic interest in history and national singularities.

If nature reaches its high point in the human spirit, it is logical to think that, from the Romantics' perspective, one should pay close attention to the cultural and historical development of mankind. Far from a rationalist and progressive enlightened worldview, the Romantic worldview considers historical periods as necessary stages in the overall development of the human spirit.

This new understanding of historical development gave new life to the interest in the great civilizations of the past, and the rediscovery of the cultures of East and the New World. *Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829*) founded the magazine *Athenäum*, and together with his brother *August Wilhelm (1767-1845)* founded the Romantic circle in the city of Jena and gave it its first systematic theorization. He provided a renewed impetus to the Classics with his essays published between 1794 and 1797, among which *The Greeks and the Romans. Historical and Critical Essays on Classical Antiquity* (*Die Griecher und Römer. Historische und kritische Versuche über das klassische Alterthum*, 1797) are particularly notable. The work of *Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843)* represents the most careful and cohesive poetic interpretation of the return to the ideal values of classical Greece, which would have consequences on the evolution of the system created by Hegel, who was a friend and schoolmate of Hölderlin.

There was also a return to the Christian and Germanic medieval world, as reflected in Novalis's work *Christendom, that is, Europe* (*Christenheit oder Europa*, 1799). The rejection of the narrow confines of eighteenth-century reason resulted in a return to the mysteries of the Christian faith, and also to medieval myths and legends. Indeed, some Romantics discovered in medieval culture the roots of the German national spirit, as an enduring and unified way of life, blessed with a rich and lively religious sentiment that ought to be recovered. The Catholic faith, to be sure, but not only that: occultism and spiritualism also returned to the scene in the European cultural landscape.

The civilizations of the East became a rich source of inspiration for the Romantic spirit. Friedrich Schlegel studied Sanskrit, drawn by the culture and traditions of India, and spread a new vision of culture throughout Europe with his work *On the language and wisdom of the Indians* (*Über die Sprache und der Weisheit der Indier*, 1808). His brother August Wilhelm would publish the *Bhagavad Gita* with a Latin translation and notes. For their part, the French Romantics introduced Taoist metaphysics to the cultural salons of Europe. *Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835)* authored important classical linguistic studies concerning the Eastern and New World languages, and his younger brother *Alexander (1769-1859)* made an impact with his geographic and ethnographic explorations of the Americas.

The finite-infinite dialectic laid the groundwork to look at the national past as a particular and unique moment in the development of the human spirit. As Chabod writes, “to counter the cosmopolitan, universalizing trends, which tend to enact abstract laws that are valid for all peoples, the nation means a sense of the uniqueness of each people, respect for their own traditions, and a jealous guarding of the particular features of its national character.”[[75]](#footnote-75) This period witnessed the initial research on the origins of national literatures, and new literary forms were developed, such as the historical novel—remember *Ivanhoe*, the most famous work of *Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)*—and published collections of short stories and folktales, such as those of the Dane *Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875)* and the brothers, *Jacob (1785-1863)* and *Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859)*. But above all, the national consciousness continued to take shape in this cultural environment, animated from the start by a humanitarian and liberal spirit. If man is an individual who needs to grow in order to expand his freedom, the nation as a historical subject should be aware of its own identity and start down the path towards freedom and the full development of its own potential. In this light, the nation is seen as a historical particularity within the whole of mankind. This keen awareness of their national particularities did not necessarily have to degenerate into a closed political-cultural vision, raising the particular by denying the universal. Nevertheless, it did create an environment for the birth of exaggerated nationalism, which in asserting the freedom of a specific nation would contradictorily deny the freedoms of other nations.

#### d) The new role of art as knowledge of salvation

The Romantic-idealistic finite-infinite dialectic also viewed the contemplation of man as an integral part of nature. As a result, from the Romantic perspective, one needs to resolve the contradiction of life in favour of a higher unity. If nature-as-divine is the totality, then nature is good, and therefore human nature is good. One simply has to educate the passions in order to find harmony with nature. Sensibility and rationality achieve natural harmony through an aesthetic education, which grasps the contradictory, the dialectic of existence. In some Romantic authors, human life is conceived as a work of art. Romantic art at the same time tended to reflect life in its state of movement, in its contradiction. Therefore, music, poetry, and painting are the Romantic arts par excellence, as they are best suited to express the contradiction of life.

From this perspective, art becomes a privileged doorway to the infinite, although it also provides the maximal expression of the artist's individuality. The aesthetic experience—both the creative genius and the person who appreciates a work of art—creates a point of contact between the finite and infinite. For this reason, art is not reduced to a purely aesthetic symbolism; rather, its ultimate significance lies in providing a window on truth: that is, the aesthetic experience itself has value with respect to knowledge. In the Romantic worldview, art plays a role that goes beyond aesthetics, because the artist is a mediator between the finite and the infinite, and the artistic creation is a revelation of truth. Ultimately, art—in particular poetry—becomes a true means of redemption.

Thus, Goethe spoke of poetry as a Gospel, and defined the works of Homer as a sacred treasure. The artist, as Goethe himself asserts in his early writing *On German Architecture*, is a God-like genius, and as a God he may declare of any artwork he has produced: “Bonum est”. The work of art, he writes in *Winckelmann and His Century,* “takes onto itself all that is noble, worthy of veneration and love, and spiritualizing the human figure, raises man above himself, touches on the entire arc of his life and his works and makes them divine in a present that also contains the past and future.” It's easy to see that, according to this perspective, the role once played by religion is now played by art. This theme was developed in greater depth by Hölderlin and Friedrich Schlegel.

### 3. Romantic authors and national developments

The birth of German Romanticism revolves around the group called “Jena Romantics”. It gathered writers, poets and thinkers who met and carried out their activities around the magazine “Athenäum”, founded by the brothers *August Wilhem (1767-1845)* and *Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829)* in 1798. The brothers put together the first systematic attempt to develop a theory of Romantic thought. Other members of the group were several writers, *Johann Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853)*, *Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773-1798), Novalis*, a poet and thinker, the philosophers Fichte and Schelling, and the theologian *F.D.E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834)*.

Later on different groups were set up: the Heidelberg Romantics - poets and writers *Clemens Brentano (1778-1842)* and *Achim von Arnim (1781-1831)*; historical linguistics and German mythology and tradition scholars *Jacob (185-1863)* and *Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859)* and the philosopher *Johann Joseph Görres (1776-1848)* -; the Berlin Romantics and the so called “political Romanticism” or Restoration Romanticism, typically represented by *Adam Heinrich Müller (1779-1829)* and *Karl Ludwig von Haller (1768-1854)*.

Where German Romanticism carries a strong ideological and philosophical charge, French Romanticism emphasises the innovation of artistic traditions and the struggle against conventions of style and topics. From an ideological point of view the most interesting author is *Victor Hugo (1802-1885)*, whose *Preface to Cromwell* became a Romanticism manifesto. His religiosity, foreign to specific institutional manifestations of faith, his identifying Romanticism with Liberalism, the study of human passions in his novels, make him the most prominent figure of French Romanticism. The most important poets are *Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863)* and *Alfred de Musset (1810-1857)*. For the latter Romanticism was a real lifestyle, a belief he practiced with a hectic life, in which his love for the (female) writer Georges Sand come to the fore. Another author worth mentioning is *Chateaubriand (1768-1848)*. His Romanticism is imbued with Christian spirit and conservative political ideas. *Génie du Christianisme (1802)* is his most important work in this regard.

The main ideas of the English Romanticism appeared in poetry and the existentialist attitude of many of them. We can mention the poets *W. Wordsworth (1770-1850)*, *S. Coleridge (1772-1834)*, *P. Shelley (1792-1822)*, and *J. Keats (1795-1821)*; and the novelist *Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)*. But the iconic figure of English Romanticism is probably *Lord Byron (1788-1824)*: he embodies the Romantic ideal of the rebel and the artist through his spirit of adventure, his desire to be singled out, his inspired poetry and death in the Greek war of independence fighting for freedom.

The works of *Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827),* *Silvio Pellico (1788-1854)* and *Massimo D’Azeglio (1798-1866)* attest to the strong political sense of longing for national unity that typifies Italian Romanticism. *Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873)*, the most influential Italian Romantic, is also imbued with patriotic spirit. His ideas evolved from an enlightened materialism to a Christian outlook on life, which he will capture in his literary work, namely the masterpiece *I promesi sposi* (The betrothed, 1827). In addition to being a man of letters, he was a moral philosopher fully in agreement with the Catholic faith.

Polish Romanticism is similar to Italian, mainly because of its patriotic charge and a sense of national identity. The main figures are several poets: *Adam Mickiewicz (1789-1855)*, -who wrote the polish national poem, *Pan Tadeusz-*, *Juliusz Slowacki (1809-1849),* and *Zygmunt Krasinski (1812-1859).*

To conclude this brief sketch of Romantic authors we need to mention the Spanish Romanticism. National identity and sentiment are reassessed by recovering the Spanish literature of the Middle Ages and the Spanish Golden Century. The work of the *Duque de Rivas (1791-1865)* and *José Zorrilla (1817-1893)*. It lacks, however the political charge of the Italian Romanticism, possibly with the exception *of Mariano José de Larra (1809-1837)*, who wrote at the death of Ferdinand VII: “Freedom in literature, as in the arts, as in industry, as in commerce, as in conscience. Behold the currency of this time. This is the measure by which we will be measured”.

### 4. Romanticism and secularisation

Though we have defined Romanticism in opposition to the Enlightenment, we must clarify that the Enlightenment and Romanticism are not completely opposed as philosophical-cultural movements, because deep down they have a common ideological stating point: the autonomy of man. Romanticism replaces reason with sentiment, but a non-regulated sentiment, which is drawn to the infinite, that wants to try everything, taste everything, not setting limits to one’s desires. Viewed in this light, we can say that we still live in the Romantic period today. The Romantic artist, the very model of a man dishevelled and diverse, could provide the key to understand how man’s absolute autonomy remains at the heart of this movement.

In fact, Romanticism continues the secularizing trend of the Enlightenment. The difference lies in the values that are now placed at the centre of man’s attention. It is no longer scientific reason, but rather love, art, life, and suffering that will take the place of the Absolute. In this sense, Romanticism displays its basic ambiguity: distancing itself from the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment, apparently opening the door to the supernatural. This is true for some Romantics, but for the most influential representatives of this movement, the newly revived values suffered a process of deification that would culminate in the replacement of the transcendent Christian God with man raised to the level of the divine.

The secularization of Romanticism is not, therefore, the disappearance of religiosity, but the transfer of its object, a transcendent God, to a divinity that is to some extent created by man. As Kahn says, “what we find is not a disappearance of religion, but rather that faith is separated from the church, from dogma, from the institutional relationship, a disintegration of the central religious form, so that the religious now flows from the centre to the peripheral areas and conquers new terrain: what is temporal is raised to the sacred and unworldly, and what becomes unworldly is offered as a substitute for the old unworldly, which had been lost or called into question.”[[76]](#footnote-76)

In the works of Schiller and Goethe, some human values become absolute and in a transcendent perspective they serve as paths to reach God, to the extent that what were means become the end. Goethe did not hesitate to deify human love: Faust's love-feeling is no longer the love of Dante for Beatrice, which leads the poet to the contemplation of divinity, but rather a love for “the feminine, converted from finite and creatural into something absolute, sacred, and divine”[[77]](#footnote-77). Becquer had a similar attitude when in his famous Rhymes he speaks of human love before which he is “mute and rapt on his knees, / as one adores God before his altar”[[78]](#footnote-78).

Likewise, they also deify life on earth. If nature works and operates continuously, man, in so far as he is part of nature, must live in continuous action. According to Goethe, “The conviction concerning our survival springs, in my view, from the concept of activity: if I work without rest until the end of my days, nature is bound to give me another form of existence.” As Kahn points out sharply, from this text we can conclude that eternal life is not presented as a gift from God but rather as a result of activity on earth: human action takes on a self-salvific religious sense. But, given that the transcendent horizon of certainty has vanished, this life brings with it, in its ambiguity, pain and suffering. The Romantic tragedies feature suffering as the inevitable destiny of man, through which he is purified and elevated. Over the years, the purifying role of suffering disappears, and the Romantic view of life winds up in the senselessness and absurdity of contemporary nihilism.

Many areas of life that had been ignored or despised by enlightened reason were recovered by Romanticism. Feelings, mystery, cultural peculiarities and tradition were given their rightful status in philosophical thinking. However, the reaction against the Enlightenment would open the gate to irrationalism. This would generate intellectual trends that would end up rejecting a transcendent understanding of the human person in future centuries.

### 5. Introduction to idealism

#### a) General characteristics of Idealism

Now we must address a complex philosophical system, which was developed during the heyday of Romanticism, and left a mark on the history of contemporary philosophy: German idealism.

The Kantian system sought to respond to the ultimate scepticism of empiricism. According to its internal principles, the possibility of the physical and mathematical sciences and the impossibility of metaphysics had been proven. At the same time, it founded a morality based on the imperatives of practical reason, and built a formal ethics of duty. But the Kantian system, rather than being a final answer to the ultimate questions of the human soul, dragged along behind it a metaphysical heritage: the assertion of the unknowable *thing-in-itself*, which was seen in the eyes of his followers as inconsistent, a true philosophical *scandal.*

*Leonard Reinhold (1758-1823)*, *Salomon Maimon*, *Sigismund Beck*, and *Gottlob Ernst Schultze*, Kant's early critics, gave different answers to that problem of the thing-in-itself. The first spoke of the thing-in-itself as something unknowable and unable to be represented: it was simply the logical foundation of a sensation that the subject had not produced. Maimon, in turn, eliminates the thing-in-itself, because, he says, it is unintelligible. Beck considers the starting point of transcendental philosophy to be the action of producing a representation: there is no receptivity *ab extra* (from without), and therefore, this problem of the thing-in-itself is not even raised. Schultz, in turn, demonstrates the inconsistency of the Kantian system: either we return to the scepticism of Hume, or we admit that things other than the subject can be known, and thereby we revert to dogmatism.

Fichte, the first great idealist, had very clear ideas regarding the thing-in-itself: “the idea of a thing that has, in itself, an existence independent of any power of representation, goes beyond thought itself… is pure fantasy, a dream, and not a thought”. Instead, philosophy must start at the root: the action of the self, which posits the self; a self that must be pure and absolute. With this assertion idealism was born.

The world outside the mind, according to idealism, is the product of thought. The *Copernican revolution* initiated by Kant is thus brought to its culmination. But what does it mean to say that the world is produced by thought? The thought that we refer to is not, of course, the mind of the particular individual, an entity too weak to sustain the whole universe. Idealists propose a super-individual intelligence, or, in other words, an absolute subject.

The transcendental Kantian self becomes, in Fichte, a metaphysical principle: the absolute self. In idealism the whole reality is the process of self-expression or self-manifestation of infinite reason. Through Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, philosophical thought returns to metaphysics. This is metaphysics of a Spinoza sort: that is, from the point of view of the totality.

At the heart of German idealism we find a great trust in the power of reason, and even more with Hegel, who believed it was not only desirable but possible to know the Absolute through philosophy. Along with this trust it is important to emphasize the theological element of idealism. Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel were theology students, and they tried to clarify the relationship between the finite and the Infinite. Their answers are different, but all three show the influence of Lutheran theology.

As we have indicated, Romanticism developed at the same time as Idealism. In the area of philosophy, three German thinkers were the predecessors of the Romantic movement: *Hamman (1730-1788)*, *Jacobi (1743-1819)* and *Herder*. The latter is looked upon as the cultural link between the Aufklärung and Romanticism, and we will look at this when we study Nationalism. However, we could say that the Romantic writers par excellencewere *littérateurs* rather than philosophers: *Novalis*, *Hölderlin* and *F. Schlegel*. It is true that idealist philosophers agreed with the Romantic artists in many points. But we cannot say *tout court* that Fichte, Schelling and Hegel were Romantics. The importance of the Infinite, the Absolute, the vision of totality, unity of historical development are all certainly characteristics common to the Romantics and the idealists. However, Fichte and Hegel's concepts of nature are far removed from Romantic views. The primacy of privileged feelings over rational knowledge, and the assimilation of poetry and philosophy, proposed by Schlegel, for instance have nothing to do with the rationalist attitude that underlies Fichte's intellectual intuition or Hegel's absolute philosophical knowledge. Ultimately, we must say that there is a spiritual affinity between the Romantic Movement and German idealism, but at the same time it is necessary to point out their differences.

The idealist systems of the 19th century have no comparison in the history of philosophy, apart from the Scholastic thought of the 13th century. The aspiration to a universal, totalizing, and final vision of the universe is truly impressive. Later European philosophy will have to take a stand before Idealism. The decline of idealism as a system took place after Hegel's death in 1831, but it became a necessary reference point for all the European philosophers of the 19th century. We will now look at the main points of Hegel’s system, who was the most influential of the idealist philosophers two centuries ago.

#### b) The absolute idealism of Hegel (1770-1831)

###### 1. Life and works

Hegel was born in Stuttgart on the 27th of August 1770, the same year as Hölderlin. His father was a public servant. At school he encountered the Greek tradition, and reading Sophocles’ Antigone made a deep impression upon him. In 1788 he moved to Tubingen, where he began to study theology. There he made friends with Schelling and with Hölderlin. He read Rousseau and became enthused by the French Revolution. His certificate of studies assessment reads: *Little aptitude for philosophy*.

From 1793 to 1796 he worked as a family tutor in Berne, and then moved to Frankfurt, where he did the same type of work until 1800. During this period he wrote his *Early Theological Writings* (published in 1907 under this title). By then one can already notice *the* topic of his philosophy: the Absolute and its relationship with finite beings.

In 1801 we see him as a *Privatdozent* in Jena, where he wrote *The Difference* Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy. In 1807, also in Jena, he published one of his main works: Phenomenology of Spirit. After the battle of Jena he started and edited the Critical Journal of Philosophy in Bamberg. Later he was appointed rector of the Gymnasium of Nuremberg. There, between 1812 and 1816 The Science of Logic saw the light of day.

By this stage Hegel was well-known in German intellectual circles, and had offers from the universities of Erlangen, Heidelberg and Berlin. He accepted the Heidelberg offer. In 1817 he published the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences. The following year he moved to Berlin, and was its university rector in the academic year 1829-1830, He held a chair of philosophy until the 14th of November 1831, when he died of cholera.

###### 2. Influences. First theological stage

The influence of Greek culture and religion are manifest in his early writings. Hence he understands Christianity according to the training he received in Tubingen: an enlightened Christianity, a religion of the intellect, contrary to Greek religion, understood as *Volksreligion* (popular religion). In this first stage he writes a *Life of Jesus*: Christ appears as a human preacher of Kantian morals. He only comes forward as divine to convince the Jews. Later the apostles make Christianity positivistic, and spiritual freedom is lost when dogmas are imposed.

This first perception of Christianity would change as his thoughts matured, At the end of his early period he considered Christ a preacher of love, as a privileged participation of divine life, and thus he surpassed Kantian morals. We can already glimpse the central problem of Hegelian speculation: the relationship between the finite and the Infinite. The Jewish God is an infinite evil: he is outside and above finite beings. The way to go from the finite to the Infinite is love. Therefore, religion is the force that achieves the union between finite and Infinite.

Philosophy should reflect on this task of religion. And so, as he develops his system, philosophy will carry forward the role that Hegel had first entrusted to religion.

###### 3. The role of philosophy

Hegel writes in The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy: “Separation is the source of the need for philosophy”[[79]](#footnote-79). This means that we need to find the synthesis between finite and Infinite, and overcome the differences. It is not a matter of denying one thing or the other, but of finding the integration of the finite in the Infinite. The tool of philosophical reflection will not be the intellect (Verstand), which perpetuates the contrasts, but reason (Vernunft), speculative knowledge.

Finitude is a relative concept. We understand the finite when opposed to the Infinite. Furthermore, the finite is an instant of the life of the Infinite. Philosophy has to build the life of the Absolute starting from the finite: it is a full Absolute, not undifferentiated like Schelling’s, whose Absolute-identity looks -in the well-known Hegel phrase- like the night when all cats look the same. The Absolute is not an impregnable reality behind its manifestations: it coincides dialectically with its manifestation, it is its manifestation.

###### 4. The Absolute and dialectics

“Philosophy is concerned with truth, and truth is the whole”. The Absolute is the whole, the entire reality, the process of its own becoming. The Absolute needs to be understood not only as a substance - this would be a Spinoza interpretation - but as a subject. A subject that is - at the same time - object of itself. The Absolute is thought that thinks of itself, taking up Aristotle’s definition. But Aristotle appears to refer to a transcendent deity, where Hegel identifies the Absolute with a becoming in the world.

The supreme definition of the Absolute is to say that it is spirit. To say that the Absolute is self-thinking thought is to identify the ideal with the real, subjectivity and objectivity. In this sense, everything rational is real, and everything real is rational. The life of the Absolute is a necessary process of self-realisation. This life can only be shown in a rational way. According to the classical philosophical tradition, conceptual thought defines, distinguishes, opposes the contents of the concepts. Finite and Infinite, one and many are opposites. But according to Hegel this only happens at the level of *Verstand* (intellect), not at the level of *Vernunft* (reason).

*Verstand*, the intellect, is not useless. It works for ordinary knowledge. But if we want to get to know the very life of the Absolute, we need to get to the bottom, in depth. In order to fathom the life of the Absolute, speculative philosophy needs to understand that it (the life of the Absolute) goes through different moments. Speaking conceptually, if A and B are opposite, for *Vernunft* A becomes B and B, A. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* he uses the example of a plant to illustrate the dialectic movement: “the bud disappears in the flowering, and you could say that the flowering confuses the first; in a similar way, when the fruit appears, the flower is declared as a false existence of the plant, and the fruit takes the place of the flower as its truth. These forms are not only distinct, but each of them disappears in the presence of the other, because they are mutually incompatible. But at the same time, their fluid nature makes them moments of organic unity, in which they not only rejected each other, but on the contrary, they are equally necessary, and this equal necessity is now the life of the whole”. For this reason there must be a moment of a conquering synthesis, a moment of identity-in-the-difference. We can follow the life of the Absolute through the *Aufheben*, the conquering synthesis, and enter into its depth: for Hegel to be is to become, and as Heraclitus used to say, *war is the father of everything*, that is, we reach oppositions through the synthetic moment, that will produce another opposition, which will be later conquered, in a necessary dialectic process.

###### 5. Hegelian logic

The Hegelian system has three key aspects: *being in itself*: logic; *being something else*: nature (self-alienated spirit); *being in itself and for itself*: philosophy of the spirit. Logic is the part of philosophy responsible for explaining the essence of the Absolute in itself. In the classical philosophical tradition, this is the task of metaphysics, but given that everything rational is real and everything real, rational, it is obvious that for Hegel metaphysics and logic are the same thing.

“The Absolute is spirit: this is the highest definition of the Absolute. The purpose of all cultures and philosophies has been to find this definition and understand its content. All religions and sciences have tried to reach this objective”. The Absolute is the thought that thinks itself, that is, God. But it is not the transcendent Christian God, because the Hegelian Absolute is the process of its own becoming. We can understand the dialectic movement of this process if we start from the first three categories of Hegelian logic: *being, not-being, becoming*. The concept of pure being (*reines Sein*) is undetermined: it leads to the not-being, to nothing. The mind goes from being to not-being; therefore, its truth is this movement, that is, the becoming. The concept of Absolute as being is the concept of Absolute as becoming, a process of self-development.

###### 6. The Philosophy of the spirit

We will leave aside the philosophy of nature to dedicate some space to the philosophy of the spirit. It is divided in three parts: the first two deal with the finite spirit; the last one deals with the Absolute Spirit as thought that thinks itself.

The subjective finite spirit - that is, the Hegelian anthropology - is covered in the first section of Part three of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Hegel picks up the topics of *Phenomenology of Spirit* that were already covered: the human soul (the point of transition between nature and spirit), consciousness, and the mind or spirit (*Geist*), which is nothing other than the activity of the spirit in itself.

The second part of the philosophy of the spirit looks at the “objective spirit”, which means the world of culture and institutions, of the “objectivizations” of the human spirit. In the same way that the Absolute objectivises itself in nature, the subjective spirit objectivises itself, or expresses itself, leaving its state of immediacy.

Hegel holds that the first objectivization of the subjective spirit is the law. The individual subject, conscious of his freedom (the person), must state externally that it is a free agent, and give itself room for freedom. He does it by taking material things as his own. Personality confers the ability to possess rights such as property. A person becomes the owner of something not only through an act of freedom but through effective appropriation of the thing. But the law should also establish intersubjective norms, and prevent possible infringements of the rules. For this reason Hegel completes his doctrine on the law with an assessment of contract and penal law.

Hegel moves from the law to study morals, which is only one step away from “Ethicity” (*Sittlichkeit*). It is fulfilled fully in the *ethical substance*, the State. Ethical substance is the synthesis of subjectivity and objectivity: the finite spirits surpass themselves through the different moments of social life. The family is for Hegel the first moment of the ethical substance, and also expresses a first feeling of totality; its first specific manifestation is family property. But the family already has in itself the seeds of its own melting away, because when the children grow up, they become individuals. The private individuals emerge from family life, and assert themselves as such private individuals, thus denying the whole.

This denial of the whole denies itself through civil society, the second stage of the development of the ethical substance. Civil society, as the union of economically organised private individuals, and the resultant division of labour and social classes, is the outer state, that is the state that leaves aside its most essential characteristic, the subjective-objective union of the spirit. For this reason family and civil society are unilateral concepts that are surpassed in the State.

The State is the third and most important stage of the ethical substance; moreover, it is the *self-conscious ethical substance*. The State is the realization of the rational will when this will has been raised to the level of universal self-consciousness. It is the highest expression of the objective spirit.

The State is *the passage of God through the world*, that identifies the individual concerns with general, universal interests. The State realises the freedom of individuals because freedom is potentially universal and as such desires the general good. However, this does not necessarily mean a totalitarian understanding of the state: the mature State must ensure the full development of personal freedom. This does not prevent Hegel from stating that individuals should turn the universal objective of the State into their own objective.

###### 7. Philosophy of History

Hegel postulates three kinds of historiography: original history, made in the manner of Thucydides, reflexive or didactic history, and philosophical history, or Philosophy of History. The latter is distinguished by the fact that reason controls the world, and therefore universal history is a rational process. More specifically, world history is a process through which the spirit attains real consciousness of itself as freedom: “World history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom”.

The concrete unity of development of the spirit of the world (*Weltgeist*) is the national spirit or spirit of the people (*Volksgeist*). The spirit of the people is the expression of its culture: art, religion, philosophy, the juridical structure, etc. The *Volksgeists* are historical moments of the Weltgeist, and their temporal succession shows the relentless development of the Spirit. Besides, there is a people in every period of history that necessarily masters the others, guiding the cultural development of an era, so that it bestows its own specific features. We need to appreciate the Hegelian notion of history as the tribunal of the peoples, because the historical events that set the destiny of nations are nothing else than necessary moments - and therefore they are fair - of the dialectic development of the Absolute.

The content of the spirit of the people is prior and higher than the individual. The private (particular) accesses the life of the Spirit through his identity with the social collective of the people he belongs to. On the other hand, the highest kind of social aggregation is the State. Therefore, the full dialectical development of the nation leads to the State, in so far as it is the highest manifestation of the Objective Spirit. From this peculiar perspective, the Prussian nation-state is for Hegel the peak of the ultimate dialectic stage.

Why does the Prussian state hold such an important position as the pinnacle of history? Hegel thinks that world history moves from East to West: from the despotic eastern empires to the Christian civilisation, going through ancient Greece and the emergence of the democratic principle. However, the German people have in Christian Europe the greatest interiority, and it has been a fertile field for the growth of the Philosophy of the Spirit. By overcoming the distinction between thought and reality, the German national spirit represents the full maturity of man, who reaches the supreme freedom of knowing itself to be a moment of the Absolute.

Every state asserts itself as sovereign individual before any other state. There is no sovereign power above the states: war is the solution to resolve disputes between the states. War is necessary: it is necessary that the finite, property and life be deemed contingent. War is a painful, but necessary, means for history to move forward. According to Ballesteros, “in Hegel, the defence of imperialism as the key of progress is linked to the fact that "only one people bear the universal spirit in each epoch of history, and therefore the spirits of other peoples have no rights against it”. The dominion of a nation over the others is closely linked to military valour, because “the foundation of the modern world has given military value its highest aspect, inasmuch as its expression already appears as a member of a totality against another totality”, and military value is therefore the very foundation of the juridical acknowledgement of dominion: “Wars are the moment when recognition gives meaning to history”[[80]](#footnote-80).

Hegel’s nationalistic bias will be a source of inspiration for many politicians of Central and Eastern Europe. But more importantly, his view of the State as the greatest manifestation of the objective Spirit opened the way for visionary and totalitarian politicians of the 20th century. Hegel also asserts the importance of great individuals as the instruments of *Weltgeist*. The prototype would be Napoleon, whom Hegel saw after his victory in Jena, at the height of his splendour.

When interpreting Hegel’s philosophy of history, some scholars have accused him of cynicism: if history were the judge, it would lead to force becoming a legitimate right. But under this perspective we can glimpse Hegel’s excessive confidence in the rational element of history: from the perspective of the Absolute, in the end, the irrational elements become rational through the *cunning of Reason*.

###### 8. The domain of the Absolute Spirit

We have looked briefly at the spheres of the subjective spirit and the objective spirit. Now we need to climb to the top of the Hegelian system: the absolute knowledge of the Absolute.

The Absolute spirit exists only through the human spirit, when this finite spirit reaches a level of knowledge that Hegel calls absolute knowledge in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is the awareness that the finite spirit has of being a moment of the life of the Absolute. This absolute knowledge can be developed in three ways: art (apprehend *the beautiful* which appears in nature, but above all in the work of art), religion and philosophy. Art, religion and philosophy lead to the absolute knowledge of the Absolute.

Beauty is the sensible appearance of the idea, and it is grabbed through aesthetic intuition. There are two elements in the work of art: the sensible form and the idea (unity of subjectivity and objectivity). According to the harmonisation of these two elements, we can speak of *symbolic art*: the sensible element prevails over the spiritual (Egypt); of *classic art*: there is perfect harmony between the two elements (Greek sculpture); and finally, *Romantic art*: the spiritual element prevails, grasped as movement, action, conflict (poetry, music, painting). This is Christian art.

A different way to reach the Absolute is religious knowledge, a non-conceptual thought. Hegel calls it pictorial or representative, a thought dressed in fantasy. There are two kinds of religion: a) *Naturreligion*, the religion of the substance. God is conceived as an undetermined universal; b) the religion of the *spiritual individuality*: God is spirit, but in the shape of a person or individual personality (Hebrew, Greek, Roman religion); and finally, c) the *absolute religion*, Christianity. God is the infinite spirit, not only transcendent but also immanent. God is not undifferentiated, it is Trinity of Persons, infinite spiritual life. In addition, the *kenosis* of the Word, which is verified historically in the Incarnation, Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and which is a “scandal for the Jews, foolishness for the Gentiles” (1 Cor 1, 23), finds its logical placement within the Hegelian system; it is the central dialectic moment of the evolution of the Spirit. Indeed, in Jesus Christ man becomes aware of his essential identity with the Absolute Spirit. Christianity is the absolute truth, but it is expressed as *Vorstellung*, representation.

The difference between religion and philosophy lies in how God is conceived: philosophy means the passage from *Vorstellung* to pure thought. For Hegel both forms are true, but the philosophical is deeper, more real.

Hegel appears to be sincere in his defence of Christianity and seems to be upholding orthodoxy in this thought. In fact he subordinates religion to philosophy, because the ultimate interpretation of the mysteries is entrusted to philosophy, not religion. Christianity would in fact be an esoteric Hegelianism, and vice versa, Hegelianism would be an esoteric Christianity. Thus, Hegel plays out one more step in the process of secularisation; supernatural truths - the mysteries of Christianity - are replaced by rational philosophical truths. The history of philosophy is a rational process that finishes with the Hegelian system, where at the end one reaches absolute self-consciousness. Hegel looks on the previous philosophical system as precedents, premises of absolute idealism.

Romanticism and Idealism take an even more extreme step in the process of secularisation typical of Modernity. Identifying - through poetry or metaphysics - man with the totality (which can take the form of a divine Nature or the Absolute Spirit in its becoming), they eliminated the difference between a transcendent Absolute and the created world. Asserting the relativity of anything good (nihilism) and making relative goods absolute (Nationalism, Marxism, Scientism), will later result in the making values of the created world into the absolute.

The Romantic spirit understood as the expansion of individual freedom without regard for an objective moral order continues to be a key element of present-day world vision in vast sections of western society. By contrast, the idealist system appears today completely finished. But we cannot forget that Hegel’s shadow - whether as a teacher or an enemy to be destroyed - remains in the background of authors such as Marx, Nietzsche, Comte, Kierkegaard and so many others.

### 6. The anti-Hegelian reaction: Sören Kierkegaaard

The Hegelian system moved towards identifying transcendence with world history, and subordinated faith to reason. Besides, the human person was simply a moment of the dialectic development of the Absolute Spirit. Critical reactions cropped up straight after Hegel’s death. Idealism was a very significant step in the process of secularisation, but some of his critics shared with Hegel his anti-transcendent attitude: Feuerbach and Marx, who will be studied later, turn idealism into a materialism closed to any reality other than the material world; Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, who are also anti-Hegelian, criticise the transcendent outlook on life, which they consider to be a great lie that prevents one from looking at reality. Sören Kierkegaaard reacts against Hegel, but in his case he attempts to recover transcendence, the primacy of faith over reason and the unique, unrepeatable nature of the human person. Kierkegaard would become very influential in several currents of contemporary thought.

Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen in 1813, and died also there in 1855. He is not a systematic thinker. Some of his most important works are: *Aut-Aut*, 1843; *Fear and Trembling*, 1843; *Repetition*, 1843; *Philosophical Fragments*, 1844; *The Concept of Anxiety*, 1844; *Stages on Life’s Way*, 1845*; Concluding Unscientific Script to “Philosophical Fragments”*, 1846; *The Sickness unto Death*, 1849; *Practice in Christianity*, 1849.

The most relevant documents to understand Kierkegaard’s intimate thoughts are his voluminous *Diary*, and also a brief essay, *The Point of View of my Life as an Author*, written in 1848, but only published posthumously in 1859. In this last work, a kind of public statement, he opens some of his inner world to the reader. There are topics such as the complicated relationships he had with his pseudonyms (pen names), the connexion between his ‘edifying’ and aesthetic works, and he reveals his personal relationship with God, albeit with some modesty.

Right from the start, Kierkegaard describes himself as a “religious writer”: “the content of this little book, he writes, says what I stand for as an author: I am and have been a religious author, all of my work as a writer relates to Christianity, to the issue of “becoming a Christian”, and a direct or indirect controversy against the monstrous illusion we call Christianity [understood as Christendom], or against the illusion that in a country like ours we are all Christians”[[81]](#footnote-81). We find in this rich and clear passage the definition of what he will later call “the problem”: “how to become a Christian”. This problem can only be understood within the Kierkegaardian dialectic between Christianity and Christendom.

Christendom is essentially belonging to an ecclesial community - the Danish Lutheran Church -, the representative of the “established order”. This belonging does not imply a specific way of life: you are a Christian because you were baptized as a child, and because you go to church on Sundays, listen to the pastor’s sermon and sing hymns. But what you hear on Sunday has nothing to do with life on Monday. Christendom is an illusion, he says. His self-imposed task -which he interprets as a divine command - will be to unmask that illusion and the hoax of Christendom, and introduce true Christianity, a doctrine not to be preached, but to be lived.

In the preface of his first two *Edifying Discourses* - that is, in a religious work - he introduces “the category,” which is “the individual.” “I was fully aware that I was a religious writer, and as such I was interested in “the individual” (“the individual” as opposed to “the public”), a thought that contains a whole philosophy of life and the world”[[82]](#footnote-82).

“The problem” - how to become a Christian - and “the category” - the individual - integrate with each other. The true Christian will be the individual, the singular person before God.

The category of the individual, presented under different angles through pseudonymous works and direct communication, has an important dialectic meaning. Kierkegaard lives in an environment charged with idealism: the system - he will always call the Hegelian philosophical construct ‘the system’ - nullifies the individual, who is conceived or thought of as a moment of the infinite, as a simple *mode* of the Absolute (here he uses Spinoza terminology). The all-embracing system leaves no room for freedom, which is reduced to self-awareness of need. The “mediation” between two opposites, according to Hegelian dialectics, will be the life of the Absolute, the necessary process of its becoming. Mediation is therefore necessary and not free, and “free” choices of the individuals are only moments of the self-affirmation of the absolute life of the Absolute. The absolute is identified with the world and with world history. In this context, we understand Kierkegaard’s clear and strong statement: “The whole confusion of modern times has been forgetting the absolute difference, the qualitative difference between God and the world”.

What is the individual for Kierkegaard? For the Danish philosopher man is a dialectical being. Man is not “one” from the beginning: he is a composite whose task is to become “individual”, by putting into action the “synthesis” that confers unity to the different elements that make it up. It is not, however, a necessary process, because the synthesis of an individual is the result of choice: it is only reached when man has chosen himself freely, but only if he has done it supported by the Absolute, as a free being but also, at the same time, as dependant on Divine Power: “entering into a relationship with himself, wanting to be himself, man is based on transparency in the power that has placed him”[[83]](#footnote-83).

Kierkegaard’s existential analyses show different levels of composition in man. Firstly, man is a synthesis of body and soul. Through the body and the soul men can discover the possibilities and the limits of their own existence. The synthesis between body and soul is called “spirit”. The spirit relates soul and body, and self-consciousness is awakened. When man begins to reflect, after the innocent infancy stage, the spirit puts the soul before the body: the self knows the meaning of each and every thing, its make-up and its possibilities, its complementarity and its opposition. The process of self-making of the individual, of self-affirmation, begins this way.

The self is a double relationship: body and soul must relate through the spirit, but the spirit is also a relationship with itself, that is, it needs to be the foundation of itself. Yet, this being the foundation of self may be absolute or derived, and it is necessary to work it out. Kierkegaard understands the relational structure of man, not only in an ontological sense, but above all in an ethical-religious sense. He thinks that a relationship that relates to itself - in other words, a self - must have been placed by itself or by another. Human existence cannot place itself, hence it follows that it has been placed by another. In this double relating to itself, the self has to choose whether to set its foundation on another, that is on the power that the very spirit has placed, God, or be the foundation of self. The self founded on the Absolute is freedom, precisely because he has chosen the Absolute, its origin and end, that is, its intrinsic truth; but the self that has chosen itself as self-foundation is despair. “The self is free, not because it transfers to itself and nullifies itself in the infinite, not even because he abandons its being (…) in the finite, but because he sets itself asserting its ability to choose the Absolute”[[84]](#footnote-84).

The self that bases itself, turning its back to the Absolute, despairs because it has betrayed its own dialectical being and destroyed its most intimate ontological structure: being a spirit - the synthesis of body and soul - based on God. The desperate self can despair in aesthetic life, either because it chooses the finite, which cannot satisfy it, or because it chooses the infinite in a fantastic sort of a way: like the infinite possibilities, without determining itself as a spirit. Ultimately, those who choose not to base themselves on the Absolute have not really chosen, because the man who gets himself lost in the immediate or in the infinite possibility of thought does not determine himself as a spirit, and lacks a true and proper self.

Kierkegaard’s existential assessments lead us to other levels of dialectical constructs: finitude and infinitude, necessity and possibility; time and eternity. Following those assessments, Kierkegaard’s individual can be either

1. an individual being: the only existing things are individuals; the abstract does not exist;
2. dialectical: there are several components in man that need to be synthesized;
3. in the making: the synthesis of the spirit is not given; it is a free struggle to find the unity in basing the self in the Absolute;
4. as a result, the synthesis of the spirit becomes an ethical-religious task, because it is a matter of the make-up of the individual before God.
5. theologically finalised: the individual self-asserts only before God; the absence of foundation in the Absolute leads to despair and the loss of self.

According to man’s self-awareness, that is, depending on the strength of the self-affirmation of the self, man finds himself in various existential circumstances, goes through different existential *stages*. But this is not a necessary psychological evolution: moving from one stage to another is a decision of freedom. The *aesthetic* stage is ruled by sense impressions; we live superficially in the immediate. In the *ethical* stage life is ordained according to the fulfillment of duty. It is the kingdom of *one or the other*, that is, the distinction between good and evil. It is the stage of the general, of moral order. The religious stage is finding oneself before God. Kierkegaard distinguishes two basic kinds of religiosity: in *religiosity A* the relationship with God is the absolute background of existence; religiosity B is made by the relationship with God in time, that is, with Christ. To move from A to B implies a leap of quality: it is necessary to go through the paradox of Christ, a God that becomes man. By accepting Christ through faith, one becomes an authentic individual.

The passage from the ethical stage to the religious stage is done through anxiety and despair. It is not a theoretical, but a vital step. Man himself is the source of anxiety. Anxiety is the realisation that it is not possible to attain ethical perfection, because human nature is finite. The denial of the transcendental foundation of the relationship with oneself - own existence - leads to despair, which is a deadly disease. In its strongest sense it is sin as a severance from God, and the resultant locking oneself up in oneself. No one can live outside Christianity and not be in despair. Anxiety and despair open the path towards the faith. Faith replaces despair with hope, and anxiety with trust in God. But this faith begins where thought ends, hence it is necessary to jump and leave reason behind. Faith is a paradox and a scandal for reason: Jesus Christ is a sign of contradiction. We can become contemporary with Christ through faith.

\* \* \*

Kierkegaard provides one of the most comprehensive criticisms of the Hegelian system with his re-discovery of the singular as an individual endowed with dignity, and the central role of faith to reach the Absolute. Several philosophical currents stem from Kierkegaard, as well as some manifestations of personalism and existentialism. His work went unnoticed in the 19th century, but the 20th century has witnessed a real *Kierkegaard Renaissance*.

Some existentialists, namely Heidegger and Sartre, are biased in their understanding of Kierkegaard. Their assessments of anxiety and despair are inspired in the Danish thinker to a certain extent, but for Kierkegaard they are not the last word. If we trust the basic sincerity of the confessions he makes, we must admit that he wanted to give his work a religious nature. We cannot really understand Kierkegaard outside Christian radicalism, in dialectic opposition to Hegel’s rationalisation of the mysteries of faith, and reducing Christendom to the culture of some Lutheran communities of the 19th century. An interpretation of Kierkegaard along existential lines is basically a truncated version of his thinking.

If we say that understanding Kierkegaard along existential lines is biased, it is also exaggerated to consider him as a Catholic thinker *in abscondito*. Despite his criticism of the Lutheranism of his times, his upholding the merit of good works and other elements of Catholic dogma, Kierkegaard remains far from Catholic orthodoxy, especially in matters referring to the relationship faith-reason and the reasonable - not rationalistic - nature of the faith.

Kierkegaard has a message for the contemporary man. His role was to open paths that can be travelled by those who want to find in man a theological foundation and a transcendent destiny.

By opposing Hegel, Kierkegaard placed the singular individual at the centre of the anthropological debate. It is not the autonomous individual of liberalism, but the individual that finds the meaning of his existence in his theological foundation, in the awareness of being before God. In this sense, Kierkegaard is not only anti-Hegel, but also anti-Nietzsche, as we will see later on[[85]](#footnote-85).

# PART II

# IDEOLOGICAL MODERNITY

Following the cultural revolution created by the Enlightenment and Romanticism, radical anthropocentrism had to find an absolute justification. In other words, if the Absolute, God, was no longer the centre and foundation of the world and of human existence, man had to find a different centre and a different foundation. The 19th and 20th centuries were mainly ‘absolutist’ centuries: during this period there occurs a presumed transfer of absolute values to aspects of reality which are of themselves, contingent and relative. When God is missing, man tries to fill the gap left by transcendence, unless he is carried away by nihilism and want of meaning. The history of contemporary political ideologies is a history where the relative becomes the new absolute. Freedom, understood not as the freedom of creatures, but almost as *causa sui*, in liberalism; the proletariat, in Marxism; the nation, for nationalism; race for National Socialism; the State, for fascism – all these will become the false absolutes that will unsuccessfully attempt to replace the Absolute. When ideological struggles lead Europe to the havoc that resulted from two world wars, nihilism and loss of meaning will conquer a position in the European cultural landscape. However, the history of salvation continues, and over these two centuries, Christianity has been a source of meaning for many, at least from a human point of view.

We have stated that making what is relative an absolute was the work of the so- called political ideologies. What is ideological thinking? According to Ibáñez Langlois the typical traits of any ideology are an *a priori* element of preconceived interests; a tendency to a vague schematism, which gives the ideology an abstract configuration; a strong emotional component linked to these abstract concepts; a reductionist outlook on human nature, and finally a utopic inclination that becomes a secularised eschatology. Following this description, this Chilean author provides an essential definition: “ideology is a system of ideas that has been simplified for the use of the masses, to achieve dominance and power”[[86]](#footnote-86).

Although we agree with Ibáñez Langlois, we feel that it is worthwhile to look at other views of the concept of ideology, because the term is polysemic. The historical origin of the concept of ideology can be found in the sensualistic school of *Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836)*. This school aimed at establishing a basic philosophical discipline that could be used by all sciences to study the origin, limits and development of ideas. Ideology would be this *prima philosophia*. Napoleon will use the term in a pejorative sense, considering it an abstract intellectual construct far removed from the common sense of normal people. This concept however receives its maximal use in Marx. According to the German philosopher, ideology has two different meanings. Firstly, it is a false representation of reality, which can be identified with the religious and philosophical alienation, for the benefit of the dominant class, and whose purpose is to perpetuate the dominance of the rich over the dispossessed class. But there is an even wider meaning of ideology. Once the communist society without classes has been set up, ideology remains as the structure of the human spirit: it is the immediate conscience of the social reality lived by men who have been placed together in history.

Karl Mannheim changes the concept of ideology in a widely-read piece (*Ideologie und utopie*, 1929): ideology is really the result of a relationship of social dominance, but it is also a permanent structural element in the history of human societies. In this way Mannheim accepted some elements of American functionalist sociology. For Parsons ideology is a system of beliefs received by all the members of a community, directed towards the integration of that very community. Bell, on the other hand, thinks that it is a system that encompasses the whole reality, a body of beliefs animated by passion, that tends towards the total transformation of lifestyles.

Ideology relates to religion, in so far as it is a set of totalising beliefs. The great difference with religious faith lies in its human origin. Ideology aims at replacing religion in its role of total knowledge. In other words, replacing religion with ideology is one of the manifestations of the transition from heteronomy - the world receives its origin and ultimate meaning from God - to autonomy, understood in absolute terms: man’s world is self-founded, with no reference to transcendence whatsoever. Hence, we could define ideologies as “religions of the temporal” (Julien Benda, *La trahison des clercs*, 1927) or “secularised religions” (Raymond Aron, *L’ âge des empires et l’avenir de la France*, 1945). As Dawson explains “the meaning of History was a mystery for the Christian, that could only be revealed in the light of faith. But the apostles of the religion of progress denied the need for divine revelation, and believed that man had only to follow the light of reason to discover the meaning of History in the law of progress which governs the life of civilisation. But it was difficult even in the 18th century to make this facile optimism match the events of History. It was necessary to explain that hitherto the light of reason had been concealed by the dark forces of ignorance and superstition as embodied in organised religion. If this were the case, the Encyclopedia was nothing less than a new revelation, and in order that it might triumph it was necessary that the new believers should organise themselves in a new church, that could be called either a school of philosophers, a secret society of *illuminati* or freemasons or a political party. This was, in fact, what really happened; and the new rationalist churches have proved no less intolerant and dogmatic than the religious sects of the past. The revelation of Rousseau was followed by a series of successive revelations - idealist, positivist and socialistic -, each of them with their own prophets and their churches”[[87]](#footnote-87).

According to Chabot, the role of ideologies in the life of communities could be summarised by the following dominant traits: replacement (of religious faith by political doctrines); immanence (affirmation of the here-and-now and oblivion of the ‘beyond’; salvation (the political ideology is the only one that can truly open the gates for mankind to reach happiness, but an earthly happiness, within an undetermined future)[[88]](#footnote-88).

The dialectics between a transcendent outlook of human life and history, on one side, and the absolute assertion of earthly values on the other, was highlighted by an insightful Dostoyevsky; Ivan Fyodorovitch states in his famous novel *The brothers Karamazov* that “if you were to destroy in mankind the belief in immortality, not only love but every living force maintaining the life of the world would at once be dried up. Moreover, nothing then would be immoral, everything would be lawful, even cannibalism. That's not all: (…) by asserting that for every individual, like ourselves, who does not believe in God or immortality, the moral law of nature must immediately be changed into the exact contrary of the former religious law, and that egoism, even to crime, must become not only lawful but even recognized as the inevitable, the most rational, even honourable outcome of his position”[[89]](#footnote-89). Moral values would crumble if a transcendent perspective was lost. According to Dostoyevsky’ character, lack of faith leads to nihilism. Rakitin, another character of the same novel, calls this theory shameful, and he concludes by reaffirming his faith in mankind: “Humanity will find in itself the power to live for virtue even without believing in immortality. It will find it in the love for freedom, for equality, for fraternity.”[[90]](#footnote-90)

After Auschwitz, Hiroshima, the Gulag archipelagos and the widespread culture of death, the reader can make up his mind on which of the two characters was right.

In the second part of this book we will study the principal political ideologies in the next three chapters: Liberalism, Nationalism and Marxism. It is also necessary to study Scientism: a cultural movement that has a bearing on the development of ideas, and intertwines with the various ideologies.

Whereas in the first part of the book we have briefly described the process of secularisation understood as the declericalization of the medieval world, -secularisation being the assertion of secularity and the relative autonomy of the temporal -, ideological Modernity, the heir of the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Idealism, is the manifestation of secularisation in the strongest sense of the word: the assertion of the absolute autonomy of man. We will return to the first meaning of secularisation in the third and fourth parts of this course.

## V LIBERALISM

### 1. What is liberalism?

It is not easy to find a definition of liberalism. Some authors think that it is an impossible task. The first problem is to outline its typical traits. A better approach would be to talk about liberalisms, rather than a univocal liberal thinking. Nonetheless, we think that it is theoretically possible to make a brief description of the ideology that lies at the foundation of the various liberalisms.

We will first clarify the terminology we will use in this study. *Liberalism* will be an ideological way of thinking, *liberal democracy* the political and institutional manifestation of this ideology, and *capitalism* an economic system linked to it.

According to G. Cotroneo, the roots of liberal thinking can be found in the philosophical reflection on the topic of tolerance, that emerges following the wars of religion in 16th century Europe. Political freedom in modernity would be based on the principle of tolerance, that proposes dialogue rather than confrontation in the understanding of the divine and its relationship with the world. Dialogue will be the standard of a self-defined “liberal” community. Beginning with the Italian antitrinitarian Socinians, followed by Montaigne, Spinoza and Locke, the principle of tolerance will develop ever more precise, definite profiles.

The next step after religious tolerance was a more strictly political issue: it was necessary to assert the *neutrality* of the State not only regarding beliefs, but also the *private* activities of its citizens. This second principle - the neutrality of the State both in higher matters and in those others which were strictly private - led to a crucial theory: the distinction between State and society. Walzer defined liberalism as “the art of separating” public and private matters.

Classic political liberalism is also known to be a *theory of the limits of the State*, that is, an attempt to identify the means to prevent the State from abusing the individual rights of its citizens, a direct criticism of absolute monarchies. The means that liberalism uses to safeguards these rights are well-known: political *representation* of the citizens, separation of powers and the establishment of the *rule of law*, where, using Kant’s words, the political set up should ensure that individual freedom can co-exist with the freedom of all.

The foundation of this new political theory was an anthropology based on the idea of an individualistic human nature. Laws and juridical institutions, invented by man to address human needs, did not have the prestige of divine assent: “as there is no absolute reference parameter to link opinions (something that happened when human law had to conform to divine law), a ‘rule’ was accepted: given that it is impossible to reach unanimous opinions, decisions had to be taken by majority”[[91]](#footnote-91). Initially, of course, “majority” referred only to those citizens who had political rights, a cultural and economic elite. The alliance of liberalism and democracy as a form of popular government will only appear with the second industrial revolution, around the 1870s.

Economic freedom joined religious and political freedom. The distinction between civil society and State made the former “the domain of freedom, creativity, spontaneity, and even disorder, whereas the latter was the site of authority (…) and also of conformity, bureaucracy and institutional rigidity”[[92]](#footnote-92). The economic world had to remain outside the reach of state power: market laws - the *invisible hand* of Adam Smith - were sufficient to create wealth, to satisfy the material needs of men, and to achieve continuous economic progress.

Initially we stated that capitalism is an economic system linked to liberal ideology. We need to add that there were other factors in the history of its development: from a technological perspective, industrial mechanization; and from a moral point of view, a materialistic attitude.

Leaving aside technical economic matters, I feel that it is important to highlight the attitude behind liberal economic institutions. A passage of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s famous novel *Crime and Punishment* can help us here. Piotr Petrovitch, one of the characters, who was in favour of the “new ideas”, engages in an ardent apology of economic freedom, which partly reminds us of Mandeville’s praise of private bad habits: “Hitherto, for instance, if I were told, ‘love thy neighbour,’ what came of it?” Piotr Petrovitch went on, perhaps with excessive haste. “It came to my tearing my coat in half to share with my neighbour and we both were left half naked. As a Russian proverb has it, ‘Catch several hares and you won’t catch one.’ Science now tells us, love yourself before all men, for everything in the world rests on self-interest. You love yourself and manage your own affairs properly and your coat remains whole. Economic truth adds that the better private affairs are organised in society—the more whole coats, so to say—the firmer are its foundations and the better is the common welfare organised too. Therefore, in acquiring wealth solely and exclusively for myself, I am acquiring, so to speak, for all, and helping to bring to pass my neighbour’s getting a little more than a torn coat; and that not from private, personal liberality, but as a consequence of the general advance. The idea is simple, but unhappily it has been a long time reaching us, being hindered by idealism and sentimentality. And yet it would seem to want very little wit to perceive it...”[[93]](#footnote-93).

Applying the political model of classical liberalism, - also called paleo-liberalism -, rather than solve social and economic problems, made the situation worse. The rapid process of industrialization and the “dogmatic” respect for economic freedom (the State’s non-intervention in the economic development of a community), created a capitalist aristocracy and a destitute proletarian mass. Two ideological factors must be added to the mix. First of all, a naturalist understanding of economic life, typical of liberalism: the market has enough spontaneous economic laws to be deemed self-sufficient; secondly a moral economistic approach, summarized in the idea that the ultimate goal of economic activity is the greatest possible profit; the specifically human aspects become subservient to quantitative data. Bearing in mind these factors, it is easy to understand that at the end of the 19th century liberalism found itself in a theoretical and practical dilemma: either to renounce liberal dogma, and change some of the key concepts of the ideology, or run the risk of provoking a permanent social conflict[[94]](#footnote-94).

The different theoretical positions regarding the social question show a deep tension, at the very core of liberal ideology, between freedom and equality. The various liberalisms that saw the light during the second industrial revolution - for instance, the proposals of Green and Richie in England and Dewey in the US to transform the role of the State - moved away from paleo-liberalist ideology: “the beliefs and methods of the first liberalism - wrote Dewey - proved to be useless to address the issues of organisation and social integration”[[95]](#footnote-95).

The new responses to the problem raised by how to relate freedom and equality changed the thesis of paleo-liberalism substantially. Various neo-liberalisms emerge, with different tendencies that cannot fit into a univocal definition. There are however common trends to all of them: the ideological premises grow less, they are very pragmatic, and they pay greater attention to social problems. Where the neoliberalism of the first half of the 20th century considers it necessary to give greater importance to the role of the State, and allowed it to regulate the market, the second half of the 20th century witnessed a return to the position of classical liberalism, partly because the failure of the Keynesian interventionist approach by the state, or the Soviet-style socialist state.

When we look closely at the religious features of liberalism as well as the political, economic and social features, we appreciate that deep down there is a somewhat vague vision of man. When he attempts to describe liberal thinking, Bedeschi shares the theoretical position of Bobbio, who holds that “liberal doctrine is the political expression of the most mature *iusnaturalism (applied natural law)*: in fact, it rests on the assertion that there is a natural law, prior and above the State, and this law grants subjective inalienable rights that cannot be taken away from the individual, before the appearance of any society, and therefore before the appearance of the State. Therefore, the State, which comes about from the will of the individuals themselves, cannot violate those basic rights (and if it does so it becomes despotic), and therein lies its role, which has been called “negative” or simple ‘guardianship’”[[96]](#footnote-96). The liberal vision of man would link up with the rationalistic tradition of individualism, typical of the enlightened philosophy: “as a person, the individual is superior to any society he may belong to, and the State is only a product of man (in so far as it comes out of an agreement or a contract between men themselves) and therefore it is never a real person, but rather the sum of individuals who each have their own sphere of freedom”[[97]](#footnote-97).

According to Burdeau the core of this anthropology is the concept of freedom, understood and experienced as quintessential to human nature[[98]](#footnote-98). But what freedom are we talking about? This difficult question deserves a considered answer. The anthropologies of the 17th century followed a long tradition of Roman and medieval natural law approach, and with the emotional image of the noble savage, understood human nature as the original, the spontaneous spring from which human specificities well up: the theory of *status naturae* had a vision of man as a free, independent individual, in other words, a man without subservient bonds. Freedom understood as independence will be the seed of another idea, which lies at the centre of enlightened thought and of Modernity itself: I mean the concept of *autonomy*.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau cannot be classified as a liberal thinker, yet he produces a definition of freedom that will be thoroughly adopted by the later liberal thinkers. According to Rousseau, as we have already seen, freedom is obedience to the law that we have given to ourselves[[99]](#footnote-99). Ultimately, for Rousseau freedom is autonomy, self-legislation. Kant will take this concept from politics to the moral and religious sphere.

A third feature needs to be added to the elements we have looked at in the liberal understanding of freedom -individual independence, autonomy-: ultimate indetermination. Freedom is the ability to choose, but freedom itself does not have a supreme value to compare to, a yardstick against which to measure the choices that must be made. Only ultimate values can be fixed points of reference. Throughout the history of liberal thought some intellectuals have put forward key concepts to help assess choices: for instance, Smith proposed *self-interest*, Bentham and Mill suggested *usefulness*. But as far as ideology is concerned liberalism was never prepared to offer definite answers to the deepest questions of human existence. Moreover, from a liberal perspective, to accept the possibility of an ultimate, definitive, knowledge is considered dangerous for the freedom of the individual. This attitude can be described as *anti-metaphysical scepticism*. However, it brings with it, inevitably, an ethical choice. According to Bedeschi, liberal ethical and political thinking “cannot exist without a previous value choice for the priority of the individual over society. It is an act of faith, but a special kind of faith that includes a polytheism of values. Without a polytheism of values, without confrontation and discussion and struggle between different points of view, understandings of the world, ideologies and political views, there is no liberalism”[[100]](#footnote-100).

A conclusion can be reached following this attempt to describe liberalism: the theoretical core of liberalism, as an abstract ideology that has a strong emotional charge, is the pairing *individual-freedom*. Burdeau underlines the key role of the idea of freedom. Another French author, Chabot, thinks that the idea of individual is more important. “Liberalism - he writes in *Histoire de la Penseé politique* - is the first political ideology in history that reflects the idea of Modernity, that is, the project of autonomy that claims to set the foundation of human society by setting itself as the ultimate cause of itself. What later liberal thinking will make evident (Bentham, Constant, Stirner) is that the concept of the individual (not freedom) lies at the heart of liberalism in its purest form. Liberalism is essentially individualistic, i.e. it sets up the individual as the supreme and central value of both human life and the history of society”[[101]](#footnote-101).

Individual or freedom? Both are part of the foundation of liberal ideology, because deep down, liberal thinking holds that the individual is always autonomous.

### 2. The liberal thinkers

The typical elements of liberalism which we have just described appear with varying force and different systems of ideas, depending on authors, countries and historical times. In any case we feel that there is a “family resemblance” among liberal thinkers.

When we study liberal doctrines it is easy to work out that many of them are closely linked to Western revolutionary events. More specifically, the Glorious Revolution of 1689 in England, the independence of the United States - the American Revolution - and the French Revolution will be a source of inspiration, reflection and contrast among the various thinkers and liberal political theoreticians.

#### a) John Locke and the Glorious Revolution

Locke is born in Wrington, near Bristol, in 1632. He studied first in Westminster. In1652 he was admitted to *Christ Church College* in Oxford, to follow an ecclesiastical career. He obtained his Bachelor’s degree and a *Magister Artium*, and in 1659 he joined the teaching faculty: he taught Greek, rhetoric and moral philosophy. Some years later he abandoned the ecclesiastical path and took an interest in medicine, natural sciences and chemistry.

He wrote his first work, *Questions Concerning the Law of Nature*, published recently in 1954. In 1665 he moved to London, to work for Lord Ashley Cooper, the future first count of Shaftesbury. In London he came in contact with several scientists, like the chemist Boyle, and was admitted to the Royal Society. Following the political fall of his patron, he returned to Oxford in 1674, where he obtained a medical degree. He moved to France in 1675, until 1678.

Back in London he again worked with the Count of Shaftesbury. But in 1682 he was accused of treason, and had to flee to Holland. Locke would also go to the Low Countries, and played an active role in political intrigues, to prepare William of Orange’s ascent to the English Crown.

In 1689 he returned to England after the glorious revolution, when the political situation had already changed. During this time he published his most important works: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, *Two Treatises of Government*. In 1693 he publishes *Some thoughts Concerning Education*, and in 1695 *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. In 1700 he retired to Oates (Essex) where he died in 1704.

Locke’s work deals mainly on two great topics of philosophical thought: the theory of knowledge and political philosophy. These two spheres appear disconnected, but in fact they are so interconnected that as a result his thinking becomes consistent and systematic to some extent. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is one of the earliest modern attempts to approach the issue of knowledge in its radical nature. Locke questions himself about the scope of our knowledge: what things we can know, and with what degree of certainty. Such research is not out of curiosity, but for a practical reason: if we find out the limits of our knowledge, we can apply the mind to useful purposes. The proper use of the intellect can be a remedy against laziness and scepticism. According to Locke, it is a matter of knowing those things necessary to live in accordance with human nature. The critique of knowledge for Locke is mainly a methodological matter, but not only a method, because it services the real goal of philosophy: to live a worthy life, with peace and happiness.

Locke is the first exponent of English empiricism in a strict sense. He is influenced by Descartes -notwithstanding the differences in their outlook -, Bacon and Hobbes. We can also find in his thinking traces of the medieval nominalist tradition. Moderation is a dominant trait in Locke’s empiricism. The same moderation will feature in his political theory.

His two most important works of political philosophy are the *Two Treatises of Government*. The first Treatise is written as a polemical discussion with Filmer, author of *The Patriarch*, where he maintained that paternal authority was the origin of political power. Filmer based his views on Sacred Scripture, as he tried to justify the theory of the divine power of the kings: Adam would have received power directly from God, which was transmitted to the patriarchs by inheritance. Locke will attempt to demonstrate that the origin and conservation of political power is not based on divine law or the traditional power of the *paterfamilias*, but rather on human nature and consensus among men. Despite his anti-Catholic prejudice Locke was quite close to the theoretical position of Cardinal Bellarmine, who had criticised Filmer’s work from the scholastic natural law tradition.

In his *Second Treatise on Government* Locke introduces his proposal for the political organisation of society. He, like Hobbes, refers to a state of nature and a state of political or civil society. But as we will see, Locke’s ideas have a different perspective to those of Hobbes. Where Hobbes wanted to secure order and peace, Locke wants to secure the individual rights of the citizens, and for this reason he will set a limit to political power.

Natural law is a first important concept of his political philosophy. We are not born with it: we come to know it, like everything else, through sense experience. It is compulsory, it is the rule of moral conduct, and God is its author. In his *Second Treatise* he identifies natural law with reason, but does not exclude its reference to God. The rational nature of natural law suggests itself as a convenient law, that enables men to set up a community.

For Locke the state of nature is a state of freedom, ruled by natural law, and where equality reigns: “that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions”[[102]](#footnote-102). In this state the only valid law is natural law. Therefore, natural freedom is “to follow my own will in all things, where the rule prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man: as freedom of nature is, to be under no other restraint but the law of nature”.[[103]](#footnote-103)

However, as men have disorderly passions, the absence of authority in the state of nature permits that some individuals disobey the natural law. This obliges each man to do justice to himself on his own account. This creates a state of conflict; it cannot be compared to Hobbes’ because it is a limited state of war, and it is not permanent or generalized. This state of war is the origin of the social pact, which is “agreeing together mutually to enter into one community, and make one body politic”[[104]](#footnote-104), and thus end all confrontations. For Locke man is not asocial. Man is social by nature, but the society of nature is prior to political society, and lacks some of the essential features that shape society as a political body.

The basic idea to understand Locke’s pact is consensus: men create civil society by a consensus agreement with the other individuals, so that the society they establish permits a comfortable, secure, peaceful life, and the quiet enjoyment of one’s possessions. The purpose of civil society is to safeguard natural rights: right to life, to health, to freedom and to property. The latter right is crucial in Locke’s social theory, and will pave the way for Adam Smith’s economic theory. Before the land is worked on it belongs to the whole of mankind. When a plot of land is worked on to obtain the goods needed to live, the goods obtained become the property of the one who worked on it.

Productive work shows human rationality, and is the foundation of private property; Locke thinks it is innate to man. Vital energy expands to the industriousness and productivity of individuals, who widen their respective spheres of autonomy and freedom through the growth of their goods.

Once the social pact has been established, the political community organises the defence of the rights of the citizens by setting up, by general consensus, a political law, a recognised, impartial judge to solve disputes and an authority to ensure that laws are observed and to carry out the sentences passed by the judge. The political community moves forward according to the will of the majority. Legislative power is the soul that shapes the community, gives it life and unity. Executive power must rest on different people to the legislators. There is also a federal power that takes care of international relations, usually the same as the executive.

In the political community natural freedom becomes civil liberty. This freedom consists of not being subject to any power other than the laws. Locke highlights that the idea of *freedom* is not contrary to the idea of *law*. The laws enacted by parliament are the defence against the oppression of absolute, arbitrary power. For this reason the powers of the State must be limited and control each other. In opposition to Hobbes Locke puts forward the first systematic approach to the liberal principle of separation of powers. In order to prevent the chance of arbitrary power, Locke also speaks of the obligation the legislative has to obey natural law.

In 1689 Locke writes *A Letter Concerning Tolerance*. He states that Church and State are two different societies. The former is a free society of men who meet by a mutual a agreement to serve God publicly in the manner they consider best to save their souls. On the other hand, the State takes care of civil goods, and the power of the people in government should not include those matters that pertain to the salvation of soul. The Church, in turn, should exhort and advise, but not coerce. Locke’s theory proposes a separation of powers rather than a simple distinction. The State can be intolerant of doctrines that endanger the preservation of civil power. Among those doctrines Locke mentions atheism and Catholicism, which he considers to be an intolerant creed that reduces the independence of the political power.

In his essay *The reasonableness of Christianity* he introduces his vision of the Christian religion. The minimal credo is to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Revelation is necessary, and it reinforces the law of reason or natural law. Jesus has transmitted to us a universal moral law through his evangelical revelation.

Christianity is the only true religion, because it contains the essential beliefs that man can assent to with reason. Although this statement has a rationalist flavour there is room in it for supernatural truths. In the *Postscript to the letter to Edward Stillingfleet*, written in 1679, he writes: “Holy Writ is and will always be the constant guide of my assent; and I will always listen to it, because it contains the ineffable truth regarding the matters of the greatest importance. I would like to say that there are no mysteries in it, but I acknowledge that there are some for me, and I fear that there always will be. I will find sufficient foundation to believe: God has said this, when I lack the evidence. Therefore, I will condemn any doctrine of mine as soon as it is shown to me that it is contrary to any doctrine revealed in Scripture”.

Locke sets the foundations of a liberal society: the purpose of political society is to safeguard the individual rights of men. This goal is a limit to power. According to Ballesteros, Locke marks the beginning of the modernity of subjective rights, by conceiving human rights as *property*[[105]](#footnote-105). Man owns his person and his actions. Elevating property to be the model of subjective rights opened the way for the most important economic thinker of classic liberalism: the Scottish Adam Smith.

#### b) The economic liberalism of Adam Smith

*Adam Smith (1723-1790)*, professor of Moral Science in the University of Glasgow, public servant, member of the *Royal Society*, will be remembered as the theorist of classic economic liberalism, and as the author of *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*.

Smith thinks that the source of national wealth is human work, the primary fact of the economy. Work manifests human nature: men work to fulfill their needs, and reason works out how to make work ever more productive. According to Smith, “the whole human personality is shown in work; this means that work activity is the expression of the fundamental impulses that typify human nature, and which are harmoniously coordinated among themselves: selfishness, affection (a mainly social feeling that moderates selfishness), the feeling of freedom, the longing for property, the predisposition to trade”[[106]](#footnote-106).

If the most important economic activity -work- is an expression of human nature, the economy is the cause of the relationships that are established in society. Smith states that division of labour is the principle that should rule the organisation of work activities and make them better. Each man should work in the area most appropriate to his liking, ability and skill, according to his self-interest. In this way the goods produced grow in quantity and quality.

Men have a natural tendency to trade. The goods produced -ever more effectively thanks to the division of labour- can only be traded off by setting up and organizing the market. To understand what *market* means, we first need to single out the factors involved in the production process: work, capital and real estate; these three create three social classes: workers, capitalists and owners. Civil society is not the result of an agreement or a pact, but the natural consequence of the effective organisation of labour. How the division of labour is carried out will determine the organisation of a specific society at the time. The most sophisticated form of society results from admitting the accumulation of capital. In other words, a sufficient number of goods must be produced to satisfy the primary needs, but production must allow to remove from consumption some of the goods for the creation and conservation of productive capital.

The types of subordination that exist within a society are completely natural, because they are nothing more than arrangements for the organisation of productive work. The most fundamental subordination comes from property. According to Smith capital is property, understood not only as a means to fulfill present needs, but as the preservation of goods that can be set aside for future requirements. This means that the capitalist person must have *self-control*, his passions restrained, austerity and thriftiness. Capitalists based on property understood as capital have an essential function in society, not because it is imposed arbitrarily, but because of the very nature of natural economic laws.

From what we have just said we see that civil society is identified with the market, a natural society that must be left free from interferences from the artificial society, which is the State. For Smith the State is the integration of services and functions to preserve peace, tranquillity and order in the natural society, that is, the market. The most important role of the State is to administer justice. The judiciary must respect the natural laws of the market, and must be specifically committed to defend private property.

State interference in the economy undermines the market. If men are left free to seek their private interests, the natural laws -which are for Smith the invisible hand - will ensure that society becomes just and prosperous. We need to abolish privileges, monopolies and any legislation that prevent or limit the activity of productive work. If everyone follows his own interest, individual selfishness would bring about the principle of heterogenesis of the ends: although it only seeks the individual profit, society will move forward as a whole.

Smith would become the prophet of economic liberalism; his views on civil or natural society structured on the basis of the relations arising from the productive process were taken up by Karl Marx some years later. Not surprisingly, economic liberalism and Marxism have in common a vision of man based on economist reductionism.

#### c) Humboldt and Constant: individual freedom

Earlier in this chapter we stated that the dual concept of individual-freedom was the very essence of liberalism. This statement becomes obvious when we look at the next two authors: *Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835)* and *Benjamin Constant (1767-1830).*

Humboldt develops the doctrine of the “minimal state”, because he thinks that the purpose of the modern State is to guarantee the individual freedom of men. He makes a clear distinction between nation - which he equates to civil society - and State; the former is the realm of initiative, spontaneity and originality, and the latter the domain of subordination and obedience. He sternly criticises the militaristic attitude of the newly born Prussian state. He limits the institutional ends of the State to maintaining internal and external security. Political institutions are for men, not the other way round. The State should not impose a virtuous life from above. Otherwise the result would be “uniformity and coerced behaviour throughout the nation”[[107]](#footnote-107). The true end of man is “the highest proportionate development of his faculties to the point of completing a finished whole”[[108]](#footnote-108). However, this is the task of freedom, not of political imposition. Once he has established the purpose of the State, modern societies should be characterised by religious freedom, freedom of education and the principle of subsidiarity.

According to Humboldt the State is necessary, but it should be subject to civil society. The political organisation should not place any obstacles to the autonomy and freedom of the nation, because the State, that guarantees security, should “promote a state of maturity for freedom with all its means”[[109]](#footnote-109).

Benjamin Constant proposes a similar doctrine. The following statement, made in his old age, provides an insight into his liberal thinking: “I have defended the same principle for 40 years: freedom in everything; in religion, in philosophy, in literature, in industry, in politics. My understanding of freedom is the triumph of individuality, both over the authority that would aim at govern in a despotic manner, and over the masses, that claim the right to subject the minority to the will of the majority”[[110]](#footnote-110).Constant makes a clear distinction between the freedom of the ancients and freedom in modern times. The former, the Greek *polis*, was the sharing of social power among the citizens of the same polis. For the modern people, however, freedom means the security of being able to enjoy a private life, thanks to the individual guarantees that the juridical order provides. The development of the individual in modern societies does not lie in the public sphere but in the private world. The private activities of citizens should gain ground over the State, which is regarded as a lesser evil that needs to be under control[[111]](#footnote-111).

Constant says the separation of powers is paramount to guarantee the autonomy of the private sphere, and constitutional monarchy is the best way to achieve it. The monarch incarnates stability and political prudence, staying above the political parties; ministers represent the role of social changes and mobility. For this reason, the executive should be active, and respond to Parliament.

The separation of powers is not enough to ensure individual freedoms; it is necessary to strengthen medium level institutions, such as local governments. Strengthening them would offer greater protection to the individual before central power, and would slow down the centralization process arising from the French Revolution. In addition, Constant holds that it is crucial to keep the vote based on the census. Only owners have the political culture to be able to participate in the constitution of public powers. “Only property makes men able to exercise political powers”. Despite this oligarchic position Constant foresees hat voting will be extended, thanks to the progress of the economy, which will ultimately replace human strength with the strength of machines[[112]](#footnote-112).

#### d) Liberty and equality: Tocqueville

*Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859)* was born into an aristocratic family, and from a tender age he was taught to respect the *Ancient Régime* and reject the French Revolution. But Tocqueville will distance himself from the formation he received, and would develop his own judgement: he both praised and reproached the two positions. He was a politician, a historian and a sociologist. He holds an important position in the history of political doctrines, particularly because of his best-known book, *Democracy in America*, published in 1835 (1st part) and in 1840 (2nd part). His unfinished essay *The Old Regime and the Revolution* is also significant, and necessary to understand his moderate liberal doctrine.

Tocqueville thinks that the 19th century confirms the triumph of democracy: it would be unwise to resist this historical process. It is rather a matter of understanding it and trying to lead it towards the ideal political order, which is freedom. The first home of democracy, as a political system based on universal vote and as the expression of popular will, is in the United States of America. For this reason, and in order to study the American penal system Tocqueville travelled to America. Out of this trip came the famous *De la* *Démocratie en Amérique*, where he assesses the American institutions and attempts to set a general interpretation approach for any democratic society.

Tocqueville, partly as a politician and partly as a sociologist, analyses the various factors involved in the American experience. In his opinion, the greatest value of democracy is equality. In the United States, thanks to the universal vote and the vast dimensions of the country, and also the history of the thirteen American colonies, there ensued an egalitarian society in politics and in the economy. This equality combines well with the freedom of representative institutions and with religious freedom, a prized inheritance from the colonial period. At the same time, Tocqueville warns of the risk of every democracy: the tyranny of the majority, that rules parliament, appoints the executive and judges, and imposes a kind of official ideology on the minority groups, which eventually become uniform with majority opinions. According to the Frenchman there are wise institutions in the United Sates that help prevent this risk. Tocqueville refers specifically to federalism, to the independence of the judiciary, and the ability of magistrates to interpret laws in favour of minority groups, granted by the constitution. The health of a democracy is shown by the majority not becoming despotic with regard to minority groups[[113]](#footnote-113).

Tocqueville looks at many different subjects. We will refer here to two of them only; they are chosen because they turned out to be prophetic: the materialistic trend of vast social masses as a consequence of industrialization, and the role of religion in a democratic society. With regards to the first one, Tocqueville feels that the growing industrialization of western societies has contributed to the birth of a nebulous mentality that leads to hold a comfortable life, conformist and full of material pleasures, as the anthropological ideal. He was a staunch supporter of *individuality* -citizens’ awareness of their own independence and freedom - but critical of *individualism*, which is the attitude of men who withdraw from the public arena and shut themselves up in the small world of their own home and circle of close friends, and a mediocre ideal: to lead a comfortable life. Modern economic developments had led to the growth of state bureaucracy and central administration. Citizens lose their civic virtues under the prevailing individualistic and hedonistic tendencies, and leave the destiny of the whole society in the hands of “civil servants” or “bureaucrats”[[114]](#footnote-114).

Moral virtues are necessary to get out of the vicious circle of industrialization-bureaucracy-individualism. Moral virtues can develop within the sphere of intermediate associations -local government, scientific, artistic associations and the like -, and by a free press, which Tocqueville hails as “the democratic instrument of freedom *par excellence*”. In this manner the egalitarian tendency of democracy is balanced by the aristocratic element, which, according to this author, brings to the table the ideal of moral freedom.

But above all this there is the need for religion, specifically Christianity. Tocqueville was struck by the importance of religion in American society, and held it as the most important safeguard of freedom. The only remedy to correct the tendency of men to live a comfortable life and to reduce existential ideals to material matters is a transcendent understanding of man. The innovative energy of the individual and the awareness of his dignity and freedom spring from religion. For Tocqueville, “Every human action, no matter how particular it may look, has its reason for being in a general ideal of God that men have, of his relations with mankind, the nature of their souls and of their duties regarding their peers. We cannot prevent these ideas from being the common source of all the rest”[[115]](#footnote-115). According to Tocqueville, political freedom and the individual’s ability for innovation are united in their origin to the Christian religion, the faith that he had found in America, so committed and socially fruitful. Tocqueville, therefore, inverted the relationship between religion and progress proposed by the Enlightenment: without a transcendent vision of the world that frees man from the narrow confines of earthly life, there will be no authentic progress of freedom, rather a growth in conformism, and society will passively become uniform. Tocqueville’s political theories went beyond liberal ideology

#### e) Bentham and Mill: liberalism and utilitarianism

Liberalism and democracy are not identical terms. If we understand democracy to be a representative political system based on universal vote, we will have to wait till the second half of the 19th century to see it established, at least for the male vote. We have already mentioned the changes that liberalism was forced to accept in its political and economic practical manifestations due to the social changes brought about by the industrial revolution. France establishes universal vote in 1848. In England the process of democratization of liberal society takes place supported by legislation that took note of the new social reality. Despite many obstacles, the British Parliament approved the *Reform Bill* in 1831. As a consequence, the number of voters increased considerably, giving greater weight to the new industrial, trading and working classes, to the detriment of the rural aristocracy. In the following years additional revolutionary laws were approved: equal legal rights for Catholics and dissident Protestants, slavery was abolished in the British Empire; work in factories was regulated, with greater humanitarian concerns, agriculture was deregulated, and the principle of international free trade accepted, etc., right up to the electoral reform of 1866. When universal vote was extended, the workers’ party was established in 1893 around the Trade Unions: the *Independent Labour Party*.

The intellectual background behind the process of democratization of liberalism was partially due to the influence of the work of *Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)* and of *John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)*, arguably the most important of all the English liberal thinkers. Bentham is the main representative of utilitarianism, a philosophical school that follows on the British empiricist tradition, especially the doctrines of Hume and the moral theory of Hutcheson. Bentham was a philosopher and a political theorist, who was interested in the social reforms that were taking place in England at that time. He wrote extensively on morals, politics and economics. His main publication is *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1780)*.

What is the doctrine of utilitarianism? According to Bentham, man is driven primarily by two passions: the pursuit of happiness, identified with pleasure, and the rejection of pain and suffering. In the introduction to his principal work, he writes: “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure.* It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do…. These feelings should be the focus of research for moralists and legislators: the principle of utility subordinates everything to them (feelings)”[[116]](#footnote-116). Anything that enables the achievement of happiness is useful. Without departing from mere hedonistic materialism, Bentham explains that there are pleasures and pains of the body, but also those of the soul. Therefore, one must sometimes engage in austere conduct, because happiness does not necessarily coincide with immediate pleasure. Bentham believed it was possible to quantify pleasures and pains (duration, intensity, real possibility of enjoying/suffering them, and so on). This calculation of pleasures and pains could be therefore used to establish the rules of moral behaviour and social legislation.

How is the principle of utility applied to politics? If the goal of the individual man is happiness, the goal of society will be general happiness, which is the sum of all individual happiness. Bentham defines the principle of social utility as an axiom: “It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong” (*A Fragment on Government*, 1776). He criticises the French revolutionary politicians, who are prone to assert the absolute rights of man and of the citizen, but do not consider that an abstract man does not exist. There are real men, who live in the midst of finite and specific circumstances. Empirical knowledge of human activity tells us whether men seek their own utility, and the interdependence of individuals in society will result in general utility. For example, in searching for individual utility —one’s own interests— individuals realize that they need a government, because without it there is neither security nor property nor welfare. Governments exist for this reason: their utility. The political constitution of any society should be aimed at the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

As we have already said, the general interest of society—general happiness—is the sum total of the personal interests of individuals. Legislation, to achieve its specific purpose, must reduce social ills to a minimum, and create the circumstances in which the greatest number of individuals can freely provide for their own interests. This implies a radical reform of the English political constitution. Government should try to do away with civil and political inequalities, although Bentham was aware that absolute egalitarianism is impossible and undesirable. Establishing universal suffrage and creating an annually elected parliament would create a closer relationship between representatives and those they represent, so that the interests of rulers and the ruled would tend to reflect one another.

Bentham democratized liberalism with the principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. It was not a matter of constitutional and economic freedom reduced to an exclusive elite, but a doctrine aimed at extending these goods to the greatest number of individuals, and striving to extend them to all.

*John Stuart Mill* would become the main torchbearer of utilitarianism, although, as we shall see, he would revise Bentham’s doctrine, moving away from the hedonistic materialism of his teacher. John Stuart Mill received a careful education from his father, the philosopher James Mill, and from Bentham; the younger Mill became interested in the most diverse areas of knowledge. He wrote many works within the field of general philosophy, as well as in morality and political philosophy. His works of general philosophy include his *System of Logic* (1843) and *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy* (1865); among his important political works are *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), *On Liberty* (1859), and *Utilitarianism* (1861). He was influenced by certain Romantic thinkers, along with Comte, with whom he maintained a lengthy correspondence.

At the present we are mainly interested in his moral and political doctrine. According to Mill, an individual’s purpose in life is happiness. In this he agreed with Bentham, although he would modify substantially his teacher’s utilitarian theory. Mill, still following the Benthamian orthodoxy, defines utilitarianism as a “creed that accepts ‘utility’ or the 'principle of maximum happiness' as the foundation of morality. This means that actions are good insofar as they tend to promote happiness, and bad insofar as they tend to produce the opposite of happiness. ‘Happiness’ is understood to be pleasure and the absence of pain; while ‘unhappiness' is defined as pain and deprivation of pleasure.”[[117]](#footnote-117) But Mill added - moving away from Bentham - that the distinction between pleasures lies primarily in their qualitative, and not quantitative, differences. There are pleasures that in themselves are superior to others: pleasures that contribute to the spiritual perfection of man, that lead to the development of his specific powers and qualities in the most harmonious manner possible, are the loftiest and most valuable pleasures, not because they last longer or are more intense than others, and so on—quantitative categories—, but because they are qualitatively better.

This entails quite a few philosophical difficulties and problems of internal consistency for utilitarianism. If pleasures are qualitatively distinguished from one another, we are assuming that there is a value higher than pleasure itself. As Mill himself implicitly recognized, if you have a certain conception of human nature, the notions of good and evil will be related to the suitability of that notion. In fact, he introduces certain features of classical ethics that provide a more comprehensive view of human nature than what Bentham could propose. The question that remains is whether we can continue to talk of utilitarianism when we introduce moral notions other than the mere quantitative calculation of pleasures.

Having clarified the difference between the utilitarian conceptions of Bentham and Mill, we can begin to examine his social doctrine. If man’s purpose is happiness, it can only be achieved if the material and spiritual barriers that prevent it are eliminated from society. Happiness is an individual right for each person, and general happiness is that which is good for a group of people. Men, through morals—associated with a sense of sociality—must coordinate their common goals to create a just society that eliminates the barriers to general happiness. But we must keep in mind the fact that individual freedom is part of general happiness: “The free development of individuality is one of the main ingredients of human happiness, and one of the main ingredients in individual and social progress.”[[118]](#footnote-118) Therefore, it is a matter of finding a form of social organization that moves in the direction of happiness for the greatest number, without hindering individual freedom.

Taking up some of the themes from the political doctrines of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Alexis de Tocqueville, Mill believes that society should intervene in the autonomous sphere of the individual only to defend itself, or when the irresponsible use of individual freedom could harm other members of society. But outside of this, no one has the right to compel an individual to behave in a specific way in order to achieve happiness. There is an intangible realm where the individual sets himself up as sovereign judge to decide the most suitable means to achieve happiness. For this reason, freedom of thought (complete and absolute freedom of opinion and sentiments in every practical and speculative sector, whether scientific, moral, or theological) and freedom to make our views publicly known, in other words, freedom of the press, are particularly important for Mill’s political project. Freedom for Mill tends towards a complete moral autonomy that leads to subjectivism: the final judge in moral matters is the individual conscience, which does not have objective parameters on which to judge, other than the individual’s own personal opinions. On the other hand, he does not clearly establish when individual freedom injures or harms the freedom of others, and what authority may establish it.

As we have said, it seems that Mill drastically reduces the functions of the State. However, his political doctrine represents a break with the liberal tradition of the minimal state. The changes that European society underwent in the 19th century must lead to greater social and political development of the working class. Workers must move from being mere salaried workers to worker-owners, who self-manage industrial factories. Mill sought to replace an aristocratic society based on privilege with a social organization where the middle class is the broadest and most decisive segment of society. The goal of social reforms should be a more equitable distribution of material goods, so that individuals do not fall into economic reductionism: that is, restricting the goal of existence to the accumulation of material wealth. A more equitable society is a prerequisite for being able to learn the art of life, identified with the Platonic virtues of a sense of justice and temperance.

This Critique of economic reductionism does not mean that Mill rejects free competition, one of the central features of liberal economic thought. The philosopher was aware that competition can lead to evil, but the consequences of socialism are even more devastating, as it stagnates society and squelches individual initiative. Free competition is a manifestation of freedom, the sole purpose of the State. Mill realized that in modern societies there is a risk of uniformity, of massification, of the tyranny of the majority. Because of this, he wished for a broad debate and clash of opinions, which in the political field is institutionalized in the system of political parties. The majority-minority dialectic, already discussed by Tocqueville, reappears with a similar force in Mills writings. The main features of Mill’s political proposal are universal vote, women’s legal equality, the key role of the people.[[119]](#footnote-119)

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G. Chalmeta states that the specific feature of any utilitarian theory is a teleological structure of the following argument: “The good of the citizen is defined prior to and independent of that which is *politically just*, and the *politically just* (the just state) is then defined as that system of political relations (of laws, institutions, customs and so on) that maximizes the good of citizens in society”. Utilitarianism identifies notions such as that which “ought to be” or “justice of political society” with the “utmost satisfaction of our desires” and “maximum distribution of welfare.” These categories can be mathematically expressed, implying that basically, its practical implementation is a technical matter. According to Chalmeta, the “maximization of the good” described by Bentham, Mill, and other utilitarians—despite their good intentions—disregards the unique value of the human person, which supersedes a purely mathematical treatment of happiness. The concept of the dignity of the person would produce the most radical rupture between the Christian position and that of the utilitarians. Man *naturaliter liber et propter seipsum existens*—and even more so, man made in God's image—prevents the oppression of the minority and of the weakest, which from a calculated utilitarian point of view cannot be avoided. Man is not only part of a whole: “It will never be ethically rational to consider man as a simple unit in the service of the greater good for the greatest number, one part that can be sacrificed in view of the good of ‘the whole of society.’”[[120]](#footnote-120)

It is true that Mill would not agree with this criticism, since he always tried to defend individual freedom. But his attempt to make individual freedom compatible with the principle of the maximization of the common good would lead him into a series of paradoxes and equivocal positions, because there are no absolute human rights that could provide a more solid foundation to a harmonious relationship between the individual and society.

#### f) The neo-liberalisms

The heyday of nationalism in the second half of the 19th century did not help the development of individual liberalism. In addition, the Great War (1914-1918) forced the State to take a more leading role in the economy. The financial crisis of 1929 that followed the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange was another blow to the classic liberal thesis. Within this historical context it is easy to understand the neo-liberal theory of *John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946*): he kept the liberal principle of private property and personal initiative, but maintained that the State is the central authority and the determining economic agent. Public finances are the main instrument to run the economy, and taxes are the means to achieve a fair distribution of the national wealth. Rather than an invisible hand, there is a “providence” that guides economic relations: state providence. This first practical solutions proposed by neoliberalism were close to those of the European democratic socialisms[[121]](#footnote-121).

The crises of the provident State in the second half of the 20th century prompted the reappearance of some classical liberal theses. The political-economic theory of *Ludwig von Mises (1887-1973)* is a case in point. He proposed once again the idea of the “minimal State”, and proposed an understanding of self-interest, which is more humane than the economic liberalism of Smith: individualism is identified with altruism, because there is a mutual dependence between individuals, and by seeking one’s good, we also seek the good of others. The well-known economists of the Chicago School, *Milton Friedman* (1912) and *Friedrich von Hayeck (1899-1992)*, proposed to re-dimension the State: the economic world has a certain spontaneous nature, which should be respected. The role of the State should only be internal and external defence, and to protect the weakest.

Several policies of a liberal nature have been proposed in the last decades; they highlight one of the more typical features of liberalism, to which we referred earlier: State neutrality in all matters of morals and religion. We find *John Rawls (1921-2002)* among them. In his first important work, *A Theory of Justice*, this American philosopher states that society is a task of cooperation for mutual benefit. Therefore, social rules should be shared by all. To reach this point the principles that rule society should not favour any conception of “good”, or the so called “good life”. According to Rawls social life should favour fairness over goodness, and leave aside the morality of the citizens’ private lives. How can this priority of fairness can be brought to bear? Rawls re-connects with the classic contract theories: the members of society are the hypothetical holders of a social contract. The “original position” of each holder is determined by their “veil of ignorance”: no one would know what his position in society was, nor their sex, colour, talents, financial status, interests, and so on. The rules of justice prepared by these members of society can be acceptable to all, because they abstract from anything that divides men in a pluralist society, that is, the different understandings of what a good life is. In a well-ordered society everyone can live with and cooperate with the others, while maintaining their understanding of good, within the limits set by the basic structure, which is the publicly validated common understanding of justice[[122]](#footnote-122).

Following the criticism that he received from the communitarians, who rightly held that the priority of justice over the good implied a non-neutral vision of man, Rawls modified his political theory. In the book *Political Liberalism*, the American professor favours a merely political liberalism, and moves away from any absolute metaphysical or moral doctrine[[123]](#footnote-123). *Charles Larmore*[[124]](#footnote-124) moves along the same lines with his *modus vivendi* liberalism, which is based on a concept of neutrality identified with the minimal morality that can be the foundation of pacific coexistence. The two basic norms of this minimal morality would be mutual respect and rational dialogue. Both Rawls and Larmore hold that practical reason has no unity. Different people can reach different understandings of good, mutually contradictory, but all of them acceptable. According to them, these differences are the inevitable result of the use of reason when one is free.

We thus return to a non-neutral neutrality, because it implies a particular vision of the world, coupled with the anti-metaphysical scepticism that we have already spoken about: man would be incapable of apprehending absolute moral values, that stem from a complete truth. Therefore, some present-day liberal theoreticians, realising that it is existentially impossible for the State to be neutral, have proposed an anti-neutralist liberalism. According to this line of thought, “liberalism ought to promote - and indeed promotes - specific moral values; it is a political system committed to protect and make specific values, attitudes and virtues prevalent in society. The first among these values, and the most fundamental, would be autonomy, in a strong sense[[125]](#footnote-125)”. Autonomy would be identified with mere freedom of choice, totally unrelated to objective values, which do not exist with this approach. Stephen Macedo suggests that anti-neutralist Liberalism would like to make the world a new California, offering the widest possible gamut of lifestyles and eccentricities. The ever-changing lifestyles would widen the scope of choice; in this way, it would be possible and legitimate to abandon, in the same week, one’s career in a company, wife and children, and enter a Buddhist sect. According to Macedo, this type of liberalism would never please those who seek an ultimate meaning for human existence[[126]](#footnote-126).

We find in this anti-neutralist tendency the so-called *radicals* and *libertarians*, who put forward anarchist theories, that is, the total disappearance of the State. For Ayn Rand, David Friedman (Milton’s son), etc., the only absolute is the autonomous individual, who has equally absolute rights over his body, his goods and his moral convictions. The State becomes the oppressor, and should be replaced by inter-individual relationships.

\* \* \*

At the beginning of this chapter we pondered over the ultimate essence of liberalism. We stated right away that there isn’t one liberalism, but several different liberalisms; however, they can all be redirected to the same ideological mould, around the concepts of freedom and individual. Those two ideas are implicit in the semantic content of a third key concept: autonomy.

Man’s autonomy becomes a political, economic and moral banner for liberalism. In the political sphere liberalism managed to focus on the rights of the citizens, against the political absolutism that did not acknowledge human freedom. In addition, it devised a constitutional juridical system that attempts to safeguard those rights by limiting political power and making room for participation; at least it shows tacit awareness of the dignity of the human person: a transcendent vision of man has nothing against liberal institutional political forms, such as the separation of powers, political representation and regular elections.

In the economic area, production grew to levels previously unthought of. It also stimulated human resourcefulness and initiative. But at the same time the ingredients of economic liberalism brought about very serious social injustices. This does not detract from the merit of liberalism to show with facts that freedom bears more fruit than rigid state bureaucracy.

In the field of politics - and to a certain extent in the economic sphere - liberalism has contributed to the rediscovery of the relative autonomy of temporal matters, and has increased the awareness that man is fundamentally freedom. As an ideology, the problem of liberalism lies in the moral domain. According to Rhonheimer, there are two versions of classic liberalism; the first would be a political doctrine centred around freedom and individual autonomy versus the coercive power of the State. The socio-political conditions of freedom are established, but there is no anthropological construct that explains ‘why freedom’: freedom is safeguarded, but nothing is said about what good it should serve. Again according to Rhonheimer, this was not an urgent matter in the 19th century, because there remained some consensus on the basic contents of public morality. Liberalism is a political doctrine that does not want to become a philosophy.

The second version, contrary to the first, does not stem from a political struggle to modify institutions; it begins with a philosophical outlook of man, based on the moral autonomy of Kantian origin. The key to a just society is the guarantee of the autonomy of each one against the autonomy of the others. The State must remain neutral regarding the different views of what is good for man, and how to achieve it in one’s own life. The final criterion for establishing whether a social norm is lawful is whether it is compatible with the principle of individual autonomy. In this case we are dealing with an anthropology that wishes to be embodied in social institutions[[127]](#footnote-127).

The first version enables different answers to the problem of what is good for society and for man, but the second version imposes the view of a radically autonomous man, and makes individual freedom absolute. Ultimately, a Liberalism “that does not want to coexist with different types of freedom, a liberalism that regards any diverging position intolerant, and then feel justified to be intolerant towards it; a liberalism that wants to shape society and the relations among men according to a specific vison of man”[[128]](#footnote-128).

When the freedom of the creature becomes absolute, it turns against itself, and becomes an ideological totalitarianism in the name of a freedom that is not respected when anyone thinks differently.

## VI NATIONALISM

Following the study of the main traits of liberalism, we will now address another political ideology: Nationalism. Nationalism has played an influential role in the political, social and economic events of the last two centuries.

Liberalism had a deep influence in the view of man that many elites had in the 19th century, and reached the popular masses towards the end of the century; Nationalism could not avoid its influence either. We could venture the following statement: nationalism is the collective manifestation of liberalism, in the sense that nationalism identifies itself with the claim of absolute autonomy, not only of the individual as in the liberal vision of the world, but of the national community. In the process of replacing the Absolute with something relative, the nation takes the place of the individual’s freedom espoused by liberalism. We could also say that national freedom, understood as the power of the people that expands and conquers new glories, replaces the bourgeois individual freedom of the 19th century. However, the relationship between liberalism and nationalism is not just one-way. Nationalism offered European and American peoples - before the expansion into Africa and Asia - a set of emotional, radical (as found in the roots, tradition and history) features that liberalism, a product of the Enlightenment, could not provide in such a comprehensive fashion.

We think that the success of Nationalism in contemporary history is due to the truth it contains. Human beings live and function in specific time and space. The land where we are born and the history that precedes us condition the way we perceive and judge the world, because they enable us to develop as persons. Therefore, the sense of belonging to a particular national community is a fact of nature. Patriotism - the love for the land of our birth, that has helped us to grow - is a human virtue, part of the virtue of piety. However, nationalism makes an absolute of what is only a part of our total being - the fact of being members of a national community - to the point of making the nation an end in itself. According to Kohn, “nationalism is a state of mind by which the individual feels obliged to give the National State supreme loyalty”[[129]](#footnote-129). Therefore it is no longer a sense of justice that makes us love our homeland, but rather a feeling of absolute devotion, by which the nation becomes the absolute end.

### 1. Nationalism and revolution

The concept of nation emerges in the Low Middle Ages and becomes progressively identified with the State form of power. We have the first national States in Western Europe in the 16th to 18th centuries: England, France, Spain, Portugal. During this period, and until the revolutionary movements, the nation was incarnated in the State, and the State in the person of the king. [In the act of coronation,] the crown represented the general interests of the nation, its unity, and the religious consecration represented a kind of mystical marriage between the nation and its monarch[[130]](#footnote-130).

This concept of nation changed radically with the French Revolution: it brought along two key elements: representation and legitimacy. In 1879, we read in the *Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen*: “The principle of any sovereignty lies essentially in the nation”. The principle of legitimacy will be the entire nation, that is to say, the people. The sovereign people will be not only the reason of being of political power, but also a part of mankind forming a community, that holds legitimacy within itself. Ultimately this change means the passage from heteronomy to absolute autonomy of the human. In the Ancient Regime political legitimacy was invested in the crown, and ontological legitimacy had a divine origin. In other words, the Ancient Regime was based ultimately on the acceptance of the divine origin of power. With the Revolution there is a double change: political legitimacy changes hands, - it has been transferred to the representatives of the people - and the ontological legitimacy is transferred from God to the people constituted as a nation.

In itself, this transfer was not necessary. As we have seen earlier, absolute monarchies were based on the king’s divine right; it was an exaggerated position of the Christian doctrine that holds that all power derives from God. The change of political legitimacy could have kept the transcendent foundation of authority. The origin of this change in the theory lies in Enlightenment anthropology, not in the very essence of representative popular government. The school of Salamanca had already developed democratic theories that did not damage the transcendent foundation of the political community.

During the Revolution and the Empire everything is national: national holidays, national symbols, national pantheon, national guard, etc. This process of making the nation an absolute, a true elephantiasis of the nation, brings as a consequence that the nation may demand sacrifices, like any religion does. Compulsory military service simply shows that now war involves everybody: it is the nation at arms, *les* *enfants de la Patrie*, who must march forward because the Motherland needs their efforts. This ideological change implicates the birth of modern warfare, where the whole of society is involved and brings with it a trail of existential dramas and increased violence[[131]](#footnote-131).

The revolutionary period witnessed the appearance of a civil religion: in times past the most important dates of one’s personal life were linked to the register of the Church - birth, marriage, death - but now the State takes over the role. Even altars to the Motherland are built, with words on them like “The citizen is born, lives and dies for the Motherland”. Education will be another key factor to establish the spirit of nationalism. The first step would be to establish a national language by replacing regional dialects[[132]](#footnote-132). Taking up an idea of Rousseau, only the State can produce good citizens. National education and the national army will be two pillars to spread revolutionary nationalism.

The “national” French army will be a trigger for nationalist feelings throughout Europe. The Napoleonic war campaigns clashed against countries already constituted as national states. Initially, England considers itself threatened and tinges its liberalism with nationalism; and Spain, with the emergence of a popular nationalism. Spanish nationalism would eventually lose its colonial empire, which was also the result of emerging nationalist powers[[133]](#footnote-133).

But the *Grande Armée* reaches territories where Nation and State are not identified with each other. French soldiers are initially welcome as liberators in the different Italian and German kingdoms. But as they themselves carry the germs of nationalism, some intellectuals reject foreign intrusion and seek national union, based on their own national ideal. This process will result in the unification of both Italy and Germany around 1870.

The opposite happens in territories where there is a multinational state organisation. The Russian and Austrian empires begin to break up, also prompted by nationalist pressures: the various nations - Poles, Slovaks, Czechs, Romanians, Hungarians, etc. - will attempt to set up a national state, by looking at their past, their traditions and legends.

### 2. Romantic nationalism (1800-1848)

Romanticism was particularly important in the Germanic world as a cultural phenomenon. The rejection of enlightened rationalism prompted a look to the past. The differences between the political traditions of central and eastern Europe (where liberalism was virtually non-existent in the early 19th century) and those of western Europe can go a long way to explain the differences between the voluntarist, “subjective” French and Anglo-Saxon nationalisms and the mainly Germanic and Slavic “objective” nationalism. The more western concept of nation was based on political factors, but the founding concept in Germany was rather vague and unclear: *Volk*, the people: it was a better fit for a Romantic spirit charged with imagination and emotion. Without mentioning it explicitly, *Herder (1744-1803)* outlines the concept of *Volkgeis*t or spirit of the people - itself a key concept in the philosophy of Hegelian history-. Herder was convinced that in nature and in history, which are both the Divinity revealing itself, we must not pay attention to the general and common, but to the particular and unique. The creative forces of the universe are always individual forces: men are above all members of their respective national communities, and can become creators through popular traditions and language. A great movement to recover folklore (folk = Volk) of many European populations was indeed started with Herder.

Herder was a scholar who had no specific political ambitions. On the contrary, *Fichte (1762-1814)* will embody an important stage of the German political nationalism: following the Napoleonic invasion he wrote the famous *Addresses to the German nation*. He exalts the people of Germany and proposes a world leadership role for its culture. With Fichte we see a kind of divinisation of the nation, which, on the other hand, is consistent with his pantheistic system. “A system that expands necessarily requires a higher love for country; it conceives life on earth as eternal, and the motherland as the earthly manifestation of this eternity”. Unlike other nations, the German nation is pure: it keeps its language and culture, the only elements that will lead to national unification under the form of State. The German nation’s mission is a universal regeneration, because it has the “seed of human perfectibility” in its clearest form. The German language is superior to the language of other peoples, and those who speak it have a cultural mission to prevail.

The nationalism of *Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872*), also involves a cultural role, but it is combined with strong political implications, because he states that Italians are the people destined to lead the world to freedom and peace. We see in Mazzini evidence of the role of ideology as a substitute religion. Italy will be called one day to play a leading role in history. Mazzini attempts to surpass Christianity, that has made the Italian people great, by saying that his nationalist movement, *La Giovine Italia* “is not a sect or a party, but a faith and an apostolate. As predecessors of the Italian regeneration we must set the foundation stone of its religion” (Manifesto of Marseilles, 1831).

Another interesting author of this period before the unification of Italy, is *Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852)*, who declares himself in favour of the unification under the guidance of the Pope. He shares with Mazzini his vision of the Italian people as “the chosen people”, but unlike him, he does not try to surpass Christianity: his view is that Italians have the mission to guide mankind, not through war and conquest, but through the moral primacy of their culture. This is one of the main topics of his book *Primato morale e civili degli italiani*. However, his vision of Christianity is very liberal.

Mazzini is a convinced democrat, with close ties to the French revolutionary republican movement, but he is also a utopian politician, who rarely managed to carry out his revolutionary initiatives; he worked actively to unite the different nationalist movements throughout Europe in the 30s and 40s. The *Young Europe* movement included different nationalistic movements from Italy, France, Poland, etc. Close to Mazzini we also find *Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855)*, a migrant living in Paris, who carried polish patriotism with his nationalistic messianism. With him we find *Juliusz Slowacki (1803-1849)* and *Zygmunt Krasinski (1812-1859).* For Polish Romantics, Poland was the Christ of nations: innocently crucified (we must recall that the Polish territory was split in three sovereignties: Russian, Prussian and Austrian), it will rise in the future and its emancipation would establish a period of peace and love. It is important to highlight the role of Catholicism in the Polish national conscience. Opposite to the Italian unification process, which took place against the religious feeling of the population[[134]](#footnote-134), the faith was the bond of the sense of belonging to the Polish nation. The nation is unity of life, of beliefs, altogether a view of the world. Not so the State, which is clearly distinct from the idea of nation in the Polish language. Polish messianism will not give up in adverse situations, like when Pope Gregory XVI did not support the revolutionary nationalist movements. Moreover, while always faithful to Rome, Poland appears in the writings of some Romantics as the bearer of spiritual salvation in the not too distant future. The words of the poet Slowacki are prophetic: “In the midst of the struggle God tolls / a huge bell, for a Slavic pope. / He has prepared the throne… / Lo, the Slavic Pope comes / a brother of the people”[[135]](#footnote-135).

History and literature have particular importance in the Romantic nationalism of the peoples of the Austrian Empire. The Empire of the Habsburgs included eleven different nationalities, with different languages, traditions and histories. There were two nationalist tendencies in Central Europe: a localised tendency, that underlined the identity of each one of the nations, and a Pan-slavic tendency with the emphasis on the substantial unity of the Slavic language peoples. Within the second tendency we should mention the Czech political historian *Frantisek Palacky*, who promoted a Pan-slavic Congress in 1848. The circumstances at that time prevented any practical results, other than the manifesto that identified the Slavic peoples as lovers of freedom. At the same time a Pan-germanic Congress took place in Frankfurt, with opposite views. It would become an important step in the future unification of Germany, and to consolidate the trend towards a predominantly German *Mitteleuropa*. During this same period the Slovak *Jan Kollár* fostered Pan-slavism with his poems, and prophesised a glorious future for the Slavic peoples.

The opposition to central European Pan-slavism in Germany was not alone. There were two more serious obstacles: the exclusive Hungarian nationalism of *Lajos Kossuth’*, with pretensions of hegemony, and the Slavophile Pro-Russian movement. We need to be mindful of several features of the Russian intellectual history to understand this latter movement. In the 17th and 18th centuries Russia opens itself to its West, particularly during the reigns of Peter the Great and Catherine II. In the main, neither the social structures nor the tsarist autocracy changed much on account of this opening to the West. The effects were mainly on the customs of the court and the aristocracy, in the public service and some artistic and literary manifestations. At any rate, we can say that from that time on Russia had some awareness of being part of Europe. In the first half of the 19th century two different intellectual tendencies emerge: that of the pro-westerners, who felt that Russia should look at progress by adopting Western lifestyles and currents of thought. Among them the we can highlight the Romanophile ideas of *Pëtr Caadaev (1794-1856)*. On the other hand the Slavophiles highlighted specifically the Russian culture and how sometimes it was superior to Western culture. In the opinion of its most representative author, *Alexei Khomyakov (1804-1860)*, the Slavic spirit is essentially religious. Freedom and love are identified in the soul of Christ, and orthodox Christians must make these sentiments prevail in social life. Khomsyokov develops the concept of *sobornost* (conciliarity), as the most typical trait of the Russian soul: orthodoxy puts forward a community view, against the western individualism, where the Tsar himself, guardian of the orthodox faith, fulfils the mission of being unity within pluralism. The other father of the Slavophile tendency is *Ivan Kireevskij (1806-1856)*, who had heated arguments with Khomyakov. He thought that Russia was the only nation that had kept the true Christianity, that is, orthodoxy. The West had developed a formal rationalism, whereas the orthodox faith opens the way to an all-round knowledge, its speculative centre to be found in the religious truth. In a similar way to Khomyakov, Kireevskij proposes the political and social unity of orthodox Russia rather than the division of society into classes and the separation of Church and State of the West.

The Russian Slavophile movement became stronger as the years went by, and bring forth the image of Holy Russia having to face a secularised and positivistic West. *Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881)* was not foreign to these nationalistic and messianic ideas. For the author of *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Russian people are Christ bearers. Russia will have the last say on the grand harmony that will result among all nations when Christ’s laws are accepted.[[136]](#footnote-136)

The passage of the Slavophile movement to Pan-slavism takes place in the 1860s and 1870s. The difference lies in that the former did not seek to expand, whereas the latter, that started in central Europe, gathers strength after the Crimean War (1853-1856). In some nationalist sectors, the downfall from the war awakens the thought that the destiny of Russia is to protect the Slavic brothers now under the yoke of the Ottoman Empire. *Nikolai Danilevski (1822-1885)* will be the great prophet of Russian Pan-slavism. According to the author of *Russia and Europe*, the Slavic civilisation and the Germanic-Latin civilisation are not compatible. The intellectual and religious superiority of the Slavs required a struggle against the West, under the leadership of the main Slavic people, that is the Russians. Danilevski felt that Western Christianity - namely the Catholic Church - had distorted Christian truth because it had allied itself with the political power. This led to a fight against the Church, the defender of obscurantist scholasticism, and the consequences were a triple anarchy: religious anarchy - in other words, Protestantism -; philosophical anarchy, that leads to sceptical materialism; and social-political anarchy, shown by the growing political democratism and economic feudalism. Russia must free their Slavic brothers from these anarchies and impose orthodoxy, together with Russian institutions and traditions[[137]](#footnote-137). The secularisation of the Russian messianism would be carried out by Soviet Marxism, which we will assess later on[[138]](#footnote-138).

In 1848, during the last revolutionary cycle of the Atlantic Revolution, Eastern and Central European nationalism became an important factor. Its spread through literature (tales, poetry, novels), history books, the renaissance of local languages, made this movement very idealistic, but not practical. The Austrian Empire worked to strengthen unity and autocracy, and nationalism had its own martyrs. It is also easy to realise that in many cases nationalism in this period precluded the rights of other peoples who also wanted to reaffirm their national identities: Slovaks, Czechs, Croats and Romanians had to defend themselves from the Magyarization that the Hungarians were trying to impose; all the Slavic peoples had to protect themselves from the predominance of the Russian “big brother” (the Czech essayist and journalist *Karel Havlicek (1821-1856)* was very conscious of this danger); some years later, in Bismarck’s Germany, the French in Alsace and Lorraine, the Danes in Schleswig and the Polish in Silesia had to endure unjust legislation that trampled on the right of any people to keep their own national traits.

### 3. The Nationalism of Machtpolitik and Imperialism

In the second half of the 19th century idealist and Romantic nationalism gave way to the nationalism of Realpolitik or Machtpolitik. It was the period of German and Italian unification brought about by Bismarck and Cavour, respectively, with the assistance of Napoleon III, one of the great defenders of the principle of nationality, especially applied to central and eastern Europe. The French, English and American nationalisms were also reinforced during this period.

#### a) Subjective nationalism

Nationalism scholars distinguish two main streams within this ideology, which we have already mentioned: the voluntarist or subjective French and Anglo-Saxon stream, and a second stream, objective nationalism, mainly of German origin, which contains more historical, biological and mythical elements. In the former, liberal ideology plays a very important role. The nation would ultimately be the product of the general will of the people, who want to live and stay together. History has a definite role, but in this type of nationalism what matters most are the projects that will be carried out as manifestations of the will of the nation, that is, the general or popular will. The best explanation of the French voluntarist nationalism is probably a lecture given at the Sorbonne on the 11th of March 1882, called *Qu’est-ce qu’une Nation*. The speaker, a positivist writer by the name of *Ernest Renan*, at first critiqued the concept of nation based on race, language, geography or religion. He then proposed the following definition: “A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle… A nation is a great solidarity created by the sentiment of the sacrifices that have been made and that are ready to be made in the future. It presupposes a past, but it is resumed in the present time through a palpable act: consensus, the clearly stated desire to continue life in common. The existence of a nation is a daily plebiscite” [[139]](#footnote-139).

The idea of nation as a body of people who voluntarily adhere to a common project will find its most important historical manifestation in the United States of America. The vital North American experience is defined by Rocco Buttiglione as follows: “This nation, which had not existed before, begins to exist in history through a specific act of conscience. It is born with a philosophy”[[140]](#footnote-140). The birth of the United States is a *covenant*, a social pact structured around a suit of universal principles that somehow put into practice the covenant political theories of the 17th and 18th centuries. Buttiglione says that two lines of thought had a key influence on the theoretical basis of this covenant. The first can be found in the authors of *The Federalist*, a publication along the lines of the Anglo-Saxon tradition of Hooker, Locke and the *Common Law* (where it is easy to find elements of the Thomistic tradition). The other line of thought would be linked to the French masonic Enlightenment, portrayed by Jefferson and Franklin[[141]](#footnote-141).

The first of these traditions provides a vision that we could identify with one of the Modernities we have referred to early on: it confirms the legitimate autonomy of the temporal sphere, but is fully aware that the ultimate foundation of society and human existence does not lie within itself, but on a transcendent Absolute. The State explicitly renounces to produce *in proprio* - through a state religion - a body of premises required to survive. It leaves these premises for society to work out. The result is the pluralist foundation of civil society [[142]](#footnote-142).

The other tradition holds a different view of Modernity: it is an attempt to promote a militant liberal philosophy that underwrites a totally autonomous and self-sufficient civil order. Buttiglione speaks of an authentic state religion -akin to the civil religion of Rousseau-, hostile to any revealed religion.

The population of the thirteen American colonies of the East Coast of the United States consisted of migrants from a variety of European backgrounds. To a great extent the reason for their migration was religious persecution. This is possibly the reason why their links to the metropolis were not particularly close. At the same time, a long tradition of self-government prepared the foundation for a complete break off from England. The independence crisis was triggered by George III when he tried to impose policies bound to English interests on the colonies.

The religious origin of the first colonisation would give a messianic tone to American nationalism: The United States are the promised land of religious freedom and democracy. This messianism underwent a process of secularisation in the 19th century through the doctrine of *Manifest Destiny*. It did not portray the United States as the universal homeland of men who want to be free, but as the providential destiny of the American nation to become great and later launch it into world leadership. The *Manifest Destiny* was first mentioned when the journalist *John Louis Sullivan* wrote an article on the occasion of the annexation of Texas. He stated in the article that no one had the right to block “our manifest destiny, which is to occupy the continent that Providence gave us for the free development of millions that grow every year…”. The annexation of Texas was simply a reflection of the general law (providential as well) that moves the population of the United States towards the West. “The future of the United States is the annexation of California, Canada and the entire Latin American continent, because Providence destined the peoples of the New World to be taken in under the wings of the American eagle”[[143]](#footnote-143).

Despite its exclusive imperialism, the United States has managed to unite people from different races and cultural backgrounds, who have a deep sense of belonging to the American nation, understood as a joint project for all. The confusing nature of American nationalism can be understood by the definition coined by Raymond Aaron: “The United States are an *imperial republic*”[[144]](#footnote-144). The entry of the United States in the First World War meant the beginning of a new stage in American history. The destruction suffered by Europe made the United States into a superpower and the key player of international relations. The doctrine of President Woodrow Wilson, that lasted throughout the 20th century, adopted some features of American messianism: The United States should proclaim universal principles that included the values of democracy and liberty. The altruistic nature of the US foreign policy was denied many times over by the events of history; indeed the Vietnam war caused a crisis in the conscience of the American people, and cast doubts on the values espoused by the *establishment*. But in the long run Wilson’s doctrine was the overwhelming winner in the ideological contest with the other superpower, the Soviet Union, that fell into an irreparable crisis in the 1980s[[145]](#footnote-145).

#### b) Objective nationalism

The vision of the nation that we have just seen -Chabot calls it subjective, of the republican or democratic kind [[146]](#footnote-146)- is very different from the vision of objective nationalism, but it has common features; its origin is mainly German and it will lead to both World Wars. In this view of nationalism the nation is not the result of free choice, it is and inheritance, with a collective tradition. The content of this tradition could be cultural, as Fichte noticed, but it can also be material, specified in race and blood. In fact, a racist theory emerged around the middle of the 19th century, which would become the essence of National Socialism. The more representative authors of 19th century racism are *Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882)* and *Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927)*. They are not German, but their theories were widely accepted in Germany. In his *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, Gobineau upholds an ethnic determinism that defines what a nation is: “The ethnical question dominates all the problems of history and inequality of races, and is enough to explain all the links of the destiny of peoples”. Culture cannot be transmitted, and the superior race has the obligation to subdue the inferior races. Another French author, *Vacher de Lapouge*, outlined the components that make a superior race: the individuals should be tall, blond, and have a dolicephalic skull. Some years later he confirmed that the Germanic branch is the purest branch of the Aryan race. Chamberlain and his father in law, Richard Wagner, spread racist theories in Germany. For Chamberlain the most important thing for the superiority of a race was being aware of that superiority: “The essential thing is to have the race in one’s own conscience”.

There are also racist factors in the history of the United States, typical of “objective” nationalism: in the mid-19th century rising American imperialism would justify the war against the native populations and against neighbouring Mexico first, and later the growing influence in the rest of Latin America, with arguments to justify the supposed superiority of the Anglo-Saxon blood line and the protestant religion over mestizos and Catholics. The issue of slavery would lead to the American Civil War, -which could be a nationalist interpretation of national unity-. It also showed the racist tendencies of some sectors of American culture[[147]](#footnote-147).

During this period, two French intellectuals will move away from the subjective nationalism typical of the more western tradition: *Charles Maurras (1868-1952)* and *Maurice Barrès*, who were in favour of an integral nationalism. They rejected the idea of a humanitarian nationalism, and set an exclusively political and anthropological priority as the national interest. Maurras coined this priority with the motto *France d’abord*, a principle that demanded rapid and effective nationalist action: *l’action francaise*. Barrès asked for union of sentiment and thought centred on the nation, above class divisions and liberal individual selfishness. The previous generations and the ancestral lands were the cement of national unity. In his book *Les déracinés* (The uprooted), he upheld that men lost their moral and spiritual integrity when they fell outside the national tradition. This view implied a certain amount of determinism: Individuals were the result of history and biological inheritance. With a graphic expression Barrès wrote that the foundation of a nation was *la terre et ses morts* (the land and its dead).

Asserting national identity raised a feeling of xenophobia: foreign was ‘the other’, ‘the different’, a source of suspicion and the enemy of the nation. Such a close-minded and exclusive mentality would become very strong in the antisemitic movement: the Jews were foreign *par excellence*, but peculiar foreigners, because they lived within the boundaries of the motherland. Once the ghettos were opened and favourable liberal legislation enacted, the integration of the Jews in European societies of the 19th century remained difficult. While the system of ghettos did create social differences, the fall of the physical walls did not achieve a complete integration. In fact, despite the mimic attitude of many Jews, vast sections of European society did not regard them as fully integrated because there were doubts about their loyalty to the nations they lived in -possibly because of a strong Jewish cultural identity- and the thought that they were plotting to acquire world domination. A mixture of racist doctrines and beliefs in pseudo-religious fables and myths was behind these postulates. There were violent persecutions against the Jews in the Russian Empire in the 19th century - the famous *Pogrom* -. In Poland, a relatively large Jewish community was subject to misunderstandings. In France there was an antisemitic movement, but it did not become generalised. In 1966 *Edouard Drumont* published *La France Juive*, where there was talk of a Jewish collusion to wreck traditional France. A consequence of French antisemitism was the conviction without proof of captain Alfred Dreyfus, the only Jewish officer in the French army, accused of treason and collaboration with the Germans.

Antisemitism was much more influential and had greater historical consequences in Germany. Noted scholars and artists made the racist sentiment their own: *Richard Wagner (1813-1883)* used to talk of the “Hebrew danger” and the historian *Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896)* published an article in 1879, with the following title: “The Jews are our misfortune”. There was a large number of antisemitic intellectuals in the 19th century, right up to Alfred Rosenberg in the 20th century: in 1930 he published *Der Mythos des 20, Jarhunderts*, based on the racist theories of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, quoted earlier. It was the eve of German National Socialism[[148]](#footnote-148).

#### c) Imperialism

Nationalism reaches its peak between 1870 and 1914. Great Britain, France, Germany, the United States, Russia and Italy went ahead with nationalist policies to assert their own superiority, and thus started a race for world supremacy, which would end in the Great War. As we have already pointed out, national education and the army were key factors in these policies.

The imperialist race spread western culture to the five continents. Present in this process are a secularised Christian universalism, financial and scientific interests, but above all there is a further proof of nationalist spirit: some countries felt that they had been entrusted with a civilising mission and were conscious of their destiny to world supremacy. According to Redondo, “In a remote sense, the drive of the European colonial expansion, the drive that supplied its overwhelming power, was possibly a Christian view of the world. A Christian view of the world, an ecumenical sense of existence that, even when secularised, managed to intuit somehow that Europe’s achievements, not so much in the preceding centuries, but throughout its whole history, were the patrimony of all, and should be made available to all (…). But it was a secularised drive. The colonial expansion took place beginning in 1870, when the liberal-progressive ideology was common patrimony of the European governing classes”[[149]](#footnote-149).

It is easy to notice the European feeling of assumed superiority behind the colonial expansion. It is worth noting that the elites of the 18th century considered non-European societies typical of Rousseau’s concept of the noble savage, free from the ills of Western civilisation. But now the superiority of the white race over the rest, and of Western culture over any other was not worth even discussing. A secularised faith sees colonialism as a religious crusade to spread the universal and absolute values of western Modernity. Two Englishmen should be quoted among the theoreticians of European imperialism: *Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)*, and some years later *Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)*, who proclaimed the glories of the British Empire. In France, *Jules Perry (1832-1893)* would propel the secularisation of French society through laicist education and carried forward a wide expansionist programme steeped in imperial-nationalistic ideology.

Secularisation has a materialistic and economic aspect as well. The transmission of new European techniques, the obvious advances in public health, the progress of universal public education and serious missionary efforts coexist with multiple instances of exploitation, injustice and serious damage to human dignity. Social Darwinism, gross materialism and racism are part and parcel of European and American expansionism.

Imperialism was the logical consequence of nationalism, keen to highlight national grandeur. European nations had to show the world their civilising mission. There is evident proof of the link between imperialism and nationalism: the countries that had greatest national conscience, France and England, carried out the strongest imperialist policies.

#### d) Nationalism and de-colonisation

There were many consequences of the universalisation of Western culture -originally Christian, albeit secularised-: the collapse of local world views, uprooting of social and cultural traditions and so on. We could summarise the social consequences of colonisation in Africa and Asia by saying that it broke down the traditional social order; economic activity is reorganised, and a new educated elite takes over the new nationalist and pro-independence movements.

The new elites that took over traditional chieftains were relatively westernised, but they were also local and their roots were steeped in the Afro-Asian traditions. After a period of xenophobic nationalism that rejected anything foreign, nationalism attempted to combine the positive aspects of the western novelties with their own cultural traditions. Political parties of the masses are created, that will support national independence. But it is a difficult nationalism, especially in Africa, because the very concept of nation-state was a European idea. Accepting the national borders set up by the colonial powers and the continuing presence of a tribal mentality and its traditions will contribute to instability throughout the continent. The bloody clashes between Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda and Burundi at the end of the 20th century attest to it.

The establishment of a single-party political system in many African countries following their independence demonstrates the need for some kind of unity of power to address the most urgent needs of the new countries. At the same time it confirms the persistence of old African traditions. National identity becomes the physical person of the president and his government. Many times it is the “Founding Fathers”, the heroes of the independence movement, who embody the country, and hold the highest positions in the new State. According to Chabot, we could speak of a trilogy of unity that legitimises the new post-independence state of affairs: a nation, a president, a party. The role of the “Founding Fathers”, - Bourguiba in Tunisia, Houphouët-Boigny in the Ivory Coast, Kenyatta in Kenya, Senghor in Senegal, etc. - was irreplaceable in the first stages of life after independence in these countries, and provided a certain degree of stability. However, the contradictory features of African nationalism threaten the pacific coexistence of peoples of different ethnicities.

The de-colonisation movement in Africa raised the awareness of a possible continental unity in some intellectuals. In this context the writings of *Léopold Sédar Enghor (1906-2002)* are particularly interesting. He was the first president of Senegal and a Nobel prize winner in literature. Senghar discovered a specific trait of African culture, called *négritude*, that leads to an ideal form of continentalism, the *africanité*, made up of a body of cultural values and customs that existed before colonisation. For the time being *négritude* and *africanité* remain in the sphere of culture, and no international or intertribal forms of political unity have become a reality.[[150]](#footnote-150)

Nationalism in India is very important in the Asian process of de-colonisation. The most important dominion of the British Empire had no political, religious, cultural or language unity before the arrival of the English. The first meeting of the Indian National Congress took place in Bombay in 1885. Its purpose was to integrate the different elements of the indigenous population; to steer the process of political and social development towards national integration; to strengthen bonds with the British metropolis, and to try to eliminate the injustices of the colonial domination. The majority of the participants were Hindu, with Muslim and English minorities. Little by little, the leadership of the westerners was passed on to the radical nationalists, who sought inspiration from past Indian history and from the religious feelings of the masses.

Following a violent period under the leadership of *Bal Gandahar Tilak (1856-1920)*, nationalism in India underwent a dramatic change under the guidance of Mohandes *Karamachand Gandhi (1869-1948)*. The two key ideas of Gandhi’s approach were S*atyagraha* (the strength of truth) and *Ahimsa* (no violence). To overcome apparent differences, truth demands self-dominion, existential witness, patience, and being accessible to others: *Satyagraha* demands that truth be held as the ultimate purpose in life. If truth is the end, non-violence is the means. “Good may come from evil, but it depends upon God, not on men. Man should only know that evil comes from evil, just as good can be explained by good”. The end does not justify the means. Gandhi moved away completely from the Hegelian view of history, where in the end all kind of evils can be justified with the cunning of Reason. India’s independence was a good thing, but it had to be achieved with respect for truth and through non-violence and civil disobedience. Gandhi borrowed many ideas from the American transcendentalist philosopher *Henry David Thoreau (1818-1862)*, and especially from his booklet on civil disobedience[[151]](#footnote-151). The apostle of non-violence went well beyond the horizons of a narrow nationalism that denies the rights of others. His religious inspiration - which include Christian and Muslim influences - opened new horizons not only to India, but to the whole world.

India’s independence was proclaimed in 1947. The inheritance left by British domination was economic colonialist exploitation, but also the unity of one of the official languages -English- and a political and administrative structure strong enough to amalgamate the disparate components of previous Indian history. Gandhi’s non-violence preaching was denied many times by the actions of extreme Indian nationalists. Muslims later separated from India and founded the Republic of Pakistan, under the guidance of *Mohammed Ali Jinnah (1876-1948)*, who was a supporter of Islamic nationalism.

### 4. Nationalism as totalitarianism

Asserting that the nation as an absolute, and the subsequent denial of the rights of other nations, led the world to World War I. 1918 marks the triumph of several nationalisms: the Austrian Empire breaks down and the old longings of central European nationalisms to establish their own countries become a reality[[152]](#footnote-152). This type of nationalism was called distraction nationalism by Hermet, because it was the work of the allies, who wanted to slow down revolutionary Marxism, ever more dangerous after the Russian Revolution of 1917. It did not solve any problems. The States constituted by some of the old nationalities included minorities, whose desires to strengthen their national identity had not been satisfied. Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia remained multinational states and were the easy prey of German (up to 1945) and Russian (up to 1989) nationalisms[[153]](#footnote-153).

The territories of the old Ottoman Empire and northern Africa followed a similar course: Libya, Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Iraq achieve national independence, though in many cases under Franco-English protectorate regimes. In these areas, the common religion, Islam and the common enemy -the State of Israel created in 1948- restrained state nationalisms and gave the Islamic peoples a certain degree of unity. We ought to remember how the Armenian genocide was perpetrated before the fall of the Ottoman empire. The Armenians were a people of very ancient Christian roots, and the genocide was also a consequence of ideological nationalism. It was a tragedy akin to the Jewish holocaust.

Another consequence of the Great War and of the breakdown of liberal ideology was the birth in Europe of nationalist ideologies that would lead to the Second World War: National Socialism and fascism. They too had imperialist aspirations, though quite different from 19th century imperialism, and a definite totalitarian intent. According to C. Dawson the liberalism of the early decades of the 20th century had lost the philosophical and humanitarian contents of the 19th century liberalisms, and had become pure individualistic materialism. The emergence of dictatorships could be explained by their substantial values content, and by the drive of wounded patriotic feeling in Germany and Italy after the international treaties that ended the First World War. These dictatorships are indeed the peak of the process of secularisation in so far as they were authentic secularised religions[[154]](#footnote-154).

German National Socialism was an irrational political ideology, that carried the ideas of Romantic nationalism and the racist elements of the mid-19th century European thinkers like Gobineau or Chamberlain to their ultimate consequences. For Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) “the nation is the supreme synthesis of all the material and spiritual values of the race”. For this reason the central, obsessive thought of Nazism is the purity of blood. The Aryan race, and its prototype, the German man, cannot mix its blood with that of inferior races. The Nazi State is an instrument of Aryan race domination, whether domestically, with a eugenic policy that preserves the purity of blood lines, or abroad, putting into practice the policy of *Lebenstraum*, or vital space for the German people, the first stage of world conquest by the “pure people” of race and blood. The *Shoah* -the systematic elimination of millions of Jews for the simple fact of being Jewish - would be one of tragic consequences of this ideology.

The French prosecutor in Nuremberg General Francois de Menthon defined Nazism as a crime against the spirit. We quote his precise words, which show that the ultimate root of Nazi violence lies on the anti-human nature of the ideology: “I propose today to prove to you that all this organized and vast criminality springs from what I may be allowed to call a crime against the spirit, I mean a doctrine which, denying all spiritual, rational, or moral values by which the nations have tried, for thousands of years, to improve human conditions, aims to plunge humanity back into barbarism, no longer the natural and spontaneous barbarism of primitive nations, but into a diabolical barbarism, conscious of itself and utilizing for its ends all material means put at the disposal of mankind by contemporary science. This sin against the spirit is the original sin of National Socialism from which all crimes spring. This monstrous doctrine is that of racism. (…) Whether we consider a Crime against Peace or War Crimes, we are therefore not faced by an accidental or an occasional criminality which events could explain without justifying it. We are, in fact, faced by systematic criminality, which derives directly and of necessity from a monstrous doctrine put into practice with deliberate intent by the masters of Nazi Germany”[[155]](#footnote-155).

Italian fascism is not racist, but it is nationalism taken to the extreme. *Benito Mussolini (1883-1945)* professed a nationalism that places the State at the centre of the life of men. Mussolini himself said: “for a fascist everything is within the State…, nothing human or spiritual exists outside the State. In this sense fascism is totalitarian”. And it is totalitarian because the State is conceived as an Absolute. The State, the immanent consciousness of the nation, overcomes the narrow limits of individual life. Showing its Hegelian origin, the fascist State is an ethical State, that sets itself up as the source of moral and legal norm. Because of its ethical nature fascism will be militaristic, because a general call to arms for war generates ascetical virtues. In this context, we can understand the fascist myth to revive the Roman Empire. Fascist Rome would have to be the third Rome, after Rome of the Caesars and of the Popes. In 1932 in Milan, Mussolini issued the prophecy that the 20th century would be the century of fascism, of Italian power, the century when Italy would be again at the head of mankind. But German and Stalin’s nationalisms prevented the Duce to carry out his project of domination.

Italian totalitarianism will take shape in the areas of education, trade unions and economic planning: everything has to be placed at the service of the State because it is the embodiment of the nation. The fascist party will be, like the communist party in Lenin’s thinking, the avant-garde of the proletariat, the attentive minority who knows and wants on behalf of the people.

There were other forms of nationalism and totalitarian tendencies with a single party mentality: Francoism in Spain, Salazarism in Portugal and Peronism in Argentina (the first period, 1945-1955). These forms did not take to their last consequences the passage from heteronomy to absolute autonomy of man, because they maintained an awareness of human dignity. However, they did consider that the State is the best place to develop human potencies to their full capacity. We must also explain that Franco received various ideological influences. Analogies with fascism are appropriate especially with the Falangism of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, who understood the State as a totalitarian instrument in the service of the integrity of the motherland.

### 5. Nationalism and religious fundamentalism

In the introduction to ideological Modernity we highlighted that ideologies had a role as substitute religions; we have also pointed out the transition from heteronomy to man’s autonomy as the foundation of a world view. In the cases of religious nationalism there is no fight against religion, but a progressive identification of nation and religion. We could thus talk of an integrating process, where the historical fulfilment of a people is identified with the values espoused by a transcendent religion.

The two clearest examples of religious nationalism are the State of Israel and Islamic fundamentalism. We should explain several things about the former. The people of Israel are conscious of being the chosen people of God, the holy nation from where the Messiah will rise. The Jews, who have not acknowledged Jesus Christ as the Saviour, had an idea of the Messiah linked to the historical destiny of the people of Israel. In the 19th and 20th centuries several intellectuals identified the Messiah with the whole people of Israel, spread throughout the world because of historical circumstances. Making the idea of the Messiah into a collective one supported the desire to erect the State of Israel where the Jews of the diaspora -and persecuted in many countries- could live together in their historic motherland. But it was not only the exaltation of a religious idea. Zionism, a cultural and political movement set up in the 19th century to promote a Jewish State, is also a typical manifestation of 19th century Romanticism and nationalism. The father of Zionism is *Theodore Herzl (1860-1904)*, a Hungarian born Jewish journalist, politician and writer. He thought that it was impossible for the Jews to assimilate completely to the European societies -he was indeed present in the demotion ceremony of Captain Dreyfuss in Paris, amid the anti-Semitic shouts of some Frenchmen, and was deeply shocked by it-. His dream of a Jewish State finally became a reality in 1948, following intense diplomatic negotiations. Although there remain Jewish minorities who have a deep religious conscience, the messianism of the people of Israel has undergone a process of secularisation: today we can speak of a Jewish nationalism that identifies nation and State -and as such it is analogous to western nationalism- where the religious component plays an important role, albeit not a central one.

We also should also make some comments about Islamic fundamentalism. Islam means “submission to God’. It is a religious concept, but it also implies specific social and political organisational aspects, as well as a cultural outlook. Islam began its historical journey in the 7th century, when -according to Muslim tradition- Mohammed, the Prophet, received a number of divine revelations. The Quran is the book that gathers the word that God transmitted to Mohammed. It has 114 chapters or *suras*. With the Quran there is the tradition or sayings and deeds of the Prophet, of which there are several compilations. The tradition is known as *sunna*.

There is no magisterial authority within Islam. Therefore, orthodoxy has been the progressive work of the consensus of scholars. It resulted in revealed law (*sharia*), a body of legal prescriptions found in the Quran and the Sunna. *Sharia* law has both religious and political implications. It is very clear regarding religious practices. The five pillars of the Muslim religion are to profess faith in Allah, where the unicity of God and his justice are highlighted, ritual prayer, legal almsgiving, fast during Ramadan and a pilgrimage to Mecca. However it is not so clear how this is applied to community life. Different juridical schools have developed. The *Hanbali* school represents the more literal interpretation, and is the foundation of the theocratic system, consolidated in the 18th century by Ibn ‘And al-Wahab, and is now the rule applied in Saudi Arabia.

Another key component of Islam is holy war (*jihad*), mentioned in the Quran. *Jihad* has three main meanings: the struggle against oneself to fight one’s own passions; the struggle for the expansion and domination of Islam (the Muslim faith is exclusive and does not recognise other religions as legitimate); and the fight against bad Muslims. The last two items have seen dramatic examples in the last decades of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st. It is enough to recall the Islamic inspired attacks on New York and Washington on the 11th of September of 2001, the persecution of Christians in South Sudan or the internal struggles between moderate Muslims and Islamic fundamentalists in Algeria.

The Islamic religion is spread through vast areas of the world: North Africa, Middle East, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, etc. The European process of colonisation awoke a pan-Islamic sentiment, based on the common religious faith, and at the same time a pan-Arabic movement in North Africa and the Middle East, based on membership of the Arabian ethnicity. However, a parallel western-inspired nationalist movement has taken place: it identifies nation with State, and given rise to several states in the Maghreb region and modern Turkey, the central core of the old Ottoman Empire. Turkey is an exception: the Turkey that emerges with the revolution of *Mustapha Kemal Attaturk (1881-1938)* is the lone example of a lay state in an Islamic country, where there is separation of political and religious powers, in the style of European constitutions. The North African countries struggle between the western forms of nation-state and Islamic political-religious traditions.

Islamic fundamentalism develops as a reaction against the compromise between western arrangements and Islamic tradition. In this context external Islam stands as the great answer to the western secularised modernity and that of the “bad Muslims” who do not follow sharia law, and vows to return to a radical unity between religious faith and political organisation. The paramount example of this attitude is the Islamic revolution led by *Ayatollah* *Khomeini (1900-1989)* in Iran. The political status of the citizen and being a faithful of Islam become equated, as well as Quranic and civil laws. The political power resides in the religious chiefs, and political obedience is a manifestation of the religious obedience owed to God. At the same time the earthly Islamic nation is the image of the heavenly homeland of the worshipers of Allah. The deposed Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the ideologues of the terrorist group Al Qaeda share similar ideas.

It is not legitimate to identify the whole of Islam with fundamentalism. Islam coexisted in peace with other religions for long periods of its history, despite being an exclusive religion. On the other hand, a religion of one billion followers merits respect. However, when taken to its ultimate consequences the very Muslim faith implies a union of religious and political powers, because the very political organisation comes from revelation. This fact has serious consequences for international respect and for the safeguarding of the rights of human persons[[156]](#footnote-156).

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The peak period of totalitarianisms helped create two international movements: the anti-fascist league, and the anti-communist league. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) became the testing ground for both movements, which were radically ambiguous. Under the anti-fascist umbrella were found both communists and liberal democrats. The Soviet propaganda machine managed to identify fascist with anti-Communist in modern parlance. In this way, any attempt to criticise communism was labelled fascist. Following the Second World War international organisations were structured with regard to their positions vis-à-vis communism. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union was not a good ground for nationalism. The logic of ideological blocks took over. However, the decadence of the Soviet empire, that tried to deal with the problems of nationalism within the Soviet Union and in Central Europe without success, came at the same time as an awakening of particularistic sentiments. From 1989 onwards we witness the re-emergence of old nation-states or new state configurations of old nations in the international scene. The Baltic Sea, Central Europe and the Balkans become the privileged stage of western nationalism.

At the same time we should not forget that there are nationalist movements in the westernmost countries of Europe; they are less significant, but they confirm that nationalism persists today. In these cases the strongest trend is merely community-based, without much possibility of turning into a national sovereignty. These include the Basque and Catalan nationalisms in Spain, the Anglo-Irish problem in Ulster, and the difficult co-existence between Walloons and Flemish in Belgium[[157]](#footnote-157).

The success of nationalism relies on the use of sentimental arguments over intellectual ones. Sentimental arguments find an easy echo in the human soul, embodied in a specific time and place. Peoples can easily adopt the idea of nation because it touches the heart and stirs the passions. We also find a strong presence of religious sentiment, although it is a secularised sentiment: the *amour sacré de la Patrie*, of the French national anthem. Nationalism resembles liberalism and communism, because it has the same anthropological problem, which is difficult to solve unless it abandons the logic of ideological thought. As the patient reader will recall, one of the essential elements of this type of thought is its reductive vision of human nature, that identifies man with his being part of a particular nation, ethnic group, race or culture, and robs the person of one of his most essential properties: openness to other persons. Man becomes more of man, becomes worthier, in so far as he communicates or enters into communion with the others. This openness has an ethical dimension and a deeper ontological dimension; it involves respect for diversity, fosters intercultural dialogue and the awareness of the radical unity of the human race, which has its foundation in the identical dignity of any person. Nationalism lowers existential horizons, and prevents individuals and whole communities from the chance of becoming enriched with the gifts of interpersonal communication. The nationalist world stays small, poor and dark, because it is a closed world.

Throughout the 20th century mankind had the chance to realise the dangers brought about by the existential closed-mindedness of nationalism and the resulting assertion of the absolute autonomy of the national community, which is only a relative reality. The 20th century begins with the nationalist crisis in the Balkans and ends in the great sorrow of the thousands of victims of nationalist fever, again in the Balkans, but unfortunately, in other parts of the world as well.

## VII MARXISM

Following the study of liberalism and nationalism, we will now turn our attention to Marxism. At first sight, Marxist ideology is the complete opposite of liberalism. Where liberalism views the world based on the individual, Marxism is a most important exponent of collectivism. Its differences with regard to nationalism are also obvious: Marxism pretends to be a universal ideology that overcomes national divisions. All this is true, but we also need to highlight that all these ideologies have common immanentist roots. Liberalism and Marxism share a vision of man that is radically autonomous: man is the product of his own self. On the other hand, they propose outlooks on life to achieve happiness on this earth that contain significant materialistic elements: economistic reductionism is a common feature.

Nationalism and Marxism too have points in common. Both ideologies make absolutes of relative matters: belonging to a nation or a social class are a feature of man’s life, but they cannot account for everything. Nationalism and Marxism underline the priority of the whole over the parts, of society -either nation or proletariat- over the single individual. But nation or social class are radically autonomous, and have no link with an objective, transcendent moral order: liberal individual freedom re-emerges once more in Marxism under the guise of class consciousness. Besides, both Marxism and Nationalism are heavily influenced by the absolute idealism of the Hegelian system.

### 1. The Hegelian left

Hegel's is an absolute system: a philosophical attempt whose driving impulse is the dialectical motion of ideas. It is no surprise, therefore, that the Hegelian system was destined to transform itself by its very nature. On the other hand, this same Hegelian system is ambiguous and leaves ample room for interpretation. Evidence of this is Ludwig Feuerbach's anonymous publication of *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* in 1830, while Hegel was still alive. In this piece Feuerbach denied individual immortality and declared that the Hegelian system was openly pantheistic.

If this early piece by Feuerbach was already polemical, the uproar was enormous when, in 1835, four years after Hegel's death, *David Strauss (1808-1874)* wrote a *Life of Jesus* in which he denied any supernatural reality and claimed that revelation was only a myth. Strauss gradually lost his faith as he progressed in his intellectual journey—it began reading Böhme and Schelling, he then moved through Schleiermacher, and finished with Hegel—. He stated that Hegel's system says nothing about the historicity of the events recounted in the Gospel. If, according to Hegel, God was incarnated in man, could the incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity be merely a symbol, a popular mystification? With this piece Strauss—who was introduced as Hegel's authentic interpreter—walked his path of demystification.

The *Life of Jesus* provoked numerous controversies: in the years that followed its publication, 48 pieces were published against it, mostly written by disciples of Hegel. Strauss, meanwhile, published a controversial *In Defence of My Life of Jesus* in 1838. In it we find the famous classification of Hegel's disciples into left, centre, and right, inspired by the political positions of the French parliament. This classification, which was born in circumstances closely linked to the publication of *The Life of Jesus*, has enjoyed notable historiographical popularity, and is useful in to distinguish the positions taken by the Hegelians after the death of their teacher[[158]](#footnote-158).

The two points of discussion were religion and the theory of the State. The Hegelian left—identified with the “Young Hegelians”—believed that Hegel's system leads to pantheism and atheism, and therefore is incompatible with Christian revelation. Through Feuerbach pantheism would become materialism. In the socio-political arena, the Hegelian left set out along revolutionary political routes. Inspired by the famous phrase “what is rational is real and what is real is rational” (*Elements of the Philosophy of Law*), they believed that Europe's political and social order of the day was still far from rational. Therefore, the Idea could not remain paralysed or crystallized in the Prussian state. In this sense, the philosopher who would initiate the Critique of Hegelian political philosophy is *Arnold Ruge (1802-1880)*, with whom Marx maintained close ties until their breakup in 1844. The most important representatives of the Hegelian left, among whom we find deep speculative differences, are David Strauss, Bruno Bauer, Max Stirner, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels. For all these philosophers, atheism is the *secret* that makes Hegel consistent.

The Hegelian right was formed primarily by Hegel's direct disciples (P. C. Martheineke, K. F. Goschel, H. G. Hotho, K. Fischer, E. Gans, H. F. Hinrichs, K. Rosenkranz, etc.). They acknowledged, by contrast, that the Hegelian system is substantially compatible with Lutheran evangelical Protestantism, and they adopt a conservative attitude in politics. On the other hand, the centre soon lost any force.

It could be argued that the Hegelian right preserves the system, and the left inherits the method, dialectics. We could also say that if for Hegel the *Aufhebung*, mediation of the synthesis, on one hand abolishes and overrides, but on the other it also preserves, the left takes only its revolutionary aspect, abolition and overriding, and eliminates the conservative nature of the *Aufhebung* which is kept by the Hegelian right.[[159]](#footnote-159)

The link that connects Hegel and Marx is Feuerbach. For this reason we shall devote special attention to him.

### 2. Ludwig Feuerbach

#### a) Life and works

Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach was born in the Bavarian village of Landshut, on July 29, 1804. He spent his youth in Munich, Bamberg, and Ausbach. Born to a wealthy family, he studied theology at the University of Heidelberg. There he became interested in Hegelian thinking. In 1824 he moved to Berlin, where he had the opportunity to attend the lectures of Schleiermacher and Hegel. In Berlin, he abandoned theology and turned his attention to philosophy. He left Berlin and went to Erlangen, where he obtained his doctorate, with a thesis *On the Infinitude, Unity, and Universality of Reason*. There he began his teaching activity; it would only last for a short while, because his explicit denial of the immortal nature of the human soul in his *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (1830) prevented him from obtaining a university chair.

His academic career cut short, Feuerbach had to be satisfied with the life of writer and conference lecturer. His marriage to Berta Löw, in 1837, would create a fitting environment for writing: his wife's family owned a porcelain factory that provided a secure source of income, and a mansion in Bruckberg. There he would pen his principal works: *Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy* (1839), *The Essence of Christianity* (1841),and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843).

In 1848 he was elected as a representative in the national assembly in Frankfurt, though he was not involved in its debates. In 1860, his wife's factory went bankrupt. The Feuerbachs, in financial ruin, left Bruckberg and moved to Reichenberg, where Ludwig died in 1872. His death would cause some upheaval, particularly in the Workers Social Democratic Party, of which he was a member.

#### b) Hegel's materialistic inversion

Feuerbach began his philosophical career as a devout Hegelian. In his doctoral thesis he transformed Hegel's thinking into a system of universal and infinite reason, common to all men. Man is a moment of this universal reason. It was a new version of Averroes' theory of the distinct active intellectual. In a letter he wrote to Hegel himself, Feuerbach tried to convince the Stuttgart philosopher to abandon Christian theism in favor of a mere pantheism of reason.

However, years later, Feuerbach would distance himself from his teacher, believing the Hegelian system to be a construct alienated from sensible reality: “Hegelian philosophy suffers from the same weakness that influences all recent philosophy, from Descartes to Spinoza: the weakness of a gap between intuition and the senses.”[[160]](#footnote-160) Reality has to be understood through the senses, not through concepts. In Hegel's abstractions, man alienates himself from himself, from his immediacy. This immediacy is found in the intuition of the senses: “truth, reality, and sensation are identical.”[[161]](#footnote-161) For Feuerbach man is not a rational being, but an animal that perceives, feels, and strives. This priority of the sensible in man's being becomes evident in his famous phrase: “Man is what he eats.”[[162]](#footnote-162) However, Feuerbach's materialism should not be oversimplified: for Feuerbach materialism means that all human activity, including thought, has a material foundation. This differs from classical materialism: in classical materialism matter is the entire building, but for Feuerbach it is only the foundation.

Starting with this materialistic inversion of the system, Feuerbach accuses Hegelianism of being a theology. Man's consciousness is not, as Hegel claimed, the self-consciousness of God, but rather the consciousness [man has] of God is man's self-consciousness. “Man's knowledge of God is nothing but the knowledge that man has of himself.”[[163]](#footnote-163) Therefore, Feuerbach can state, within limits, that “truth is nothing more than anthropology”. This anti-Hegelian critique is the basis for his philosophy of religion, which would have a great influence on Marx: “Briefly, this is my doctrine: theology is anthropology; in other words, the object of religion, which we call *Zeus* in Greek and *Gott* in German, expresses none other than the essence of man. In other words, the God of men is but the essence of man, made divine.”[[164]](#footnote-164)

In what sense is God a projection of man? According to Feuerbach, all divine determinations are determinations of mankind. God is a kind of mirage, a *fata morgana*, the dream-mirror where man contemplates himself: it is the specific concept of man in his mystical form. Man experiences natural needs, and its powers—will, reason, love—are open to infinite potential objects. This opening to the infinite, together with the existential impossibility of achieving it, causes man to project his essence onto an external being, which is God. Thus, we can understand why Feuerbach states that “religion is rooted solely in need. That which you need most intimately is your God, and nothing more.”[[165]](#footnote-165) And in addition to necessity, God is the expression of a desire: “What I am not, but I desire and long to be, that is my God.”[[166]](#footnote-166) The existence of religion is nothing but an alienation. The real man, through religion, has been alienated from himself, because he has severed his infinite essence from his real existence. To save himself from alienation, man must become aware of himself, and discover the infinite in his own being. Feuerbach takes a vital step forward in the secularisation process that replaced the transcendent with the immanent: the Bavarian philosopher made man into something divine, and he took note of the historical importance of this step: “*Homo homini Deus*, here is the supreme practical principle; here is the vital turning point of history.”[[167]](#footnote-167)

According to Feuerbach, religious consciousness is a necessary step in the process that ends with man's full self-consciousness. From this perspective, for Feuerbach Christianity is the perfect religion, because it contains within it a dynamic that leads to man's self-affirmation. Thus, God the Creator is the projection of man's power over nature; the Triune God is a projection of the social life of man; God Incarnate is the projection of the body and the sensible. As A. Cruz aptly states, “The only thing that remains is to reverse the terms: from God-Man to Man-God; and to recognize that man's knowledge of God is actually his knowledge of himself. Feuerbach's philosophy is presented as the full illumination, as the full truth of Christianity.”[[168]](#footnote-168)

The infinite, however, is not a property of the particular individual, who is in himself limited. The full realization of man requires the human species: man must reintegrate himself in the species, unite himself with the rest through social life. That is why Feuerbach develops an interpersonal dialectic of the I-you, where the I recognizes itself only when faced with another I (facing a you), and joins with others through love. God’s place is occupied by the human species, gathered together in a community of love. Where Saint John would say “God is love,” Feuerbach would say, “love is God.” But it is a mere human love, and it is absolutely autonomous: “Love towards man cannot be derived: it must be original. Only then will love be an authentic, sacred, and trustworthy force. If for him the essence of man is the supreme being, then in practice the supreme law for man must be the love of man for man.”[[169]](#footnote-169)

The inversion of the Hegelian system, which is changed from idealism to materialism, and the replacement of God by the human species, will have a vital influence on the works of Karl Marx, who will shift Feuerbach's Critique from theory to practice. We shall deal with Marx next. But in order to understand correctly the specific traits of Marxism, it is necessary to cover first some of the socialist and anarchist trends that Marx encountered, and how he took up some of these ideas and criticized others.

### 3. Utopic socialism and the anarchist movement

Socialists and Marxist ideologies appear in the first half of the 19th century as a result of the deep contradictions of liberal society and fierce capitalism. The tension between absolute freedom and equality created a state of social conflict. The “social question” was examined by many intellectuals, thinkers, politicians, and churchmen. Where Leo XIII tried to apply the morals of the Gospels and a consistent transcendent anthropology, others attempted to solve the same problem from another angle: a vision of man that shared the immanentist reductionism proposed by the liberals.

It is necessary to look at utopic socialism first. We find good intentions and social concern in the supporters of this line of thought, but its materialist anthropological foundation assumes that men’s happiness is mainly material, and can be achieved on this earth. Human problems can be solved by changing the social structures; this was the view, among others, of *Charles Fourier (1771-1837)*, who proposed a society organised in “phalansteries” or communities, sexually promiscuous and with voluntary association of capital. According to Fourier men have good passions, but civilized society has made them become bad. Society must be reordered so that human passions can find again the goodness they had lost. Fourier shows the influence of Rousseau. Marx will speak of Fourier’s “fulfilled humanism”. Communism and atheism are at the foundations of *Robert Owen’s (1771-1856)* social project: the Englishman feels that the actions of man depend on the social and economic circumstances. It is necessary to implement an equitable educational system that can abolish the ideas of hierarchy, property and sexual discipline. Victor Considérant and Etienne Cabet are also utopic socialists, but their views are more moderate[[170]](#footnote-170).

The most influential thinker of these social movements is *Claude-Henry de Rouvroy, count of Saint-Simon (1760-1825)*. For Saint-Simon modern science will offer mankind a new social organisation that will carry out the ideals of the Revolution. Saint-Simon proposed a society ruled by technicians and scientists, where conflicts would be solved in a rational manner. He stated that there are laws necessary to develop historical societies. Modern science will finally replace theology and metaphysics in the primary role the latter two had in centuries past. The future belongs to industry, the axis of the new society. The new social structures will be peaceful, given that the interests of industrial capitalists and workers are essentially the same. In the last stage of his career he proposed a “new Christianity” that would work as social cohesion force once cleared of ecclesiastical forms. Besides the interest that Saint-Simon’s theories may have, he had an important role in the history of philosophy, because he was the teacher of August Comte, the father of modern positivism.

The reason for the adjective “utopic” in these initial socialists is Marx. He studied these doctrines carefully, and he is known to have respect for Saint-Simon. But he thought that society’s structural change could not happen without a violent revolution. To think that rich and poor could have the same interests was utopic. Nonetheless, he shared with these socialists the vision of society being ruled by necessary laws, and the economic foundation of social structures. Marx will be proud of his “scientific” socialism, in contrast to these utopic attempts, although he cannot forget that his Marxist project also has an important utopic component, and his cultural indebtment to Saint-Simon, precisely in applying to his socialism the name scientific.

The thinking of *Pierre Proudhon (1809-1865)*, who was one of the first anarchists, is contemporaneous with utopic socialists. The Frenchman wanted to replace the political structures of society - that is, the State - with an association of small owners, who would build an egalitarian society on the basis of free contracts. Proudhon’s ideal was a society with no authoritarian and centralized government of any kind. The dominant idea in politics was the free contract: distributive justice vanishes, and only commutative justice remains. Such society will change eternally, because anarchy - that is the disappearance of the State - is a mythical symbol that must unite men with a view to bring about this revolutionary ideal. Marx thinks that Proudhon’s anarchism is the ideological manifestation of the small bourgeoisie, and dedicates to it a critical book: *The Misery of Philosophy*.

The Russian *Mijail Bakunin (1814-1876)* was the other man who inspired modern anarchism. His doctrine of anarchism was to take the anthropological premises of liberalism to their last consequences: if man is mainly absolute freedom, we must remove from society any institution or sign of authority that could be an obstacle for the exercise of freedom without limits. For Bakunin the idea of God was the absolute denial of human freedom. Yet, Satan “was a true model for mankind, and he had achieved this position through a very conscious act of insubordination”[[171]](#footnote-171).

Industrial workers, set up in democratic trade unions, will carry the social revolution forward, which will do away with all authority. Revolutionary general strikes will be a preferred weapon of trade union anarchism. But above all terrorism will be the method to impose anarchic points of view. In the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century many died in assassination attempts: the Russian Tsar Alexander II, the French President Sadi Carnot, the Spanish Prime Minister Cánovas del Castillo, the President of the United States William McKinley, Sissy, the wife of the emperor Francis Joseph of Austria, the king of Italy, and so on.

Anarchism and Marxism will oppose each other in the workers’ movement of that period. Initially the trade unions were clandestine organisations, but later they were recognized by several liberal governments in Europe and America. Where anarchists advocated violent revolution and absence of internal hierarchy in the workers’ unions, Marxists thought that strategy was necessary to take over political power, and this required a rigid structure to rule the trade unions. On the other hand, anarchists wanted to do away with political power immediately, and thus eliminate the need for a dictatorship of the proletariat, which was a Marxist tenet.

To complete the picture, *Ferdinand Lasalle (1825-1865)* proposed a socialism diametrically opposed to anarchism. He proposed a State socialism: revolution is not necessary to achieve a socialist society, but the union of all workers is. Only the State could create such union. His theories clearly show the influence of Hegelian political doctrine. He will have an influence on the British labour movement through his disciple Richard Wagner. Marx would criticize Wagner in his book *The German Ideology*.

### 4. Karl Marx

#### a) Life and works

Karl Marx was born in Trier on May 5, 1818, to Jewish parents of middle-class standing. In 1824 he was baptized into the Lutheran church, along with his seven siblings. His father’s decision to baptize them was due primarily to Prussian legislation, which only allowed Lutherans to practice the liberal professions. From 1830 to 1835 he was a brilliant student at the Lyceum of Trier, where he received a humanist education in an Enlightened environment. His father had already given him a complete education in Rousseau, Voltaire, and Diderot. In 1836 he moved to Bonn to study law, but the following year he went to Berlin, where he attended the lectures of Von Savigny, one of the fathers of the historical school of jurisprudence. In those years he began to read the works of Hegel. There he discovered his philosophical calling and came in contact with the young Hegelians, including the Bauer brothers. An indifferent university student, he defended his thesis, titled *The Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*,in Jena in 1841.

After graduation, Marx tried to obtain a university chair alongside Bruno Bauer, but the latter was persecuted because of his political ideas. Marx therefore devoted himself to journalism, editing the *Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne. But the newspaper was shut down due to political issues. In 1843 he married Jenny von Westphalen, with whom he would have six children; three of them died prematurely. Three daughters survived him. He was remembered as a loving father and husband.

The same year he was married, he wrote *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Political Right.* He then travelled to Paris. In the French capital he came into contact with several socialist movements, and with the help of Arnold Ruge he became the editor the *Franco-German Annals*. In 1844, he published *Contribution to the Critique of Hegelian Philosophy of Law* and *On the Jewish Question*. In Paris he met Engels, and a good friendship developed between them.[[172]](#footnote-172) In 1845, together with Engels, he wrote *The Holy Family*, directed against Bruno Bauer and his companions. He also penned his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* which would be published in 1932. In 1845 *The German Ideology* and *Theses on Feuerbach* came out. These works were written in Brussels, where Marx had to retreat after being expelled from France for political reasons. The subtitle of *The German Ideology* is *CRITIQUE of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer, and Stirner,* and *German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets.*

In 1846 he broke with Proudhon, one of the fathers of anarchism. As a response to the book *The Philosophy of Poverty* by the Frenchman, Marx published his *Poverty of Philosophy* in 1847. During this time, Marx would come to join the League of Communists, to whom he gave the slogan “Working Men of All Countries, Unite!” In 1848, along with Engels, he published a small book, at the request of the League's Second Congress, that became iconic: *The Communist Manifesto*. In that year he returned briefly to Paris, then moved on to Vienna. In 1849 he moved permanently to London, due to political changes in continental Europe. He wrote many works while in England. Among the most important are *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859; *The Capital*, 1867 (supplemented by Engels between 1885 and 1894); *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 1875, and various articles for newspapers in the United States, in particular the New York *Herald Tribune*. His journalistic work helped him to cope with his family's pressing economic needs.

From London, Marx would participate in the setting up of the *First International Association of Workers* (the *1st International*). As an executive of that association he would lead the struggle against departures from “socialist orthodoxy.” His attacks were directed primarily against the anarchists Proudhon and Bakunin and against the socialism of the German Lasalle. The 1872 congress, held in The Hague, decided to expel the anarchists and relocate the International's headquarters to New York.

After 1873, Marx led a life of retirement from these outside commitments, and he continued to work on *The Capital*. He died in London on March 14, 1883, and was buried in the Highgate Cemetery.

#### b) Dialectical and historical materialism

According to F. Ocáriz, “Marx dealt with three main elements: Hegelian and post-Hegelian philosophy, socialism, and economic science, which were presented as three separate currents, despite the fact that they were interrelated. By contrast, Marx would have to find their unity: philosophy, politics, and economics had to be all of a cloth; that is, a philosophy (materialism) in which the intimate structure of reality was economic and would necessarily lead to socialism.”[[173]](#footnote-173) To carry out this enterprise, Marx would have to undertake a profound philosophical, political, and economic critique. As a proper Hegelian—at least in this regard—Marx uses the dialectical method. The best term we can use to refer to this undertaking is *revolution*: it's not a matter of criticizing a few principles in the abstract, but rather of transforming the human circumstances that these principles have given rise to.

Following Hegel’s footsteps, Marx looks at reality as a whole, which evolves historically under the force of an internal dynamic, similar to the Hegelian dialectic. But unlike Hegel, for Marx the nature of reality is purely material. Marx's materialism is dialectical, because this is the underlying explanation for the individual moments within a total process, seen as a struggle between opposites. In contrast to what Hegel imagined, for Marx the *thesis* and the *antithesis* are real and enduring moments, while the *synthesis* is the ideal: that is unreal and abstract. As a result of the elimination of the ideal or rational side of the Hegelian system, the dialectic that governs the internal dynamic of the Marxist whole has been stripped of the synthesis as the climax. In this way Marx inverted the hierarchy of the three moments of the dialectic movement postulated by his teacher. This last fact is shown clearly in the role that the family, society, and the state play in the philosophy of the two different thinkers. For Hegel, family and civil society are two transitory moments—and as such, abstract—which are superseded by and subsumed by the State: the real incarnation of the spirit. In contrast, for the revolutionary philosopher from Trier, family and society are two real and historical subjects in permanent juxtaposition, while the State is an ideal structure built *above* this real dialectic relationship.

Thus, Marx retains only a part of the Hegelian system, which had already been transformed by Feuerbach into materialism, and eliminates Logic as the science of the absolute spirit: only man and nature remain. But our philosopher would also depart from Feuerbach: Marx is a practical thinker. We must transfer the critique of pure theory (as his German predecessors had done, including the Hegelian left) to praxis, so that it may become a tool that can transform social reality. Thus, Marx turns Feuerbach's theoretical materialism into practical materialism.

According to Marx, man is only matter, and as such his activity is only material, sensible, an activity that transforms nature. The practical nature of this materialism is shown in how reality is constituted fundamentally by the effects of human action. In this sense, man's relationship with nature is not passive-contemplative but rather active-transformative. The mediating element between man and nature is labour, through which man produces the articles required to meet his needs. However, in transforming nature, man makes himself the object of his own action: in reshaping nature, man makes himself. The fruits of labour are the objectification of human nature. Thus, reality reveals itself to us as the historical result of a transformation of the material circumstances of human life, and not as pure material nature (Feuerbach). Therefore, Marx can say that “the so-called universal history is but the production of man through human labour, nature's genesis through man.”[[174]](#footnote-174)

In this way, Marx has reduced man to *homo economicus*. That is, what man *is*, is determined by the material conditions of the production of the means of subsistence. Man's consciousness—his manner of understanding himself and interpreting his relations with the world—is a *superstructure* produced by the socioeconomic *structures* of each period. As Engels writes in the foreword to *The Communist Manifesto*, “economic production and the social adjustment that is necessarily derived from it in each period are the basis for the political or intellectual history of the same period.” In other words, man's world view in a concrete historical society is the ideal expression of the economic structures that govern relationships between the elements of that society.

From his earliest writings, Marx criticises the state of *alienation* that man finds himself in: it is the real, concrete, material man—that of Feuerbach—and not the Objective Spirit—as Hegel held—that is alienated. This term suggests that man is violently stripped of his most genuine being: the fruits of his labour. The cause of this alienation is found in the economic *structures* that uphold society, and more specifically in the relations of production, which historically have been based on private property.

The capitalist or privatised socioeconomic *structure* is the root foundation of the *superstructure*, and can be identified with the different levels or different manifestations of human alienation, such as religion, philosophy, the state, class divisions. If the structure is, at its base, economic, the superstructural alienations may clothe themselves in the appearance of the spiritual, but in reality they are the effect of a single cause, grounded in the existence of private property. The entire Marxist system of thought is aimed at the elimination of the causes of alienation in the hope of creating the new man, redeemed from socioeconomic injustices.

This radical materialism is the skeleton of the Marxist view of history. Such a vision is simple and progressive: in society, there are two antagonistic classes, owners and proletarians. “The history of each hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (*The Communist Manifesto*). The proletariat is destined to save mankind from its alienations, and a communist paradise without classes will be established through the revolution.

#### c) Critique of religious alienation

Although Marx was not born an atheist, it takes only a superficial analysis to realize that a critique of religion runs throughout his work. Moreover, we can say that one of his main objectives is to get past the problem of God at its root: in the world without frontiers that Marxist reasoning posits, there is no room for supernatural, imaginary, or individual beings.

In this regard, Marx's thought shows the profound influence of Feuerbach's ideas: God is a mirage, and man is raised until he is turned into a divine supreme being. Now it is a matter of asserting man's self-mastery, but not through denial, but rather from the reality of the man himself. The Marxist dialectic supersedes the moment of God's denial. What remains after the denial of the denial is the mere affirmation of man. In a socialist society, there is no room for God: there is no room even to raise the question of God. It is one of the boldest assertions that would ever be made in the history of philosophy: to move from a *negative* atheism, which depends on the denial of God, to a *positive* atheism, which is based on the affirmation of man. Maurice Clavel has graphically expressed this atheism using a phrase that is all-encompassing, and therefore, somewhat restrictive: “Insert a complete hatred for God into a young Hegelian, and there you have Marx, the whole Marx.”[[175]](#footnote-175)

At first glance, it seems that religion is both cause and effect of socio-economic alienation. It is a cause, because it confirms injustice, dressing it up with a sacred halo. However, for Marx it is more an effect, given that if there were no injustice religion would not even exist either: “Religious misery is, at one and the same time, the *expression* of real misery and a *protest* against it. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is *the opium of the people.*”[[176]](#footnote-176) Therefore, it will be necessary to abolish religion as an illusory happiness, so that man can partake of real joy. We have to eliminate that which lays beyond the horizon and worry about the here and now.

Marx not only directed his criticism against the religious phenomenon in general: he specifically attacked Christianity for preaching slavery, despair, submission, etc. The final point of his critique of religious alienation is overwhelming: religions reflect socio-economic structures. The religious world, therefore, has no real consistency, it is only speculation. However, since religion is superstructural by nature, its disappearance will depend on changing socio-economic structures.

What does Marx say about two basic problems of life, death and the fact of having received our existence? They lead us to wonder about the limitations of man and they appear to contradict man’s absolute autonomy: Marx believes that man is a determinate and finite being, but that the species is not. In the survival of the species (*Gattung*) we rediscover man's inclination towards the infinite. As regards the limitation inherent in the fact of having a received existence, Marx considers it necessary to abolish the idea of *creation*. It should be replaced by the idea of a *generatio equivoca* (equivocal generation). There is no parent-children chain, but only a circular motion of man-nature: man, in this sense, produces himself.

#### d) Critique of philosophical alienation

Philosophical alienation is the second alienation. Marx, when he refers to philosophy, usually thinks about Hegelian philosophy and Hegel's immediate followers. What happens with this philosophy? It radically separates theory and praxis. In the Hegelian system “the history of consciousness is smuggled in, as if it were the real story.”[[177]](#footnote-177) The Hegelian interpretation of history is the work of speculative imagination, the philosopher's capacity to represent, but it is not actual history. The Hegelian left had continued along this line of thought and remained in the world of ideas. Insofar as it is separated from the material world, such philosophy is a cause of alienation. That is why Marx says that Feuerbach made a great contribution to “the proof that philosophy is nothing other than religion rendered into thought and expounded by thought, i.e., another form of alienation of the human being, equally to be condemned” (*Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole*, in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 1844).

Philosophy should serve the cause of liberation from alienation, rather than simply interpreting or contemplating man. It is easy to understand Marx when he states on his *Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach* that “philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; what matters is to *change* it”.[[178]](#footnote-178) With this attitude, it is clear that he departs from the traditional concept of philosophy: there is no room for contemplation, and theory turns into revolutionary praxis to eliminate private property. A new reality must be built based on the knowledge of reality, through revolution. That is why there is no theoretical objective truth; rather, truth is made through practice. In his *Second Thesis on Feuerbach*, Marx writes, “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth — i.e., the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in *practice*. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely a *scholastic* question”.

#### e) Critique of political alienation

If we move down one step in the levels of alienation, we will discover that the State is the apparatus of oppression that guarantees society's division into classes. In the Hegelian state, the sovereignty of the people is not the same as the arbitrary sovereignty of the State constitution. There is a separation between social life and political life, and the bourgeois institutions exist to serve the wealthy and the oppressors. We must supersede this alienation. Marx foresees the demise of the State, but only after a period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which should last until the task of destroying any links of domination has been accomplished. “Political emancipation is at the same time the *dissolution* of the old society, in which the essence of the State is alienated (separated) from the people, the sovereign power” (*On the Jewish Question*).

#### f) Critique of social alienation

Social alienation consists, fundamentally, in society's division into classes: there are two classes, the capitalists, the rich, and the dispossessed, identified in the historical circumstances of the liberal bourgeois society with the industrial proletariat. The root cause of this division is private property, the foundation of the capitalist system.

The revolution will eliminate class division. When the proletariat achieves the maturity needed to launch the political struggle against the bourgeoisie, the end of the bourgeoisie shall be declared: “The working class, in the course of its development, will replace the old civil society with an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society. Meanwhile the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution” (*Poverty of Philosophy*).

The social revolution that will abolish the distinctions between classes will be effective only to the extent that it eliminates the cause of that alienation: private property. We can now look at the final alienation—economic.

#### g) Critique of economic alienation

Marx devoted a good deal of space to a critique of classical political economy, although he would take many elements from it, such as the theory of value. Our philosopher believed that the capitalist system—based on private property—was dialectically destined to disappear through the opposite that it engenders: the proletariat. This was an assertion of *scientific* socialism, which Marx would try to explain in his works.

According to Marx, the worker, when he works, does not work for himself: his activity belongs to someone else: the capitalist. If this is already a manifestation of man's alienation, we must add that industrial labour is actually an artificial and forced type of labour: the worker does not work to satisfy a natural need, but rather works to meet the needs of others. From a strictly economic point of view, according to the theory of value that Marx derived from some British economists, such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, labour is a commodity's source of value. When the capitalist pays a wage for the worker's hours of labour, and then sells the product at a price higher than the salary, a robbery takes place: if the merchandise is worth more, it is because of the worker's contribution to the final product. This is the so-called theory of *surplus value*, through which the capitalist is enriched by the exploitation of workers.

For Marx, the logic of the capitalist system is destined to self-destruct. Capital, through the systematic theft of surplus value, tends to accumulate and concentrate in the hands of the few. This is how society's proletarisation begins: the capitalist has ever more money to invest in the workforce, which increases the number of workers. “As the number of capitalist magnates, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, decreases, the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation grows; but the revolt of the working-class also grows, a class always increasing in numbers, disciplined, united, and better organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter for mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Eventually, centralization of the means of production and socialization of labour reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. It is the death knell of capitalist private property. The expropriators are expropriated.”[[179]](#footnote-179)

The regime of private property is at the root of all the evils of the real man. In such a system, man does not make himself. His life belongs to another. Therefore, “the positive abolition of private property in so far as it is an appropriation of human life is, therefore, the positive abolition of all alienation, namely the return of man to himself, who, abandoning religion, State, etc., shall once again find his true human existence, that is, his social existence.”[[180]](#footnote-180) To accomplish the abolition of the system of private property, Marx uses the notion of the proletariat, the social working class, whose material base is apt for the revolution. Since the working class is enslaved and, therefore, is nothing, it can turn itself into a being dialectically, and can become the main character of history.[[181]](#footnote-181)

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The ideological nature of Marx's thinking is manifested in its view of history with all the power of substitution. Ideologies fulfill the role of replacing religion: Marx's very choice of words, using terms like *sin, misery, redemption,* and *paradise,* clearly demonstrates the substitute nature of ideology, understood as a kind of secular religion. According to Dawson, Marxism is the ideology that has most strongly insisted on the purely scientific, and not religious, nature of its doctrine. At the same time, it is the ideology that owes most to the messianic elements of the Jewish and Christian traditions. In fact, it is an apocalyptic doctrine, a damnation of the existing social order and a message of salvation for the poor and the oppressed, who are promised retribution in a classless society, Marx's equivalent to the millennial reign of equity.[[182]](#footnote-182)

But at the same time, this aspect of Marxism—that is, the hope for a free and just future—can be bewildering to anyone who wishes to find internal consistency in the system. If class struggle is the engine of history, will history come to a stop after the revolution? If so, is the communist paradise to be found in a place beyond history? It seems that two incompatible moments seek to cohabit in Marx's theory of history: the apocalyptic element of the end of history, inherited from the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the need for dialectics as an intrinsic law of human events, retained from the Hegelian tradition. The apocalyptic element wins out over the dialectic, thereby setting up Marx's theory of history as another version of a modern secularised eschatology. However, instead of reaching the long-sought paradise, the various incarnations of a utopic ideology would show once more how an ideology is capable of creating hell on earth.

### 5. Neo-Marxisms and the social democratic movement

Thinkers and political leaders inspired by Marx have attempted to apply Marxist theory to changing circumstances of space and time (neo-Marxists), or have tried to add other elements to the Marxist orthodoxy (social democrats). We will briefly describe the main supporters of these two streams.

The most important political leader -also a political theorist- of the first stream mentioned is without a doubt *Vladimir Ilich Ulianov Lenin (1870-1924)*. He was the main character of the October Revolution, and had to develop some of Marx’s ideas to be able to address the historical circumstances of Russia in the early 20th century. Specifically, Lenin deals with three concepts that had not been considered in detail in Marxist thought: imperialism, the role of the communist party and the proletarian state.

According to Lenin, the Marxist prophesy that capitalism would disappear at the hands of the whole society becoming proletarian will eventually take place, but before it happens there will be a final stage of capitalism: imperialism. Lenin thinks that the final stage of the concentration of capital will be an international affair, where the Western capitalist powers will unite to find new markets in the countries already colonized. The class struggle will become an international war between the bourgeois countries, capitalist and oppressor, against the colonized countries. In this way he opened a door for a rapport between the universal Marxist ideology and the movements of national liberation that would become a reality in the process of de-colonization in the 20th century.

The second concept refers to the role of the communist party. In theory, if Marx was followed to the letter, an assessment of the relations of production would be enough to steer the revolution, which would have started almost spontaneously. Some Marxists (Plekhanov, Rosa Luxemburg, Kautski) severely criticised Lenin’s position, because he thought that the voluntary decision and the quasi military organisation of the party could replace the lack of awareness of the proletarian masses or the incomplete maturity of the social situation. For Lenin the party is the frontline of the proletariat, its conscience, and it holds the position that the masses would have to hold, according to the former. The soviet communist party would be heavily centralized, with no internal oppositions, and with a quasi-military structure.

The third element we want to highlight is the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The party must take over the State, in order to destroy any relations of domination, and put it at the service of the proletariat. Alienations must be removed through collectivism, the struggle against religion and bourgeois ways of thinking; later, setting up a kind of direct democracy that would prevent the risk of the bureaucratization typical of the bourgeois state. However, this second role of the dictatorship of the proletariat never eventuated.

After Lenin’s death, two figures catch our interest: *Stalin (1897-1953)* and *Trotsky (1879-1940)*. The latter, who was defeated in the power struggle, and assassinated in Mexico under Stalin’s instructions, is the great supporter of the permanent revolution. According to Trotsky it is a matter of making the revolution an international affair until it becomes a world affair. This international approach was immediately shown to be useless in view of the social-economic circumstances throughout Europe. Stalin, on the other hand, will impose his doctrine “socialism in a single country”. First the soviet communist system needs to be strengthened, and then proceed to conquer the world. Stalinism easily became a nationalism that followed the centuries old tendency of Russia towards world domination. Stalinism is also the darkest side of communism: repression, genocide, bureaucratization, militarism. According to Trotsky, in a book he wrote in exile -*The Revolution Betrayed*- Stalin carries out in the Russian revolution a role similar to Napoleon’s in the French Revolution (although the comparison is not fair to the Napoleonic regime, because it had much greater respect for human dignity).

*Mao Tse Tung (1893-1976)* followed a different path. According to the Marxist principles, the circumstances in China were not appropriate for the proletarian revolution. Mao replaced the proletarians, virtually non-existent in his country, with the farmers. He borrowed Lenin’s theory of imperialism, and managed to unite the nationalist bourgeois forces and the peasants against Japanese imperialism. Once the foreign enemy was defeated, Mao would quickly walk the path towards communism, with a rigidly structured communist party, and an ideological based army, that had the role to link the party and the mass of peasants. Maoism was the Chinese way of communism, a mixture of Marxism and Nationalism.

Where Lenin, Stalin and Mao were practical politicians, Western Europe developed a theoretical, intellectual Marxism, and modified it to fit the prevailing socio-political circumstances. Within this context the man who had the greatest influence was *Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)*, one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party. Gramsci thought that there should be a revolutionary strategy specific for Western Europe. If the State was everything in Russia, because society had never developed, the social superstructure was very important in Europe. Therefore, it was not a matter of taking over the State to dominate society, but rather to conquer society in order to take over the State. Intellectuals needed to be conquered ideologically, particularly through schools which had replaced the Church, because the intellectuals are the most effective at disseminating ideas. The university, the judiciary, art, must become Marxist. The intellectuals must break away from political power in order to become bearers of the change in values.

Gramsci inherited Renaissance humanism, French Jacobinism and the Enlightenment. Combining them with Marxist materialism he set up a philosophy of immanence. More specifically, Gramsci stated that “the philosophy of praxis presupposes this cultural past: Renaissance, Reformation, German philosophy and the French revolution, Calvinism and the English classic economy, lay liberalism, and historicism found at the base of any modern understanding of life. The philosophy of praxis is the crowning of all this movement of intellectual and moral reformation”. For Gramsci the central core of Marxism is to be a religion of immanence. Any manifestation of a transcendent view of man is the enemy of the Marxist idea and has to be defeated. Capucci thus defines Gramscianism as “a revolution against transcendence”[[183]](#footnote-183).

Gramsci put forward a synthesis of Marxist atheism and bourgeois atheism -which we studied in the chapter on the Enlightenment-. The instrument to set up the civilization of immanence is the Communist Party, which Gramsci called the modern Prince (he was an admirer of Machiavelli). Following Machiavellian ethics, any means for Gramsci are acceptable if they lead to achieving the end, and the end is to carry out the cultural revolution. The party determines the values that will be useful to contribute to the full secularisation of social life and mores. However, the party does not only inspire a new immanent culture, it is also its executor. Analogously to the groups of thinkers of the French Enlightenment, there should be within the communist party a cultural elite to impose immanent viewpoints on the masses. It is a matter of developing a new “common sense”, devoid of any Christian tradition. Any measure that leads to immanence will be called *modern, progressive and democratic*. And the components of any transcendent outlook will be anathematized with the words *old, reactionary and fascist*.

Many political and economic aspects of the Marxist totalitarian system disappeared following the fall of the soviet empire. But insofar as it is a materialistic and immanentist ideology, Gramscian Marxism has managed to breathe life into a laicist, radical culture, that even today prevails in vast sectors of western society[[184]](#footnote-184).

This was the path that many followed in western Europe, and social democrats managed to achieve political power in many countries around the world. The founder of social democracy was *Eduard Bernstein (1850-1923)*, who undertook a revision of Marxist doctrine. Marx’s economic prophesies are not true, and the dialectic approach prevents seeing things as they really are. The absence of domination of classes can be achieved through the democratic processes of liberal countries. Social-democratic parties must gain power by winning at the ballot box, not by violence. Democracy works towards reconciling classes and superseding them. Democracy is thus both a means and end. Bernstein will the spokesman of a Kantian humanistic vision, that will provide a breath of fresh air to the sealed immanentism of orthodox Marxism.

Several democratic socialist systems grew in the 20th century - for instance British labour and Scandinavian socialism - that abandoned their Marxists roots, although they maintained a world view that is not compatible with Christianity, mainly because of economism. As we have already mentioned, the acknowledgement of the positive role of private property and free individual initiative have brought them closer to some neo-liberalisms, and so blurring the rigid ideological barriers of the 19th century.

### 6. Ideas become realities

In his books Chekhov describes at length the difficult social situation of the final years of Russia under the Tsars. Poor peasants who fight for survival, political corruption and sheer poverty are the main characters in his novels. In a short story of 1892, *Ward Number 6*, this great writer puts on the lips of Gromov, a madman with a persecution complex, a song of hope for the future of Russia: “Yes, there will be better times, yes there will be. You may think that this is ridiculous, but listen: a day will be born on earth when truth will be victorious, the poor, the humble, the persecuted, the disgraced will reach the happiness they deserve and now do not have. I may not be there, but it matters not: I rejoice in thinking that future generations will be happy, and I welcome them wholeheartedly: Forward, my friends! May God protect you, unknown friends of a faraway future!”[[185]](#footnote-185) Chekhov did not see the end of Tsarism nor the victory of the revolution that was supposed to bring about that happiness.

This book is about the history of contemporary ideas, but it would be confusing not to mention some practical consequences of the ideas that have revolutionized our contemporary world. Communism and Nazism are a case in point. If the racist ideology of Hitler caused the death of millions of Jews and was the principal cause of military and civilian deaths in the Second World War, the ideal, classless paradise of communist society was in fact linked to terror, violence, and in the worst cases, to genocide.

According to Leninist-Marxist theory, the dictatorship of the proletariat would have been a temporary period of destruction of bourgeois society, a prior and necessary step to set up the classless communist society. Studying the historical facts of the countries that attempted to institute such dictatorship draws the following conclusion: Marxism-Leninism, unless it remains in the sphere of abstract theory, must make use of violence to impose its views on any specific society. The disappearance of the bourgeois class requires a committed class struggle, and this involves necessarily existential dramas, poverty and death.

Recent studies show that communism has taken the lives of one hundred million victims while in power between 1917 and 1989. Writing an exhaustive list of the crimes committed by the communist regimes would be far too long. Suffice it to recall the security police set up by Lenin, the embryo of the future KGB; the policy of dekulakization (struggle against the peasants) and the annihilation of the Cossacks, initiated by Lenin and continued by Stalin; the purges within the Soviet Communist Party; the religious persecution against the Orthodox Church and against any religious display; the famine and poverty caused by blind economic policies, that caused six million deaths in the Soviet Union; the paranoia of the Great Terror (1936-1938), where the massive deportation of millions of citizens of different nationalities in the Soviet Union combined with the proliferation of concentration camps, where hundreds of thousands of “counterrevolutionary elements” died or barely survived. Stalin’s disappearance changed the panorama of repression in the Soviet Union and satellite countries (there were 20 million deaths during the Lenin-Stalin period), but the basic human rights were systematically denied: freedom of religion, opinion and travel. The closed universe of this social utopia crumbled in the 90s due to the pile-up of numerous blameworthy mistakes of an economic, political, and military nature. Above all however it fell due to anthropological blindness, by failing to realise that the human person is something more than the *homo oeconomicus* that Marxism holds him to be.

Repression, terror and paranoid violence would be even worse in the Asian communist countries. Mao Tse Tung is possibly the historical person who has caused the most deaths in the 20th century (it is thought that 6.5 million people died during his regime). There is a history of violence and oppression in China’s history, side by side with a culture of millennia of high values. But there was no precedent for such inhumane violence, with no apparent reason. If in Lenin’s Russia the revolutionaries were industrial workers, in China it was the peasants who carried out the revolution that would demolish their own children. Mao fostered war among factions in the little villages, the opposition between the land and the cities, the war against intellectuals, and in the cultural Revolution of the 1960s, against culture itself. Being a good pupil of Stalin, Mao added an oriental touch to the “re-education camps” for the Chinese counterrevolutionaries modelled after the GULAG archipelagos of his Russian master. The death of Mao in 1976 improved things to a certain extent, but the systematic violation of human rights persists. The death of one thousand people who protested against the regime in Tiananmen Square in 1989 shows that there is a long way to go before the end of the tunnel.

Mao takes the record of victims in absolute terms, but Pol Pot wins the macabre competition: the *Khmer Rouge* murdered a third of Cambodia’s population in the 1970s. These are real nightmares, still present in Kim il Sung II’s North Korea, that together with Viet-nam and Cuba have survived a tragic utopia that resists its demise.[[186]](#footnote-186)

## VIII SCIENTISM

In the preceding chapters we referred to the Enlightenment and Romanticism, two apparently opposed cultural movements; however, they shared the same immanentist root. From the impulse of the Enlightenment, which placed scientific reason and the scientific progress that would follow from it at the core of its world view, there were great developments in experimental sciences in the first half of the 19th century, at the time when Romanticism was at its peak. Some revolutionary discoveries - Laplace, Dalton, Thompson, Davy, Carnot, Wöhler, Von Baer, etc. - in the fields of astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology gave a new vision of the universe, of the laws of nature and of living structures. There is no doubt that these discoveries showed progress in a positive sense, not a reductionist approach: the ever-deeper knowledge of nature belongs to the project that God has for man. From the point of view of our concern - the history of ideas - we are not so much interested in the progress of experimental sciences themselves, but in the interpretations of such progress that have been made a posteriori, and their influence in historical attitudes.

When we talk about scientism we mean an ideology. We have talked at length about the most important political ideologies of Modernity: Liberalism, Nationalism and Marxism. Scientism is not a political ideology, but rather a reductive view of man: scientific progress is the starting point, from which it attempts to provide the ultimate explanation of reality. We are not talking about a scientific matter, but a philosophical and ideological issue. In other words, scientism pretends to reach beyond science itself, and provide a complete interpretation of man’s destiny. In so far as it is reductive and comprehensive, it can be defined as an ideology. In addition, portraying the progress of mankind as a rational faith in a happy and just future for all men shows clearly the replacement factor, typical of any ideology.

I feel it is useful to set down the links between scientism and the political ideologies we have studied so far. No doubt the progress of experimental sciences confirms the pride that accompanies a liberal worldview of man’s autonomy. Dominion over nature was an extension of individual freedom; it led to making man the lord of the universe, not so much in the biblical sense, but as a manifestation of the liberal view of man being his own foundation. Various ideological readings of studies in biology reached pseudo-scientific racist conclusions. We have already seen how they were used by some types of Nationalism, and became the grounds to justify European and North American expansionism. Finally, by looking at man simply as a part of nature, the subject of physical and biological processes like any other animal species, became a good culture medium for the materialistic and atheist worldview of Marxism.

It looks easy to find a close *liaison* between Scientism and the Enlightenment. Both ideologies have the same core concepts: scientific reason as the only valid way to reach the truth, with the resulting reduction of religious faith and of sentiment, and the belief that material progress is the ultimate end of mankind. For the same reasons it is easy to look at Scientism as an alternative to Romanticism. In conclusion, we could say that the cultural panorama of the 19th century is highlighted by three currents: the Enlightenment in the first half of the century, Romanticism as the opposition to cold rationalism until 1848, and towards the end of the century, scientism or positivism, which supersedes Romanticism and links back - intellectually - to the Enlightenment of the 18th century.

### 1. The positivism of Auguste Comte

#### a) Life and works

The most classic manifestation of nineteenth-century scientism is the positivism of the French philosopher *August Comte (1798-1857)*. He was born in Montpellier. Although he received a Catholic education at home, at the age of 14 he abandoned the faith of his parents. A student at the *École Polytechnique* he developed the idea of a society ruled by scientists. His contacts with Henri de Saint-Simon, for whom he worked as his secretary for several years, left a strong impression in his thought. Saint-Simon, in turn, was a disciple of Jean D’Alembert; this philosophical affiliation shows the ties that link positivism and the Enlightenment.

In 1826, after his break with Saint-Simon, Comte started to give lectures to a group of followers. The fruit of these lessons is the Frenchman’s most famous work: *Cours de philosophie positive* (*Course on Positive Philosophy,* 1830-1842). In 1844, Comte began a new phase in his thinking, during which he would develop his doctrine of the Humanist Religion. Some scholars believe that this return to religion is partially due to Comte’s love for Clotilde de Vaux. However, the most common opinion stresses the continuity between the two periods, and the reappearance of certain Saint-Simonian elements in the final stage of his philosophizing. In this period he published the *Système de politique positive* (*System of Positive Polity,* 1851-1854), among other works, and the *Cathéchisme positiviste* (*The Catechism of Positive Religion,* 1852). He died in 1857, supported financially by his followers.

#### b) Positive knowledge and the theory of the three stages

What did Comte mean by “positive knowledge”? It is a knowledge based on the observation of facts (phenomena) and the laws that describe their operation. In other words, Comte begins with a phenomenological conception of human knowledge, which limits its scope to only those facts that can be empirically verified. Consequently, natural sciences constitute *the* knowledge, while theology and metaphysics have no scientific basis, because their attempts to go beyond empirical knowledge are futile[[187]](#footnote-187). In his *Discourse on the Positive Spirit*, Comte said, “Any proposition that is not ultimately reducible to the simple enunciation of a fact, whether particular or general, would not make any real intelligible sense.”[[188]](#footnote-188)

Having set forth what Comte means by the adjective “positive,” we can understand better his philosophy of history, because the theory of the three stages of human development is closely linked to this epistemological framework. According to Comte, in its historical development humanity runs through three phases or stages: theological, metaphysical, and positive. These stages are also those of the development of the individual soul, and therefore Comte’s theory of the three stages is presented as a necessary bio-psychological law. A famous passage from the *Cours de philosophie positive* reads: “Who among us, recalling his personal history, would not agree that he has been in turn … a *theologian* in his childhood, a *metaphysician* in his youth, and a *physicist* at maturity?”[[189]](#footnote-189) Comte intends to apply this clearly autobiographical observation to all individuals, but he mainly proposes it as a key to reading all of history.

The first stage of mankind's development, called theological, is characterized by the search for the root causes of the events; these causes are found in the will of personal superhuman beings: this is the age of the gods. This stage is divided into three periods: fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism. The theological stage is characterized by a social organization based on absolute authority, the divine right of kings, and a dominating militaristic presence as the hinge of society.

In the metaphysical stage, which follows the theological stage, the personal wills of superhuman beings are replaced by abstract metaphysical entities. The ultimate causes of events are explained in terms of “force,” “attraction and repulsion,” “ether,” etc. From a political point of view, the metaphysical stage is critical of the previous stage, and abstract principles are set as the foundation of the new order. Human rights, popular sovereignty, and the anonymous rule of law are raised against absolute authority.

If the first stage is “organic,” in other words, stable, the second stage is revolutionary and changeable. The history of mankind moves towards a new stable period: the positive stage, the realm of the scientific mindset. Neither mysterious divine will nor metaphysical abstractions provide answers to questions about the root causes of facts, because at this stage such questions are not asked. The human mind of the positive stage does not concern itself with essences or purposes, but rather devotes itself to explaining phenomena based on general laws, which are established through experimentation. Positive knowledge is real, certain, and useful. By establishing the laws of nature, man can predict the future and control the universe. The political manifestation of this final stage of mankind's development is an industrial society, ruled by scientists, who impose rational plans for social coexistence, thereby ensuring order and progress.

Comte places the theological stage in the times of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the metaphysical stage in the period between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and the positive stage in the middle of the 19th century. Notwithstanding the clear separation between the attitudes of the different stages of development, Comte realizes that some institutions and beliefs overlap the three stages, but he also believes that the development of science will result in the disappearance of theological and metaphysical holdovers.

#### c) The classification of the sciences

For Comte, science therefore assumes a leading role in social organization. In his *Cours de philosophie positive*, he lists the six basic sciences: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and finally sociology. Depending on the degree of complexity of their specific subject, these sciences have reached maturity at different times throughout history, passing through the three stages mentioned above. Already in Antiquity, mathematics was the first to reach the level of positive science —the science of quantity and magnitude—thanks to the work of the great mathematicians of ancient Greece (Euclid, Pythagoras, etc.). Astronomy, physics, chemistry, and finally biology, in that order, *came of age* with modernity and the birth of the scientific-experimental method, following a timeline that reflects the increasing complexity of the object of study. Unlike the others, sociology—the last of the sciences to join the team—is still fallible and uncertain, because it is still in the metaphysical stage: it is still talking about the rights of man and the will of the people in the abstract. It is necessary, therefore, to establish the positive bases for sociology.

Comte criticized the liberalism of his day, because of its tendency to build abstract concepts. Men must enter the positive stage through a change of mindset. Sociology must become “social physics”: it must make knowledge objective through experimentation and use its findings to set standards of behaviour and social interaction. In other words, sociology should follow the methods of other sciences—fundamentally, the observation of phenomena—to establish social norms and policies. It is a matter of applying the same spirit that astronomy or chemistry uses, but in this case to the observation of social phenomena.

Thus, Comte reduces man to be a natural being who responds to largely predictable universal laws. Therefore, political power, from a positivistic perspective, should rest with those people who know the laws of the highest science: sociology or “social physics.” This highest representative of positivism envisages a state which arbitrates and plans, ruled by scientists. This political model could be called “technocratic,” and its ultimate goal is no longer the abstract and metaphysical freedom sought by liberals, but rather scientific freedom, which was later translated into the words of the Brazilian flag, one of the homelands of positivism: “ordem e progresso” (order and progress).

#### d) Religion and morality

In his final philosophical phase, Comte introduced the theme of the religion of Humanity. There is another science above sociology, morality, which must rule the relations between men. Only a scientific understanding of human nature can establish fair moral standards. The progress of science will bring with it the religion of Humanity, in which love and solidarity are the supreme values. This positive religion will have temples, its own liturgy, and even saints. The great men—scientists, artists, benefactors of humanity—will take the place of the old Catholic saints[[190]](#footnote-190). Thus, humanity itself will overcome its own obstacles and will live in a joyful world, no longer guided by theological-metaphysical darkness, but by redemptive science.

Henri de Lubac has masterfully analysed the relationship between Christianity and Comte’s religion of Humanity. The French theologian emphasizes the atheistic nature of Comte’s religion, which replaces God with humanity. Comte’s apparently positive appraisal of Catholicism is actually the result of the philosopher’s inability to understand the Gospel. Comte believed that Catholicism, with its cult of the Virgin Mary and the saints, is closer than Protestantism to the religion he created. According to de Lubac, Auguste Comte did not understand human nature in all its depth and richness, and he did not realize that it is impossible to satisfy the soul’s thirst for transcendence with a god that is not transcendent, but only a whole of which we are a part.[[191]](#footnote-191)

### 2. Positivism in France

Comte’s positivism was continued by other French thinkers. They are not true disciples of the philosopher we have just studied, but they uphold a very similar worldview and a reductive scientist trend.

*Émile Littré (1801-1881)* started his intellectual itinerary as a disciple of Comte. But later he moved away because he felt that the teacher had forsaken positivism in view of his theories on philosophy of history and his idea that mankind was an Absolute that had to be worshiped. However, Littré asserts the “Comte has made a legitimate deduction by giving positive philosophy, of which he is the author, an equivalent role to that of religion”[[192]](#footnote-192), if we think of religion as a general view of the world. Littré’s statement confirms that Comte’s positivism is really an ideology.

The French physiologist *Claude Bernard (1813-1878)* shares many points of view with Comte, especially the idea that the experimental method was the only way to provide a true knowledge of reality. *Ernest Renan (1823-1892)* has the same opinion. He was a multifaceted man, and we have already quoted him in the chapter on Nationalism. Renan wrote a piece, *La vie de Jésus*, where he denied the divinity of Christ. As far as he was concerned, an enlightened man could not believe in God, “because he is a being that does not show himself through any act, he is a being that does not exist as far as science is concerned”[[193]](#footnote-193). Renan rejects the idea of a personal God, but under the influence of German idealism he thinks of the Absolute as the symbolic ideal of mankind’s moral sentiment. He also accepts a kind of metaphysics, sometimes identified with poetry. Renan’s thinking is somewhat chaotic and inconsistent, difficult to interpret. One thing remains clear for Renan: the knowledge of a personal God will never be true rational knowledge. The “scientific” reading of Holy Scripture - removing all supernatural content - will remain the more permanent inheritance of Renan.

Another interesting author is *Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893)*. He was a historian of literature and philosophy, but also the author of a large work, *Les origines de la France contemporaine*. He says that any historical fact can be understood by studying three determinant causes: time, environment and race. Thus he started a positivist historical tradition that put aside human freedom as the prime mover of history.

*Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)* and *Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939)* had a similar role to that of Taine in the field of sociology. The former maintained that sociology should study social facts with an empirical method. His sociological thinking reached the conclusion that individuals are coerced by society. Morals and religion are social forms imposed on individuals, and respond to the needs and usefulness of specific societies in history. Durkheim thinks that religion is merely a social fact. Religion’s purpose is to cohere society, and he sees the divinity as a transfiguration of society and its symbolic expression. Lévy-Bruhl is himself one of the first modern anthropologists, and affirms the radical difference between primitive society, where the principle of participation to an undetermined whole rules (ultimately stating that the primitive mind is pre-logical), rather than the principle of non-contradiction, and modern society, known for its scientific knowledge. In addition, he states that morals are always an ethical code specific to each society in history.

### 3. Biological evolutionism and social Darwinism

During the second half of the 19th century evolutionism would be an influential pseudo-philosophical trend, alongside positivism. Though the idea of organic transformation of species was not completely new, the publication of *Charles Darwin’s (1809-1882)* work spread the theory of natural selection, and the theories of Herbert Spencer made evolutionism well known.

Darwin was not a philosopher, but a medical doctor with an interest in biology. Between 1831 and 1836 he sailed around the globe on board the English ship *Beagle*. He had the opportunity to study the typical traits of animal species around the world. This prompted him to think about the possibility that the diversification he had observed in space could also take place over time.

Darwin had already formulated his biological theory in 1839, but did not publish anything until 1859 when his most famous book *On the Origin of the Species* came out; the first print run was sold out on the very day of publication. Darwin’s theory had many features of the theories proposed by Lamarck one hundred years earlier. A summary of his proposition would be as follows: every animal species, including man, evolves progressively, until it changes into another species. There are three basic laws of evolution: adaptation to the environment, that facilitates life and survival of the better suited species over those less suited; the natural selection that this primacy gives to the fitter members over those less fit, and the fight for survival, which means that at times of crisis the fittest destroy or devour the weaker. For Darwin these three laws confirm that transformation means improvement.

In 1871 Darwin published *The Descent of Man*. The topic of the origin of man, who supposedly descended from an ape, was a key factor to understand the rough struggle that scientists waged against revelation and faith. We must highlight that Darwin presented his theory with caution and prudence with regard to the opinions of others, and tried to stay away from any philosophical or theological dispute. But what he proposed as a scientific theory became a battle flag for militant positivists. For many Darwinians faith and science were incompatible, and the time had come to defeat once and for all the medieval theological darkness. In addition, the theory of evolution could be used in politics: the principle of natural selection (which for Darwin was a fundamental law of biology to be applied to the world of life sciences) became for some the key to interpret the history of human society. Racism and colonialism were simply manifestations of the struggle for life, and of the survival of the fittest; the fittest were the white men of Western culture.

*Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)* fashioned evolutionism into a philosophical system. His tone is mild, but this philosopher of the Victorian era creates a whole philosophical system based on the laws of evolution. Spencer never attended university, but he achieved a good level of knowledge in mathematics and biology thanks to his father’s help. In 1846 he decided to concentrate on philosophy. His main ideas are gathered in the voluminous books he wrote: *Principles of Biology (1847-1867), Principles of Psychology (1870-1872), Principles of Sociology (1877-1896) and Principles of Ethics (1892).* Taken together they become a complete philosophical system.

According to Spencer, all religions assert that the world is a mystery that demands an explanation. Science may know and explain many things, but it never reaches the intimate essence of reality. Ultimately, human knowledge is always relative, and does not remove the human inclination to predicate an unconditioned existence that can explain conditioned and limited existence. Spencer calls this undetermined existence the Unknowable. Religion declares that this world is the demonstration of something beyond our human knowledge, and science confirms this inability. However, the role of science throughout history has been to purge from religion its more coarse and crass elements.

We have another level of knowledge, besides religion and science: philosophy. In Spencer’s opinion, philosophy unifies and merges the limited knowledge of particular sciences. Experience is a non-unified knowledge, science is a partially unified knowledge and philosophy is a fully unified knowledge. The criterion of truth of any knowledge is its consistency: it is a matter of starting from basic intuitions, and assuming their veracity on a provisional basis, until their consistency is verified with the more general experiences of mankind.

The relationships established among real things provide the consistency of a worldview. Spencer establishes a number of physical and mathematical relationships, true laws of reality. Thus he reaches the ideas of space, time, matter and motion. The psychological analysis of these ideas leads to the conclusion that they are all based on the experience of a universal force. The more general and unifying law of the universe is the continuous redistribution of matter and movement; the persistence of some relationships between forces proves it. In the words of Spencer, *“*Evolution is a change from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity, to a definite, coherent heterogeneity, through continuous differentiations and integrations”[[194]](#footnote-194).

The universal law of the passage from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous is also applied to the history of human societies. Spencer often uses the analogy between biological organisms and society, but he tries to safeguard the freedom of the individuals: he envisages an evolution from homogeneous militarized societies to diversified industrial societies, which are thought to be the greatest expression of individual capabilities. Unlike Comte, Spencer remained a liberal thinker, and he held that the most evolved societies were those with the greatest individual freedom. This was the reason for his strong criticism of the English social reforms of the second half of the 19th century, because he said that free individual initiative rather than the State would bring about a fairer and more equitable world through the evolution of morality. Especially in political matters, Spencer tries to make a deterministic view of the universe compatible with the assertion of some moral values, such as individual freedom[[195]](#footnote-195).

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Scientism in the second half of the 19th century was a period of optimism. Between 1870 and 1900 scientific research made giant steps, but more importantly this period witnessed a technological revolution - which is none other than applied science - that changed the life of Western societies. If we can pick a difference between positivism as a doctrine and a “de facto” positivism, the entry of technology in daily life filled vast sectors of society with de facto positivism. A simple list of the main inventions of the late 19th century and early 1900’s would be enough to understand the impact they had in home life, work and international communications: 1851, mechanical reaper (McCormick); 1855, security lock (Yale); 1857, steel making process (Bessemer); 1858, sewing machine (Howe, Singer); 1859, oil combustion, propeller shaft (Ericsson); 1860, bitumen; 1861, matches (Lundström); pocket watch spring (Phillips); 1862, frequency converter (Siemens); 1864, typewriter (Scheller, Remington), pedal bicycle (Lallement, Meyer); 1865, refrigerator (Linde, Tellier), central heating; 1866, dynamite (Nobel); 1867, cement, reinforced concrete (Monier); 1869, electric motor (Gramme, Jacobi); 1870, electric oven (Siemens), celluloid, plastics (Hyatt); 1871, elevator (Otis); 1873, dynamo (Siemens); 1876; telephone (Graham Bell); 1877, ball bearings (Starley); 1879, electric light (Edison), 1880, Industrial ball bearings, electric lift (Siemens), phonograph (Edison); 1881, tramway (Siemens), chain driven bicycle; 1884, turbine (Parsons), linotype machine (Mergenthaler); 1886, internal combustion engine(Daimler), roll film (Eastman); 1887, alternator (Tesla), automatic telephone; 1889, rayon (Chardonnet), tires (Dunlop); 1890, blimp (Zeppelin); 1892, wireless telegraphy (Marconi), X-rays (Röntgen); 1896, cinematograph (Lumière), radioactivity (Becquerel); 1897, petrol engine; 1898, radium (Curie); 1900, lathe and drill (Taylor); 1902, airplane (Wright); 1906, wireless phone, broadcasting (Marconi)[[196]](#footnote-196).

Man’s dominion over nature coincides with the forceful European expansion, when nationalism becomes imperialism. It is not only a timely coincidence, because they are two aspects of the process that would glorify Western man, and filled him with Promethean security in a future progress without end: “Glory to man in the highest!; because man is the lord of all things”, was Swinburne’s song in 1871[[197]](#footnote-197).

However, the optimism of the turn of the century kept going during the years of the Belle époque in the early 20th century purely by inertia. But it held a deep contradiction within. On one hand, a happy future was forecast because of the progress of science and the universalization of Western culture. On the other, under the influence of evolutionism and materialistic scientism, man was thought to be one more element of the natural world. The First World War in 1914 would shatter the optimistic view of positivism and evolutionism to a certain extent. At the same time, the wretchedness and cruelty of war led some minds to confirm their view that men were only determined by biological laws of nature. Science itself would face its own crisis; however, this will be studied in Part III of this book.

### *4. Contemporary Scientism*

Scientist trends have found new vigour under the impulse of the impressive development of science and technology during the second half of the 20th century, coupled with the Marxist crisis and the self-dissolution of some central European philosophical trends. Strictly speaking, these trends have not created a school, but rather a diffuse culture, mentality or ideology. At present these elements make up a sort of prevailing philosophical “atmosphere” (at least in some environments). It appears to move into the 21st century with a sense of triumphalism, despite the serious anthropological problems it causes in the world: in fact, it is nothing more than a new technological naturalism without ethical boundaries.

Logical neo-positivism flourished in the 1920s and 1930s (Carnap, Wittgenstein in his initial period). Now it can be considered totally surpassed (mainly thanks to the criticism of Karl Popper). Neo-positivism’s central thesis was verificationism, a theory of knowledge which says that only statements verifiable through empirical observation are meaningful (Principle of verifiability). Physics is the only valid model to reach reality. Metaphysics (unverifiable) would be a linguistic nonsense, speaking in a vacuum, with no content. Philosophy should only be a linguistic reflection, and its purpose to “dissolve” every metaphysical expression (God, the soul, freedom, etc.) more effectively, and find the foundation of scientific propositions with metalogics and metamathematics (however, Wittgenstein admitted metaphysics as an ineffable intuition).

The problem with this approach is that not even science can provide true knowledge, because scientific truth, physical laws and causality, terms used by science, are metaphysical concepts. Neopositivist science places itself at the service of technology, and then becomes blind technology, simple human praxis with no understanding. The non-realistic interpretation of sciences, consistent with the criticism of metaphysics, is called instrumentalism. It coincides with pragmatic philosophy (according to which there is no theoretical truth, only human action). Many philosophers of science in the second half of the 20th century (Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, Feyerabend) have highlighted the (non-verifiable) metaphysical concepts that guide sciences and are their foundation. These concepts may appear in the shape of ideologies, preconceptions about the nature of the world, about the task and the value of science. Logical neo-positivism has been defeated, at least theoretically.

However, the idea of scientism and its approach endures, not so much as a developed philosophy, but as a somewhat prevalent mentality in schools, universities, public opinion, etc., partly due to science being popularised, often with scientist clichés. On the other hand, today’s philosophy is no longer transmitted exclusively in academic circles, as it was in the past, but in a non-systematic way, as blended ideology, in scientific explanations and in the mass media.

Modern techno-science has encountered boundaries in the 20th century, both metaphysical (the inability to be its own foundation), ethical (it can be used for evil purposes, when in the hands of irresponsible people, as shown by the arms race and the use of nuclear energy for war purposes), and ecological (it can cause harm to the planet, ecosystems and organisms, sometimes beyond solution). The need for external control (anthropology, ethics, politics) gives the lie to scientist ideology. On the other hand, the development of natural sciences (cosmology, new areas in physics, biology) has introduced a new broad, non-systematic approach to the philosophy of nature, which has obvious implications for new forms of metaphysics and natural theology.

The progress of biotechnology and computer science, research on artificial intelligence, and the evolutionary theories of nature have led to new approaches in naturalist and materialist philosophy and provide scope for a technocratic theory; according to these new approaches future technologies will be able to solve all human problems and even create a more perfect human species, whose function would be to dominate the universe. Clearly, these ideas are in the domain of science-fiction, but they point to a resurgence of the Enlightenment.

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In 1935 Christopher Dawson took stock of the secularisation that resulted from ideological Modernity. He looked especially at political ideologies, and made the point that they were substitute religions. Although they kept some features of Christian tradition, the spiritual forces of ideological Modernity became the core of the revolt against transcendence. Nationalism draws from Christianity the mystical concept of the nation as a spiritual unity, but when its transcendent origin is taken away it becomes a principle of hatred and destruction; liberalism borrows the humanitarian and idealist spirit and its faith in progress, but idealising humanitarianism replaces Christian faith in the divine order, and leads to making secular society the ultimate end of man; socialism draws from the Judeo-Christian tradition the passion for social justice and defence of the rights of the poor and destitute, but this passion became the strength to promote the struggle of communism against religion, and the foundation of atheistic socialism that leaves no room for human rights and spiritual freedom[[198]](#footnote-198).

If secularisation is perceived as the absolute autonomy of man, what else is left? According to the English historian, the religious features of the ideologies vanished in the process of secularisation: “society is left to its own devices, without faith and without hope to support it, and man is faced squarely with the vanity of human existence and the poverty of any human result: “Acceperunt mercedem suam, vani vanam”[[199]](#footnote-199).

Once its possibilities are exhausted, ideological Modernity leads to nihilism and loss of meaning. We will see in the third Part of this book how much the cultural environment of the 20th century will be scarred by this existential malady.

# PART III

# THE CRISIS OF THE CULTURE OF MODERNITY

To a great extent, the main political ideologies are daughters of the Enlightenment. A key component of the worldview of the Century of Lights was the idea of progress, which was later taken up by positivistic scientism. The progress of science and man’s dominating power should create a more human, freer and happier world. The utopic and eschatological features of these ideologies are relevant: if these ideologies had triumphed, they would have brought a happy future, more worthy of man.

On these bases it is easy to realise how the First World War was a real cultural shock: instead of peace, freedom, justice and wellbeing, Modernity brought about the greatest war conflagration ever seen in history. Not surprisingly, 1919 would be the peak of the increased awareness of the crisis of culture that had been brewing since the end of the 19th century. The historian of ideas, already used to having to live with very different interpretations of cultural processes, is struck by an almost unanimous sense of crisis among intellectuals at the end of the Great War. The diagnoses are obviously very different, but the important fact here is to highlight the general feeling of crisis.

According to Gonzalo Redondo, “in the years immediately following 1919, philosophers, theologians, historians, poets and artists spoke widely about the cultural crisis. Among others, Paul Valery -who wrote in 1919 that ‘We, civilisations, now know that we are mortal’, Franz Kafka, André Malraux, Oswald Spengler, Guglielmo Ferrero, Jose Ortega y Gasset, Arnold Toynbee, Christopher Dawson, Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, Aldous Huxley, Mark Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Max Pollock, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Maritain, Thomas S. Eliot, … and the list should include all the thinkers of the period between the two wars (1919-1939). Pope Pius XI -who ruled the Church during most of this period - should also be included in the list”[[200]](#footnote-200).

Unanimity in confirming the crisis; diversity in interpreting its causes. The human spirit had several paths to choose from. Some realised that the problem was a crisis of values; others felt that the cause was mainly economics; others thought that it was necessary to pursue the consequences of ideological thought to the very end. There was a move towards the religious, towards transcendence. There were conversions to the Catholic Church or to other Christian denominations among Western intellectuals (T.S. Elliot, G.K. Chesterton, J. Maritain, G. Marcel, N. Berdiaeff, E. Waugh, S. Undset, etc). One cause for those conversions was the rejection of the main idea of modern ideologies: man’s absolute autonomy. There were philosophical currents that aerated the closed-minded atmosphere of positivism, idealism and materialism. These were mainly spiritualism, personalism, Blondel’s philosophy of action, neo-Thomism; others put forward “value philosophies”, attempts to stem the social and spiritual breakdown in the period following the Great War (M. Scheler, N. Hartmann); at the same time some thinkers looked to the past for reference points that could be used to build on the ruins left by the war (W. Jaeger, J. Huizinga, C. Dawson)[[201]](#footnote-201).

A common trait among these critics was the realization that the ultimate cause of the crisis was a mistaken understanding of the human nature. If the absolute autonomy of man, together with an ever increasing freedom of conscience -there would be no objective yardstick for conscience to measure itself, and therefore it would become totally free and self-ruling- had led to the confrontation of millions of persons, it was possibly due to the fact that man is not an absolutely autonomous individual, or that the different countries, idolised by nationalism, did not really embody the highest ideals. The awareness that there was no anthropological foundation in the post-enlightened ideas, brought on a crisis in the understanding of the State and of the economy -- a crisis that the Wall Street crash of 1929 would made even more evident-. The very function of science, until then thought to be the solution to all the problems of mankind, also changes during this period. The new theories proposed by Mach, Plank and Einstein in the early 20th century changed the paradigm of Newtonian science, and put in doubt the assumed certainties of 19th century positivism. Comellas has even talked about the *anguish of science* in the first 15 years of the 20th century[[202]](#footnote-202).

If the authors who represent the departure from ideological Modernity rediscover man as a person, in other words, not as a mere autonomous individual but as a spiritual individuality open to interpersonal transcendence (God and the others), post-war nihilism assimilates the supposed radical absence of meaning of man and history. Nihilism can lead to totalitarianism: if man’s life has no meaning, human will must arbitrarily give meaning to life and history. If there is no objective moral order, we need to create an artificial strong morality that will provide meaning to a world without it, through the will to power. In the European political climate, the crisis of liberalism and weak parliamentary democracies made the will to power of fascism, the blind assertion of irrational values of National Socialism or Stalin’s statist planification appear as something appealing.

But nihilism can also lead to what is called today *pensiero debole*: absence of absolute truth, tolerance, getting along with what little happiness can be provided by a meaningless existence. Men must accept history’s absence of meaning and absorb their own finiteness, live with the absurdity of daily life, with the fact that being is “too much”, as per Sartre’s existentialism. Then we have a long list of cultural, literary and philosophical expressions that can be lumped together as *weak nihilism*. If nothing makes sense, then it is useless to establish objectively what is good and evil, and forbidding or permitting.

A key thinker to understand the two branches of nihilism is Frederic Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s nihilism is a prevalent feature today in the *Weltanschaaung* of vast masses of persons who are closed to the idea of transcendence. Such nihilism will influence several philosophical currents. The existentialism of Heidegger and Sartre is particularly important. The first author notes that man is limited, he is “a being for death”. The Frenchman holds that human existence is absurd: man is freedom, but a freedom never satisfied. Man -with his will- would like to be God, but he realises that he will never manage to be. Man is *condemned* to his freedom; it is a useless passion. Both philosophers find their inspiration in a secularized reading of Soren Kierkegaard. No doubt, theirs was a reductive reading: they kept some concepts, such as the anxiety and desperation of human existence, but did not include faith, the remedy proposed by Kierkegaard to overcome them.

There are also many examples of nihilism in the literature of first half of the 20th century: Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, James Joyce, Albert Camus, all portray human existence torn up, lost in the absurdity of life without reference values.

Art in the 20th century fully shares this outlook of general crisis. We can perceive a radical criticism of the rationalism of 19th century positivism in both music and painting. A process of subjectivization is evident in the moving away from the objective world and from nature. Artistic currents are usually preceded by a negatively worded manifesto, its purpose, to *épater le bourgeois* (to surprise the bourgeois), to break with the preestablished moulds. Fauvism, Dadaism, cubism, surrealism deny not only positivistic rationality, but common sense itself; they become elitist artistic impressions, that the masses are not able to understand. Their critical potentiality make these movements short-lived, and they are replaced after a few years by more daring vanguard trends. The very revolutionary nature of these movements explains why artists move through different stages in their artistic life. In painting, stroke, the third dimension and movement are left out; in music, harmony and tonality. This gives the artist total subjective freedom; diversification prevails in the 20th century.

Nietzsche’s nihilism and its heirs are some of the ingredients of the cultural cocktail of the 1960s. The crisis of the culture of Modernity, noticed from 1919, deepened during the Second World War, appeared to be overcome through the 50s, when a period of relative peace -despite the Cold War, and wars in Korea and Indochina -, economic development and international cooperation (we cannot forget the United Nations, established in 1945) provided some respite and faith in the future of mankind. But the cultural crisis of Modernity explodes once more in the 60s, and was noticed by many more people than in the 1930s[[203]](#footnote-203).

In fact, it was the same crisis, caused by an anthropological understanding that denies the idea of transcendence. Many intellectuals of that time, who were behind the university revolt of 1968, took the idea of man’s absolute autonomy even further. Nietzsche’s morality of man as the arbiter of values will appear in different guises within the so-called cultural revolutions of the 1960s. The underlying philosophy of these anticultural movements is unclear. We could possibly talk of anarchy, which literally means absence of power. Freedom of conscience, a crucial factor of the culture of Modernity, is exaggerated: there are no limits. This became obvious in the fashionable slogans of the time: “Forbidding is forbidden”, “Be a realist, ask for the impossible”, or “All power to the imagination”. “Make love, not war”, “Sex, drugs and rock-and-roll” were also typical slogans at that time.

The facts are well known. The student revolt began in California[[204]](#footnote-204) and spread to the Sorbonne, Paris, in May 1968. The complaints were about the massification of the culture taught at university, which was thought to be useless and retrograde. The revolts spread to Berlin, Mexico City, Tokyo and many other cities around the world. In 1969 the protest began to weaken.

Several movements coincided with these cultural revolutions; there were common threads in all of them: the ecology was very important, and often the starting point to look at man as one more element of nature: there are features of German idealism (pantheism), oriental spiritualities and scientist materialism; the gay movement in the United States and Western Europe; drug use as a means of liberation; feminism started with just claims such as women’s right to vote, and access to secondary school in the early 20th century, but then, upholding an equivocal understanding of women’s freedom, it reaches extreme positions, not so much claims of being equal to man, but breaking off what someone called “the chain of nature”: motherhood. This kind of radical feminism attacked the essential elements of the family: the sacred value of life and fidelity in marriage, by promoting abortion and divorce. It is easy to find the influence of Nietzsche’s ideas and of the “superman” underpinning the cultural revolutions of the 60s and 70s: man free of bonds, who decides what is just and what isn’t, who raises himself to the level that belongs only to God. The objective moral order disappears from the cultural horizon of the masses, and is replaced by arbitrary subjectivism that professes to be absolutely free, and which will lead to hedonism: if man can choose anything, he will easily choose the most pleasurable option.

In addition to the Nietzsche’s nihilism we should also mention the cultural influence of Freud and the School of Frankfurt. Freudian psychology featured a reductive anthropology: men are not determined by reason but by the subconscious, a propelling force, identified with the libido or sexual drive. All human actions can be explained starting from sexual impulses, which were repressed by institutions and traditions. Some German intellectuals schooled in Marxism, like Reich, and others from the School of Frankfurt - Marcuse, Fromm - apply Marx’s critical categories to sexual relations, interpreted in a Freudian key. The relationship between man and woman takes the form of sexual repression, one more reason for the class struggle between capitalism and the proletariat. The connection between sexual activity and procreation disappears, and the ultimate purpose of sex is pleasure. In this way homosexual relations, abortion and infidelity are justified. The contemporary permissive society becomes legitimate, to confirm man’s absolute autonomy. Absolute autonomy degenerates into a culture of death: the millions of victims of the permissive, hedonistic society - unborn children, elderly people euthanized - bring together Western liberal societies and the darkest totalitarianisms, that have also caused millions of innocent victims.

In the following chapters we will cover various aspects of the crisis of the culture of Modernity. We will begin with the currents that are open to transcendence in order to solve the crisis. Later we will look at the different aspects of contemporary nihilism, with particular attention to Nietzsche’s philosophy. The last chapter in this section will cover the permissive society that arises as a consequence of the sexual revolution and today’s predominant cultural trends: feminism, neo-Malthusianism, ecology and new religious movements.

## IX THE DEPARTURE FROM IDEOLOGICAL MODERNITY

Awareness of the cause of the crisis of culture of Modernity - that is, a misconception of human nature - can be seen in the fields of literature, philosophy, political doctrines, etc. By reading the books of Chesterton, the political essays of Guardini, the novels of Undset, Bernanos or von le Fort, one can easily perceive that there was a Christian-inspired intellectual movement in the first half of the 20th century[[205]](#footnote-205). This renewal contributes towards the transformation of the anthropological foundations of Ideological Modernity: man is neither the autonomous individual proposed by liberalism, nor a mere cell of the totalitarian society.

We have already referred to several thinkers that broke the prevailing ideological moulds of the 19th century. The mention of Kierkegaard and Tocqueville will suffice. There are some common elements in the 20th century authors, for instance: it is impossible to reduce man to mere nature (against positivism); philosophy cannot be absorbed by science; man is interiorness and freedom, conscience and reflection; nature is determined by a higher providential plan with a final purpose (against self-founding evolutionism). These authors and their respective trends make the 20th century a century of deep Christian thought, or at least thought open to transcendence. Reductive anthropologies and nihilisms occurred at the same time; we will study in later chapters of this Part III.

We will now enter upon the study of certain contemporary philosophical currents that present a view of the world and of human existence that is open not only to horizontal transcendence—that is, interpersonal communication—but also to vertical transcendence—the relationship of man with God, and of creation with its Creator. This does not mean that the philosophies studied in the other parts of this book are entirely lacking a transcendent opening: it suffices to think of the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. What we want to underscore in this fourth part is the transcendent vision that unites and characterizes certain specific contemporary philosophies, which embrace the transcendent at their very core.

Specifically, we will present three schools of thought that can all be included under the title “philosophies of transcendence”: French spiritualism, neo-Thomism, and personalism. We will devote a chapter to each of these currents, including an introduction that provides a brief summary of the essential features of these philosophical traditions. In this brief overview we simply want to point out the elements that justify our choice for creating a specific part for presenting them.

French spiritualism, neo-Thomism, and personalism are *contemporary* philosophies, both in a chronological sense and with regard to their content. The authors we study here cover a fairly broad time span, which coincides with the time period covered by this book as whole. The precursor of spiritualism, Maine de Biran, began to publish in the late eighteenth century; he shared the anti-Enlightenment critique of certain Romantic philosophers and was familiar with German idealism. Other authors we will refer to, such as Karol Wojtyla, were still alive at the time the first edition of this book was published. In other words, these philosophies of transcendence span the entire time period of contemporary history.

Each of these three currents is quite novel, and not mere perpetuators of an ancient and medieval *philosophia perennis* open to transcendence. Rather, they have elements that are genuinely innovative and creative. We think it is important to underline the novelty of French spiritualism, neo-Thomism, and personalism, because failing to do so would run the risk of portraying them as mere traditionalist reactions against secularized philosophies closed to transcendence, grounded on an assertion of man’s absolute autonomy. The historic events of the nineteenth and twentieth century will provoke the philosophical reflection of these currents. In that reflection they will provide new insights, new analysis, and a new philosophical terminology. It is true that they contain a marked reaction against the positivism and against every philosophy based on absolutizing a partial aspect of reality, and in particular the reality of human existence. But this is not just a “defensive reaction”; rather, these are fruitful proposals that emerge in the heat of intense reflection about the events of the last two centuries. In the France of rationalism and positivism, there arose a current of thought at the beginning of the nineteenth century that would last well into the twentieth century. Not so much a school per se, this represented a new philosophical attitude that can be called *spiritualism*. The characteristics of this current of thought will be better understood if we emphasize its contentious stance with respect to positivism and idealism. Faced with the abstractions of the German idealist systems and the suffocating narrowness of positivism, these French philosophers wanted to return to one of philosophy’s classic themes: that of the spiritual soul and of the individual person open to transcendence.

The following elements are shared by the doctrines of spiritual authority: that man cannot be reduced to mere material nature (in contrast to the positivist stance); that philosophy cannot be absorbed by science; that man possess an inner nature, freedom, conscience, and thought; that nature is determined by a higher plane that has a final and providential nature (in contrast to evolutionism grounded in the self); that metaphysics is possible, if this is understood to mean knowledge of man’s inner nature.

In the twentieth century, these authors will have a major influence on the Western cultural world—especially in the Romance language countries—and many of their theoretical developments would be taken up by certain theologians. The tendency of spiritualism to seek transcendence within the human soul is exaggerated by the modernists, who would sometimes lose the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders. On the other hand, echoes of Bergsonian evolutionism may be noted in the works of Teilhard de Chardin. But the main effect of this current of thought has been to renew the field of philosophy, which in France had become rigid in the hands of positivist systems closed to the spirit.

Spiritualism has been defined in various ways by historians of philosophy. The characterization we have adopted allows us to ascribe this category to the philosophy of Henri Bergson, although he might well merit his own chapter. Unfortunately, space does not allow us to dwell on a discussion of the spiritualist doctrines *of François-Pierre Maine de Biran (1766-1824)*, *Felix Ravaisson (1813-1900)*, *Leon Ollé-Laprune (1839-1898)*, *Louis Lavelle (1883-1951)*, or *René Le Senne (1882-1954)*.

### 1. The moral and religious doctrine of Henri Bergson

Henri Bergson was born in Paris in 1859. He studied at the *Lycée Condorcet* and the *École Normale*. He taught in several provincial schools, as well as in the É*cole Normale* and the *Collège de France*. He was elected to the *Académie Française* in 1914 and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1928. He was Jewish by birth; he was in the process of becoming a Catholic but he never converted, out of solidarity with the Jewish people while the Nazi persecution was being unleashed.[[206]](#footnote-206) He died in Paris in 1941. Among his works we should note *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1881); *Matter and Memory* (1896); *Laughter: Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900); *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1903); *Creative Evolution* (1907); *Mind-Energy* (translation of *L'énergie spirituelle*, 1909); *Duration and Simultaneity* (1910); *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932); *The Creative Mind* (translation of *La Pensée et le mouvant,* 1934); and *Writings and Words* (published posthumously in 1957-1959). His body of work is literary and poetic by and large and is generally not systematic.

Henri Bergson’s thought departs from the logic of ideological Modernity with his moral and religious doctrine. Following a long period when he had no publications, he published *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* in 1932; it follows his evolutionist philosophy. Like Lévy-Bruhl, he thinks that there are links between moral codes and specific societies. However, these links do not mean that there is an absolute determination of society over the individual. Bergson begins his moral reflections by looking at the human sense of obligation; this leads to state the free nature of men: “A being cannot feel obliged unless he is free, and any duty, taken on its own, implies freedom”. Society is the source of obligation. Obligation does not mean lack of freedom, but it does mean social pressure, and this is the keystone of “closed morality”.

However, the moral idealism of those who have introduced in their lives higher values and patterns of greater universal effect than the common ethical codes of their respective societies -here Bergson quotes the moral doctrines of Socrates and Jesus - cannot be explained in terms of social pressure alone. The moral ideal acts out of a calling, a vocation, not because of social pressure. Those who respond are not compelled or constrained by social pressure, but attracted by example.

Just as there are two moralities (though in practice they intermingle), there are two religions: a “static” religion, a product of the *fonction fabulatrice*: it is a defensive reaction of nature against anything that could be depressing for the individual, and divisive for society in the use of the intellect; man seeks security in this defensive reaction. Thus, fabulation produces a divine authority that forbids and orders, a new life after death, and beneficent supernatural powers, that give cohesion to the social group. Instead, “dynamic” religion, essentially identifies with mysticism, This second kind of religion is a contact with the creative effort from the author of life, in other words, a partial coincidence. It is God’s effort, possibly God himself. A mystic - Bergson specifically quotes the great Spanish mystics, Saint Therese of Avila, and Saint John of the Cross - is the individual who transcends his material nature and continues and furthers the divine action: “God is love and the subject of love. Here is the contribution of mysticism”[[207]](#footnote-207).

Jacques Maritain had been “woken up” from his positivist dream by Bergson’s lectures; he makes a distinction between the “system” and the “spirit” of Bergsonian philosophy. If the former is confusing in terms of metaphysics and logics, the latter, “on the basis of fidelity to inner light, pure spiritual journey, reaches the very threshold where all philosophy stops[[208]](#footnote-208).

Bergson’s philosophy was a breath of fresh air in the suffocating cultural environment of his time, and gave credence to religious experience. Bergson’s outlook, possibly because it was not systematic, but rather poetic, had a liberating influence and gave a positive understanding of the world that many people found attractive. It was a way of thinking that could generate enthusiasm when facing mechanism and positivism.

Bergson's classes at the *Collège de France* soon became cultural events. Many students and listeners attended, attracted by his brand of vitalistic metaphysics, which broke with the mechanistic materialism that dominated the French philosophical scene. Bergson exerted a decisive influence on authors such as Maritain and Gilson, who later would become the main exponents of neo-Thomism.

According to Bergson, we know material objects through external and spatial general perception. In contrast, spiritual things are known through intuition (immediate awareness or direct perception of reality). Positive science deals with the material world, while metaphysics touches upon that of the spirit. According to Bergson, we perceive physical objects as if they occupied positions in a homogeneous and empty medium: space. Our ordinary idea of time has also spatial character: it allows us to talk about succession and simultaneity. This form of knowledge is useful for everyday life and the natural sciences, but it prevents us from reaching the unification of the real.

However, philosophy makes it possible to achieve this unity, based on intuition. Its object is movement, becoming, and duration, which can only be known in an immediate fashion through intuition, in the interior of the conscious life. This is because pure duration is not spatialized. For Bergson, duration mean a memory of the past and an anticipation of the future: a continuity of movement, with distinctions that are qualitative, but not quantitative. Discursive thought and language break the continuous flow of consciousness and are unable to grasp the continuity of life. The idea of pure duration expresses the nature of the life of the innermost self, while the concept of the self as a succession of stages represents the most superficial self, created by spatializing understanding. In contrast, the union of spirit and matter, of soul and body, which is expressed in human action, must be understood not in terms of space but of duration. Based on this, Bergson asserts that “every debate between the determinists and their opponents implies a preliminary confusion of duration with dimension, of succession with simultaneity, of quality with quantity.”[[209]](#footnote-209)

The key to the evolution of life in general must be sought in the inner life of man. We ourselves are aware of a vital impulse—*élan vital*—which is manifested in the continuity of our own becoming or duration. As a hypothesis, this *élan vital* can be posited as *the original impetus of life*, and as a cause of variations in the species. The clash between *élan vital* and inert matter produces different lines of evolution. Evolution progresses in three main directions: plant life, instinctive life, and intelligent life. Bergson describes his evolutionary theory as “creative”: this means that it distances itself from mechanistic evolutionism, which is driven by causal factors. The Bergsonian evolution is creative in the sense that *élan vital* does not follow a single, default trajectory, but branches out in several directions in the various forms of life.

Bergson's evolutionary theory has consequences for his anthropology, and in particular in the distinction between instinct and intelligence. Instinct is the ability to use and constitute bodily organs as tools—that is, as instruments that are parts of the organism, such as legs and hands; intelligence, however, is the ability to use tools that are not part of the body—that is, artificial tools or utensils. Therefore, man, historically, is more *Homo faber* than *Homo sapiens*. Understanding is geared towards production, to fashioning matter, but it is unable to apprehend movement—evolution—such as it really is. Intelligence, therefore, does not know reality in its deepest sense. Instinct is closer to life; it is an extension of life. However, instinct lacks a reflexive consciousness. For Bergson, intuition is instinct that has come to be disinterested, self-aware, able to reflect on its purpose and broaden it indefinitely. Consciousness of our own duration allows us to transcend and puts us in contact with a total continuity of durations. Intuition, and not intelligence, allows us to know reality.

### 2. Maurice Blondel's philosophy of action

Maurice Blondel was born in Dijon in 1861; he studied at the *École Normale* from 1881. His teachers were Ollé-Laprune and Boutroux. In 1893 he graduated in philosophy, defending the thesis *L'action* (later known as “The First Action”). This thesis ran counter to official positivism and so raised many controversies which ended up hindering his academic career. However, he managed to be appointed *maître de conférences* in Lille and professor at Aix-en-Provence. Other publications followed: *La pensée* (1934); *L'être et les êtres* (1935), *L'Action* (1936-1937); *La philosophie et l'esprit chrétien* (1944-1946). He died in 1949, at the age of 88. In 1950, *Exigences philosophiques du Christianisme* was published posthumously.

Maurice Blondel's philosophical approach focuses on the question of the meaning and destiny of human life. Blondel wanted to address human existence in its entirety, without favouring any of partial aspects of this existence, such as the will, reason, or feelings. For Blondel the key to achieve this totalizing vision, and thus overcome the divisions caused by post-Kantian philosophical conception of man, lies in an analysis of human action. In the search for unity, for the totality of human existence and, more radically, in the search for the meaning of life, “Blondel determined the radical element common to everything that man knows, wants, and does. That element, which he shows at the same time to be the starting point for any further research, is action. Action is the first and irreducible element of human life, from which every human develops.”[[210]](#footnote-210) In Blondel's own words, “Action is the synthesis of knowing, of wanting, and of being, that which binds the human compound together, a bond that cannot be broken without destroying all that has been unbound. It is the exact point where the world of thought, the world of morality, and the world of science converge. If they were not bound through action, everything would be lost”[[211]](#footnote-211).

The philosophy of action is a critique of life, which begins with action in order to reach a unified vision of man. For Blondel, every human action is a movement that begins in the will, that arises from inside the subject. For this reason, he sometimes uses the term “method of immanence” when he refers to his philosophical method. This expression should not be confused with the “system of immanence,” understood to be the worldview closed to transcendence. When Blondel refers to the primacy of immanence, he is stressing the fact that action arises in the immanence of the subject, in its inner being, but the analysis of action tells us that immanence must be overcome, until reality and transcendence is achieved. Thus, one could say that Blondel's vision of human action is *immanent, synthetical,* and *dynamic*. We have already seen why it is immanent. It is also synthetical, because it is the source of the different aspects of human experience—fundamentally, knowing, wanting, and being—and at the same type it is dynamic, because action manifests itself in its *unfolding*: a central element of Blondel's philosophy is that it makes explicit those things that are implicit in any human action, through an analysis of its internal dialectic.

This philosophical approach, created from the standpoint of a unified meaning of human life and produced through the analysis of action, accounts for Blondel’s criticism of any attempt to explain human reality from a single, partial, and limited aspect of action. Blondel devised it as a way to overcome *intellectualism*—that is, the claim of complete independence of thought from action; *pragmatism*, which pretends that the action is its own explanation; *rationalism*, which implies that reason is the sole judge of truth in any field; and *fideism*, which consists of the assertion that faith is sufficient in and of itself. Fideism maintains that within the ambit of religion, reason loses its explanatory power.

If the synthetical nature of action permits a criticism of one-dimensional reductions, its dynamic nature means that Blondel's philosophy is also an apologetics: a rational examination of the intrinsic motivations of revealed religion. This apologetics is based on the analysis of the purposes of actions. Towards what is action directed? In the words of our author, “Is the answer yes or no? Does human life have a meaning, and does man have a destiny?”[[212]](#footnote-212) According to Blondel, careful attention to the dynamic nature of action leads to transcendence. However, throughout history this question has been answered in different ways. One possible solution is *dilettantism*: Life does not lead anywhere, and therefore we must enjoy it and have fun. But the *dilettante* is selfish: he loves only himself and finds no meaning in his superficial existence. There is also another possibility, *nihilism*, which is Schopenhauer's pessimistic solution: to renounce the will to live. But we have neither a concept of nothingness, nor a will to it. If we look at this attitude more closely, we see that pessimism is a form of mysticism: we wish to be the Absolute, but we are unable to achieve this. *Scientism* is another answer; it aims at eliminating all doubts and all meaning, and provides objective certainties instead. But science does not explain action, because it arises from the inner being of the subject, and the object of science is not the inner being but external phenomena.

Blondel believes that man is not an isolated individual: on the contrary, the analysis of action demonstrates the social nature of mankind. Therefore, one of the specifically human actions is to give oneself, to lose oneself in order to find oneself in one’s family, in one’s country, in humanity. From this perspective, Blondel criticized ideologies—modern liberalism, nationalism, Marxism—which denature the person.

When man realizes that he is pursuing an ideal that transcends phenomena, he has entered into the sphere of morality. Blondel distinguishes between a will that desires (*voulante*) and a will that is desired (*voulue*). The first is a transcendent will, which desires the whole, the infinite; the second, by contrast, is the will of the concrete, which can never identify itself with the whole. For Blondel, the tension that exists between these two wills—which in part recalls the Scholastics' *voluntas ut natura* and *voluntas ut ratio*—is what drives action's dynamism. To achieve good we must overcome the particular, the concrete, the contingent: we would like to fully satisfy ourselves with these things, but we fail to do so. An authentic will, which seeks the Absolute, must recognize the presence of the only thing that is necessary: God. Therefore, mortification and suffering are healthy, because they prevent us from becoming acclimatized to the world. “Mortification as the genuine metaphysical experience, that reaches the very being”. Man must recognize his inability to become divine. Thus, man must conceive of the possibility of a supernatural order; the supernatural is “that which is absolutely impossible and absolutely necessary for man.”[[213]](#footnote-213) It is impossible, because it cannot be reached through our own efforts; it is necessary in order to satisfy our thirst for the infinite. Only the grace of God, which comes from on high, may quench this thirst.

What can a philosophy of action do when it faces the supernatural? It cannot prove its existence, but it can show its possibility, show that the hypothesis of the supernatural is necessary and inquire into what is required to make the act of faith possible. The path that leads to faith is to act in accord with revealed truth. Following in Pascal's footsteps, he proposes an existential testimony of Christianity: *Fac et videbis*: act like a Christian, and you will find the truth.

Blondel always remained faithful to Catholic orthodoxy, although some modernists would also find strength in his ideas and terminology, which blurred the ontological difference between the natural and supernatural orders. On the centenary of the publication of *L’Action*, Saint John Paul II sent a letter to the archbishop of Aix-en-Provence, praising Blondel's work, and in particular his comprehensive vision of man.[[214]](#footnote-214)

### 3. The Christian existentialism of Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973)

Many people think of Gabriel Marcel as a Christian existentialist. It is difficult to pigeon-hole Marcel's philosophy under a precise label, but it can be conceivably included within the non-Cartesian French tradition, which runs from Pascal to Blondel, running through Maine de Biran and Bergson[[215]](#footnote-215).

Marcel was born in Paris in 1889. He was an only child, and his mother died when Gabriel was only four years old. Raised in a family atmosphere of rigid morality, his upbringing left a mark on his training. He took an early interest in the analysis of the existential situations that he saw taking place around him. His philosophical studies were initially influenced by idealism, but he would soon abandon them in order to commence an original line of thought. It was not at all systematic, as he always sought to penetrate the mystery of existence. The powerful experiences of the First World War, during which Marcel worked in an office that helped track missing persons, led him to raise questions about the other, the hereafter, suffering, and death—that is, questions about situations that were real, far away from the abstractions of idealism. In 1929, as the result of his spiritual development and guided by the example of other converts like Charles Du Bos, Marcel became a Catholic. Ten years earlier he had married Jacqueline Boegner, who came from a Protestant family. She too would embrace the Catholic faith in 1943. Jacqueline died in 1947, after a lifetime of loyalty and love for her husband. Marcel never forgot his wife, and always applied one of his more powerful philosophical statements to her memory: “To love a human being is to tell her/him you shall not die”.

His life crisscrossed his work, to the point that we can say that his work is a reflection on human existence drawn from his personal experience, his relationships with others and with his historical circumstances. One example of the existential nature of his thought is that—in addition to philosophical works written in generally non-systematic outlets, such as newspapers, lectures, and articles—Marcel composed many theatre plays, where his characters’ existential attitudes are intertwined with philosophical reflection in such a way that they are brought to life in specific scenarios. Among the most important philosophical works we should mention the *Journal métaphysique* (*Metaphysical Journal*, 1914-1923); *Position et Approches concrètes du Mystère Ontologique* (1933), *Être et avoir* (*Being and Having*, 1935), and *Du refus à l’invocation* (1940). Among his plays, the most significant are *Un homme de Dieu* (1925) and *Le monde cassé* (1933).

Marcel understands existence as *incarnation*, that is, like the embodied feeling of being inserted in the world, and at the same time as *participation*, or openness to others, expressed in the feeling of “being and existing together” with all other people and with the absolute Thou.[[216]](#footnote-216) Marcel's view of human existence is as distant from subjectivism as it is from objectivism. The person cannot be explained by verifiable objective science, but neither can it be reduced to mere subjective feelings.

Marcel allows for the possibility of metaphysical knowledge—that is, a knowledge of inner states and the foundational truths of existence. This statement asserts Marcel's famous distinction between *problem* and *mystery*: “A problem is something that we are faced with, and does not let us go through. But it is there, before me. Mystery, however, is something that I'm involved in, and whose essence consists of being not entirely set out before me. It's as if in that zone, the distinction between *in me* and *in front of me* loses its very meaning.”[[217]](#footnote-217) Objective thinking raises problems and tries to fix them, separating the object from the subject. By contrast, the mystery surrounds us, involves us. Therefore, metaphysical knowledge, knowledge of being, is not something objective and distant, but rather a type of knowledge that is involved in being itself: the very knowledge of being is a real mystery. Metaphysics should not “clear up” the ontological mystery, because such a vain attempt to clarify it would lower it to level of problem. The metaphysical attitude before the mystery has to be one of availability and openness.

The distinction between problem and mystery leads to another classic Marcel distinction: the distinction between being and having. The primacy of having over being shows many aspects of the decadence of contemporary culture, because man objectifies himself and loses his sensitivity to being open to the mystery that envelops his existence. Having nullifies being. Having can enter into a constructive dialectic with being only when it becomes an instrument, a means. On the contrary, the primacy of being is embodied in vital attitudes that are witness to the mystery: creative fidelity, love, hope.

For Marcel, man is always a wanderer, a wayfarer (*homo viator*). Life is a pilgrimage in search of the meaning of existence. There will be obstacles along the way, and temptation will always be at hand to give having primacy, but at the same time the earthly pilgrimage can be structured around hope. In hope we are opened to the transcendent: it affirms the existence of a being beyond anything that appears, that fulfills man's yearning for meaning. Understood in this way, as an affirmation of the mystery of being, metaphysics exorcises all desperation. But transcendence is not reached through logical discourse, only through intuition. The genuine attitude of the philosopher is not speculation about the divine, but adoration. As noted by B. Mondin, “the philosopher must speak with God, not of God.”[[218]](#footnote-218)

In his final works Marcel undertook an analysis of the problems of contemporary culture, and addressed topics ranging from the primacy of depersonalizing technology to the ideological persecution in the Communist countries of Eastern Europe. Both in these works and in those that are more metaphysical, Marcel resists any systematization. However, when taken together, his analyses of the specific situations of human existence lead to a vision of life that is open to interpersonal transcendence, to hope for eternal life, and open to the mystery of God.

### 4. Personalism

Personalism is a philosophical current that focuses on the human person. Although the philosophical topic of personhood is a constant feature of Western thought, a specific current of thought that focuses on it emerged only in the 1930s—that is, between the two World Wars. The timing of its origin is important, because personalism was created precisely in response to the crisis of modern culture that became evident in the years that followed the First World War. The relatively non-technical nature of this philosophy, and its ability to relate to the existential problems of man, stems from the attempt to provide an answer to the crisis of a particular time in history. At the same time, personalism would propose -once more- perennial values of a higher order than the circumstances of that particular time in history. Two important manifestations of its influence in the twentieth century are the 1948 UN Declaration of the Rights of Man, and the texts of the Second Vatican Council, where it is easy to find features of personalism. After a period of declining support, partly because of the cultural supremacy of Marxism, personalism now seems to be recovering strength and incisiveness.

Faced with the theoretical attitudes of positivism, Marxism, and nihilism, and the practical abuses of both left-wing and right-wing totalitarianisms, personalism seeks to vindicate a vision of man as a unitary, unique, and unrepeatable person. We shall describe the essential elements of this current and then discuss the philosophy of Emmanuel Mounier.

#### a) General characteristics

The defining feature of personalism is looking at the person as the centre of philosophical reflection. Thanks to the influence of Christianity, the idea of person has held a very important position in many currents of thought and philosophical systems. But placing the person at the very centre of thought is a new development. However, not everything about personalism is new. We will follow Juan Manuel Burgos[[219]](#footnote-219),and first introduce the traditional features of personalism, which make this current of thought a realist philosophy; then we will look at its unique contribution to contemporary philosophy.

Personalism is a kind of realist philosophy with the following characteristics:

1) It promotes an ontological or metaphysical worldview: the world is a reality external to man, which has consistency of its own. There are entities in it that have varying degrees of perfection, the person stands out among them; 2) Man has the capacity to know a truth that, at the same time, transcends him. Personalism allows the possibility of objective knowledge of reality, which is accessed subjectively. However, man is not capable of knowing the *whole* truth, and so it leaves the door open to mystery and transcendence; 3) The person is free, with a capacity for self-determination—man has self-mastery—and the capacity to change the world; 4) The person is a substantial reality, not merely a succession of experiences without ontological support. Some personalists think that al-though this is man's reality, the term “substance” suffers from overly static implications, precisely because it was originally used to refer to “things” rather than “persons”; 5) There exists a human nature, which changes accidentally over the course of history, but remains specifically identical to itself within these changes; 6) Man has an ethical dimension and a religious dimension, which arise from his spiritual and free nature.

All these elements are present in some classical anthropologies, such as that of Augustine of Hippo or Thomas Aquinas. The new developments of personalism would be the following:

1) The insurmountable distinction between things and persons and the need to treat the latter as distinct philosophical categories, 2) The radical importance of affectivity, seen as an essential part of the person. Feelings, emotions, the “heart”—these things should be the subject of philosophical reflection, just as intelligence and free will have long been; 3) The person has an essential calling for interpersonal, family and social relationships. The person realizes himself through giving, dialogue, and communion with other persons; 4) Personalism maintains the absolute primacy of moral and religious values over those that are purely intellectual; 5) It turns human corporeality and sexuality into a topic of philosophical reflection. The person is an embodied and sexuated spirit; 6) Personalism must be communitarian, given the relational characteristics of the human person. The reflection of political philosophy should help overcome the choice between totalitarian collectivism and capitalist individualism; 7) Philosophy cannot be reduced to an academic and erudite knowledge; it must interact with cultural and social reality; 8) The union between faith and culture: the notion of person achieves its greatest expression in Christian revelation. Personalists distinguish between the supernatural and natural realms, but they do not place them in artificial opposition. Personalism finds grounds for reflection and inspiration in revealed truths, but it carries out a strictly philosophical task based on the integrated experience of the individual; this includes the religious dimension. We should note that there are some non-Christian personalists, such as the Jewish thinkers Martin Buber and Emmanuel Lévinas, who also used New Testament revelation as a source of reflection; 9) Personalism sees the development of a modern philosophy that values subjectivity as a positive turn and criticizes the modern trends of relativism and subjectivism. Personalists do not position themselves “outside” Modernity, since they see themselves as part of it.

The main elements that characterize personalism do not make it a closed school of thought. We prefer to call it a current, which encompasses various authors whose work reflects these elements, although each has a distinct style and emphasis. We can place within this current the philosophical approaches of Karol Wojtyla, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Lévinas, Julián Marías, Romano Guardini, etc. We will now look at the thinking of Emmanuel Mounier, one of the few philosophers who admitted being called a personalist.

#### b) Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950)

Emmanuel Mounier was born in Grenoble in 1905, to a Christian family from a peasant background. He studied philosophy in his hometown and in Paris. His first contact with the big city was quite traumatic, mainly because of the scepticism that prevailed in the classrooms of the Sorbonne. Reading the works of Charles Péguy opened new perspectives for his ideal of Christian thought. In 1931 he published his doctoral thesis, which dealt with the thinking of this French writer. He was also influenced by Maritain, Berdiaeff and Marcel, and would strike up a good friendship with Jean Guitton. After he finished his studies, he decided to abandon the strictly academic world and devote himself to developing a thinking that leads to action: according to Mounier, the European crisis of the period between the World Wars required a vital and generous cultural and social commitment, and not the scholarly work of the academic philosopher. In this environment of spiritual commitment to the problems of his day, in 1932 he founded the magazine *Esprit* (Spirit), which was not only one of the most influential publications from the 1930s to the 1950s, but a cultural movement that brought together a number of intellectuals of that era, identified with personalism in one way or another. His first work on personalism appeared in 1935: *Révolution personnaliste et communautaire (The Personalist and Communitarian Revolution)*;a year later *De la propriété capitaliste à la propriété humaine (From Capitalist Property to Human Property)* and *Manifeste au service du Personnalisme* *(Manifesto in the Service of Personalism)* appeared*.* In 1946 he published *Introduction aux existentialismes (Existentialist philosophies; an introduction)*. Other important works include *Qu'est-ce que le personnalisme?* (*What is Personalism?,* 1947) and *Le personnalisme* (*Personalism*, 1950). After the Second World War, he founded a few personalist communities, where he lived with his wife, Paulette Leclercq. The premature death of his daughter gave Mounier a strong inner restlessness and a deeper experience of the Christian mystery of pain. In 1950, he died of exhaustion and a heart attack.

Among Mounier’s works we can select certain of his assessments of different philosophical trends throughout history. He criticises the philosophy of abstract “ideas” removed from reality, which Kierkegaard stigmatizes, beginning with Plato and ending with Hegel. But he also has a critical attitude towards the philosophy “of things”, which, following the method of natural sciences, studies man as another object of the material world (as do positivism and conductism). Existentialism comes close to reality, but when the existentialist attitude is taken to extremes it falls into solipsism and pessimism.

Mounier introduces personalism as an alternative to all these currents. The central tenet of personalism is the existence of free and creative persons, which introduces a “principle of unpredictability” into reality and which prevents the construction of a closed and allegedly all-encompassing system. Personalism flees from both materialism (the man is his body) and the making of the human person into an angelical being. Man is *entirely body* and *entirely spirit*: his bodily and spiritual existence belong to the same experience. Man has an embodied existence, given that he is part of nature. But man is also a free nature capable of fully realizing his own moral and spiritual vocation and of humanizing or personalizing the world.

In the *Manifesto in the Service of Personalism* Mounier proposes the following description of the person: “A person is a spiritual being established as such by its manner of subsistence and the independence in its being; he maintains this subsistence by adhering to a hierarchy of values, freely adopted, adhered to and lived through responsible commitment and constant conversion; he therefore unifies all his activity in freedom and furthermore develops, through creative acts, the uniqueness of his vocation.”[[220]](#footnote-220)

The first part of the description refers to the ontological characteristics of the person: the subsistence and independence of its being. In the second part, we see the person in motion: the person is an ethical project. Mounier called this dynamic aspect of the person *personality*. According to the philosopher from Grenoble, there are three fundamental dimensions in man’s spiritual development, in making himself into a person. These dimensions are *vocation*, *incarnation*, and *communion*. Vocation is what gives a unifying meaning to man's life: with vocation each person discovers his place and mission in the world; incarnation is an omnipresent dimension of human life, which prevents us from complete self-transparency and causes us to feel continually cast out of our own selves in order to concern ourselves with the problems of the world and of our neighbours; communion is the social and self-sacrificing dimension of the person: man can find himself only by giving oneself to others. These three fundamental dimensions in the development of the personality imply a series of existential attitudes. These include *meditation*, which allows one to discover one's personal vocation; *commitment* to the world's problems, confronting the gravity of our bodily condition; and *detachment from self* that allows room for communion. Perfect self-detachment is love.

Mounier's personalism is oriented towards the community, because the person himself is only fulfilled within the community. Our philosopher distinguishes between *society* and *community*. Society is a group of people that has not yet reached a true personalization of social relations. It is the realm of “it is said” or “it is done.” In the community, by contrast, interpersonal relationships between “I” and “you” create a “we” united by bonds of love. If, at the individual level the vocation gives unity to life, in the social order love gives unity to the community.

The personalist community is evidently still far from being achieved, so we must devise political and social projects that lead towards its realization. As a result, Mounier devoted many pages of his work to political, economic, and social issues. The State must exist for man, not man for the State. Mounier rejects political totalitarianism, but he does not defend capitalism and bourgeois liberalism either, because they are based on a materialistic, individualistic, and selfish vision of man. For Mounier, a liberal capitalist society is “established disorder.”

Personalism asks us to reconsider all social structures. Man, according to Mounier, must be decentralized: we must create the appropriate circumstances to enable the person to give himself to others and be available for communication and communion with his fellow men. The person exists only within a social relationship, as a member of an “us.” Only within a community of persons can man achieve his moral vocation. Hence Mounier defines his doctrine as a “communitarian personalism.” We must arrive at a “personalized socialism.” Mounier's personalism calls for political action in overcoming totalitarianism and liberalism. On occasions Mounier was not particularly critical of Marxism, because he admired its struggle for justice and its yearnings for liberation. Besides, he felt that given the European circumstances, only Marxists were the force that could defeat a selfish, individualistic and depersonalizing capitalism. In order to understand his attitude, we need to think that the struggle that Catholics and communists together had in the French Resistance during the Second World War made the two groups grow in mutual understanding. The Catholic French hierarchy would be very clear to warn of the dangers of such connivance. Yet, Mounier’s rejection of the world vision of materialist Marxism will be a constant in his life.

Being a Catholic thinker, Mounier gave interesting clues to unmask the relationship between the world and Christianity. The personalist community should not be a new kind of Christianity: God’s kingdom is not of this world, and the danger of confusing temporal structures and religious faith did not disappear with the fall of the *Ancient Régime*. It is rather a matter of creating a pluralist society where there is room for spiritual values. Far from the prevalent clericalism in French Catholic thought, Mounier highlights the relative autonomy of temporal realities.

### 5. Neothomism

The philosophical and theological teaching of St Thomas Aquinas had been an essential feature of Catholic tradition since the end of the thirteenth century. Popes have often highlighted the intrinsic value of the Thomistic synthesis between reason and faith. This authoritative insistence did not succeed, however, in keeping the Thomistic tradition faithful to its sources—the writings of St Thomas himself. And from the 14th century onward, Thomism began to stiffen, and lost its vitality and connection to the scientific world, with the exception of the Thomism of the 16th century, which produced thinkers of the calibre of Francisco de Vitoria, Domingo de Soto, Domingo Báñez, and Francisco Suárez. In the 19th century we note a weak Thomistic revival, which became stronger towards the end of the century, during the papacy of Leo XIII. It was during this time that neo-Thomism emerged with philosophers of the stature of Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson. Neo-Thomism is not only a sign of the vitality of the Church but also a reaction against the philosophical systems of Enlightened rationalism, idealism, and positivist materialism. In addition, it attempted to be a response to political liberalism, identified with laicism and the secularization of society, understood as the absolute affirmation of the temporal order, and also a response to all totalitarian systems that deny human dignity.

#### a) The encyclical Aeterni Patris of Leo XIII (1879) and the renewal of Thomism

In 1879, at the beginning of his papacy, Leo XIII published *Aeterni Patris*, an encyclical on Christian philosophy. The Pope took a critical view of the world landscape at the end of the 19th century: the lack of social peace, international tensions and moral degradation were due to spiritual causes. Among others, the separation of reason and faith was a key factor, which had existed since the beginning of the Modern era. In this encyclical, Pope Leo XIII encouraged intellectuals and theologians to revitalise Christian thought, and in particular to return to the philosophy of St Thomas, who, as *Doctor Communis*, presented a harmonious synthesis between reason and faith. In that synthesis, reason did not lose its power; to the contrary, truths known through faith helped reason to expand its horizons and enable intellectual investigation to advance much further: “It is not in vain that God has inserted the light of reason into the mind of man; and far from extinguishing or diminishing the power of intelligence, the light of faith perfects it. By adding faith to the efforts of intelligence, one is capable of achieving greater things.”

Although this Roman Pontiff felt Thomistic philosophy was the greatest exponent of a philosophical stance in harmony with faith, he did not identify Christian philosophy with the thought of St Thomas. Neither was Leo XIII's proposal a simple return to the 13th century: in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* he stated explicitly that it was necessary to get rid of the excessive minutia of scholastic analysis, and of all the elements which the progress of science in recent centuries had proven to be false. Leo XIII sincerely appreciated the new scientific discoveries, which could not conflict with the truths of faith if they were truthful themselves.

This papal document expressed an apostolic interest: in order to create a Christian society, Christian intellectuals must be awakened from their slumber and abandon fideistic attitudes, which were the order of the day in certain philosophical currents of the 19th century, a reaction to exaggerated rationalism and positivism.

On the other hand, Leo XIII indicated the need to study Thomism directly from the source—that is, the writings of St Thomas himself. This instruction was not arbitrary: after the death of St Thomas, commentators began to pop up who little by little departed from the true Thomistic spirit, building rigid philosophical systems with rationalist tendencies that did little justice to the *Doctor Angelicus*.[[221]](#footnote-221)

There were various positive reactions to this in the Catholic world. Within this atmosphere of a return to St Thomas, certain centres of study were set up or consolidated, which would become the driving force of the Thomistic revival: the *Institut Catholique* in Paris; the *Institut Supérieure de Philosophie* in Louvain carried on after the First World War the work begun by Cardinal Mercier in the last decades of the 19th century; the Dominicans of Le Saulchoir who, under the leadership of P. M. Mandonnet, would give birth to an institute devoted to historical Thomism; and in 1921 the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan was founded. The foundation of Thomistic journals accompanied these institutional initiatives. In 1909, the first issue of the *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica* appeared; in November 1926 Jacques Leclercq, from the Faculty of Saint-Louis in Brussels, founded *La Cité* *chrétienne*; *Nova et Vetera* was founded in 1925 in Switzerland by Charles Journet, and *La vie intellectuelle* was founded in France in 1928. All would have influence in their respective environments. An entire generation of Catholic and non-political Thomistic journals was borne.

The Belgian neo-Thomist movement was particularly important. The Thomism of Louvain presented itself as a critique of, and in dialogue with, the experimental sciences. According to Cardinal Mercier, Thomism had to be put back in touch with modern philosophical trends, and in particular with Kantian philosophy. Such a project entailed quite a few gnoseological challenges, because the critical issue was approached in such a way that the transition from the realm of ideas to reality was truly problematic. The most extreme example of these difficulties was the attempt to create a synthesis of Thomism and transcendental Kantian philosophy, carried out by Joseph Maréchal. These gnoseological trends were criticized by Maritain and Gilson. Cardinal Mercier's efforts in Louvain were carried forward by philosophers such as Léon Noël, Maurice de Wulf, and Louis de Raeymaeker.

#### b) Jacques Maritain

It is imperative to mention *Jacques Maritain* among the most representative authors of this current, who attempted to return to fidelity to St Thomas.[[222]](#footnote-222) The intellectual journey of this great philosopher summarizes the history of ideas in the 20th century. He was born in Paris in 1882 to a liberal Protestant family. He began his intellectual journey as a scientistic thinker and a socialist, but freed himself from positivism thanks to the influence of Bergson, whose lectures at the Collège de France he had attended. In 1906, he converted to Catholicism, together with his wife Raïssa, a Russian Jew. In this he was moved to a certain extent by his reading of several works of the poet Leon Bloy, whom he came to know personally and who would be Maritain's baptismal godfather. The conversion left a deep mark on his philosophical thinking. Through Father Clérissac he read St Thomas Aquinas, and he would eventually become, over the years, the main disseminator of the Angelic Doctor in Europe and America. After his religious conversion, Maritain exhibited a rather closed intellectual attitude towards Modernity, which he saw as an atheistic trend to turn man into a divine being. He adopted a conservative position with regards to politics, and he affiliated himself—but only outwardly—with Charles Maurras's *Action Française*. After the harsh criticism that Rome levelled against that political movement, Maritain embarked upon a cautious opening towards modernity, realizing that it was not a question of returning to a civilization that had been definitively left behind, but rather of devising a new Christianity, in which Christian values could once again breathe life into an agnostic society that was devoid of meaning.[[223]](#footnote-223)

In 1923, thanks to a bequest he received from Pierre Villard, a soldier killed in World War I, Jacques Maritain bought a house at Meudon, on the outskirts of Paris. Meudon would become a *foyer* in both the familiar and spiritual meaning of the word. The house had a chapel with the Blessed Sacrament reserved. Maritain's friends gathered in Meudon, attracted by intellectual interests as well as spiritual. The publication of the book *Art et scholastique* (*Art and Scholasticism and The Frontiers of Poetry*) was an opportunity to engage in dialogue with many artists, such as Ghéon, Cocteau, and Fumet. There he developed the first *Cercle d’études thomistes*, along with more informal meetings with intellectuals such as Julien Green. The purpose of these gatherings was educational, catechetical and spiritual. He also hosted annual retreats, where they heard the preaching of priest friends of Maritain, such as Garrigou-Lagrange and Father Altermann. Maritain was spurred on by a sincere zeal for doctrinal apostolate.

Meudon gave impetus to the project of publishing a series of books and journals, issued by Plon Press, “Le Roseau d’or.” It started out with Maritain's famous essay *Trois réformateurs* (*Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau)*. Set up in 1925, the series published 52 titles from authors who shared a realistic worldview that was open to transcendence: Bernanos, Claudel, Ghéon, and Massis are among the French authors whose works were joined by those that appeared in translation, including Chesterton, Papini, and Guardini.

In 1940, Maritain went to the United States on a cultural mission, and he would remain there until 1944. He undertook a variety of intellectual, patriotic, and humanitarian initiatives during the Second World War. After the war, he was appointed Ambassador of France to the Holy See (1945-1948); he returned to Princeton once again as Professor Emeritus, but he also lectured in the universities of Chicago and Notre Dame. He participated actively in the drafting of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), along with several UNESCO initiatives. After the death of his wife, Raïssa, in November 1960, he withdrew to the community of the Little Brothers of Jesus, founded by Charles de Foucauld, in Toulouse. He had occasional involvement in the Second Vatican Council. In his later years, especially after the publication of his book *Le Paysan de la Garonne* in 1966, he became critical of the developments of progressive theology and its anthropocentric trends. He died in Toulouse on April 28, 1973.[[224]](#footnote-224)

Maritain's Thomism is innovative: he tried to develop a philosophical discipline based on Aquinas' principles that Aquinas himself had not developed in depth. It includes his writings on social and political philosophy, pedagogy, the philosophy of history and aesthetics. What does Maritain mean by Thomism? In his work *The Angelic Doctor* (1930) he summarized his position in eight points: “a) There is a Thomistic philosophy, not a neo-Thomist philosophy; b) Thomism does not seek a return to the Middle Ages; c) Thomism seeks to use reason to distinguish truth from falsehood, not to destroy modern thinking, but to purify and to integrate all the truths that were discovered after St Thomas; d) Thomism is neither Right or Left, it is not positioned in space, but in the spirit; e) to judge Thomism as if it were a style of clothing that was worn in the 13th century but that today is no longer fashionable, as if the value of metaphysics was a function of time, is a truly barbaric mindset; f) Thomism is a form of knowledge. Vital, ongoing exchanges must take place between Thomism and particular forms of culture, but Thomism in its essence is strictly independent of these particular forms of culture; g) there is nothing more childish than to judge the value of metaphysics in the light of a social state that must be retained or destroyed; h) the philosophy of St Thomas in itself is independent of the information derived from faith and depends only on its principles and on its structuring of experience and reason. This philosophy, however, while remaining separate from them, is in vital communication with the superior wisdom of theology and with that of contemplation.”[[225]](#footnote-225) Considering the above, it is understandable why Maritain did not want to be called a “neo-Thomist” but rather a “paleo-Thomist”—that is, a faithful disciple of the true St Thomas.

This French thinker begins from a position of realism with regard to the theory of knowledge, which introduces various epistemological levels. In one of his central works, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, Maritain makes a distinction between *speculative knowledge*, the gateway to the intelligibility of being, and *practical knowledge*, whose purpose is to guide action. In addition, Maritain distinguishes between science, metaphysics, and theological knowledge as different ways of conceptualizing reality. Science knows reality through its causes, although contemporary science is undergoing a process of mathematization, and increasingly uses fictitious causal constructs that distance certain sciences from experiential reality to some extent. Philosophy of science has to be in continual dialogue with the empirical sciences, since the science of nature and the philosophy of nature are mutually complementary, although they may differ because they deal with different degrees of abstraction.

In addition to scientific knowledge, one can achieve knowledge of being *as being*; this more comprehensive and deeper knowledge is metaphysics. Metaphysics is not useful, in the sense that it is a contemplative kind of knowledge. It is a goal, not a means: it reveals to man true values and their hierarchy. Metaphysics arrives at the existence of God as author and root cause of nature. But to know not only that God exists, but *who God is*, we must rise to the plane of the supernatural theological wisdom, which enlightens reason through faith. In addition, Maritain valued the mystical experience of the saints, which surpasses the intellectual knowledge of theological wisdom: mystical wisdom is a genuine supernatural experience of God, a work of faith sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In the field of practical knowledge, Maritain gave special attention to ethics and politics, which we will cover in the next section. For this French Thomist, ethics is a scientific form of knowledge; its purpose is praxis: its purpose is the study of human action in the light of the ultimate good for man. In this regard, the distinction between moral action—the goal of ethics—and simple making—the goal of technology, whose purpose is to manufacture things—is of the utmost importance. The science of ethics is initially autonomous—that is, it is structured on the basis of principles that are accessible with natural reason alone. However, the science of ethics also requires a deep knowledge of human nature, which can be accessed only through divine Revelation, in order to build a moral system that corresponds to the needs of actual men. In this sense, a relationship of dependence is established between ethics and theological knowledge.

Maritain developed a social and political thought within the limits of Thomism, but the starting point is an analysis of history and the changing human circumstances. If St Thomas had lived in another era, says Maritain, he would have freed Christian thought of “the images and fantasies of the *Sacrum Imperium*.” Once he surpassed an initial period of conservative tendencies, Maritain introduced his concept of the “new Christianity” as a concrete historical ideal in his composition *Integral Humanism* (1937). According to Maritain, one cannot return to medieval Christianity, a period which operates under a sacral paradigm: political society is seen as a tool that works on behalf of the salvation of souls. Instead, Modernity gives rise to a process of secularization, which turns the temporal into the absolute. Maritain proposes a new Christianity, which is characterized by the primacy of the individual and its communitarian and pluralistic nature. It is a question of creating a society that is open to transcendent values, inspired by Christianity, that recognizes the relative autonomy of the temporal, but not denominational or sacralised.

If *Integral Humanism* is his central work during the period between the two World Wars, while he was in the United States during World War II, he would write his major work of political philosophy in English: *Man and the State* (1951). Society must be at the service of the person, and the State—that is, the set of political institutions that structures society in a hierarchical fashion—is merely a tool at the service of the political community, which is the body that genuinely exercises sovereignty, a gift received from God. Maritain makes a distinction between the individual and the person. The individual is “that which excludes all other men from oneself.” It is the narrowness of the self, “always threatened and always willing to hoard things for himself.” The being known as the person, however, entails the subsistence of the spiritual soul as communicated to the composite human being, and whose principal characteristic is free and loving self-giving. Man is a unity of the individual and the person. Some societies might not consider man to be a person, only an individual. This happens with liberal bourgeois individualism, a consequence of philosophical nominalism. There may also be societies that so overvalue the universal above the individual (ultra-realism), that they degenerate into totalitarianism. Thomism's moderate realism favours a society of persons that satisfies the needs of men as biological individuals, and that is based on respect for the human person who transcends the biological level and earthly society itself.

Maritain's vision of history responds to Christian tradition: in human history, God's providential plan and human freedom intertwine mysteriously. Therefore, there are no necessary or deterministic laws in history, nor is there progressive evolution. All historical eras, as in the parable of the wheat and the tares, have positive and negative aspects, which are to be judged against man's final destiny, which is the knowledge of the truth and the practice of good morals. Although Maritain is not a historian of philosophy, he devoted some essays to St Thomas, Martin Luther, Descartes, Rousseau, Bergson, and others. He believes that over the course of history, philosophy has passed from an ancient-medieval period where there is a primacy of being and confidence in the ability of the intellect to know what things are, to a period based on phenomena, which begins with Descartes but whose key manifestation is Kant; knowledge is limited to what is apparent, without penetrating the thing-in-itself. Meanwhile, natural theology suffers a radical change, from the medieval theologians to the Deism of the Enlightenment, and ends up as contemporary atheism.

Jacques Maritain revived Thomism: he was not a pessimist who dreamed of an impossible and undesirable return to the past. He was, instead, aware (as was Pope Leo XIII) that the philosophical principles of St Thomas could offer many solutions to the serious symptoms of the contemporary cultural crisis.

*Etienne Gilson (1884-1978)* is another neo-Thomist writer worth mentioning. He was a historian of philosophy, who studied many modern and medieval authors. He rejects the primacy of the critical problem, because the very consideration of the problem of knowledge implies that we know what knowledge is. He also rejects “essentialism”, and discovers the *actus essendi*, the key stone of Thomistic philosophy. Gilson is the thinker who sees *philosophie chrétienne* as a real and genuine possibility: the Christian philosopher cannot leave his faith aside when he does philosophy. He must use his reason, but his guide and reference points are the absolute truths of revealed religion.

\* \* \*

The preceding brief pages are not meant to be exhaustive. We have outlined several currents of thought of the 20th century which are aware that the cause of the crisis of the culture of Modernity is a reductive anthropological understanding. They attempt to escape from this crisis with anthropological approaches that give back dignity to the human person. The purpose of this chapter is only to bear witness to one of the possible solutions to the crisis of modern culture; without rejecting subjectivity, it highlights that man is a creature, that he enjoys relative autonomy, and that he needs interpersonal communication with other men as with God.

## X THE NIHILISMS

In the introduction to Part III we referred to nihilism as a response that several intellectuals gave to the crisis of culture of Modernity that arose during World War I. What do we mean by Nihilism? We will answer with Vittorio Possenti’s description: “Many concepts are related to the idea of nihilism: a value crisis, the devaluation of higher values, intellectual and moral relativism, the dissolution of the very idea of truth, a terminal gloom that points to decadence, a desperate sense of finiteness, loss of centre and of meaning, end of the linear understanding of history, and even the concept of *post-history* and of “end of history”. A relationship between these events and the enigmatic nature of nihilism is undeniable: however, it is not enough to find a resemblance. Other authors are possibly more correct when they say that nihilism is related to the loss of centre and the crisis of meaning, which depends on the loss of a privileged or absolute viewpoint on the whole. At the same time the accusation of nihilism is used by others to bash it unto submission, or as a weapon of one-upmanship before the public in order to give the term nihilism a negative connotation. If nihilism has generated fear and repulsion for a long time, now some argue that there is no need to be ashamed of it”[[226]](#footnote-226).

Contemporary nihilism has two fundamental aspects. On the one hand, from a more existential perspective nihilism shows a crisis of meaning: many men do not know the ultimate meaning of human existence. On the other, from a more theoretical perspective, nihilism is a kind of radical scepticism about the possibility of knowing the truth. We will look at these two aspects of contemporary nihilism, and begin with the doctrines of Nietzsche, the father of contemporary nihilism.

### 1. The nihilism of Nietzsche

#### a) Life and works

Nietzsche’s philosophy is closely linked to his life. To understand his philosophical work, we must understand his historical and personal circumstances.

Nietzsche was born in the presbytery of Röcken on October 15, 1844, a village next to the town of Naumburg (Saxony). His father, who died when Friedrich was very young, was a Lutheran pastor, and his grandparents were pastors and theology professors. Nietzsche’s childhood was spent in a Christian family environment comprising his mother, his sister, his grandmother, and his aunts. During this period, he wanted to become a pastor. In 1858 he entered the royal lyceum of Pforta, where Fichte had been a pupil. There he received literary, scientific and religious training. However, during his adolescence he began to doubt his religious beliefs, which he clearly portrayed in his poem “To the Unknown God,” and in his early essay “Fate and History.”

In 1864 he began his studies at the University of Bonn, enrolling in Theology and Philology, but the following year he abandoned his theological studies. In 1865 he moved to Leipzig. During his stay in that city, he read *The World as Will and Representation*, and thus discovered Schopenhauer’s thinking, which fascinated him and left an indelible mark. He also read Strauss’ *The Life of Jesus* and Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*. These two authors’ attacks on religion, and the pessimistic view of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, served in some part to resolve the inner doubts that tormented Nietzsche’s soul, and led him to reject Christianity. In 1866 he read Lange’s *History of Materialism*. This book confirmed his belief in the insurmountable gulf between the infinity of life and the limitedness of intellectual knowledge.

He did not take part in the Austro-Prussian War, but in 1866 he performed his military service with great enthusiasm in Naumburg. In 1869 he moved to Basel, where he had been assigned the chair of philology through the good services of his mentor, the renowned philology professor Friedrich Wilhelm Ritschl. The University of Leipzig awarded him a doctorate without requiring a thesis, on account of his academic work. Although in those years he published few philological essays, he developed his true intellectual vocation during that time: philosophy.

In Basel he met and came to admire Jackob Burkhardt, among other scholars, whom he regarded one of his teachers, along with F. Overbeck, a professor of Church History who shared Nietzsche’s vision of Christianity, and Paul Ree, a positivist thinker. His most important intellectual relationship during this period was with the musician Richard Wagner, a *genius* in Schopenhauer’s sense. During his stay in Basel, he often visited Wagner and his family, who lived in Tribschen; there he found a welcoming and intellectually engaging atmosphere. In 1872, he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy, Out of the Spirit of Music*. The book was very poorly received in philological critics, perhaps because they did not understand that this was a book of philosophy.

After 1872, Nietzsche would move further away from the academic world. His published essays had little to do with philology: *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* (1872); *Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books* (1872); *Unfashionable Observations* (1874-1876). In 1877, he distanced himself from Wagner when he discovered that the musician admitted—according to Nietzsche’s narrow view—certain Christian ideas. This decision was also influenced by Nietzsche’s morbid susceptibility, as he believed that he had not been treated with the finesse he merited while in Bayreuth, Wagner’s new home. A year later he wrote *Human, All Too Human*. In 1879, he resigned from his university chair because he suffered from chronic headaches and stomach problems. To promote his recovery, he made trips to the south of Europe, in Switzerland and Italy. A pension from the university allowed him to meet his modest financial needs. After this brief hiatus, he resumed his literary activity, and published *Daybreak* that same year. In 1881, in Sils-Maria, one of Nietzsche’s favourite Swiss destinations, he had a kind of vision of the eternal return of all things. Part of these experiences, and especially the more profound pages concerning his doctrine of “the death of God,” would be recounted the following year in *The Gay Science*. That same year—1882—he had a brief romantic tryst with Lou Salomé in Rome. However, this intelligent and beautiful young woman rejected Nietzsche’s interest, favouring his friend Paul Ree. The romantic setback drove Nietzsche, a solitary and introverted man by nature, even further into isolation.

Between 1883 and 1885 he produced one of his most important works: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He would continue in 1886 with: *Beyond Good and Evil*; 1887: *The Genealogy of Morals*; 1888: *The Case of Wagner*, 1889: *Nietzsche versus Wagner, Twilight of the Idols*, 1894: *The Antichrist*. In these works he unleashed his hatred of Christianity with a spate of accusations and insults. These were also years of intense loneliness and inner suffering. In 1889, he suffered a complete psychological breakdown. He believed that he was God, and sometimes wrote letters signed as Dionysus, and others as “the Crucified one.” In Turin, he wanted to hug a horse being mistreated by the coachman, and fainted in the middle of the street. He never again managed to take complete control of his intellectual faculties. He died eleven years later, on August 25, 1900, following a stroke he had suffered in Naumburg. During those final years, his mother was always beside him until her death. After that, his sister Elisabeth cared for him.

*Ecce Homo*, which is a kind of autobiography, was published posthumously in 1908, and in 1911 *The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of all Values,* a set of previously unpublished fragments, was collected and published by his sister.

#### b) Life: The Grand Theme of Nietzsche

Nietzsche was a poet and a prophet: he hated systematic thinking. He writes in a captivating style that relies heavily on metaphors, images, and stories of legends. These elements make it difficult to make a definitive interpretation of Nietzsche’s writings.

Life is the ultimate motivation for Nietzsche’s thinking, already present in his first essay, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. In this essay, Nietzsche characterizes Greek tragedy in the period before Socrates as a reflection of the vital balance that existed at the time between Apollonian drive—rational tendencies, which generate clear-cut forms shown in sculpture and architecture—and Dionysian drive—a creative chaos, an orgiastic force that is expressed aesthetically through music. However, this fragile balance of Greek culture would not last long, because Socratic philosophy would break it, leading the Apollonian drive to rule. Thus, after Plato, life would be infused with an objective meaning and a transcendent goal, which was later consolidated in Christianity. This, for Nietzsche, means the denial or mortification of the life-generating drive, the ability to create something really new in culture.

Based on this insight, Nietzsche interprets the history of Western culture as a process of decline that has lasted for 2500 years. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, he sets out to say that the accepted explanation of the world and of human existence is radically wrong, flawed in its origins. The divine and transcendent foundation of the meaning of life on earth is actually a great lie that should be unmasked. As a result, the unmasking of the divine fallacy—which Nietzsche called *the death of God*— should cause all values created by the transcendent vision of life to disappear. Thus, his thinking seeks to obliterate any transcendent vision of life, and give it a new immanent foundation, firmly affixed to the ground. That is why he could say of himself: “I am dynamite.”

Nietzsche’s approaches life with an intellectually destructive attitude. He answers the question “What is life, really?” with “Life is nothing but *nonsense*.” Here we find the subject of nihilism. But the devaluation of all values—that is, the fact that after the death of God nothing makes sense—cannot be the final word: other values must be created that will give new meaning to life. Thus we come up with a constructive perspective. In order to overcome nihilism we must understand life. This understanding is developed around the following themes: *eternal return, will to power, the Übermensch (superhuman), and the revaluation of all values.*

#### c) The death of God and nihilism

According to our author, Western philosophy, from Plato to Kant, has always related the problems of being and of value to God. But the time has come to affirm that God is dead, because mankind, which has created this imaginary deity, has realized—or at least the wisest and most perceptive of its number have realized—that man is finite, a nonsense, a nothing. The confidence and certainty that rested on a transcendent explanation of life based on the existence of God have disappeared, and man must learn to live in existential abandonment.

In his book *The Gay Science* Nietzsche introduces the topic of the death of God. We read in the famous section 125: “Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the marketplace and cried incessantly: ‘I seek God! I seek God!’— As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? migrated? — Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. ‘Whither is God?’ he cried. ‘I will tell you. We have killed him—you and I! All of us are his murderers! But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? And backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? —Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives, —who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to wash ourselves clean? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed, —and whoever is born after us, for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto!’— Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners: they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern to the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. ‘I have come too early,’ he said then; ‘my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering—it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves!’— It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam Deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: ‘What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?’”[[227]](#footnote-227)

It is a very impressive piece. What does the death of God mean? On the one hand, the confirmation of the secularization of European world: “The greatest recent event—that “God is dead”, that faith in the Christian God has become unbelievable—is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe. At least, for the few whose threatening gaze is sharp and subtle enough for this spectacle, a sun seems to have set and some ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt: to them our old world must appear daily more like twilight, more mistrustful, stranger, ‘older.’”[[228]](#footnote-228) The lack of faith is not yet complete. Europeans had not been completely uprooted: so far the shadows creep forward.

From a metaphysical point of view the death of God means the collapse of the transcendent world; from a religious point of view, it means that faith in the Christian God had disappeared. Mankind has not killed God, who had never existed, but its concept, the source of meaning and comfort. Therefore, this “event,” as Nietzsche calls it, is tremendously ambiguous: the disappearance of God erases all points of reference: there is no longer a horizon; the sun has broken free from the earth, there is neither above nor below. In the absence of any absolute, everything becomes relative and worthless. In this regard, the death of God is a tragedy: the “madman” who announces the death of God must awaken those atheists who have not yet realized the tremendous consequences that this event entails. It is a veiled criticism of so many atheists of Modernity, like Strauss, Feuerbach, and Marx; they assert God’s non-existence, but they continue to talk about absolute values such as justice, brotherhood, and the meaning of history. Thus, Nietzsche’s atheism is in fact the most consistent of contemporary atheisms.

The death of God is an ambiguous, tragic event, as we have said, but also heroic, in a positive sense, because the disappearance of God opens the door for the deification of man. Behind the death of God, we can still hear the words “you shall be as gods” from the Book of Genesis. Said Zarathustra, the prophet of Nietzschean nihilism: “But let me reveal my heart to you entirely, my friends. If there were gods, then how could I endure not to be God? Therefore there are no gods. Although I have drawn this conclusion, now it drags me.”[[229]](#footnote-229) In this way, Nietzsche brings out into the open the ideological core of Modernity: the absolute autonomy of man, who must do away with the Absolute in order to take its place in history and in human existence.

For the reasons that have already been set forth, it is logical to infer that nihilism and the death of God are in practice the same thing. According to Nietzsche, Nihilism is the devaluation of all values. “What does nihilism mean? That supreme values have been rendered worthless. There are no ends: there is no answer to the question why. Everything is in vain.”[[230]](#footnote-230) In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche explains the process of *how the real world became a fable*. Man’s steps in this regard are: Platonism, Christianity, Kantianism, positivism, nihilism. In analysing these steps, our author constructs a sort of history of metaphysics, which betrays a rather precarious training in the history of philosophy. But what is more interesting to emphasize is not the matter of details but rather the ultimate meaning of nihilism: the transcendent world, considered the “real” world by Platonists and Christians, and to a lesser degree by the Kantians, has disappeared, and the “apparent” world has been transformed into the real world, into this unique world. However, it is a world without meaning, which lacks natural purposes or established orders, because behind it there is no providential designer. After showing the nonsense of this-only world, Zarathustra begins (*Incipit Zarathustra*) his work as the prophet of the future.

#### d) The eternal return

After the death of God, we observe the absence of an absolute being, or of any transcendent reality that would give reason to the world. Nietzsche is faced with a changing and contingent cosmos, which has no horizon or sun that would provide a higher reference point. In 1881, as noted above, Nietzsche intuited the theory of the eternal return or recurrence of all things: if nihilism has shattered the idea of a permanent and unchanging being, the only thing that exists is the future, to be now given the characteristics of permanence that pertain to beings. In his inverted metaphysics, Nietzsche establishes *becoming* in the place of *being*. For this replacement to have permanence, he invokes the notion of eternal return: Time is infinite, whether we look to the past or to the future: eternity is contained within time. All evolving and changeable events become permanent precisely because they will all happen again, in the same manner and at the same order, in the infinite future, as they have been repeated countless times in the past.

Zarathustra is the thinker of “becoming,” a figure opposed to the metaphysics of being. In line with his worldview predicated on the assumption of God's death, or the disappearance of any transcendent point of reference, Nietzsche returns to the pagan Greek world, with its cyclical view of human history. In paragraph 341 of The Gay Science, Nietzsche proposes the main content of the eternal return: “This life, as thou livest it at present, and hast lived it, thou must live it once more, and also innumerable times; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh, and all the unspeakably small and great in thy life must come to thee again, and all in the same series and sequence—and similarly this spider and this moonlight among the trees, and similarly this moment, and I myself. The eternal sand-glass of existence will ever be turned once more, and thou with it, thou speck of dust!"—Wouldst thou not throw thyself down and gnash thy teeth, and curse the demon that so spake? Or hast thou once experienced a tremendous moment in which thou wouldst answer him: "Thou art a God, and never did I hear aught more divine!" If that thought acquired power over thee, as thou art, it would transform thee, and perhaps crush thee; the question with regard to all and everything: "Dost thou want this once more, and also for innumerable times?" would lie as the heaviest burden upon thy activity! Or, how wouldst thou have to become favourably inclined to thyself and to life, so as *to long for nothing more ardently* than for this last eternal sanctioning and sealing?”[[231]](#footnote-231).

In the preceding quote the eternal return appears fascinating, but also terrible. For Nietzsche himself, it was unbearable to think of the idea of a return to the existence he had already suffered. Therefore, he speaks of the eternal return as a snake coiled around the neck of a shepherd. The shepherd is terrified, but Zarathustra, who passes before him, encourages him to bite off the snake’s head and spit it out. The man does so, and he is regenerated. His terror is transformed into joy: he has said yes to life, which implies the eternal return of all things. As we see, Nietzschean anthropology is closely linked to this worldview.

This theory has a cosmological and an ethical side. The cosmological component is the clearest: it holds that the world is ruled by necessity. If all that happens has happened already, then the future is also immutable. The amount of force at work in the universe is finite, but the time it unfolds in is infinite. Therefore, any possible development of force is only a repetition. From a critical perspective, we can say that the necessary recurrence of the events, assuming that Nietzsche’s assumption is correct, is only one possibility, but this does not have to involve logical necessity. However, the ambiguity and contradiction inherent in this doctrine is expressed above all in its ethical aspect. Nietzsche conceives his theory from a position that supports a future open to actual decision, symbolically represented by biting the snake’s head. The eternal return would be an ethical doctrine, an imperative, a practical rule of the will: “The thing that you desire, you should desire it in such a way that you also desire its eternal return.” Ultimately, the German philosopher regarded the eternal return, contradictorily, as a cosmological imperative and as freedom, as an ethical calling and an actual decision.

With the theory of the eternal return, Nietzsche sets forth the ontological basis of his doctrine: “Conclusion: to imprint the nature of being on becoming, that is the highest will to power.”[[232]](#footnote-232) The disappearance of the transcendent horizon makes everything changeable, with a contingency devoid of necessity. The eternal return of all things attempts to transfer the permanence and necessity of being to the coming-to-be.

#### e) The Übermensch (The superman)

This doctrine is closely linked to his anthropology. Time is infinite, whether looking towards the past or towards the future. Everything should have been and will be once again. Therefore, to wish for the eternal return one must be at ease with life. The overcoming of the anguish of eternal return and its acceptance produce an anthropological regeneration: thus is born the Übermensch, the superman or superhuman, who acknowledges nihilism and overcomes it.

After the death of God, Zarathustra announces the arrival of the Übermensch. Zarathustra said: “I teach you the Übermensch (the superman). Man is something that must be surpassed. What have you done to surpass man?”[[233]](#footnote-233). Man harbours desires for transcendence within himself. Until this moment, transcendence has been personified in God. But now man must transcend towards himself and towards the earthly world. As the sense of the transcendent existence disappears, the Übermensch stands up in the new meaning of the world: “Man is a rope stretching between the animal and the superhuman: a rope stretched over an abyss. A dangerous crossing to the other side, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping. Man's greatness lies in being a bridge and not a goal: what is worthy of being loved in man is that he is a transit and not a sunset.”[[234]](#footnote-234)

The Übermensch is a new state of humanity. He will be able to say yes to life, he will not scorn his own body, he will not love his neighbour but rather his friend. He will be a free man, able to give himself over to good and to evil, and to impose the law of his own free will: since all values have been made worthless, we must create new values that depend solely on the absolute autonomy of man. The Übermensch must overcome God, but he must also overcome the negative consequences of God’s death, namely nihilism.

As his thinking evolved, Nietzsche would make the character of the Übermensch ever more biological and aristocratic: The new man would be the *strong man*, *the eagle who attacks head-on, the Barbarian*. He will be in charge of making *grand politics*, that will govern the anonymous and depersonalized masses, without fear of sacrificing them to achieve his personal views.

But Nietzsche realizes that the ideal of the Übermensch is not attractive to most people. In a desolate world devalued by the lack of transcendence, there are two anthropological possibilities: either to overcome nihilism through the creation of new values—a task to be undertaken by the Übermensch—or to live a life of pettiness, surrounded by a nihilism that has not been overcome. Our author calls the people who embody this vital attitude *the last man*: a tiny, godless man, but unable to overcome nothingness, since he continues to embrace the old values that allow him to live in relative comfort and peace. *The last man* does not set any ideals for himself, and his life is not enlightened by any star. He is the contemporary man, the ‘petit bourgeois’. We can identify a double legacy of Nietzschean nihilism in the history of the twentieth century by looking at his doctrine of the Übermensch. On the one hand, voluntarist totalitarianism, which would embody the ideals of the Übermensch; and on the other hand, “weak thought,” moral scepticism, the mere confirmation of existential absurdity.

#### f) The will to power

To complete this overview of Nietzsche’s philosophy, we now ought to refer to the notion of the will to power, and one of its consequences: his moral doctrine. “This world is a will to power, and nothing else.” It is a new version of Schopenhauer’s concept of will as a transcendent reality, as the truly real. But it is not identical, because for Nietzsche the world is not an illusion, nor does the will to power exist in a transcendent plane: the world, the universe, is a unity in the process of becoming, and it is the will to power in the sense that this will gives it its intelligible nature.

The will to power is a theory of the universe, a way of viewing it and describing it, which completes his doctrine of the eternal return. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he writes: “A living entity wishes to unleash its own strength on everything—life itself is will to power—: self-preservation is just one of the most frequent and indirect consequences of this (…). Assuming that in the end we manage to explain the whole of our instinctive life as the translation and the ramification of the only fundamental way of desiring—that is, the will to power, as is my proposal—assuming that one could reconnect all the organic functions to this will to power ... we would have achieved the right to unambiguously label all acts of force as will to power. The world seen from the inside, the world determined and qualified as intelligible, would be the ‘will to power’ and nothing more.”

Nietzsche claims that the world is intelligible through the will to power, but that does not mean that the world has regained meaning. The will to power as explanatory reality is merely a blind and irrational force. At the same time, Nietzsche reveals the arbitrariness of his worldview. Colomer writes: “In the same way as with the eternal return, the will to power is not one argument among many that can be proved or refuted. It is a mock-up, a voluntary way of seeing the world, which Nietzsche opposes to the viewpoints of science and metaphysics. Nowhere does Nietzsche demonstrates that the will to power is the real essence of all that exists. He takes it as a matter of fact. And based on this assumption he interprets all phenomena, even those that may seem more to the contrary.”[[235]](#footnote-235)

The arbitrary and all-embracing nature is highlighted in fragment 1067 of The will to power, that Nietzsche’s editors placed as the final point of his work: “And do ye know what "the universe" is to my mind? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This universe is a monster of energy, without beginning or end; a fixed and brazen quantity of energy which grows neither bigger nor smaller, which does not consume itself, but only alters its face; as a whole its bulk is immutable, it is a household without either losses or gains, but likewise without increase and without sources of revenue, surrounded by nonentity as by a frontier, it is nothing vague or wasteful, it does not stretch into infinity; but it is a definite quantum of energy located in limited space, and not in space which would be anywhere empty. It is rather energy everywhere, the play of forces and force-waves, at the same time one and many, agglomerating here and diminishing there, a sea of forces storming and raging in itself, forever changing, forever rolling back over in calculable ages to recurrence, with an ebb and flow of its forms, producing the most complicated things out of the most simple structures; producing the most ardent, most savage, and most contradictory things out of the quietest, most rigid, and most frozen material, and then returning from multifariousness to uniformity, from the play of contradictions back into the delight of consonance, saying yea unto itself, even in this homogeneity of its courses and ages; forever blessing itself as something which recurs for all eternity,—a becoming which knows not satiety, or disgust, or weariness:—this, my Dionysian world of eternal self-creation, of eternal self-destruction, this mysterious world of twofold voluptuousness; this, my "Beyond Good and Evil" without aim, unless there is an aim in the bliss of the circle, without will, unless a ring must by nature keep goodwill to itself,—would you have a name for my world? A *solution* of all your riddles? Do ye also want a light, ye most concealed, strongest and most undaunted men of the blackest midnight? *This world is the Will to Power—and nothing else!* And even ye yourselves are this will to power—and nothing besides! “[[236]](#footnote-236).

#### g) Morality and Christianity

Identifying the world with the will to power entails certain consequences for Nietzsche’s moral doctrine. Values are determined by the will to power. They are projections, games that life plays unconsciously to assert and experience its power. Furthermore, it’s impossible to assess the value of life, because—as origin and measure of all values—life is incommensurable to value. There also follows from this the relativity of all values, which are forms of the will to power: values are relative to life.

But forgetting that behind every valuation is the will to power, Nietzsche names himself the arbiter of values. He states that there are two types of valuations: the a-moralistic and the Christian-moralistic. One is a morality of lords, and the other of slaves. The first is a morality of hierarchy, and the other is based on equality. The priestly class, the producer of the *spirit*, has twisted all values. The Judeo-Christian movement is the process by which “resentment becomes the creator and producer of values”[[237]](#footnote-237): Humility, disease, poverty, Christian pseudo-values that stand in defence of the weak, are in fact counter-values. Christianity is only the most powerful version of a more general reality: the morality of slaves.

Having said this, we can more readily understand the terrible phrases written in the *Antichrist*: “I condemn Christianity. I raise up against the Christian Church the most terrible accusations that have ever passed the lips of any accuser. For me, she is the greatest of all imaginable corruptions; she had worked the greatest of all possible corruptions. The Christian church leaves nothing untouched by its corrupting contagion: it has made a counter-value of every value; a lie of every truth, a perversion of everything that is honest... I would inscribe this eternal accusation against Christianity on every wall wheresoever there exists a wall to write it on. I call Christianity the sole great damnation, the sole greatest inner perversion, the sole great revenge instinct in which no means are poisonous enough, stealthy enough, subterranean or petty enough; I call it the only unquenchable infamy of humankind.”[[238]](#footnote-238)

Nevertheless, the relationship between Nietzsche and Christianity is ambiguous. On the one hand, the philosopher yearns for the world of certainties and assurances he was given in his childhood within the Christian faith. Jesus is the *joyful messenger*, who died as he had lived, as he had taught: the most noble man in history. But Christianity has betrayed Jesus: the God of the Cross is a curse against life. Nietzsche had intended to destroy the transcendent meaning of the Christian vision of life, at the same time as he debated with the existential abandon that leads to mental alienation.

According to Colomer, there are two Nietzsches: one, a hater and a blasphemer, sits next to the other, who is more authentic, more human, who told his mother not to read his books and who would write to Overbeck: “My life now consists of the hope that all things are better than I understand them to be and that someone makes it impossible for my truths to be believed.”[[239]](#footnote-239)

### 2. Agnostic Humanism

We have already said that Nietzsche’s inheritance is two-fold. On one side, the totalitarian regimes based on power and voluntarism (Nazism, Fascism, Stalinism). On the other, we find weak thought, moral relativism, sceptical subjectivism before any presumed value or truth. This *light* version of nihilism - in fact it is a nihilism that has not been overcome- will be found in many 20th century writers. Novels, plays, tales of the period between the two world wars, are full of characters lost in existence, without firm reference points and who ask themselves what the purpose of their life is, and who find no meaningful answers. The case in point are the characters of the play *Waiting for Godot*, of Samuel Beckett. Two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, wait for Godot to come, but he never does. Other characters appear instead, who transmit nonsensical messages. According to some critics Godot is God, or transcendence or the meaning of life, that is never seen. Another paradigmatic case is James Joyce’s Ulysses, where we witness a meaningless whirl of a meaningless life through the thousand encounters, memories and references to two characters who live in Dublin on the 16th of June of 1904. Or the famous Kafka novels -*The Process, The Castle, the Metamorphosis*- where the main character finds himself in a number of absurd scenarios, to the point he loses his own subjectivity.

In a short story called *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place, Ernest Hemingway (1899-1960)*, puts a nihilistic prayer in the words of a Spanish waiter: “Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing be with thee”[[240]](#footnote-240). Hemingway’s characters - soldiers, bull fighters, boxers, hunters- can never manage to finish a sentence and identify themselves with their forces and will to power. But in the end, they are defeated by an absurd, blind fate, like the sharks that devour the fish in the famous story *The Old Man and the Sea*. Hemingway’s existential parable ends up with suicide.

The awareness of human finitude and absence of hope in a ‘beyond’ will bring the topic of death to be at the centre of literature and philosophy. *Thomas Mann (1875-1955)* wrote his famous novel *The Magic Mountain* in the years that followed the First World War. He very artfully portrays a collection of characters who are trying to escape from certain death - they are tuberculous patients in a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps - with worldly existential attitudes, never open to supernatural hope. Furthermore, suffering makes them feel that time is eternal.

At the same time, in his initial works, Heidegger thinks that man is a *Sein-zum-Tode*, a being-for-death. Man has been thrown into existence in the midst of a world full of objects. Human existence is a perennial making plans, that invariably end in death. Along this way of thinking, awareness of oneself means apprehending that human existence is totally finite. Freeing oneself from death means understanding that death is the last, definitive final point of our existential projects. Contemporary technology, and its hunger to control the world is an expression of nihilism when looked at from this perspective, because it distracts us from thinking about the only thing that we cannot avoid: death. But death itself ceases to be unavoidable as soon as it becomes our own choice; “in so far as this possibility is understood clearly, the more sharply the understanding delves into the possibilities as the impossibility of existence in general”[[241]](#footnote-241). As Pietro Prini writes, “the ’not yet’ of our death does not come later, like the ‘not yet’ of the full moon comes after the last crescent, or the ‘not yet’ of maturity comes after the bitterness of the fruit, but it is always by our side, part of our own being. Each one of us carries within himself and matures death within oneself relentlessly. Heidegger, in the style of Homer calls men “the mortals” (*die Sterblichen*), because in accordance with our essence, “we are in so far as we live in the proximity of death” (*Der Satz vom Grund*, Pfullingen 1957, p.186)”[[242]](#footnote-242).

We have quoted several writers and one philosopher. Now it is the turn of *Albert Camus (1913-1960)* an intellectual between philosophy and literature. Camus wrote books that made an impact in the last century. Among the best known we find *L’étranger* (1941), *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), *La peste* (1947), *L’homme revolté* (1951), *La Chute* (1956).

Camus begins with the realization that daily life is nonsense, and results in boredom and tiredness. We have to take stock of ordinary life to understand how absurd it is. Looking at things from a distance leads to anxiety, when we realise that life is nothing more than a road to death. Camus’ literary work does not revolve around death, but around the absurdity of life. The only serious philosophical issue is to work out whether life is worth living. This question has two wrong answers: suicide and hope. The first one is not valid because with suicide we extinguish our clear conscience, the light that discovered how absurd life is, and the only thing that we should be protect and develop. Hope is not a solution either, because it assumes the existence of a God that ordains the Universe, yet the world is disordered and absurd. Hope is a moral suicide that leads to the death of clear conscience. The only possible answer is rebellion. The rebel man is the man who has discovered that life is futile, and helps others to discover it.

This existential attitude is obvious in *Le mythe de Sisyphe*. He uses the image of Sisyphus, from the Greek mythology: he has to carry a stone to the top of a mountain, but once there, the stone falls, Sisyphus comes down and climbs up again, eternally trying in vain to finish his task. Camus puts forward the main problem of modern man: authentic human life begins only at the very moment that Sisyphus realises that lifting the stone once more after it has fallen is useless and has no meaning. Acknowledging the absurd is not the end but the beginning: man’s problem -despite and after such knowledge- is to give dignity and value to life, without escaping the absurd, and not give evasive pseudo-explanations by recurring to religious faith, but facing it and overcoming it. In short, suffering, work, fatigue, aporia are the very realities that we have to make sense of and give worth to: this is what we need to acknowledge, this is what we have to say yes to” [[243]](#footnote-243).

Camus introduces himself as the defender of atheistic humanism. Human conscience has a value that needs to be protected. He is far from any totalizing ideology, and proposes specific struggles to achieve specific justices. In his novel *La peste*, one of the characters, a doctor that gives his whole life to his patients, asks himself whether it is possible to be a saint without God. Although life is absurd, we have to set up the city of men, where consciences are respected.

The culture of Modernity reaches a paradigmatic moment with Camus. Without reference to transcendence, human life falls into the absurd darkness of a period of time destined to death. The values that remain in his humanism run the risk of disappearing because they have no roots. Jean-Paul Sartre will be more consistent. He will draw anthropological consequences from his humanism, which are the denial of human dignity although he has defined it as humanistic: being is too much, man is a useless passion, hell is other people.

### 3. From the death of God to the death of man: postmodernity

According to Possenti the theoretical core of nihilism is the idea that it is impossible to know the truth. Nihilism and the death of metaphysics would be the same thing. If nihilism, for Nietzsche, is the passing of finality, of meaning, the lack of response to the question why this gnoseological attitude leads to the awareness of the idea that truth is conformity with reality. Contemporary nihilism extends even to scientific knowledge, which was considered in the 19th century as the impregnable redoubt of certainty. Some authors think that the fact that science is fallible is the proof of weak thinking against neo-positivism, the heir of 19th century scientism.

In 1979, Jean-François Lyotard published *The post-modern condition*. In this book he coined the term postmodern, which had hitherto been used to indicate various splits from Modernity. There are 19th century precedents for the use of the term, but we are now interested in the meaning given to the term from the 1960s. At that time postmodern meant pop art, rock concerts and hippie culture. In those years there was an attempt to blur the distinction between elite and popular art, between critic and fan. A culture of masses breaks through and creates a “new sensitivity”. Several deaths are proclaimed around the student revolts of 1968: rationalism, humanism, Victorian morality, traditional values, etc. Having set these precedents, we can say that postmodernism is an intellectual attitude with political and social overtones, that sets itself up against the discourse and practices of Modernity, because they are deemed to be exhausted, oppressing and distorted. There are many worlds, and they cannot be approached with general arguments.

The authors we have bracketed together as postmodern do not accept that label. However, they share the same intellectual attitude, and have common traits. All postmodern trends, under the influence of Nietzschean critique, attempt to overcome Modernity, which they consider a failed project that has run its course. Postmodern people rebel against the great modern myths: reason, progress, the grand narratives of meaning (holisms typical of ideologies, of all-encompassing philosophies or religious worldviews). Where the modern project tried to conceptualise everything, the postmodern introduces a radical scepticism against rationalizing attempts: they rather talk of *weak thought* (Vattimo), *tired thought* (Bataille), *deconstruction* (Derrida), linguistic games (Lyotard), etc. Postmodernists oppose the unifying attempts of rationalism and scientism: they talk about the difference, the irreducible, the undetermined, the scattered instead of bringing up what unifies. With postmodernism we enter a post-metaphysical period: basic explanations are abandoned, and we remain at the level of the contingent, the particular, random, and singular: in other words, the irreducible difference.

The postmodernists accuse modern philosophy of being non-neutral metaphysics, that gives precedence to one of the terms of binary oppositions typical of the West: between subject and object, spoken and written word, reason and nature, reality and appearance; the second terms are excluded or devalued with regard to the first terms of the binary opposition. According to Derrida, we need to “deconstruct” binary metaphysics that has given preference to reality rather than appearance, spoken word to writing, reason rather than nature, man and not woman.

Viewed from this perspective we can understand one of the typical slogans of the revolution of May 68 in Paris: “All power to the imagination”. The student movement criticised institutional university teaching, which was thought to be bureaucratic, creating hierarchies, accomplice of power, rationalist and far from existence itself. The same environment of nonconformism and rebellion against what had been established by the institutions and practices of Modernity criticised global politics -including Marxism- and some intellectuals end up with micropolitics where the emphasis is placed on what is different and nonconforming: feminism, ecology, homosexual movements.

We will briefly cover the main ideas of two typical postmodern authors: Lyotard and Derrida

#### a) Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998)

Jean-FrançoisLyotard positioned himself as the main critic of the so-called “meta-narratives”—that is, modernist attempts at global explanations of the world. They are called *meta*-narratives because they are usually explanations that reach beyond the discipline from which they were proposed. Thus, the different schools of philosophy, religious faiths, ethical systems, and political ideologies are grand narratives that seek to legitimize the project of Modernity, trying to justify hierarchical social relations, the role of science, and the value of knowledge.

For Lyotard, grand accounts or meta-narratives are nothing more than language games that can only be legitimized as games with immanent rules. Sciences, for instance, can arbitrarily impose their own rules, but they must renounce transcendent explanations. On matters more related to the human sciences—history, art, politics, sociology—a totalizing and singular vision of the universe must be abandoned. There is a plurality of worlds that cannot be encapsulated with universal arguments. It is time to move beyond grand narratives to a “regime of phrases” and “speech genres,” which are always limited and segmented, referring to an independent world that is but one of a plurality of infinite universes that cannot be assimilated into a single discourse.

According to Lyotard, it is impossible to reach a consensus, since there is no space for universal communication. The end of the grand narratives coincides with the assertion of difference, of what is unique and irreducible.

#### b) Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)

For Lyotard the main object of his critique of the modern project is metanarrative, but for Derrida it is the logocentrism of western philosophy, that has interpreted reality from the perspective of the human logos, and thus set up a metaphysics of presence: logos reveals being. The logocentric tendency reaches its peak with the Hegelian assertion that real and rational are identical.

Derrida proposes de-construction to unmask the fallacies of logocentrism, and the conceptualising trends in the history of philosophy, and therefore, western cultural practices. For this to happen writing must reassert itself before spoken language. Logocentrism has been phonocentrism, the primacy of the voice. To give primacy to *foné*, speech, is to give primacy to the conscience. Speech would externalise the internal contents of the conscience, ideas, which in turn would refer to an ultimate foundation; throughout western philosophy this ultimate foundation has been given different names: the platonic world of Ideas, the Aristotelian essence, the Christian God, the cartesian Reason, the Kantian transcendental or the Hegelian Absolute Spirit.

Western metaphysics has looked at writing in its vicarious function: mere copy or disguise of language. If we invert the western priorities on which metaphysical tradition is based and we displace phonocentrism for the sake of spelling, we de-construct the absolute discourse. Writing is polysemic, and this provides an advantage: there is no single meaning nor an exclusive truth. With de-construction we break down oppositions, hierarchies are inverted, and we reach concepts that cannot be assimilated, that do not refer to an ultimate or given truth. All in all it is a matter of asserting difference as an irreducible element of language, and deny any relationship to a transcendent or metaphysical sense, which has been a historical product of logocentrism.

According to Derrida - and in this matter he follows Saussure, and takes him to the ultimate consequences - language is a system of differences. A meaning implies being different from other meanings. A word means something, because it does not mean what the others mean. Therefore, meaning reveals a presence-absence: presence of a meaning that implies the absence of any other, but for this very reason they are somehow present. Each meaning leaves a footprint or a trace in the others. Meanings are part of an encompassing system, speech, where they imply each other. Thus every meaning is a convention. With this we manage to de-construct the intelligible-sensible hierarchy of western logocentrism: that which gives meaning and that what is meant are inserted in the system of differences. Derrida uses the neologism “difference”, to distinguish it from a conceptualizable difference in positive terms, the “difference” of the logic of identity (the difference of the Aristotelian definition: “genus plus specific difference”). On the contrary, “Difference” has a double meaning: to differentiate, or differ, or to update in time, what is beyond, what cannot be reduced to thought, what rejects conceptualisation completely. To differ also means that any interpretation is subsequent, there is no prior meaning.

The very written text reveals presence-absence. The author, when he writes, separates himself, absents himself form the text. The receiver, the reader, will also disappear, because both author and reader are mortal. Thus the text (the written word) acquires independent life, it is indifferent to the death of author and reader: it is a machine, something not human. As the text favours the absence, it makes logical sense that metaphysics of presence, the heir of the Greek logos, has despised the written word.

Derridian de-construction takes the reading of the written word from the side lines. He decentres the text, for instance taking a footnote and places it in the middle of the discourse. He tries to take apart the writing process followed by the author, and unmask the binary oppositions of western metaphysics, in order to state that what is at its centre cannot be said.

Metaphysics with Derrida finds itself in a cul-de-sac. Needless to say that we do not have to enter it.

\* \* \*

The various postmodern currents claim that there is no truth, only interpretations of texts, symbols and signs, determined by the historical context. Metaphysics, as knowledge of the truth of being, is described as arrogant: the epistemological relationship with being is the paradigm of violence.[[244]](#footnote-244) For Vattimo, for example, the multiplicity of interpretations leads to the “dissolution of the very idea of reality.” The world, built like a Tower of Babel, causes ontology to collapse into meaninglessness.[[245]](#footnote-245)

In these philosophical trends, the crippling of the intellect reaches a historical nadir: for some postmodernists, the very concept of man himself was an 18th century invention, but following nihilism and the devaluation of all values, we have almost arrived at the end of man: “To all those who still wish to talk about man, about his reign or his liberation,” Foucault writes, “all those who still ask themselves questions about what man is in his essence, all those who wish to take him as their starting point in their attempts to reach the truth…, to all these warped and twisted forms of reflection we can answer only with a philosophical laugh—which means, to a certain extent, a silent one.”[[246]](#footnote-246)

The radical result of contemporary nihilism can be traced back to the cultural environment created by the so-called “masters of suspicion”. In fact, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud understand man not as something original and real, but a necessary bypass of irrational forces found behind any human manifestation. When facing any phenomenon we need to discover “what lies behind”. Buttiglione has made the following comment about these thinkers: for them “the subject and conscience are absolutely not original phenomena. They are rather the result of a set of economic-social phenomena (Marx), drives (Freud), and in a broad sense, resentment (Nietzsche). In other words, man is not an original starting point, but the fruit of becoming”.[[247]](#footnote-247)

The loss of the consistency of the real subject is the paradoxical conclusion of the purported assignment of absolute autonomy to the human creature.

## XI THE PERMISSIVE SOCIETY

Permissiveness is a prominent feature of western society. We mentioned earlier that the slogan “Forbidding is forbidden” was at the centre of the university revolts of 1968. A consequence of cultural nihilism has been the loss of an objective moral order, clearly shown in the area of sexuality. If man is the arbiter of values, there is a good chance that he will fall into a comfortable hedonism. Throughout the 20th century a number of explanations for sexual behaviour had the pretence of scientific status; they opened the path to a radical change of mores and practical social behaviour. But permissiveness also means rejection of obedience, criticism of social structures, and in extreme cases it justifies violence.

### 1. Sigmund Freud’s pansexualism

Freud’s proclaiming the humiliation of western man’s narcissism is well known: if Copernicus’s heliocentric theory meant cosmological humiliation, Darwin was the flag carrier for biological humiliation, and Freud himself the standard bearer for psychological humiliation. Man is not his own master, because he depends on the impulses of his subconscious. Specifically, human action is determined by the libido, or sexual instinct. Society’s institutions are a restraint on the libido’s full development, and generate neurosis. Freud’s psychoanalysis will have fame and credibility beyond most other theories, and it will influence the moods of 20th century society.

Freud was born in Freiburg, in the Austro-Hungarian empire, but he spent most of his life in Vienna. He studied medicine and became professor of neuropathology. He spent a short period of time in Paris, where he worked with the psychologist J.M. Charcot; he returned to Vienna and married Martha Bernays, the mother of his six children. He wrote his most important works in Vienna, where he set up a school with his disciples. Adler and Jung are the best known among them. However, his bad temper and the stubborn defence of his opinions hindered the development of his school. His main works are: *The Psychological mechanism of forgetfulness* (1898), *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1913), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). After his death in London in 1939, where he had fled from the Nazi regime, his *Scheme of psychoanalysis* was published posthumously.

Freud detects a deep subconscious level in the human psyche; he calls it Es or Id; and a level of conscious activity that he calls Ego. According to Freud the original, subconscious “I” is identified with the principle of pleasure, also known as the libido. On the other hand, the conscious Ego is ruled by the principle of reality: the world outside one’s consciousness has an influence on the individual, and shapes a world of criteria, values and interests. The principle of reality is a restraint for the libido, the original primordial instinct. The conscious Ego is not only instinctive: it moves away from the original Ego, becomes moralized, and establishes purposes. For the Viennese psychologist the ultimate constituent of human nature is the subconscious, the hidden aspect of our personality, structured around the libido. We could say that Freud reduces man to sexuality, and sexuality is identified with pleasure[[248]](#footnote-248).

The individual’s psyche is normal when impulses and tendencies flow from the subconscious to the conscious level without obstacles along the way; but any resistance to that flow results in a psychological disturbance. The individual tends to satisfy his own subconscious instincts spontaneously. When these instincts or appetites are perceived as a source of conflict in the conscious surface, the Ego sets up a mechanism of censure. The repression that results inverts the normal flow of the psyche, which now flows from the conscious to the subconscious, and thus triggers neurosis, a psychic imbalance of the individual.

Morality is a consequence of the psychological processes determined by the libido, or erotic impulse. The ultimate yardstick to interpret human behaviour is the libido. In the first stages of life the sexual urge of a child is directed towards the mother (for boys) or towards the father (for girls). The figure of the Father appears as the repressor and rival. The father is an obstacle for incest, so that family and society are based on suppression of incest, and fear of castration. This “Oedipus complex” explains the history of mankind to a great extent, even the religious dimension of man, because God would be the sublimation of the father figure. Freud turns upside down the premises of Christian anthropology: man has not been created in the image and likeness of God; the Freudian deity is purely a projection of inner psychological factors. The origin of religion lies in the need to protect the helpless child, its contents stem from the desires and needs of childhood, which remain in adulthood.

The concept of sublimation explains the consequences of psychic censures. Every conscious human desire or longing is nothing more than the sublimation of the sexual appetite. When the censored libido is not directed to its natural object (to satisfy pleasure) but towards one’s Ego or the ideal Ego imposed by social pressure, it becomes a narcissistic libido on the surface of the repressed conscious Ego, and tends towards the “Super-Ego”, the hypostasis of all the repressing conventions of the social environment. The erotic impulse is sublimated in the law, in morality, in customs, in religion. Human behaviour configured by sublimation amounts to frustration, and leads to neurosis. The therapy for any neurosis is the unmasking of the true nature of desires, the real motives of human behaviour, which are always determined by the libido or erotic impulse. Catharsis happens when the hidden motivation emerges; however, moral value judgments should not be made.

Freudian anthropology reduces man to his subconscious, controlled by the sexual impulse, and reduces the social, political and religious sphere to mere artificiality caused by the censorship of the libido: in other words, mere sexual sublimation. Freud does not advocate for the disappearance of the social artificial, because he thinks it is necessary for relationships. Following his reductive anthropology, it is a matter of curing psychological illnesses by detecting the sexual causes that underpin individual conflicts. Freud unwittingly opened the door to permissiveness by putting together neurosis and sexuality: Freudian pansexualism becomes a way of interpreting the world. When this comes in contact with Marxist revolutionary thought it will result in the contracultural crisis of the 1960s. Putting together Freudianism and Marxism was the main work of Wilhelm Reich and other members of the School of Frankfurt. We will outline their key ideas in the following paragraphs.

### 2. The origin of the sexual revolution: Wilhelm Reich

In the simplest of terms, “the justification of the permissive society thesis is based on the idea that inhibition makes structural changes in man, so much so that he acts, thinks and feels contrary to his natural interest, which is the joy of living, the inclination to happiness; it gives rise to a repressive, authoritarian and reactionary, and therefore, aggressive character” [[249]](#footnote-249). This is the basic idea of the book *Psychology of fascism* (1933) by *Wilhelm Reich* (1897-1957). Reich applies concepts of a previous work, *The Sexual Revolution*, to analyse contemporary society. He identified repression with fascism, understood in a very broad sense. The use of the word fascist is so ambiguous that any traditional institution, every sign of authority was deemed repressive and inhibitory.

Reich simplifies Marxism: by eliminating all the messianic elements he is left with only historic materialism. But on the other hand the political developments of the first half of the 20th Century -the birth of the fascist movements- have shown that the economic factor is not the engine of history. In fact, the impoverished masses contributed to the fascists’ rise to power. Ideology provided the decisive momentum. Marx could not be aware of scientific psychology, but now we can understand that what moves history is the sexuo-economy: “there are no typical class conflicts. Therefore the terms “bourgeoisie’ and “proletariat” have been replaced typically by terms such as “reactionary”, “revolutionary” or “liberal”. This change was made necessary because of the fascist plague” (1942 Preface to “*Mass Psychology of fascism*”). Reich maintains that if we were to leave passions free, human aggressiveness would disappear. In the post-sexual revolution society’s ideas contrary to sexual happiness should disappear, therefore we should eliminate the traditional family and the traditional church: “The original Christianity was essentially a communist movement,” Reich states in *The sexual revolution*. “Its power to affirm life resulted in the ascetical and the supernatural, through contemporaneous denial of sex. Christianity struggled to affirm mankind, but when it transformed itself into Church, it reneged its own origins. The Church owes its power to the human structure that results from a metaphysical understanding of life: it thrives on the life it eliminates”.

Many years later, Herbert Marcuse would come back to the idea that the disinhibition of sexual instincts is liberating, and be able to fashion a more solidary and humane society. We will see later how neo-Malthusian movements agree with Reich in the need to destroy the link between the sexual act and reproduction. *Bertrand Russell* (1872-1970) will be the mouthpiece of many such ideas in England in the first half of the 20th century. However, Freud did not share his zest: in his book *Civilisation and Discontent* (1930), he stated that that there was, alongside *Eros*, an equally original principle, *Thanatos*, the principle of aggressiveness and destruction. Sexual liberation would not unfold a period of non-violence and of freedom, because the struggle between *Eros* and *Thanatos* will be permanent. It was a secularized version of the dogma of original sin.

### 3. The Frankfurt School and the critical theory of society

The Frankfurt School emerged from the Institute for Social Research, founded in the 1920s in the riverside city of the Main. At first, the school was led by an Austrian Marxist, Karl Grünberg, who was first replaced by Friedrich Pollock, and later by Max Horkheimer from 1931. In addition to Horkheimer, the main exponents of the School are Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Erich Fromm. Many of its members were forced to migrate to the United States, although Horkheimer, Adorno, and Pollock returned to Frankfurt after the Second World War. Erich Fromm lived in Mexico for many years, and Marcuse was given a university chair in [the University of] California [Berkeley].

To understand the intellectual position of these sociologists, we must bear in mind the historical circumstances of that period. The Frankfurt School coincided with the growing bureaucracy of the Soviet regime, Fascism, Nazism, and the development of a technological civilization in the Western world. The ultimate goal of the school as a group—although we should not forget the intellectual talents of each of its representatives—was to provide a critique of society understood as a whole. There is a clear influence of Marxist thinking, and there are traces of Hegelian thought and a “Marxified” Freudianism. The Frankfurt School presents a humanist Marx, that of his early writings,and in this way distanced itself from the Soviet totalitarian experiment. The Marxism of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse is filtered through their reading of György Lukács (*History and Class Consciousness*, 1922). The Marxism of the Frankfurt School is not orthodox: critical theory is not based on the primacy of economics, but rather—as we shall see—on a critique of the logic of dominance.

The *critical theory of society*, or simply “critical theory,” as it has come to be known in English, is a critique of industrial society developed by Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) in the well-known book *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1944), as well as in Horkheimer’s book *Eclipse of Reason* (1947) and Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* (1947). The topics they addressed in these publications would be later developed by Marcuse in his book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Today’s society, according to the authors, is a machine, a mechanism of Leviathan proportions that has escaped from man’s control. Social mechanism oppresses individuals and crushes them. Western technological society places efficiency and utility at the service of power, not man. Those who are inefficient are either defeated by the competition or abandoned without concern. In modern society, man is an instrument of capital: the vast machinery of industrial society grows through the accumulation of power and financial gain.

Modern society stands in opposition to the human person. Opulent societies rise up next to those where people die of hunger. Even personal relationships, such as those characterized by love, follow the logic of dominance: the culture of the gift has been lost, and a culture of commercial exchange prevails. For Adorno, the source of boredom in everyday life in the industrial society is “the awareness of the absence of freedom in the whole of existence.” Contemporary man, a tiny cog in the industrial machine, lives in solitude, because he only finds coldness in others. Social controls are so refined and inexorable that the individual identifies himself with society, which manages to absorb the opposition within itself. Thus the “one-dimensional” man is created.

The cause of these dehumanizing symptoms is modern reason, regarded as merely *instrumental reason*. According to these sociologists, the process—which began in 1789 although its roots lie in a more distant past—resulted in the establishment of a totalitarian society, identified with the *system*, its ultimate goal being the control of nature. Reason is afraid of truth: what matters most is not the truthfulness of a theory, but its usefulness. Contemporary society is a fully managed society, where technological progress destroys individuality. Behind capitalist economic progress—and the Soviet regime is merely a form of State capitalism—lurks the spectre of fascism: that is, the threat of an ever more encompassing political power in the hands of a small group of privileged individuals. The system imposes its own rationality and uses the cultural industry—modern mass media—to standardise tastes and ideas and to “sell” an illusion of happiness that, in reality, oppresses and annuls. The system prevents creativity and hinders critical capacity.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, the source of man’s oppression is not private property, but rather the logic of dominance consubstantial with instrumental reason. We see it in the communist countries, where private property has been abolished, but the logic of dominance continues with its anti-humanist policy. The Frankfurt School diverges from Marxist orthodoxy on this very point: the relationship between structure and superstructure is not as simple as what the Moscow Academy officially proposes. These authors reject Marxist determinism and the theory of the ideological reflex, which would leave no room for critical thinking.

Philosophy must become able to criticise the system. Why does Enlightenment reason lead to the logic of the Nazi concentration camps and the American atomic bomb? Auschwitz and Hiroshima destroyed the Enlightenment myth of mankind’s natural, necessary, and irreversible progress. Auschwitz inspired a period of self-reflection that would translate into words the example provided by the victims of the concentration camps through their sacrifice. Adorno had already stated that philosophical systems had vainly tried to capture the whole without realizing that thought and reality are different. Reality is that which is individual, that which is unique: it is the suffering of so many victims of the system. After Auschwitz, all culture is trash: the logic of dominance becomes man’s self-destruction.

Horkheimer and Adorno indicate mainly what we should get rid of in order to build a city worthy of man. First, we need a critique of instrumental reason that regains clarity of knowledge and “denounces the illusion” of false idols. We must recognize the *other* in all his diversity, so as to recover the revealing dimension of thought that is open to the truth, to the gift. In their final period, Horkheimer and Adorno appear to be open to religious transcendence, as a means to destroy the oppression that technological society exerts over the individual. But the prevailing logic of their discourse is to expose rather than to propose solutions.

Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), who did not stray from a this-worldly vision of man's existence, shares the critique of the system made by Adorno and Horkheimer. However, he also added features of Freudian psychology, which, according to his philosophical premises, could salvage certain aspects of technological society. In his book *Eros and Civilization* (1955), he analyses Freudian doctrine that claims civilization is based on the repression of the libido. Marcuse does not agree with the Austrian psychologist, who argued that civilization, organized according to the principle of the reality of the conscious self, acts to restrain the unconscious self’s pleasure principle. Freud felt that a culture of repression must be established in order to achieve social coexistence. Marcuse, however, wondered whether a culture without repression might be possible. His answer was yes, and he based his conclusion on Freudian psychology. There is a liberation route for man’s rigorous truths because healing from neurosis is possible when man delves into his memory, exploring the unconscious, bringing to light the real motives for his behaviour. Marcuse states that at present contemporary technological society is an obstacle for individual realization, as it is based on an alienating type of labour. But the same technological progress creates the conditions for increased leisure time, which could give rise to a civilization where Eros is released, where sex can become a game and fantasy—where, in short, the society of repression gives way to the society of satisfaction.

In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse comes closer to the positions of Adorno and Horkheimer: technological society sells the illusion of freedom, but it actually oppresses man with bureaucratic structures, imposing an ideology, and removes critical opposition by integrating all social classes into the modern project of the mastery of nature. Marcuse, however, sees the possibility of a revolutionary process: in the technological society, one sector does not fall within the rules. Foreigners, the exploited, the unemployed, the disabled—all find themselves outside the system. Critical theory of society must join hands with those who break the rules of the system, those who, without hope, give their lives for the Great Refusal—that is, in opposition to totalitarian institutions.

The justification for terrorist groups, who sought to destroy the system and break the rules of the game, was within reach.

### 4. Feminism

These ideas are held by vast cultural movements. Separating sexuality from procreation has been a key concept of the sexual revolution. It has many consequences for society, among others the fall in the birth rate of the main industrialised societies. We ought to refer to the feminist movement because it figures prominently among the features of the permissive society.

There is no straightforward definition of feminism. Karen Offen ventured to try: “It is an ideology and a movement for social and political change, based on the critical analysis of man’s privileges and of the subordination of woman in any society” [[250]](#footnote-250). The remote origins of feminism should be looked for in the Enlightenment, in so far as it proclaimed an egalitarian reason, and a progressive view of history; in utopic socialism; in liberalism, and also in Christian thought. The diversity of backgrounds points to the multiple streams of this cultural movement. From a historical point of view, feminism developed in the 19th and 20th centuries.

There was a significant difference among the first feminist groups: some of them proposed an egalitarian feminism (in other words, they proposed an imitation of the male status in society); others highlighted the diversity of roles between the two sexes, and proposed a program of claims to raise women’s cultural and professional level. Among the first group there is liberal feminism, inspired by some of John Stuart Mill’s work. Starting from individual rights, feminists demanded a wider scope for personal, professional, political and social autonomy. At the same time, socialist feminism, under the influences of Saint-Simon and Owen’s theories, felt that socialism, rather than the bourgeois egalitarian movement, was the best option to improve women’s situation. Socialist feminism gained wide acceptance in Germany and Russia towards the end of the 19th century.

Within the Catholic milieu there were feminist movements too. They highlighted the equal dignity of men and women, and requested the right to vote, improved education, better professional opportunities and a legal system to families, especially married women and mothers.

The general programme of the feminist movements in the 19th century can be summarized as follows: right to vote (although in some countries, anti-clerical and socialist groups opposed it out of fear of the moderate female Catholic vote); access to secondary and tertiary education; access to the same professional openings as men (in some cases with tacit or explicit contempt for domestic work); and finally, claims in the area of sexuality. Regarding the final point, liberal feminists talk about the “right” to divorce and to artificial birth control. The socialist groups closely linked economic and political exploitation with sex. In order to liberate society, it was necessary to destroy the family and establish free love. The works of Bebel (*Woman and Socialism*, 1883) and Engels (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884) were crucial in this respect. On the other hand, Catholic feminism rejected divorce, Malthusianism and sexual irresponsibility. Side by side with other Christian movements programmes were set up to raise moral standards and to fight prostitution.

The First World War was an important event in the history of feminism. Many women had to take the place usually reserved to men, and society in general realised that women could also carry out tasks other than the traditional tasks (teaching, health and care for the family) very well. This took place in the early 20th century; it coincided with the populist development of a neo-Malthusian mentality, where the separation of sexuality and child-bearing was seen as a sign of progress. This would obviously have a bearing on the future status of women.

Feminism in the second half of the 20th century was more revolutionary. Its ideas were based on Freudian psychology and on some sociological theories of the School of Frankfurt. The French writer Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was very influential in promoting it. According to Sartre’s partner, women are reduced to the domain of the body, the natural, and being passive, whereas men carry out an active role transforming society. Historically women have accepted being limited to marriage and motherhood. Simone de Beauvoir wants to break the biological chains that oppress women: control of nature and abortion will free women from their alienation. If an egalitarian society is to be established, women must have the same sexual freedom as men; this will be the end of the traditional family and will make both sexes financially equal. It is easy to appreciate that Beauvoir wants an egalitarian feminism, which holds the male model as normatively superior.

The main streams of feminism in the second half of the 20th century are:

*a) Radical feminism*: it centres around sexuality, thought to be a source of oppression for women. The starting point is the slogan “What is personal is political”. Radical feminists seek to solve the problem of the subordination of women in society by political means. Sulamith Firestone was one of the main supporters of radical feminism: she thinks that fertility is the cause of women’s oppression. Liberation will come when the power structures created by nature and reinforced by men are destroyed. If workers must take possession of the means of production, women must take control of the means of reproduction through genetic technology (*The Dialectics of Sex*, Bantham, New York 1972). Some of them move away from an excessively biological approach. For instance, Kate Millett says that the goal of feminism is to destroy patriarchy, that is, the social, economic and cultural structures that have consolidated the privileged position of men in society (*Sexual Politics*, Doubleday, New York 1970). Such radical attitude brings about the destruction of institutions like family, church and academia, because they are examples of a patriarchal society, or its consequences. It is a feminist version of the struggle against the “system” proposed by the School of Frankfurt. One way to achieve the liberation of women is to reject heterosexuality and create a female sexuality through celibacy, self-eroticism and lesbianism.

Radical feminism set the pace for feminism in the second half of the 20th century. Consistent with the slogan “What is personal is political”, radical feminists sought legal reforms to facilitate abortion and contraception. In France abortion was de-penalised in 1975, with the support of the left-wing political parties.

*b) Psychoanalytic feminism* has a different view: it holds that the root of women’s oppression lies in their psyche. Women need to overcome the Oedipus complex that relegates them to a lesser role in society. According to Nancy Chodorow, women taking on men’s work would even the role of the sexes in society. Others think that the best way to overcome the Oedipus complex is female “erotic independence”, in other words, homosexuality.

*c) Marxist-socialist feminism*: Marxist feminists confront two sources of oppression: social class and sex. The defeat of capitalism will not necessarily bring equality of sexes, because the struggle between the sexes has its own dynamics. Juliet Mitchell thinks that the revolution must achieve men’s defeat. Women’s condition is dictated by the structures of production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children. Capitalist and patriarchal structures must be changed urgently to achieve female liberation (*Woman’s Estate*, Vintage, New York 1973).

*d) Reforming-liberal feminism* is the stream that most resembles the first feminism. They work through institutions and seek a juridical reform that removes all discriminations. A book by Betty Friedan -Th*e feminine mystique,* W.W. Norton, New York 1963- was very successful. There Friedan makes a ruthless criticism of the housewife. The real world is the professional, competitive world, so far dominated by men. The home is a “comfortable concentration camp”, to be liberated from. Friedan shares with Simone de Beauvoir the view that the world is male oriented: the normative world belongs to men. Later Betty Friedan would temper her statements, and recover a positive view of the proper feminine role in the family and in society.

Liberal-reforming feminism is consistent with its liberal roots, and speaks of the “sexual rights” of abortion and artificial birth control, the need for a new understanding of marriage and widening the scope of divorce legislation.

*e) Theological feminism*: there has been a growing connection between feminism and theology throughout the 20th century. Greater participation of women in the life of the different churches has been a constant aspirational feature among the Protestant churches since the end of the 19th century. In 1958, 44 religious denominations of the World Council of Churches accepted women into the priesthood. In the Catholic Church some theologians, mainly German and Anglo-Saxon, pressed the point, but the hierarchy responded with doctrinal fortitude, reasserting the very will of Jesus Christ, the Founder of the Church, who established that the ministerial priesthood was reserved to men only.

Within the theological feminism stream there are those who want to “purify” Christian biblical tradition from any male chauvinism (reforming feminist theology); others want to transform Christian tradition into a female post-Christendom (revolutionary feminist theology); and finally those who want to create a new female religion, the “religion of the goddess”.

We should also add that throughout the 20th century Christian feminism continued the struggle for the dignity of women. Literary and philosophical greats like Edith Stein and Gertrud von Le Fort wrote valuable essays. Saint John Paul II wrote about feminism in several documents, notably in his Apostolic Exhortation *Mulieris dignitatem*. Contemporary Christian feminism remains faithful to the tradition of a religion that revolutionized male chauvinism in the cultures of Antiquity by asserting the equal dignity of men and women. Even today there is a clear difference with regard to the respect for women’s dignity between countries of Christian tradition and the regions of the world that are under Muslim influence.

Feminism is among the cultural trends that have made a substantial impact on today’s mental categories. Initial fair claims evolved to the point of advocating aberrant propositions that damage the human dignity of women, the family, and ultimately the whole of society[[251]](#footnote-251).

More recently, radical feminism has raised a new issue: gender ideology. A distinction is made between biological sexual differences (sex) and the roles that society assigns to men and women (gender). Traditional female roles, such as motherhood, would be nothing more than cultural constructs, not something from nature. Given that cultures are always evolving, the roles attached to sex should also change, especially bearing in mind that previous cultures favoured the male sex, and society was structured around patriarchy. According to the promoters of gender ideology, there should be no difference between the sexes: male and female have no specific role of their own. Hence, words like family, procreation, heterosexuality do not exist in nature, they are only “biologized” cultural products. Societies should take on board the existing cultural changes, and public authorities have an obligation to restructure society and set standards that agree with gender ideology. A consequence of this approach is making unions between homosexual “marriages”, and “alternative” families, the same as heterosexual marriages open to children.

Under the influence of Marxist thinking, gender ideology denies that human nature exists, and its understanding of human rights is radically different from its original intention, which was to enshrine these rights in modern laws. It is no longer a struggle for the rights of women, but a matter of restructuring society by denying the consequences of human nature understood in a normative sense.

Michael Schooyans is correct when he says “in the discussion about what is innate and what is acquired, what comes from nature and what stems from culture, gender ideology clearly denies absolutely the existence of anything natural or innate. There is no distinction between male and female. The middle point between those two is hermaphroditism. The very idea of natural differences is abhorrent, such differences must be abolished. There is nothing more antifeminist than those radical feminists who want to eliminate what is specifically feminine, and reduce all behaviour to roles where the actors can be swapped, just like (using Lenin’s metaphor) gears help the smooth operation of a machine”[[252]](#footnote-252).

### 5. Neo-malthusianisms

The anti-childbirth mentality is an important feature of the contemporary culture mindset. Its roots go back a long way. In 1789 *Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834)* wrote a famous *Essay on the Principle of Population*. From an enlightened perspective, Malthus wanted to study the following question: “It has been said that the great question is now at issue, whether man shall henceforth advance ever more rapidly towards an unlimited, and hitherto unconceived improvement, or be condemned to a perpetual oscillation between happiness and misery, and remain still at an immeasurable distance from the wished-for goal even after the greatest effort”[[253]](#footnote-253). According to the English economist, the main cause that prevents mankind from reaching a state of perfection is the imbalance between population growth and the growth of production. Specifically, population increases geometrically (1, 2, 4. 8, 16…), but output grows only arithmetically (1, 2, 3, 4, 5…). The solution to this problem is “to abstain from marriage, temporarily or permanently, with a very moral conduct with regards to sex during the said period”[[254]](#footnote-254).

Malthus’ forecasts were proven wrong, because world production increased way beyond what was thought possible thanks to the progress of technology. But a neo-Malthusian mentality persists today, with various ideological inputs. We have just seen the strong influence of feminism; Freudian theories that reduce man to libido. and the ideas of the sexual revolution, provided “scientific” reasons to break the link between sexual activity and childbearing. *Margaret Sanger* the founder of I.P.P.F. (*International Planned Parenthood Federation*) in 1932, had a key role in promoting the contraceptive mentality. She proposed eugenic policies, very similar to the policies that Hitler’s Nazi regime was carrying out at the time. IPPF and other similar foundations promote a mentality contrary to human life, and constrain Third World Countries to implement demographic policies that violate basic human rights and show that colonial imperialism remains alive. In the First World, permissive legislation that allows abortion and euthanasia shows the lack of consistency of the final stages of Modernity: those structurally weaker or helpless (the unborn and the elderly and sick) are excluded from the happiness promised with the advent of man’s absolute autonomy. Not everyone is entitled to happiness, just like it was in the *Ancient Régime*, the society of privileges[[255]](#footnote-255).

### 6. The Ecology

Alongside Feminism and the contraceptive mentality, the environment is a key concern in contemporary culture. The obvious deterioration of the natural environment, as a result of its abuse by a technological society, awakened the environmental concerns of society in the last decades of the 20th century. Concern for the environment is not homogeneous. We will cover briefly the main strands of this cultural movement in the following pages.

According to J. Ballesteros, the basic concept of the relationship between man and the nature can be summarized in one of three approaches: technocratic anthropocentrism, which views man as independent from nature; biologism sees man purely as a more developed animal than others, and monotheistic inspired thinking, that regards man as being part of nature, but also made in the image of God, and therefore above nature.

The first approach began in the first centuries of Modernity. Both Descartes and Bacon -the fathers of rationalism and empiricism, the two philosophical streams typical of modernity - maintained that knowledge is not something to contemplate reality, or to understand the meaning of human existence, but mainly to exert dominion over nature: *Scientia propter potentiam*. On the other hand, the cartesian dichotomy between *res cogitans and res extensa*, and identifying man with the soul, opened the door to contemplate the body and the material world as mere objects, as matter to be dominated by the human intellect.

This idea is linked to the myth of progress, the darling of the enlightened. The progress of man’s dominion over nature -in other words, the technological progress that modern science made possible, would always improve living conditions. From this perspective, the Enlightenment will lead to Saint-Simon’s optimistic technocracy and Comte’s positivism. The spread of this mentality in the West and the actual progress of technology created the technological society, which was strongly criticised by the School of Frankfurt. Ballesteros points out that “the technocratic mentality assumed unlimited resources that could be used for production (…) The human being is seen as an active being; its activity is above all the technical manufacturing of goods”[[256]](#footnote-256).

According to this cultural current, the problem of ecology is solved by science and technology: it is not a problem of ethics, but of economics and technology. Unfortunately, the facts belie the optimism of technological anthropocentrism: it has not managed to stop wars (the most important factor of ecological devastation), hunger and the deterioration of the environment.

There is an underlying attitude ‘à la’ Prometheus, because the relationship of man with nature is not about care and management, but about man declaring his absolute dominion - the *ius abutendi* of Roman law-. Biologism, on the other hand, understands man as a mere component of the ecosystem, and therefore denies his dignity (which places him concurrently within and above material nature). In addition, biologism is mainly pessimistic with regard to the future of the human species, as we will see a little later.

In previous pages we referred to Malthus’s doctrine: his only solution to the growing needs of the species was to reduce the population. Darwin and Spencer will follow this path, as they state that the struggle for life and the survival of the fittest is dire in the world of nature, and also in man’s world, because it is not specifically different from nature. Making man equal to nature will be taken to radical extremes by the supporters of the *deep ecology*. According to them it is necessary to eliminate human lives for the sake of life in general. For Devall and Sessions[[257]](#footnote-257), monotheism is to blame for today’s environmental degradation, because it upholds man’s superiority over nature. The monotheistic statement has broken the sacred links between man and earth, and opened the door to capitalism, imperialism and fascism. These two authors have borrowed elements of Taoism and Buddhism, and advocate for a “biocentric egalitarianism” contrary to “human chauvinism”. In this context the favourite anthropological model of the deep ecologists is the savage, in intimate contact with nature. This is the “quality of life”, that can only be achieved if the world’s population is drastically reduced.

The main trait of *deep ecology* is the total annihilation of the human person’s worth. For the authors just quoted “the prosperity of non-human life demands a reduction of human life” [[258]](#footnote-258); for William Aiken, on the other hand, “a massive human mortality would be a good thing. Our duty is to trigger it. The duty of our species regarding the environment is to eliminate 90% of our number”[[259]](#footnote-259).

Once the absolute autonomy of man has been stated, some of the extreme trends that emerged from the crisis of the culture of Modernity place man at the same level as animals and plants.

Personalist ecologism is different from technocratic anthropocentrism and also from biologism: man is part of nature, but he is also gifted to excel over the material world. The relationship of man with nature is not one of abusive dominion, but one of care and stewardship: nature is at the service of man, the only being wanted by the Creator for its own sake. What is essential is not so much to defend the “rights” of non-human beings against the rights of humans, but to set the biological conditions that guarantee a worthy life for all humans. Nature does not possess unlimited resources; therefore it needs to be taken care of and managed wisely. Man is its principal resource, because he can use his intelligence to find further resources. Personalist ecologism is critical of the consumer mentality, and puts forward an attitude towards nature that is not exclusively about economic terms: nature is also the source of esthetic enjoyment and spiritual improvement. Man is superior to nature, but he also depends on it for his survival. This requires solidarity with the environment, awareness of the limitations of the human condition, and a participation of man in God’s providential government[[260]](#footnote-260).

### 7. The return of the sacred

Before we complete the third part of this book, we will refer briefly to new contemporary religious movements, that show a return to the sacred, although this return is somewhat confusing.

The process of secularisation does not mean eliminating man’s religious dimension. Throughout the previous chapters we have shown that -at least in the West - the transcendent outlook of life based on Christian revelation has been replaced by other world visions that served as substitute or secular religions. In other words, Modernity includes trends that have made the relative absolute, by attempting to provide a comprehensive picture of man and history on the basis of one-sided perspectives. We can recall the more significant examples: scientific reason made absolute in the Enlightenment and in Positivism, feeling in Romanticism, the economy in a materialistic sense in Marxism. These global approaches pretended to replace the “motives” of faith with purely human and natural elements. The tragedies of the 20th century - especially the two World Wars- opened the way for relativism, that mistrusts any global explanation (like the ideologies’ explanations themselves), any absolute moral value and any objective truth.

However, where there appeared to be no room for the supernatural and the transcendent, the final decades of the century have witnessed an abundance of new forms of religiosity and alternative spiritualities; even magic and esoteric circles have recruited new followers. These developments demonstrate that man is a religious being, and his yearning to delve in life’s mysteries cannot be suppressed. But it is also true that the religious offerings are so many and so diverse that this “return of the sacred” cannot be construed as a simple process.

If we take secularisation to be a “qualitative process where religion becomes marginalized and its influence wanes in the great cultural, moral and political decisions”[[261]](#footnote-261), secularisation itself promotes the success of new religious forms that either have no intention to shape culture, or do not have the means to do so. On the other hand, secularisation helps religion to become vague religiosity: we are witnessing today in vast sectors of Western society a process where religion is “de-institutionalised”, and people *believe without belonging*. The return of the sacred does not mean that the masses are returning to traditional institutional Churches, those that possess an objective body of dogma and moral teaching that stem from religious truths.

The prevailing relativism of contemporary culture helps to understand such religious “dispersion”: if it is not possible to reach an ultimate, fundamental truth, religions cannot provide absolute certainties either. This can account for people moving from one religious denomination to another, non-stop experimenting and the tendency to syncretism. There are many attempts to make compatible things that by nature are incompatible, like Christian faith and re-incarnation. Moreover, because of the crisis of the myths of Modernity, some try to put in the same category things like magic and science, medicine and witchcraft, etc. A “weak” reason, in this case post-modern reason, opens a space for magic, the occult and superstition.

According to Massimo Introvigne, the overflow of new religious forms goes back several centuries. He tries to make some sense of the chaotic panorama of contemporary religiosity. He suggests a classification on the basis of the progressive estrangement from a Catholic view of the world.

In the first stage the idea of Church is rejected, and the motto would be something like “Christ yes, Church no”. This stage gives rise to several contemporary sects: those of protestant origin, where there is an ecclesiological break (Pentecostal neo-Protestantism, and some evangelical protestant groups), and those of Christian origin, where there has been a theological break, because they are based on alleged new revelations, such as the Seventh-day Adventists.

The second stage is further removed from the Catholic outlook on the world: it rejects both the Church and the role of Jesus Christ as the Saviour. The motto here would be “God, yes, Christ no”. This second stage begins with the French Revolution, the influence of oriental religions grows, and gives rise to contemporary “oriental” cults.

The third stage leaves the idea of a personal God aside: “Religion, yes, God no”. A typical example of this stage would be, for example, the Church of Scientology.

The last stage rejects the religious sentiment: “Sacred, yes, religion no”. This involves new forms of contact with the sacred, which are not religious in a strict sense, like magic and spiritism. The *New Age*, very fashionable in the final years of the 20th century, would be one of them.[[262]](#footnote-262)

It is difficult to define *New Age*. From a psychological point of view, *new agers* maintain that they have started a new era, the Era of Aquarius, that takes over the previous Era of the Fish (associated with Christianity). For its members it is a new paradigm, a new outlook on the world, with philosophical, scientific, economic and political trimmings. From a sociological point of view it is neither a sect nor a movement, but a network, with no hierarchical organisation, with informal encounters, freewheeling initiatives and no undisputed reference icons. It has instead some features that give rise to a vague non-dogmatic spirituality rather than structured doctrine. Several common components of this spirituality can be worked out: a) *relativism*: there is no objective truth, each has his/her own truth, one can even create his/her own reality; b) *rejection of organised religions*: if truth does not exist, no religion can pretend to possess it. Furthermore, religions break up the day-to-day religious experience, and put it off to specific times and places, far from the world. The new agers prefer to talk of spirituality, that should have a bearing on ordinary life; c) *pantheism*: ‘Everything’ is one thing. There is no separation between Creator and creature, between nature and man. This ‘Everything’ evolves unceasingly, it is both material and spiritual. God is not a transcendent being, but interpersonal awareness located in the collective subconscious. Man can contact this awareness or Universal Mind, that includes animals and plants. New Age adopts some of the postulates of deep ecology that are critical of anthropocentrism. Pantheism is associated with some manifestations of feminism: God is Father and Mother, and could even be identified with Gaya, the Earth deified. The deification of man derives from pantheism: in a certain sense we all are God[[263]](#footnote-263).

# PART IV

# THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

We have looked at the main lines of thought of the last two centuries. Now we will examine how the Catholic Church has related to the contemporary world. We will not look at the history of the Church as such, only the relationship between faith and culture. Accordingly, we will highlight the pontifical magisterium of this period, and focus on the pontificates of Pius XI and Saint John Paul II, who are key contributors in this field.

## XII CHURCH, OLD REGIME AND REVOLUTION FROM PIUS VII TO BLESSED PIUS IX

### 1. Church and historical change

In the early chapters of the book we covered extensively the political, social, economic, and especially the cultural changes brought about by the Atlantic Revolution. The Catholic Church was an integral part of this process, as she was fully integrated in the political, social and economic structures of the *Ancien* *Régime*.

The alliance between the Throne and the Altar, the organic view of society divided into the three states and economic interventionism were ever present features in a Western European society that had a Christian worldview of life. These features disappeared after the revolutionary events. Historians, politicians, men of faith, whoever wants to understand the relationship between the Church and the contemporary world needs to ask the following question: did these social and political features belong to the essence of the Church, a divine institution founded by Jesus Christ, or were they simply historical, circumstantial elements, that could change without betraying the deposit of revelation, which the Church had received in order to safeguard it faithfully?

The question can be answered in various ways. At this point, they give us a chance to take up the ideas on clericalism, laicism and secularisation that were introduced in Part I of the book. If the answer makes a clear distinction between supernatural elements and historical, accidental elements, and we think that the elements of the *Ancien Régime*, so closely bound to the Church, are among the latter, we open the way for a process of de-clericalization and cleansing of the historical memory that allows for an open and critical dialogue between the Church and the contemporary world. However, if the answer to the question is that there is no difference between essential factors and those that are circumstantial in history, we reinforce clericalism, that condemns Modernity ‘en bloc’. The natural reaction of laicism is to seclude the Church to the sacristies and individual consciences. The result is to stymie any external and social manifestation of the faith.[[264]](#footnote-264)

The first step to understand the difficult relationship between the Church and the world in the past two centuries is to make a distinction between the immutable deposit of faith, safeguarded by the Church, and historical institutions that change over time. The latter could be linked to the Church circumstantially, as an historical institution. Our position in this regard is that the political, economic and social structures of the *Ancien Régime*, its virtues and defects, were purely a set of historical institutions subject to change. The second step is to clarify the relationship between the new institutions -the *Nouveau Régime*- and the Church, in so far as the Church is the guardian of revealed faith.

If the absolute monarchy, the hierarchical organisation of society, economic arrangements, etc. of the *Ancien Régime* are circumstantial factors, the same should be said of the republican régime, the separation of powers, legal equality, freedom of the press and of speech, etc. with regards to the *Nouveau Régime*. Of themselves, these institutions were not contrary to revealed faith. Moreover we could say, as Guardini and Chesterton have done, that the great ideals of Modernity have a Christian origin, and that to a certain extent they are the result of a more consistent understanding of Christian tradition than that of the *Ancien Régime*. The revolutionary trilogy, *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, makes no sense unless it is considered within a Christian cultural context.

When we undertake the (necessary) task to sift divine from human, natural from supernatural, it is important to make a distinction between the institutions of the *Nouveau Régime* as such and their theoretical underpinning. We can find many deeply Christian minds open to transcendence within the revolutionary events of the Atlantic Revolution; we cannot however forget - as we have insisted in Part II of this book - that the philosophical background of many of these events is the pretense of man’s absolute autonomy, and its necessary corollary: the understanding of freedom of conscience in a liberal sense, that when taken to the extreme denies an objective moral order. The result of this process is that man makes himself the arbiter of moral values.

It is possible to classify the various intellectual positions of Catholics with regard to the culture of Modernity, although there is a risk of oversimplification. There is a majority of Christians who do not have specific training, and regard themselves as faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church. There is a group that we can describe as being traditionally sensitive, who think that pre-revolution society was the best way to organise social relations. The violence against the Church, her ministers and goods, led many people to reach the conclusion that Modernity is intrinsically anti-Christian, and that modern liberties are *semper et ubique* (always and everywhere) liberties of doom. There are differences among them. At one end, we find clericalism. They do not make the distinctions mentioned earlier, and they feel that the fall of the *Ancien Régime* is a tragedy without remedy for the Christian spirit. As a result their cultural horizon becomes very narrow: in their view there would only be one Catholic culture derived from faith, and it would be built only around institutions associated with the faith. This would indeed deny the privilege of Christian freedom in the many areas left to the free initiative of Christians[[265]](#footnote-265).

A second group, known as liberal Catholics, greet the Revolution enthusiastically, and hold that freedom, equality and fraternity are the social fruits of a mature reading of the Gospel. Here too we should make some distinctions. Some intellectuals are able to distinguish between the liberal institutions that safeguard the rights of the person and the rationale of these institutions, man’s absolute autonomy, which is basically anti-Christian and incompatible with a gospel inspired anthropology. There are Catholics who do not make this distinction, and they too accept the starting point of ideological Modernity, which is freedom of conscience understood in a liberal sense[[266]](#footnote-266).

### 2. Gregory XVI and Blessed Pius XI

The Pontificates of *Pius VII (1800-1823)*, *Leo XII (1823-1829)*, *Pius VIII (1829-1831)*, *Gregory XVI (1831-1846)* and particularly *Blessed Pius IX (1846-1878)* should be looked at with this difficult cultural context in mind. The first papal condemnation of liberalism as man being his own foundation was Gregory XVI’s encyclical *Mirari vos*, promulgated on the 15th of August 1832. There, liberal ideology was identified with naturalism, that is, asserting that human realities were the ultimate foundation, unrelated to any transcendence. The Pope claimed for himself the government of the universal Church, as the successor of Peter, and rejected the attempts to make the Church a modern human institution. He condemned the theories that opposed priestly celibacy and marriage indissolubility, and religious indifferentism, the end result of a liberal understanding of freedom of conscience. The condemnation of the freedom of the press in this context meant the right to proclaim erroneous doctrines. Within the political sphere, Gregory XVI favoured an understanding between princes and priests, all united in the service of Church and State.

The most significant papal document of the confrontation with the intellectual trends of ideological Modernity is the *Syllabus* of Blessed Pius IX, which was indeed a complete condemnation of all modern freedoms. It was promulgated together with the encyclical *Quanta cura* in December 1864. It has been interpreted in many different ways. At the time he was the temporal ruler of the Papal States, threatened by the imminent Italian unification that eventually took place in 1870. His precarious political position did not help a proper understanding of either Encyclical or Syllabus. Independently of the historical circumstances, Blessed Pius IX did not condemn freedom itself. He condemned naturalism, the principle of man’s absolute autonomy -so often mentioned in this book- as the ultimate foundation of modern freedom. We should also mention that the Syllabus was structured in a way that was difficult to understand: it contained 80 short statements with references to 30 documents of the Magisterium. These references were necessary to understand the context of the condemnations. Oversimplified statements of the papal doctrine, both for and against, were published the very next day. The rejection of the practical freedoms of liberalism makes sense if these freedoms are taken as the necessary consequences of the mistaken principle underpinning them. It is also true that the political philosophy behind the official statements of the Church were inspired in medieval thinking, and that it would possibly have been better to make a greater distinction between specific institutions and their erroneous ideological basis. However, bearing in mind that the Church was under constant siege during most of the 19th century, the Popes could not make too many fine points; from a doctrinal point of view it was more important to reject anthropological naturalism, which is incompatible with revealed faith.

The First Vatican Council was convoked during the final years of Pius IX’s pontificate. With regard to our topic - the relationship between the Church and the contemporary world -, the Council provided important matters for consideration. First of all, the Church stated, against the spirit of ideological Modernity, that faith and reason are not incompatible; on the contrary, they should exist in harmony, because they both have the same divine origin. The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* asserted that it is possible know God with human reason alone, and that grace is needed to reach the revealed truths that are beyond the reach of human reason. It does not mean, however, that faith is contrary to reason: some truths of faith cannot be reached by reason alone, but they are reasonable, and they are not absurd. Moreover, in the Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, Pius IX had the courage to define papal infallibility on matters of faith and morals when he speaks *ex cathedra*. Blessed Pius IX had no human respect. He defended strongly and faithfully the particular assistance of the Holy Spirit on the Catholic Church, at a time when the world was ever more sceptic of anything that surpassed sense knowledge.

During this period Pius IX lost the temporal power over the Papal States. This became a difficult period for the relations Church-State that would be finally solved in 1929, during the Pontificate of Pius XI.

## XIII FROM LEO XIII to PIUS XII

### 1. Leo XIII

A substantial change of approach took place during the pontificate of Leo XIII. He made a distinction between the materialistic or autonomous basis of Modernity itself and many of the institutions of modern times; these distinctions could not have been made in earlier years. He covered he main political issues of the day at some stage or other of his vast magisterium: the origin of authority, the common good, the social nature of man, religious tolerance, etc. are among the most important. Leo XIII realised that times were a changing. A general rejection of Modernity was not an option, because the world needed a different approach to replace a traditional view that wanted no changes. The Pope set out to challenge the absolute, naturalist concept of freedom by introducing a Christian view of freedom, free from the anthropocentric and autonomic dangers of ideological Modernity[[267]](#footnote-267).

Leo XIII addressed the social question with his famous encyclical *Rerum Novarum (1893)*, the first statement of the Church’s magisterium on social doctrine. The focus of the Church’s magisterium in the first half of the 19th century had been on doctrinal and political topics, but from 1848 onwards the social panorama had become untenable. Following several papal interventions, Pope Leo XIII decided that these matters needed urgent attention. He criticised the deleterious consequences of savage liberalism, and warned Christians of the dangers of socialist collectivism; he then proposed a system of industrial relations between capital and labour centred around the human person[[268]](#footnote-268),

The conflict between the Church and the laicist state of the third French Republic became an important issue throughout his long pontificate. While defending the freedom of the Church to carry out her salvific role in society, he had no hesitation to encourage French Catholics to engage with the Republic; he stressed what was a matter of opinion on the different modes of government -there is no essential bond between Catholicism and the monarchy- and stated the obligation that Catholics have to work for the common good of the society they live in.

Leo XIII’s magisterium signalled a change although he maintained the continuity of papal teaching. Being a man of his time, he was tied to traditional political thinking: he emphasized the role of the State in creating a fairer society, and relegated to a secondary role the necessary re-Christianisation of society, that ought to be carried out by social forces, not run by the State [[269]](#footnote-269).

### 2. Saint Pius X and Benedict XV

*Saint Pius X (1903-1914)* had to face modernism, a critical doctrinal issue. This book is not the forum to deal with the theological history of modernism. For our purpose it is enough to state that this doctrinal movement, born within the Church, claimed that faith was purely a religious sentiment, and welcomed modern rationalism and immanentism as the preferred framework for theological and biblical exegetical research. In other words, it proposed once more many of the ideas of liberal Catholics, that had already been condemned by Popes Gregory XVI and Blessed Pius IX. The holy Pope could not but condemn these principles, which questioned the supernatural nature of the Church and of the deposit of revelation. Where the magisterium of Leo XIII focused on the dialogue between the Church and the world, Saint Pius X focused on the Church itself, because some of its intellectual sectors were suffering the influence of ideological Modernity. Saint Pius X re-stated the traditional -not traditionalist- teaching of the Church with the decree *Lamentabili* and the encyclical *Pascendi (1907)*[[270]](#footnote-270).

The danger was momentarily averted, or so it appeared. But later on Pius XII and Paul VI had to confront neo-modernist theological movements.

With the advent of the First World War and the totalitarian regimes that denied human dignity, the Popes spoke up not only defending the freedom of the Church that was being attacked, but the freedom of the human person, regardless of race, culture, religion or nationality. Benedict XV (1914-1922) would make increasingly urgent calls for international peace, based on the rights of nations and of individual persons. At this stage we want to look at the pontificate of Pius XI (1922-1939) in greater detail. During this period many political and economic events took place, that were born within the crisis of the culture of Modernity.

### 3. Pius XI

#### a) The Programme of his pontificate

Pius XI took some time to publish his first encyclical. There he outlined his programme of action. *Ubi arcano* would see the light of day on the 23rd of December 1922. The Pope reviewed the situation of the world at that time. World War I was still recent memory, but the world had not yet found true peace: “For anyone who, as We do, desires profoundly to study and successfully to apply the means necessary to overcome such evils, it is all-important that he recognize both the fact and the gravity of this state of affairs and attempt beforehand to discover its causes. This duty is imposed upon Us in commanding fashion by the very consciousness which We have of Our Apostolic Office. We cannot but resolve to fulfill that which is so clearly Our duty. This We shall do now by this Our first encyclical, and afterward with all solicitude in the course of Our sacred ministry”.[[271]](#footnote-271)

After he established the need to find the cause , Pius XI made a list of the ills of the world: international turmoil, because the unrest between nations had not ceased after the Treaty of Versailles; there was domestic disarray, such as class struggle and clashes between political parties, often pursuing their own goals above anything else; there was no peace within families, nor in the hearts of many individuals, who were victims of a mindset that spurns obedience and effort. What was the cause of all these evils? The Pope had no doubts: “Because men have forsaken God and Jesus Christ, they have sunk to the depths of evil. They waste their energies and consume their time and efforts in vain sterile attempts to find a remedy for these ills, but without even being successful in saving what little remains from the existing ruin. It was a quite general desire that both our laws and our governments should exist *without recognizing* God or Jesus Christ, on the theory that all authority comes from men, not from God. Because of such an assumption, these theorists fell very short of being able to bestow upon law not only those sanctions which it must possess but also that secure basis for the supreme criterion of justice which even a pagan philosopher like Cicero saw clearly could not be derived except from the divine law. Authority itself lost its hold upon mankind, for it had lost that sound and unquestionable justification for its right to command on the one hand and to be obeyed on the other. Society, quite logically and inevitably, was shaken to its very depths and even threatened with destruction, since there was left to it no longer a stable foundation, everything having been reduced to a series of conflicts, to the domination of the majority, or to the supremacy of special interests”.[[272]](#footnote-272) According to the Pontiff, God’s absence created serious problems, not only in the political sphere: God’s absence from school and family is even worse if society is to function normally.

If the cause of the absence of peace is the estrangement from God, the remedy can only be the peace of Christ, that has been entrusted to the Church. The teachings of Jesus Christ on spiritual and inner values, the dignity and sanctity of life, the sacramental sanctity of marriage and the resulting sanctity of the family, “these ideals and doctrines of Christ (which are in fact but a portion of the treasury of truth which He left to mankind) were confided by Him to His Church and to her alone for safekeeping, and that He has promised that His aid will never fail her at any time for she is the infallible teacher of His doctrines in every century and before all nations”[[273]](#footnote-273).Thus the Church should have a key role in solving the problems of the world and to lead mankind to pacify spirits.

Therefore the remedy is the peace of Christ, that had reigned in centuries past, albeit with the limitations of human history. In his first encyclical Pius XI made a mild attempt to praise medieval Christendom, when there existed an authentic society of nations, based on a Christian international code that could be used as a reference point[[274]](#footnote-274).

According to Pius XI, in order to solve the problems of the world Christ ought to reign in all environments of human life: “It is apparent from these considerations that true peace, the peace of Christ, is impossible unless we are willing and ready to accept the fundamental principles of Christianity, unless we are willing to observe the teachings and obey the law of Christ, both in public and private life”.[[275]](#footnote-275) The Pope summarizes this desirable reality with one expression: “the kingdom of Christ”[[276]](#footnote-276). The same ideas appear in the motto of his pontificate, in order to display the continuity with the previous pontificates. Indeed, Saint Pius X set out to “restore all things in Christ”, and Benedict XV tried to work for peace throughout his pontificate. “These two programs of Our Predecessors We desire to unite in one - the re-establishment of the Kingdom of Christ by peace in Christ - "*the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ*."[[277]](#footnote-277)

Three years after his first encyclical, Pius XI wrote a second one, with one single purpose: to highlight the doctrinal riches and the consequences of the kingdom of Christ in society. The encyclical *Quas primas* was published on the 11th of December 1925. The Pope stated that Christ is king not only as God, but also as Man, and that He enjoys ultimate and most absolute power in this world. A mainly spiritual kingdom[[278]](#footnote-278), but also social[[279]](#footnote-279). Pope Ratti described the benefits the effective kingdom of Christ would bring to society: bonds of obedience, broken by the laicist mentality, would gather greater strength[[280]](#footnote-280), freedom for the Church would be restored[[281]](#footnote-281), the public worship that any society should offer to God would once again hold its proper place[[282]](#footnote-282). Christ would reign in the minds, in the wills and in the hearts of the faithful, and they would become good and faithful servants of the heavenly kingdom[[283]](#footnote-283).

#### b) Pius XI and the crisis of the culture of Modernity

In the encyclical *Quas primas* Pius XI summarized all the ills of contemporary world in one word: laicism, which he described as “the plague which now infects society”[[284]](#footnote-284). According to the Pope, laicism at that time was the result of a long history of secularisation. Initially, “The empire of Christ over all nations was rejected. The right which the Church has from Christ himself, to teach mankind, to make laws, to govern peoples in all that pertains to their eternal salvation, that right was denied. Then gradually the religion of Christ came to be likened to false religions and was placed ignominiously on the same level with them. It was then put under the power of the state and more or less tolerated, at the whim of princes and rulers. Some men went even further, and wished to set up in the place of God’s religion a natural religion consisting in some instinctive affection of the heart. There were even some nations who thought they could dispense with God, and that their religion should consist in impiety and the neglect of God. The rebellion of individuals and states against the authority of Christ has produced deplorable consequences. We lamented these in the Encyclical *Ubi arcano*; we lament them today: the seeds of discord sown far and wide; those bitter enmities and rivalries between nations, which still hinder so much the cause of peace; that insatiable greed which is so often hidden under a pretence of public spirit and patriotism, and gives rise to so many private quarrels; a blind and immoderate selfishness, making men seek nothing but their own comfort and advantage, and measure everything by these; no peace in the home, because men have forgotten or neglect their duty; the unity and stability of the family undermined; society in a word, shaken to its foundations and on the way to ruin.”[[285]](#footnote-285)

Pius XI had to confront many crises, or rather, many manifestations of the crisis of Modernity’s culture. Some of them were direct attacks on the rights of the Church; others involved the whole of mankind, and finally others denied the rights of the Church, of God and of man. A simple list of some of these critical events, in chronological order rather than importance, is enough to realise how serious the situation was in the period between 1932 and 1939: anti-clerical policies of the French government; persecution of the Church in Mexico; world financial crisis following the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929; totalitarian fascism in Italy, religious persecution in Spain, totalitarian neo-pagan regime in Nazi Germany; militant atheism in communist Russia.

The description of laicism in *Quas primas* gave the Pope a chance to explain the reasons for the various world ills during his rather lengthy pontificate. Circumstances changed during the period between 1922 and 1939, but the ultimate explanation the Pope offers for the historical events mentioned in his encyclicals is always the same: not acknowledging the rights of God and of Christ in human society.

A quick glance at some of the encyclicals of Pius XI can confirm the statement made earlier. In the encyclical *Maximam gravissimamque,* on the 18th of June 1924, the Pope gave permission to the French bishops to promote diocesan associations that could preserve the rights of the Church in France in an effective manner. Pius XI summarized briefly the recent history of the relations between France and the Holy See, and praised the decisions of his predecessor Saint Pius X. “We recall, but with sorrow, those sad days when in your country the evil project of separating the interests of the Republic from those of the Church was conceived and how, what is more unfortunate, steps were taken to put the project into execution. We cannot forget either how, at one fell stroke, the relations which existed between the Holy See and France were brusquely and unjustly broken off, how on December 9, 1905, the law of separation was passed by which the Concordat which had been in force over a long period of time was abrogated by but one party to the contract in direct violation of all the formalities demanded by law, how also, without the slightest regard either for the hierarchy of the Church or for the authority of the Holy See, unjust and arbitrary laws were enacted concerning the rights and possessions of the Church, as well as on the subject of divine worship. Neither can We forget how Our Predecessor of saintly memory, Pius X, in his encyclical *Vehementer* of February 11, 1906, and in the allocution which he made at the Consistory of February 21, the same year, condemned in no uncertain terms and with all possible solemnity this very law; nor how he condemned, at the same time, the so called "Associations Cultuelles" which were to be established in the spirit of that law, Associations which in another encyclical *Gravissimo* of August 10, of that year, the same Pope rejected once more and condemned”[[286]](#footnote-286). The situation in 1924 was quite different, and it was possible to negotiate with the French government on the matter of diocesan associations; however, the Pope was very clear: “At any rate, let no one distort the meaning of Our present decision in a way which is quite foreign to Our thoughts to the effect that by it We desire to nullify the condemnation of Associations made by Our Predecessor of saintly memory, Pius X, or that We have become reconciled to the so-called “Lay Laws.” Whatever Pius X condemned, We condemn; wherever and as often as the term “lay” is understood in the sense of a feeling or ideal inimical or foreign to God and to religion, We absolutely condemn such a thing and declare moreover to the whole world that such “laicism” must be condemned[[287]](#footnote-287). Pius XI always tried to find room for the freedom of the Church, and did not hesitate to negotiate with any political regime, although he always thought that the confessional state was the best way to regulate the relations between Church and State. At that moment French government was more accommodating than previous governments had been, and the Pope took advantage of the opportunity. At any rate, it was clear in the mind of the Pope that the reason for all the troubles for the Church in France was: laicism contrary to the rights of God in society.

The reason for the severe world crisis that followed the New York Stock Exchange collapse is similar. For many experts of that time the financial crisis showed the failure of liberalism; a more directed economy of the socialist kind looked like the best solution to pull out of the crisis. Pius XI wrote two encyclicals about the crisis. He criticised both the Manchester type liberalism and the socialist and communist prescriptions. Moved by apostolic charity, the Pope wanted to encourage people to be generous and to live solidarity. He spoke for the first time about the financial crisis in the encyclical *Nova impedet* (2nd October 1931); he asked Christians to make a big effort to help those most in need. The following year he published the encyclical *Caritate Christi*, in May 1932. The Roman Pontiff described a dark scene: no society is free from the financial crisis; it shows in high rates of unemployment, and the subsequent suffering of families and individuals. The cause of such a sad situation is greed, the mother of all sins, that spreads in a materialistic world where God has disappeared from the existential horizon of many people. More specifically, Pius XI criticises “that sordid and excessive self-love which orders and subordinates all things to its own advantage, and not only neglects but tramples upon the advantage of others”[[288]](#footnote-288). Such individualism -typical of economic liberalism- became possible when the law of Christian love was abandoned, and the sacred principles that were uppermost in the life of society were trampled upon. The Godless -communists and other agitators- took advantage of the circumstances and “with extreme audacity, direct all their efforts to one end, seeking to cast away every bridle from their necks, and breaking the bonds of all law both human and divine, wage an atrocious war against all religion and against God Himself; in this it is their purpose to uproot utterly all knowledge and sense of religion from the minds of men, even from the tenderest age, for they know well that if once the Divine law and knowledge were blotted out from the minds of men there would now be nothing that they could not arrogate to themselves”[[289]](#footnote-289).

Laicism appeared not only under the shape of the anticlerical policies of Western democracies or economic liberalism. During his pontificate laicism took the shape of totalitarianism many times. Pius XI had to contend with severe problems in many countries, notably Mexico, Spain, Italy, Germany and Russia. A review of the source of the various forms of totalitarianism leads once more to the great evil of modern times, laicism: in other words, replacing God with a purely worldly outlook on life.

Pius XI gave special attention to the problems that the governments of the Mexican revolution inflicted on the Church. In 1926 he wrote the encyclical *Iniquis afflictisque*, where he exposed the Constitution of 1917. The Constitution infringed on the rights of God and of the Church in society. The Mexican constitution enacted all the yearnings of militant laicism: separation of Church and State, no juridical acknowledgement of the Church, subordination of the Church to civil magistrates, prohibition to teach religion, even privately, etc. [[290]](#footnote-290). Six years later the Pope published a second encyclical, *Acerba animi*, dealing with the Mexican bishops’ decision to cancel worship. Pius XI stated that “the persecution of Mexico, besides being an outrage against God, against His Church, and against the conscience of a Catholic people, is also an incentive to the subversion of the social order, which is the aim of those organizations professing to deny God”[[291]](#footnote-291).Pope Ratti never grew tired of crying out against the unjust laws of the governments of Álvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles and Lázaro Cárdenas: in 1937 he published a third encyclical, *Firmissimam constantiam*. In this document he encouraged setting up Catholic Action in Mexico, and praised the constant efforts of bishops, priests and lay people in “ardently professing the Catholic Faith and in opposing the impositions of those who, ignoring the divine excellence of the religion of Jesus Christ and knowing it only through the calumnies of its enemies, delude themselves that they are not able to accomplish reforms for the good of the people except by combating the religion of the great majority”[[292]](#footnote-292).

Neglect of the faith in God and rejection of the kingdom of Christ were the reasons for the severe difficulties the Church encountered in Mexico. Something similar was happening in Spain during its Second Republic. On the 3rd of June 1933 the Pope published the encyclical *Dilectissima nobis*. Pius XI highlighted that the Church is not bound to any form of government, provided that the rights of God and Christian consciences are safe. The Pope did not denounce the republic as a form of government, but the attack unleashed against those rights by means of legislation “Relating to religious Confessions and Congregations”, was triggered by true hatred of religion[[293]](#footnote-293). Pius XI lamented the separation of Church and State. “Separation, well considered, is only the baneful consequence - as We often have declared, especially in the Encyclical *Quas Primas* - of laicism, or rather the apostasy of society that today feigns to alienate itself from God and therefore from the Church. But if the pretension of excluding from public life God the Creator and Provident Ruler of that same society is impious and absurd for any people whatsoever, it is particularly repugnant to find this exclusion of God and Church from the life of the Spanish Nation, where the Church always and rightly has held the most important and most beneficially active part in legislation, in schools, and in all other private and public institutions”[[294]](#footnote-294).

The Spanish affair deteriorated to the point of a Civil War (1936-1939). And the Pope had to confront anticatholic persecution even in his beloved Italy. After the 1929 treaty with the fascist regime that settled the ‘roman question’ once and for all, the relations between the Holy See and Mussolini’s government remained very difficult. The attacks against the youth associations of the Italian Catholic Action prompted the Pope to publish the encyclical *Non abiamo bisogno* on the 29th of June 1931. The Pope denounced the totalitarian regime, calling it “a real pagan worship of the State — the “Statolatry” which is no less in contrast with the natural rights of the family than it is in contradiction with the supernatural rights of the Church”[[295]](#footnote-295). The Pontiff called “to wage the good fight for the liberty of consciences. Not indeed (as someone, perhaps inadvertently, has represented Us as saying) for “the liberty of conscience”, which is an equivocal expression too often distorted to mean the absolute independence of conscience and therefore an absurdity in reference to a soul created and redeemed by God”[[296]](#footnote-296). This was not a superficial distinction: freedom of conscience, understood in a liberal sense, was an essential element of the laicist mentality.

Replacing God with a State idolatry in the fascist regime was bad; but replacing the true religion with a neo-pagan faith in Nazi Germany, or with the atheist ideology of communism, raised to “State religion” in Russia was even worse. In March 1937 Pius XI published three encyclicals. The Pope had just recovered from an illness that many thought terminal. The strength of the Pope, nearly 80, took the world by surprise: on the 14th he vigorously criticised National Socialism with the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*; on the 19th, he condemned communism with *Divini Redemptoris*; on the 28th he published *Firmissimam constantiam*, that has already been mentioned, on the religious persecution in Mexico.

Pius XI did not mince his words when he referred to Nazism, at the time the ruling regime in Germany. The word ‘Nazism” is not mentioned in the document, but the Pope’s target was all too evident. In 1933 the Holy See and Germany had signed a concordat. Pope Ratti did not hesitate to negotiate with any regime, if he could secure some room for the freedom of the Church. The concordat became a dead document right away, but at least it was the juridical basis for the recurrent complaints of the Holy See against the German government, in defence of the freedoms that were not respected. The deteriorating situation prompted him to raise his voice once again in 1937. In the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* Pius XI denounced blasphemous use of religion by the Nazi ideology. The Pope encouraged Germans to remain faithful to the genuine faith in God, stating that “Whoever identifies, by pantheistic confusion, God and the universe, by either lowering God to the dimensions of the world, or raising the world to the dimensions of God, is not a believer in God[[297]](#footnote-297). Those who replace God with an impersonal destiny do not have the true faith either: “Whoever follows that so-called pre-Christian Germanic conception of substituting a dark and impersonal destiny for the personal God”[[298]](#footnote-298). Following this Pius XI condemned the raising of race to be the supreme norm, and he called it true idolatrous worship. And he added “None but superficial minds could stumble into concepts of a national God, of a national religion; or attempt to lock within the frontiers of a single people, within the narrow limits of a single race, God, the Creator of the universe, King and Legislator of all nations before whose immensity they are “as a drop of a bucket” (Isaiah XI, 15)”[[299]](#footnote-299). Pius XI summarized the pseudo-religious nature of Nazism with two words: “provocative neo-paganism”.

The Pope was concerned by the Nazis’ abuse of Christian religious language. Therefore, an important part of the encyclical is dedicated to clarifying the meaning of words: revelation is the word of God to men, not suggestions made by blood or race to promote the history of a people; faith is holding what God has revealed as true, not the pride, happy trust in the future of the people itself.’ Immortality is the individual survival of man after worldly death, not a collective survival in the continuity of the very people, for a worldly future of undetermined duration, etc.[[300]](#footnote-300) Pius XI ended the encyclical with an act of faith in Providence, and the hope of new peace between Church and State. “But if, without any fault of Ours, this peace is not to come, then the Church of God will defend her rights and her freedom in the name of the Almighty whose arm has not shortened”[[301]](#footnote-301).

The situation in Germany was dire, and the same could be said of soviet communism. The encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* defined communism as “a system full of errors and sophisms. It is in opposition both to reason and to Divine Revelation. It subverts the social order, because it means the destruction of its foundations; because it ignores the true origin and purpose of the State; because it denies the rights, dignity and liberty of human personality”[[302]](#footnote-302). It would take too long to mention all the criticisms of communism that Pius XI made. We will only refer to the fact that Pius XI states that it is a result of the pretence of some intellectuals of the 19th century to free human civilization from the bonds of morals and religion. Communism displays the process of laicist secularisation, that destroys the moral foundations of man, family and society. Pius XI linked communism to liberalism, not only because the latter caused grave social injustices, but because liberalism secularized society. “If we would explain the blind acceptance of Communism by so many thousands of workmen, we must remember that the way had been already prepared for it by the religious and moral destitution in which wage-earners had been left by liberal economics. Even on Sundays and holy days, labour-shifts were given no time to attend to their essential religious duties. No one thought of building churches within convenient distance of factories, nor of facilitating the work of the priest. On the contrary, laicism was actively and persistently promoted, with the result that we are now reaping the fruits of the errors so often denounced by Our Predecessors and by Ourselves. It can surprise no one that the Communistic fallacy should be spreading in a world already to a large extent de-Christianized”[[303]](#footnote-303).

The laicism that Pius XI detected behind all these political and social developments was also the cause of the deterioration of social customs. For the Roman Pontiff two areas were particularly important in shaping society: education and the family. The Pope wrote two encyclicals to deal with these two topics (*Divini illius magistri*, 31/12/1929, and *Casti connubii*, 31/12/1930). He warned about the dangers of the so called neutral or lay education, that aspires to remove God from education (see. *Divini illius magistri*, AAS (1929), pp. 751-754), and about the errors against fertility, the indissolubility and sacramental nature of Christian marriage, which are the result of a neo-pagan laicist mentality (*Casti connubii*, AAS (1930), pp. 556-576).

The prevailing laicism prevented contemplative life and interest in religious matters. As the Pope wrote in his encyclical *Mens nostra*, of the 20th of December 1929, “The most grave disease by which our age is oppressed, and at the same time the fruitful source of all the evils deplored by every man of good heart, is that levity and thoughtlessness which carry men hither and thither through devious ways. Hence comes the constant and passionate absorption in external things; hence, the insatiable thirst for riches and pleasures that gradually weakens and extinguishes in the minds of men the desire for more excellent goods, and so entangles them in outward and fleeting things that it forbids them to think of eternal truths, and of the Divine laws, and of God Himself, the one beginning and end of all created things, Who, nevertheless, for his boundless goodness and mercy, even in these our days, though moral corruption may spread apace, ceases not to draw men to himself by a bounteous abundance of graces.”[[304]](#footnote-304)For Pius XI the world had a serious malady, which prevented men to look on high. The remedy was the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ. The Pope had great trust in the role that Catholic Action could play in the re-Christianization of society and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. Catholic action was described as “the participation of lay people in the hierarchical apostolate of the Church”. It became very important during the pontificates of Pius XI and Pius XII.

During the pontificate of Pius XI the Church and the Italian State signed the Lateran Treaties in 1929. The Pope managed to recover enough independence through the establishment of the State of the City of the Vatican, which the Pope needed to carry out his spiritual role in the Universal Church. The treaty was one of the best achievements of the fascist regime. Mussolini went ahead with it because was a political realist. We should point out, however, that the ideological clash between fascism and Christianity grew worse despite the treaty[[305]](#footnote-305).

During this pontificate the documents of the magisterium tentatively opened to new forms of political organisation and, once the corporate proposals of Pius XI were surpassed, western democracy was clearly approved through the radio messages of Pius XII (1938-1958). A long time had passed since the days of Leo XIII; now the role of society as a whole was emphasized, rather than the role of the State itself. In addition, in order to understand some of Pope Pius XII addresses, the international situation following the Second World War and the proximate danger of soviet communism - that threatened the freedom of the Church in vast areas of the world -need to be factored in.[[306]](#footnote-306)

In order to provide a more comprehensive picture of this period, we should mention that Catholics were heavily involved in politics, and tried to implement the social doctrine of the Church. Their presence is different from country to country at different stages. An important Catholic political party was already set up in Germany in the 19th century -*Zentrum*-, that opposed Bismarck’s anti-Catholic policies, known as *Kulturkampf*. In Italy Catholics were not allowed in politics for some time, as a protest against the position of the Papacy in relation to the State. Later on several associations were set up during the pontificate of Benedict XV, like the Popular Party of don Luigi Sturzo, a Christian inspired, non-denominational party. We have already referred to the ideas of Maritain and Mounier in France, because they will be very influential in the Latin world.

The actions of Catholics in the first half of the 20th century was quite different from the previous century. The fall of liberal ideology and the more open approach of the Popes from Leo XIII onwards contributed to a more relaxed environment. In addition, the excesses of both right and left totalitarian regimes brought Catholics closer to western democracies, while rejecting their original anthropocentric foundations.

## XIV FROM VATICAN II TO SAINT JOHN PAUL II

### 1. The Second Vatican Council: the legitimate autonomy of temporal matters and religious freedom

The Second Vatican Council was the most important ecclesial event of the pontificates of *Blessed John XXIII (1958-1963)* and *Saint Paul VI (1963-1978)*. It was a landmark event in the dialogue between the Church and the contemporary world. Its documents reflect the influences from various quarters. The new Franco Belgian theology represented mainly by Henri de Lubac and Yves-Marie-Congar is an important example. The liturgical, pastoral and ecumenical movements of the years that preceded the Council had a bearing in the minds of the Council Fathers. It is also important to pay special attention to new ecclesial realities of those times, that highlight the universal call to sanctity, the sanctification of work, the apostolic vocation that results from Baptism, etc. Among the many factors that had an influence on the Council I want to consider the teachings of Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Founder of Opus Dei. The sanctification of work and of the ordinary circumstances of the Christian are the core of the message of Saint Josemaría. With regard to our specific topic -the relative autonomy of temporal matters - Escriva maintained forcefully since the 1920s the legitimate freedom of Christians in political matters, and the need to take an active part, with a well-formed conscience, in all areas of civil society. These were times when clericalism and laicism appeared to be the only choices; Saint Josemaría managed to introduce to the world the beauty and the demands of Christian freedom, well removed from clericalisms that confuse the temporal with the eternal, and from laicisms, that keep completely apart the natural and supernatural orders[[307]](#footnote-307). These would be key topics of the Council.

As we look at the documents of Vatican II, we will concentrate on two Council ideas, because they open up new perspectives in the relations between Church and contemporary world: the legitimate autonomy of temporal affairs and religious freedom, as they are closely linked to the thread of this book.

One of the most important documents of the Council on these matters is the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world*,known as *Gaudium et Spes*. It was promulgated on the 7th of December 1965, 101 years after the *Syllabus*. Time had not passed in vain, and the Church’s defensive attitude had become opening to, dialogue with, and constructive criticism of Modernity. It is worthwhile quoting from this document to appreciate the change of attitude.

In n. 4 of the document the Council Fathers describe the situation of contemporary man. Rapid changes are typical of today’s culture; they are the result of human intelligence. “As happens in any crisis of growth, this transformation has brought serious difficulties in its wake. Thus while man extends his power in every direction, he does not always succeed in subjecting it to his own welfare. Striving to probe more profoundly into the deeper recesses of his own mind, he frequently appears more unsure of himself. Gradually and more precisely he lays bare the laws of society, only to be paralysed by uncertainty about the direction to give it” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, n. 4). As far as the Council is concerned, the modern world is a paradox: an impressive growth in production coupled with people dying of hunger by the thousands; greater exchange of ideas, coupled with ideological manipulation of those ideas, etc. “Influenced by such a variety of complexities, many of our contemporaries are kept from accurately identifying permanent values and adjusting them properly to fresh discoveries. As a result, buffeted between hope and anxiety and pressing one another with questions about the present course of events, they are burdened down with uneasiness. This same course of events leads men to look for answers; indeed, it forces them to do so”. (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 4). The course of history challenges man, and forces him to respond.

The document is aware of the nihilistic environment of today’s culture, that often brings anxiety and loss of the sense of existence with it. It invites man to ask again the fundamental questions of the human condition: “What is man? What is the sense of sorrow, of evil, of death that continues to exist, despite so much progress? What is the value of victories achieved at such high cost? What can man offer to society, what can he expect from it? What follows this earthly life?” (n.10). The answer to all these questions is found in the Life of a Person, Jesus Christ, who shows man to every man. In the light of Christ, the Council attempts to explain the mystery of man to today’s world. And man is above all the image of God, created to give glory to the Creator. Any answer that does not take this fact into account ends up being harmful to man himself, who becomes lost by “exalting himself as the absolute measure of all things or debases himself to the point of despair. The result is doubt and anxiety” (n. 12).

*Gaudium et Spes* highlights the social and community nature of man’s vocation, such that the human creature “cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (n.24). This anti-individualistic view of the person will be taken up often in later magisterium, to criticize the selfish consumer society of liberal ideas. The vocation to solidarity and charity sets a reference framework for possible solutions to the social and political organisation of society. But the Council vigorously states that there are no single solutions to earthly problems; on the contrary, there is great autonomy in temporal affairs. Let us read carefully the following text, that fits perfectly the thread of this book: the history of ideas read from the perspective of the process of secularization in the two meanings that have already been described: “If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered by men, put to use, and regulated, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts (…) But if the *autonomy of temporal affairs* is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator the creature would disappear. For their part, however, all believers of whatever religion always hear His revealing voice in the discourse of creatures. When God is forgotten, however, the creature itself grows unintelligible” (n.36).

The first part of this long quote gives the *coup-de-grâce* to clericalism, that wanted to be involved in all areas of human endeavour on behalf of a Church. In fact, the Church leaves these areas to men’s free initiative. Secularity was asserted in the sense of de-clericalization or secularity. In the second part of the quote *Gaudium et Spes* was critical of secularisation understood as the claim of absolute independence of temporal affairs.

The same key principles are applied later to the political and social arenas. Number 43 calls on lay Christians to work for the temporal common good, and avoid the temptation to not care about this world, because it is not our final home, but also to forget the ‘beyond’ and think only of temporal matters. To be involved in building a city worthy of men is a moral obligation: “The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties towards his neighbour and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation”. This obligation must be taken up with complete personal responsibility, and should not be passed on to the Church’s hierarchy: “Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city; from priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment. Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role”.

In the same number, *Gaudium et Spes* struck another blow to clericalism, by reaffirming the legitimate pluralism that should exist among lay Christians: “Often enough the Christian view of things will itself suggest some specific solution in certain circumstances. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that with the same sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter. Even against the intentions of their proponents, however, solutions proposed on one side or another may be easily confused by many people with the Gospel message. Hence it is necessary for people to remember that no one is allowed in the aforementioned situations to appropriate the Church's authority for his opinion”.

This principle is stated again, even more clearly, in n. 76: “The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system”. Furthermore, the Church “is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person”. The pastoral constitution underlines the independence in cooperation as the best way to set up the relations between Church and State, and at the same applauds the fact that in today’s culture “The present keener sense of human dignity has given rise in many parts of the world to attempts to bring about a politico-juridical order which will give better protection to the rights of the person in public life. These include the right freely to meet and form associations, the right to express one's own opinion and to profess one's religion both publicly and privately” (n. 73).

The tone of this document is radically different compared to previous documents, especially the magisterium of Pius IX. But we should not forget that Vatican II insists time and again on a transcendent view of the human person, fully consistent with the criticism of the principle of man’s autonomy that we have seen in the Church’s magisterium of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. *Gaudium at Spes* is one of the clearest examples of the process we have attempted to describe in this book: Modernity identifies itself with a process of secularisation, but this process does not travel in one direction only. It can lead to the self-affirmation of man, or it can lead to affirming secularity (de-clericalization and relative autonomy of temporal affairs).

The Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, has been described as “the heart of the council” by Rocco Buttiglione[[308]](#footnote-308). It is symbolic of the new relationship between the Church and today’s world.

Indeed, this document states very strongly the right that consciences have to seek the truth freely, without any external constraints. We have referred many times to the issue of religious tolerance and freedom of conscience. The Council rejected the liberal understanding of freedom of conscience, that is, radically autonomous; it rather added many ideas that emerged throughout Modernity to the terminology of the Magisterium, always respecting objective truth and the natural moral order. The Council stated that, in keeping with previous magisterial tradition, and in the belief that the Catholic religion is the only true religion, and that it is every man’s obligation to seek the truth, especially in reference to God and his Church, and, once having come to the knowledge of the truth, to embrace it and guard it. And “This Vatican Council likewise professes its belief that it is upon the human conscience that these obligations fall and exert their binding force. The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of truth itself, as it enters the mind gently and powerfully” (n. 1).

In n. 2 the Council addresses the heart of the matter: “This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The Council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right” (n. 2).

The religious freedom acknowledged by the Council is not the religious indifferentism of ideological Modernity. On the contrary, after it has set clearly the obligation that man has to seek the truth, and stated that there is an absolute Truth, the Declaration sets down the need for a juridical framework that safeguards the right of the individual conscience to seek it without any external compulsion. *Dignitatis Humanae* opened up a very fruitful path for the dialogue with the modern world, and did not identify the principles of revealed faith with the absolute freedom of liberalism or the gnoseological or ethic scepticism of nihilism. We could say that in rejecting subjectivism, a central topic of modern thought, the Church made subjectivity her own.

The Second Vatican Council set the foundations to build a Christian Modernity that could provide meaning to the secularised and nihilistic modernity of the 20th century, and excluded clerical or theocratic attitudes.

Unfortunately, at the end of the Vatican Council II the great hopes of renewal of the Church were compounded by events that revealed a deep crisis in the life of the Church. Some ecclesiastics promoted movements of protest within the Catholic Church claiming to follow “the spirit of the Council”, when in fact they denied what the documents stated. Ultimately, it was a futile attempt to make many ideas of Modernity compatible with the gospel message. In some theological environments freedom was opposed to authority; in others, the proponents of liberation theology mixed Marxism and Christianity; sexual morals became an ever-increasing area of debate between the hierarchy and rebellious theologians, who espoused a relativistic understanding of freedom of conscience; etc. In addition to doctrinal issues there was a crisis of discipline, and a severe drop in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Paul VI, who was deeply hurt by it all, had to confront the post-conciliar crisis. His position on sexual morals was crystal clear with the promulgation of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968). It was the butt of much criticism, but Paul VI felt the moral imperative to react against doctrines and practices that did not respect the dignity of conjugal love. After the death of Pope Montini, the very short pontificate of John Paul I -only 33 days- in September and October of 1978, gave the Church new hopes. His pleasant style and his unforgettable smile were a providential hiatus between the sorrow associated with the final years of Paul VI’s pontificate and the strength of a Pope -“who comes from a faraway country”, as Saint John Paul II described himself on the very day of his elevation to the see of Peter[[309]](#footnote-309).

### 2. The pontificate of Saint John Paul II (1978-2005). Towards a Christian Modernity

To a certain extent Karol Wojtyla is a symbol of the 20th century: a Pole, who suffered the totalitarian regimes of both right and left in his own country. His philosophical training included sources of the *philosophia perennis*, but also of Modernity. He achieved a personalist synthesis that would have an impact in the philosophical thinking of the 20th century. Providence made him John Paul II, the last Pope of the second millennium; he developed a body of magisterium and a pastoral programme that reached the depths of modern culture. In perfect harmony with Vatican Council II, Saint John Paul II set out the truth about man, that has been revealed in Christ. The Pope reviewed the situation of the world today from a Christocentric perspective which includes a personalist understanding of man. Modern cultural trends found immediate resonance with the Pope, because for him these events were not abstract theory, but the arena where the destiny of mankind generally, and of each man in particular, are played out.

It would be impossible to review the whole magisterium of his long pontificate. It extensively covered topics ranging from feminism to colonialism, including the issues of science-faith and the ecology. A choice becomes necessary. We have chosen three key topics, that will give us a glimpse of important aspects of the dialogue between the Church and the world today. We will first look at how Saint John Paul II addresses liberalism -we think this is a priority after the fall of the Berlin wall-. Then we will look at his assessment of the so called “culture of death”, and finally look at his proposal for the world community, using his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1995. Many topics already covered in this book will be taken up again, this time from Saint John Paul II’s perspective.

#### a) The social doctrine of the Church and liberal ethics

The social doctrine of the Church was already included in the Gospel. However, it was only presented in a structured form at the time of the pontificate of Leo XIII, with the famous encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, and developed further by the contributions of several Popes later on. It is not a self-defence mechanism against ideologies that are deemed mistaken or heterodox. The Christian social message is above all a positive message, its power comes from the teachings of Jesus Christ, and the truth about man given to us by the Son of God made man. This is an important starting point -the priority of positive proposals over critical content[[310]](#footnote-310)-, otherwise we would run the risk of appearing defensive, which is many times the acceptance of an inferior position[[311]](#footnote-311).

According to John Paul II there is a basic difference between liberal social ethics and the Christian social ethics that we find in the social doctrine of the Church. The former is the result of *an ideological way of thinking*, whereas “the Church's social doctrine is not a "third way" between *liberal capitalism* and *Marxist collectivism*, nor even a possible alternative to other solutions less radically opposed to one another: rather, it constitutes a *category of its own*. Nor is it an *ideology*, but rather the *careful formulation* that results from a careful consideration of the complex realities of human existence, in society and in the international order, in the light of faith and of the Church's tradition. Its main aim is to *interpret* these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching on man and his vocation, a vocation which is at once earthly and transcendent; its aim is thus to *guide* Christian behaviour. Therefore it does not belong to the field of *ideology*, but of theology and particularly of moral theology”[[312]](#footnote-312).

The fact that social doctrine is about theological knowledge does not prevent -in fact it becomes necessary- that this thinking be philosophically rational. Theology does not apply the revealed content of reality directly; it needs the mediation of a rational reflection. When we talk about social doctrine of the Church, we are saying that any theological reflection requires the rationality of philosophy[[313]](#footnote-313).

Having said this, we will introduce the teachings of saint John Paul II on the so called liberal institutions, and then the deepest point of the incommensurability between liberal social ethics and Christian social ethics. We think that they cannot be measured against each other because the anthropological underpinning of these two ethics cannot be measured. We will begin with the review of the capitalist institutions, then we will refer to liberal democracy, and at the end of this section assess their anthropological tenets.

###### 1. The magisterial judgements on liberal capitalism

When we analyse the various pronouncements of the Church over the typical institutions of liberal capitalism we find the following kinds: rejection, conditional rejection, conditional approval, approval[[314]](#footnote-314). The very essence of capitalism is the reason for so many different appraisals. Capitalism is an economic system set in historical structures; in so far as they are part of history, those structures are subject to change.

Appraisal of capitalist institutions is a common topic in the social encyclicals of Saint John Paul II. *Laborem exercens* reviews the origin of the concept of capitalism: For certain supporters of such ideas, work was understood and treated as a sort of "merchandise" that the worker -especially the industrial worker- sells to the employer, who at the same time is the possessor of the capital, that is, all the working tools and means that make production possible”[[315]](#footnote-315). The Pope maintains that the theoretical essence of capitalism is none other than inverting the order established in the book of Genesis, where God commands man to master the earth. John Paul II states that capitalism exists whenever “*man is treated as an instrument of production*, whereas he -he alone, independently of the work he does- ought to be treated as the effective subject of work and its true maker and creator”[[316]](#footnote-316).

*Laborem exercens* repeats once more the previous social magisterium strong rebuttal of the capitalism of the beginnings of the process of industrialization; It adds that although the circumstances have changed, the new economic systems (including neo-capitalism) *have allowed flagrant injustices to persist or have created new ones[[317]](#footnote-317).*

This encyclical singles out a theoretical-practical strain between capital and labour: “The conflict originated in the fact that the workers put their powers at the disposal of the entrepreneurs, and these, following the principle of maximum profit, tried to establish the lowest possible wages for the work done by the employees”[[318]](#footnote-318). The social doctrine of the Church proposes and teaches a principle that has always been taught by the Church: “*the priority of labour over capital.* This principle directly concerns the process of production: in this process labour is always a primary *efficient cause,* while capital, the whole collection of means of production, remains a mere *instrument* or instrumental cause. This principle is an evident truth that emerges from the whole of man's historical experience”[[319]](#footnote-319).

Placing capital above labour -not considering that capital itself is a fruit of labour, and ultimately is nothing more than an ensemble of things- is a consequence of the reductive perspective of economism: “This way of stating the issue contained a fundamental error, what we can call *the error of economism,* that of considering human labour solely according to its economic purpose. This fundamental error of thought can and must be called *an error of materialism,* in that economism is convinced, directly or indirectly, of the primacy and superiority of the material, and directly or indirectly places the spiritual and the personal (man's activity, moral values and such matters) in a position of subservience to material reality. This is still not *theoretical materialism* in the full meaning of the term, but it is certainly *practical materialism,* a materialism judged capable of satisfying man's needs, not so much on the grounds of the premises derived from materialist theory, as on the grounds of a particular way of evaluating things, and so on the grounds of a certain hierarchy of goods based on the greater immediate attractiveness of what is material”[[320]](#footnote-320).

*Laborem exercens* looks at another aspect of liberal economy, related to the concept of capital: the idea that private property is an absolute. The encyclical reaffirms that private property is licit, including the means of production. In this way Christian social doctrine *diverges* radically from the programme of *collectivism*, but at the same time “it differs from the programme of *capitalism* practiced by liberalism and by the political systems related to it. In the latter case, the difference consists in the way the right to ownership or property is understood. Christian tradition has never upheld this right as absolute and untouchable. On the contrary, it has always understood this right within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole of creation: *the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use,* to the fact that goods are meant for everyone”[[321]](#footnote-321).

In *Sollicitudo rei socialis* the Pope proposes again the doctrine on private property, and adds the classical expression “Private property, in fact, is under a "social mortgage"[[322]](#footnote-322). He also states clearly the right to economic initiative, intimately united to the creative initiative of the individual citizen[[323]](#footnote-323).

In his last social encyclical, *Centessimus annus*, he underlines the common destiny of goods as a key principle, and he confirms the central role of man as the efficient cause of the whole process of production. In numbers 34 and 35 he rates some economic institutions. Free market appears to be “the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs”[[324]](#footnote-324). However, the Pope points out that the market alone is not enough, because many human needs are not covered by the market. In *Centessimus annus* the Church “acknowledges the legitimate *role of profit* as an indicator that a business is working well. When a firm makes a profit, this means that productive factors have been properly employed and corresponding human needs have been duly satisfied. But profitability is not the only indicator of a firm's condition. It is possible for the financial accounts to be in order, and yet for the people — who make up the firm's most valuable asset — to be humiliated and their dignity offended”[[325]](#footnote-325).

Altogether, we can find in *Centessimus annus* various conditional approvals for some institutions of the capitalist system. In number 42 the Pope makes further clarifications. If we were to ask whether the capitalist economic system should replace communism, the Pope answers: “If by "capitalism" is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative, even though it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a "business economy", "market economy" or simply "free economy". But if by "capitalism" is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative”[[326]](#footnote-326).

We have briefly touched upon some of the judgements of the most recent social magisterium on capitalist institutions. Now we will cover the pronouncements on liberal democracy, and later finish by looking at the anthropological foundations of both.

###### 2. Liberal democracy in *Centessimus annus*

It is very important at this stage, before we cover the magisterium judgements on liberal democracy, that we define what liberal democracy means. Otherwise the meaning of the pontifical texts could be easily misunderstood.

Through the history of western thought, democracy has been understood in three different ways: democracy as the participation of the people in the management of public affairs; democracy as one of the classical forms of government (the other two are the monarchy and aristocracy); finally democracy as the “ideology as the sovereignty of the people”. Magisterial tradition holds the first understanding as morally necessary: the participation in the public in the State is a right of man, although this participation can happen in different ways, depending on the historical circumstances. In so far as a form of government it is a matter of opinion (it is a possible form of government, but it is not compulsory). On the other hand, democracy as an ideology is rejected, if popular democracy is understood as absolute power, totally unrelated to transcendence”[[327]](#footnote-327).

When we talk about liberal democracy we refer to a political system that comprises well known common legal arrangements: separation of powers, constitutional legislative set up, political representation of citizens, regular elections, etc. In this instance liberal democracy has the same meaning as constitutional democracy.

*Centessimus annus* refers specifically to the novelty of Leo XIII’s positive approach at the time of *Rerum Novarum* with regard to the three powers of the State in the organisation of society. Saint John Paul II shares the positive approach towards this liberal institution. We have seen earlier that Locke first established the idea, and Montesquieu followed it later. The Pope then states that “Such an ordering reflects a realistic vision of man's social nature, which calls for legislation capable of protecting the freedom of all”[[328]](#footnote-328). The Pope identifies the mutual limitation of powers with the Rule of Law: “Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law: “Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law”[[329]](#footnote-329), where the law -not the arbitrary will of men- is sovereign.

The approval of the classical liberal organisation of the powers of State is explicit, and so is the rejection of any totalitarianism, where man becomes an instrument, and the freedoms of the Church and of intermediate levels of the community organisation are denied.

Number 46 of the encyclical repeats the appreciation for a democratic system understood as the participation of citizens in political life -the first meaning of democracy we referred to earlier-. This positive assessment extends to other institutions of liberal democracy: free elections by the citizens, accountability of the government to the people. Along these lines “the formation of narrow ruling groups which usurp the power of the State for individual interests or for ideological ends”[[330]](#footnote-330) is also rejected unequivocally.

After praising the democratic system as a form of government Saint John Paul II warns of the risks of this very system unless it is based on the correct understanding of the human person, that facilitates structures of participation and co-responsibility. One can appreciate the foresight of the Roman Pontiff what he warns of the temptation of an alliance between moral agnosticism and democracy: “Nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and sceptical relativism are the philosophy and the basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life. Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered unreliable from a democratic point of view, because they do not accept that truth is determined by the majority, or that it is subject to variation according to different political trends. It must be observed in this regard that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism”[[331]](#footnote-331).In order to avert this possible failure of democracy the Pope encourages everyone to respect all human rights, that arise from a comprehensive view of man.

A consequence of this comprehensive view of man is to reassess the role of the State in the area of economics: the State should facilitate “guarantees of individual freedom and private property, as well as a stable currency and efficient public services”[[332]](#footnote-332). In addition, “The State has the further right to intervene when particular monopolies create delays or obstacles to development. In addition to the tasks of harmonizing and guiding development, in exceptional circumstances the State can also exercise *a substitute function,* when social sectors or business systems are too weak or are just getting under way, and are not equal to the task at hand”[[333]](#footnote-333). The Pope insists on the “exceptional circumstances”, because a Welfare State” leads to a loss of human energies” [[334]](#footnote-334).

The Pope’s appraisals of liberal political institutions are approvals or conditional approvals. So far we have only addressed some of the pontifical texts that assess the various liberal political and economic institutions of liberal ideology, but we have not said anything about the ultimate reason that underpins these judgements. Why does the Pope stands up for the priority of human labour over capital, the common destiny of goods over private property, democracy with ultimate values over an agnostic democracy in the moral sphere, a State with economic functions over a minimal State? We will now attempt to provide an answer to these questions.

###### 3. Christian anthropology

The answer to the preceding question lies in what the Pope calls “the truth about man”, and is based on the concept of Christian anthropology. Although Saint John Paul II wrote extensively on this topic, we have chosen to use the encyclical *Centessimus annus* to outline his position, because of the eminently social nature of the encyclical. We also need to remember that Christian anthropology is a part of moral theology to a certain extent, and that it requires the rational background of philosophical anthropology. In this case we will call it personalism, taken in a wide sense of the word.

Saint John Paul II states that “the guiding principle (…) of all of the Church's social doctrine, is a *correct understanding of the human person* and of his unique value, inasmuch as "man ... is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself". God has imprinted his own image and likeness on man (cf. Gen 1:26), conferring upon him an incomparable dignity”[[335]](#footnote-335).

Thus we can say that the main point of Christian anthropology is the fact that man is person -in other words, *imago Dei*-, and therefore enjoys a very high dignity. The encyclical affirms “clearly and forcefully that every individual — whatever his or her personal convictions — bears the image of God and therefore deserves respect”[[336]](#footnote-336).

Christian anthropology acknowledges that man -every man- has such high dignity. But it also acknowledges the reality that counteracts it: man often betrays his dignity through sin. “Man, who was created for freedom, bears within himself the wound of original sin, which constantly draws him towards evil and places him in need of redemption. Not only is *this doctrine an integral part of Christian revelation;* it also has great hermeneutical value insofar as it helps one to understand human reality. Man tends towards good, but he is also capable of evil. He can transcend his immediate interest and yet remain bound to it”[[337]](#footnote-337).

Supernatural realism is not blind to the problem of evil. It also leads to the realisation that man is called to live life to the full, despite his wretchedness and weaknesses. In other words, this call becomes a vocation. To believe in personal dignity means to believe in one’s ability “to respond to one’s personal vocation, and thus to God's call. The high point of fulfilment is to carry out the right and duty to seek God, to know him and to live in accordance with that knowledge”[[338]](#footnote-338).

Saint John Paul II highlights the view that the human person’s ontological structure is open to God and to the others. Man’s vocation is fulfilled by the awareness of the metaphysical transcendence of the person -in other words really transcending oneself-: ”When man does not recognize in himself and in others the value and grandeur of the human person, he effectively deprives himself of the possibility of benefitting from his humanity and of entering into that relationship of solidarity and communion with others for which God created him. Indeed, it is through the free gift of self that man truly finds himself. This gift is made possible by the human person's essential "capacity for transcendence". Man cannot give himself to a purely human plan for reality, to an abstract ideal or to a false utopia. As a person, he can give himself to another person or to other persons, and ultimately to God, who is the author of his being and who alone can fully accept his gift. A man is alienated if he refuses to transcend himself and to live the experience of self-giving and of the formation of an authentic human community oriented towards his final destiny, which is God”[[339]](#footnote-339).

If man is openness towards others and fulfils himself only when he gives himself, the self-giving must be free. Man fulfils himself when he is free, and hence the Church “in constantly reaffirming the transcendent dignity of the person, the Church's method is always that of respect for freedom. But freedom attains its full development only by accepting the truth. In a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation and man is exposed to the violence of passion and to manipulation, both open and hidden”[[340]](#footnote-340).

The relationship between freedom and truth may be one of the keys to understand how it is not possible to measure liberal social ethics with Christian social ethics. The encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, especially its second chapter, deals with the relationship between freedom and truth. There the Pope states that natural reason has the ability to know the moral truth. If he is to be free, man should be able to tell good and evil, a distinction he makes in the light of natural reason, “*the reflection in man of the splendour of God's countenance*”[[341]](#footnote-341).

Saint Thomas Aquinas identifies the light of natural reason that allows us to discern good from evil with natural law itself[[342]](#footnote-342). Natural law “is nothing else but an imprint on us of the divine light”[[343]](#footnote-343). It is therefore a participation of the eternal law in the rational creature, but it is also proper to human nature.

Saint John Paul II speaks of the “rightful autonomy of the practical reason”. With these words he means that “man possesses in himself his own law, received from God”. It is a relative moral autonomy, quite different from an autonomy that is its own foundation -which therefore denies that practical reason shares in the Wisdom of the divine Creator- or as “freedom which creates moral norms, on the basis of historical contingencies or the diversity of societies and cultures”. According to the Pope, such understanding of moral autonomy would be “the death of true freedom”[[344]](#footnote-344).

The understanding of the person as self-transcendence, which is only fulfilled through the gift of self, provides the definitive ingredients to better the individual-society dialectic of liberal ideology. In fact, the person is never only individual: to be person is to be-with and be-for the others. And at the same time, the opening to transcendence provides the ultimate meaning of man, and that can only be accomplished in Truth and Love: man’s vocation is a free path towards the Absolute. With words from *Centesimus annus*, “the Church receives "the meaning of man" from Divine Revelation. "In order to know man, authentic man, man in his fullness, one must know God", said Pope Paul VI, and he went on to quote Saint Catherine of Siena, who, in prayer, expressed the same idea: "In your nature, O eternal Godhead, I shall know my own nature"[[345]](#footnote-345).

The autonomy of man is the autonomy of his freedom: created freedom, guided by God’s moral law: therefore, it is a relative autonomy. The liberal understanding of man, that is, an independent individual, autonomous, sceptical of ultimate values, demonstrates a futile attempt to turn the relative into absolute.

Relative autonomy and absolute autonomy cannot be measured. However, the Pope gave clear approvals and sometimes conditional approvals to some liberal institutions. Why so? Let us proceed in an orderly fashion. The approvals *tout court* referred to the area of political institutions, and specifically to the State’s separation of powers and setting up the Rule of Law. Placing limits on political power confirms a principle of modern constitutional democracy: the person has inviolable rights. “Constitutional tradition starts from the basic idea that the fundamental rights of citizens must be protected and ensured; in order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to set the juridical framework so that political or social powers cannot violate these rights. Therefore, power -all power- needs to be limited, and constitutional restrictions must be put in place. Democracy does not mean “absolute power of the people” (it would be demagogic absolutism), but rather “no one has absolute power”[[346]](#footnote-346).

According to Rodríguez Luňo, the conviction that there are things that can never be done belongs in the essence of democracy. They are analogous to morally intrinsically evil acts. The separation and limits of the powers of State and setting up a juridical system to ensure them are institutions able to safeguard the value-person.

When this conviction weakens in a community, and the sense of truth is lost, there is a strong temptation to establish an association between democracy and moral agnosticism. However, liberal political institutions as such are not necessarily linked to such agnosticism. This is the reason why the Pope simply approves, but warns of the dangers of removing from any democracy the stable points of reference that the concept of the dignity of the person provides.

The Pope gave capitalism several conditional approvals. If the market economy places the person at its centre, if it moves away from an economist attitude, if labour is valued as a free and responsible human activity, etc. the conditions are met for an approval *tout court*. A question remains: if these capitalist institutions can change accordingly, do they remain liberal institutions? If we say that the essence of liberalism is freedom as man’s absolute autonomy, the answer is no. The dyad individual-freedom of liberal thinking is very different to the triad person-freedom-truth. Saint John Paul II rights in his *Letter to Families*: “Individualism presupposes a use of freedom in which the subject does what he wants, in which he himself is the one to "establish the truth" of whatever he finds pleasing or useful. He does not tolerate the fact that someone else "wants" or demands something from him in the name of an objective truth. He does not want to "give" to another on the basis of truth; he does not want to become a "sincere gift". Individualism thus remains egocentric and selfish. The real antithesis between individualism and personalism emerges not only on the level of theory, but even more *on that of "ethos".* The "ethos" of personalism is altruistic: it moves the person to become a gift for others and to discover joy in giving himself”[[347]](#footnote-347).

#### b) Culture of life and culture of death

Saint Paul VI coined the expression civilisation of love. Saint John Paul II used it often; he identified civilisation of love with culture of life. We cannot limit its content to the social and political sphere, because the idea of civilisation of love belongs in the context of theology. The civilisation of love is the possibility of structuring society in many different ways, but always fully respecting the truth about man as held by Revelation. The light of reason can penetrate this truth and discover its basic structures, aware that in the last instance man is a mystery of God’s love.

Christian anthropology’s understanding of man is neither pessimistic nor optimistic: its starting point is a fact of revelation: man was created in the image and likeness of God, has fallen into sin, but has been redeemed by Christ. The reference point of the Pope’s appraisal of contemporary society is the “truth about man”. His comments are not the result of anthropological pessimism, and he does not regard social structures as the deciding factor. He looks at the perverse consequences that men and peoples have to endure when the person is not faithful to that image and likeness of God which man enjoys because of the loving hand of God the Creator. And he also looks at transcendence: the person can achieve self-fulfilment if he freely moves towards his ultimate end by responding to the divine vocation that sustains his dignity.

The Holy Father makes a diagnosis of contemporary culture in the encyclical *Evangelium vitae*. He attempts to show how negative attitudes towards human life in present day culture are based on their anthropological foundations.

Some ideologies condone attempts against the dignity of the human person with the same question Cain asked after he killed his brother Abel: Am I my brother’s keeper? It is an attitude that forsakes the sense of responsibility for one’s brother, the lack of solidarity towards the weaker members of society and indifference between individuals and communities (cfr. n. 8).

Attacks on life -and the legislation that supports them- have many causes. In the background there is the profound crisis of culture, which generates scepticism in relation to the very foundations of knowledge and ethics, and which makes it increasingly difficult to grasp clearly the meaning of what man is, the meaning of his rights and his duties (n. 11)[[348]](#footnote-348).

One can notice a veritable “structure of sin” within contemporary culture; it is nothing more than a veritable “culture of death”, fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency. If the ultimate criterion for something to be valued is efficacy and usefulness, the weaker life which would require a greater welcome is rejected; it is considered useless, an unbearable load that should be disposed of. We could speak in a certain sense of a “war of the powerful against the weak” (n.12)

A typical aspect of the structure of sin is the hedonistic mentality, unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality. It is based on a self-centred concept of personal freedom, and it looks on procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfilment. Hedonism even accepts infanticide, because it rejects limitations, handicaps, illness; we are going back, says the Pope, to a state of barbarism which one hoped had been left behind forever (n.14). Suffering is the evil *par excellence* and it must be avoided. Everything goes to eliminate suffering from man’s existence: it is a clear sign that this cultural environment does not have the tools to decipher the mystery of pain. Those tools can be provided by a religious outlook on life.

Saint John Paul II adds another stroke to the picture of contemporary culture: “there exists in contemporary culture a certain Promethean attitude which leads people to think that they can control life and death by taking the decisions about them into their own hands. What really happens in this case is that the individual is overcome and crushed by a death deprived of any prospect of meaning or hope” (n. 15).

Behind all this -utilitarianism, hedonism, promethean vanity- lies a wicked understanding of freedom. The seriousness of today’s crisis is obvious when we look at crimes against life: instead of looking on them as crimes, they are thought of as legitimate expressions of individual freedom, that should be acknowledged and protected as true rights. This idea contradicts the very idea of human rights: on one hand there is today greater moral sensitivity to acknowledge the dignity of the human person, regardless of race, culture, religion or social status; on the other there is an attempt to infringe man’s rights especially at the more significant moments of existence: the moment of birth and the moment of death (n. 18).

What are the roots of this remarkable contradiction? the Pope asks. According to him the origin of this paradox lies in “a mentality that carries the concept of subjectivity to the extreme, and even distorts it. Only those who enjoy full or at least incipient autonomy have rights, because they do not depend on others at all”. Another aspect of the same mentality is the idea that the dignity of the human person is necessarily related to the ability to communicate verbally and clearly. According to this view, the “structurally weak”, like the unborn and the dying, have neither dignity nor rights. Indeed, when a State ruled by law accepts these anthropological concepts it has changed the “strength of reason” into “the reason of strength” (n. 19).

When we look deeper into the root of the contradiction -asserting human rights on one hand and justifying the attempts on the life of another- we will find “a notion of freedom that exalts the isolated individual in an absolute way, and gives no place to solidarity, to openness to others and service to them”. It is an individualistic concept of freedom, that ends up by becoming “the freedom of ‘the strong’ against the weak, who have no choice but to submit”.

This concept of freedom denies its relationship with the truth. When the only point of reference are one’s decisions, objective truth, and the truth about man (which would show that freedom has a basic relational dimension) especially, are no longer light: good and evil are confused. Subjective personal opinion, selfish interests or whim become the lone guide (n. 19).

If the individual thinks of himself as having absolute autonomy, based on an individualistic freedom, society becomes a mass of individuals placed side by side, but without mutual bonds. “Each one wishes to assert himself independently of the other and in fact intends to make his own interests prevail. Still, in the face of other people's analogous interests, some kind of compromise must be found, if one wants a society in which the maximum possible freedom is guaranteed to each individual. In this way, any reference to common values and to a truth absolutely binding on everyone is lost, and social life ventures on to the shifting sands of complete relativism. At that point, everything is negotiable, everything is open to bargaining: even the first of the fundamental rights, the right to life” (n. 20).

In seeking the roots of the loss of respect for human life at a time when human rights are proclaimed, at least in theory, Saint John Paul II reaches the core of contemporary man’s drama: the “eclipse” of the sense of God and of man, which is a consequence of a social and cultural milieu lorded by secularism.

Without God the creature disappears. His dignity is degraded, because “he regards himself merely as one more living being, as an organism which, at most, has reached a very high stage of perfection”, but nothing more than a living being. Enclosed in the narrow horizon of his physical nature (…) Life itself becomes a mere "thing", which man claims as his exclusive property, completely subject to his control and manipulation (n. 22).

The eclipse of the sense of God and of man inevitably leads to a practical materialism, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism. In such a context suffering is rejected as useless and nonsensical, sexuality too is depersonalized and exploited, procreation then becomes the "enemy" to be avoided in sexual activity, or a source of selfish affirmation (genetic manipulation). The first to be harmed by these anthropological views are women, children, the sick or suffering, and the elderly (n. 23).

We finish this summary of John Paul II’s diagnosis with a literal quote of n. 24 of *Evangelium vitae*: “It is *at the heart of the moral conscience* that the eclipse of the sense of God and of man, with all its various and deadly consequences for life, is taking place. It is a question, above all, of *the individual conscience*, as it stands before God in its singleness and uniqueness (…) And yet all the conditioning and efforts to enforce silence fail to stifle the voice of the Lord echoing in the conscience of every individual: it is always from this intimate sanctuary of the conscience that a new journey of love, openness and service to human life can begin” (n. 24).

Following Saint John Paul II’s assessment of contemporary culture, we can ask these questions once more: How should our anthropological approach be: pessimistic or optimistic? Is there another alternative? Man is thirsty for transcendence, but aware of his existential limitations. He is open to good, but must face his inclination to evil. He lives enmeshed in social structures, yet he yearns for some personal autonomy, that his inner conscience demands. The Second Vatican Council put it in better words: “For in man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways; on the other he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions he is constantly forced to choose among them and renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society”[[349]](#footnote-349).

In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, Saint John Paul II highlighted the essential components of Christian anthropology: it is well aware of the presence of evil, but affirms man’s highest destiny, because the struggle between good and evil has been won once and for all in Christ. He quoted Saint Augustin: "You made us for yourself, Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (Confessions, I, 1). In this creative restlessness beats and pulsates what is most deeply human: the search for truth, the insatiable need for the good, hunger for freedom, nostalgia for the beautiful, and the voice of conscience”[[350]](#footnote-350).

The *civilisation of love*, proposed by Saint Paul VI and by Saint John Paul II, where man’s potential can be fulfilled within a framework of freedom and justice, is not born of naïve optimism, blind to the real world. It removes itself from anthropological pessimism and optimism, and places itself in the supernatural realism that knows what human nature is capable of, fallen after original sin, but redeemed by Christ, the Son of God made man. It is based on the anthropology that admits the presence of evil in the very heart of man, and knows that changing social structures will not pluck evil from the world. The civilisation of love is a difficult, but achievable goal: it begins in man’s heart, with a personal conversion. Any concept of society that does not begin with this premise -the first battle is a personal affair- is doomed to seek refuge in the island of Utopia.

#### c) A new world order: Saint John Paul II’s proposal

The first section on the pontificate of Saint John Paul II covered his assessment of liberalism, and the second dealt with some of the consequences of nihilist cultures and the permissive society. In the third section we will look at his thoughts on nationalism and intercultural dialogue.

The address he gave to the United Nations in 1995 ought to be studied in the context of a changed world situation after the events of 1989, with the fall of the Soviet empire in Central and Eastern Europe, and the end of the Cold War. The Pope wanted “to reflect with you on what the extraordinary changes of the last few years imply, not simply for the present, but for the future of the whole human family”[[351]](#footnote-351).

A typical feature of our times is the quest for freedom. Lately many men and women have accepted the risk of freedom, claiming a political, social and economic space that was their right on the basis that they were free beings. The foundation of the quest for freedom is based on the universal rights that all men have by the very fact of being persons. Saint John Paul II states that the world search for freedom has an inner structure: “its global character which offers us its first and fundamental "key" and confirms that there are indeed universal human rights, rooted in the nature of the person, rights which reflect the objective and inviolable demands of a *universal moral law”*[[352]](#footnote-352).

According to the Polish Pope, the rights of man remind us that this world is not irrational and without meaning: “there is a *moral logic* which is built into human life and which makes possible dialogue between individuals and peoples. (…) The universal moral law written on the human heart is precisely that kind of "grammar" which is needed if the world is to engage this discussion of its future”[[353]](#footnote-353) and can transform a century of constriction into a century of persuasion.

For the Pope “it is a matter for serious concern that some people today deny the universality of human rights, just as they deny that there is a human nature shared by everyone. To be sure, there is no single model for organizing the politics and economics of human freedom; different cultures and different historical experiences give rise to different institutional forms of public life in a free and responsible society. But it is one thing to affirm a legitimate pluralism of "forms of freedom", and another to deny any universality or intelligibility to the nature of man or to the human experience”[[354]](#footnote-354).

The non-violent revolutions of 1989 demonstrated that the quest for freedom cannot be suppressed. It arises from a recognition of the inestimable dignity and value of the human person. They have taken place in the name of solidarity and point the way ahead. The quest for freedom in the 20th century does not involve individuals alone; it also involves nations. The Second World War “was fought because of violations of the rights of nations. Many of those nations suffered grievously for no other reason than that they were deemed "other". Terrible crimes were committed in the name of lethal doctrines which taught the "inferiority" of some nations and cultures” [[355]](#footnote-355). The violation of the rights of nations has persisted above all in the so called “popular democracies”. For these reasons it becomes necessary to seriously think about the rights of nations, similar to what was done at the Cracow Academy during the Council of Constance, and the School of Salamanca in the 16th Century, on the occasion of the discovery of America.

Side by side with the trends to blend into the “global village” in the areas of economic interdependence and communication, there is a resurgence of local ethnical and cultural consciousness. “This tension between the particular and the universal can be considered immanent in human beings. By virtue of sharing in the same human nature, people automatically feel that they are members of one great family, as is in fact the case. But as a result of the concrete historical conditioning of this same nature, they are necessarily bound in a *more intense* way to particular human groups, beginning with the family and going on to the various groups to which they belong and up to the whole of their ethnic and cultural group, which is called, not by accident, a "nation", from the Latin word "nasci": "to be born". This term, enriched with another one, "patria" (fatherland/motherland), evokes the reality of the family. The human condition thus finds itself between these two poles — universality and particularity — with a vital tension between them; an inevitable tension, but singularly fruitful if they are lived in a calm and balanced way”[[356]](#footnote-356).

The rights of the nations are based on this anthropological foundation. First, the right to exist, that on its own does not require sovereignty, because there are various legal ways to work it out. The right to exist implies the right to one’s language and culture, the means for a community to express itself and promote its original spiritual sovereignty. Every nation has a right to decide how to live in keeping with its traditions, provided that basic human rights are respected and there is no oppression against minorities. At the same time, every nation should live in peace, respect and solidarity with the other nations.

“The world has yet to learn how to live with diversity” (…) The fact of "difference", and the reality of "the other", can sometimes be felt as a burden, or even as a threat. Amplified by historic grievances and exacerbated by the manipulations of the unscrupulous, the fear of "difference" can lead to a denial of the very humanity of "the other": with the result that people fall into a cycle of violence in which no one is spared, not even the children”[[357]](#footnote-357). Yet, there is a basic common dimension beyond all the differences, because the different cultures are nothing more than different ways of approaching the ultimate meaning of personal existence. It is precisely there that we can find the source of the respect that every culture and nation deserves: “*every culture is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person: it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life*. The heart of every culture is its approach to the greatest of all mysteries: the mystery of God”[[358]](#footnote-358).

The Pope, who had spoken about the need to respect differences, insisted on one of the more frequent topics of his pontificate, which he picked up from the Vatican Council: religious freedom. Every community strives to answer the problem of human existence. Hence the cornerstone of the structure of human rights and the foundation of every truly free society is the fundamental right to freedom of religion. No one can impose an answer to the mystery of man: “*The truth about man* is the unchangeable standard by which all cultures are judged; but every culture has something to teach us about one or other dimension of that complex truth”[[359]](#footnote-359). In this context it is necessary to clarify the essential difference between patriotism, a proper love for one’s own country, which is not opposed to the truth of man, and indeed provides lights to clarify the mystery of human existence; and “Nationalism, particularly in its most radical forms, is thus the antithesis of true patriotism, and today we must ensure that extreme nationalism does not continue to give rise to new forms of the aberrations of totalitarianism. This is a commitment which also holds true, obviously, in cases where religion itself is made the basis of nationalism, as unfortunately happens in certain manifestations of so-called "fundamentalism"[[360]](#footnote-360).

Freedom is the measure of man’s dignity and greatness. It must be used responsibly, both in the personal and in the social spheres. The moral structure of freedom is the core of the culture of freedom. Its internal logic, or moral structure, identifies with its alignment to truth, a truth than can be universally known because the moral law is written in every man’s heart. The Pope remarks that there are other concepts of morality that oppose this understanding, like utilitarianism, that defines morality not in relation to good, but on what is advantageous: political utilitarianism perpetrates injustices because it is inspired by aggressive nationalism; economic utilitarianism drives more powerful countries to manipulate and exploit weaker ones (n.12).

The Pope hopes that the United Nations can become a “family of nations”, a community based on mutual trust, security and solidarity. Saint John Paul II speaks of a new hope: we must reject the temptation of cynicism and take a risk on solidarity and peace, just like so many people ran the risk of freedom in 1989 (n.15). Modern man, who began Modernity full of “maturity” and “autonomy”, reaches the end of the 20th century with fear. We need to overcome fear, and be aware that man is not alone: God is with him.

The Pope appeared at the General Assembly of the United Nations as a witness of Jesus Christ, witness to human dignity, witness to hope and merciful providence. He ended his address with the following words: “We must *overcome our fear of the future. But we will not be able to overcome it completely unless we do so together*. The "answer" to that fear is neither coercion nor repression, nor the imposition of one social "model" on the entire world. The answer to the fear which darkens human existence at the end of the twentieth century is the common effort *to build the civilization of love*, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice, and liberty. And the "soul" of the civilization of love is the culture of freedom: the freedom of individuals and the freedom of nations, lived in self-giving solidarity and responsibility.

*We must not be afraid of the future. We must not be afraid of man*. It is no accident that we are here. Each and every human person has been created in the "image and likeness" of the One who is the origin of all that is. We have within us the capacities for wisdom and virtue. With these gifts, and with the help of God's grace, we can build in the next century and the next millennium a civilization worthy of the human person, a true culture of freedom. *We can and must do so!* And in doing so, we shall see that the tears of this century have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the human spirit”.[[361]](#footnote-361)

# EPILOGUE

We have reached the end of a quick historical journey through the centuries of Modernity. At the time of writing it, at the dawn of the third millennium, many intellectuals speak of the end of an era, of the exhaustion of the modernity project, even of post-modernity. The new millennium opens the way for new millenarisms, for apocalyptic visions of history, and for some even the end of history. The task we set ourselves was eminently historical, and remains so. But we also feel that at this stage it is worthwhile to briefly outline today’s cultural trends.

The thread of this course has been the process of secularisation. If we take it in a “strong” sense -that is, the affirmation of man’s absolute autonomy- secularisation ends in tragedy. The promethean vision of man, whether it is enlightened, or Romantic, or Marxist, or Nietzschean or any other version, has caused severe distress in the various spheres of human existence. In the area of politics the 20th century has witnessed the tragedies of the Nazi concentration camps, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the various Gulag Archipelagos, nationalistic genocides; in the area of science, scientism has created a technological society almost impossible to rule, that turns itself against man, with genetic manipulations and ecological disasters; in the area of the economy, the economist mentality has produced an ever deeper divide between North and South: opulent societies co-exist side by side with almost two thirds of the world that struggles to survive.

If we take the second meaning of the concept -asserting the relative autonomy of temporal matters- secularisation has been mainly an internal process of the Church, that led to a de-clericalization of the Christian worldview, and made a dialogue between the Church and society possible. This dialogue needs to be ever more specific in order to be a significant contributor to the new evangelisation.

Many people think that present day culture is marked by the development of communication techniques. In the area of information and human relations the global village is already a fact. However, the future of human culture does not depend on communication techniques but on the understanding of man that these techniques transmit.

What vision of man will prevail in the third millennium? After the exhaustion of the modern project, man finds himself still searching for the meaning of human existence. Some cultural trends are keen to avoid the dead-ends that resulted from the idea of man’s absolute autonomy. In the area of politics and the economy, at least in the western world, the tendency is to integration -thus overcoming nationalisms- and the principles of subsidiarity -against State centralism- , and of solidarity -against liberal individualism- ; in the area of science we are becoming more aware of the danger of technology without ethical foundations, particularly in respect of the environment; in the area of culture, the centrality of the white man is replaced by pluralism open to cultural diversity.

All these trends mean to go beyond ideological Modernity and the nihilism of the 20th century. However, the cultural horizon remains confused. The trends we have mentioned above open the way for society to become truly personal, but economism, hedonism and moral relativism prevail in many cultural environments. The very globalisation process can prompt a civilisation based on the trends we just outlined. The very awakening of the religious sentiment shows a leaning towards a humanised religion that does not look on high, but tends to think of man redeeming himself.

Today’s world, the heir of two centuries of “strong” secularisation, remains in a state of crisis, which is a sequel to the crisis that became obvious after the First World War. It is basically a crisis about the truth of man. Christian anthropology sees man as a free creature, but also dependent on God. God is the Lord of history, but history is also the result of the free decisions of men. It is a mystery how the divine authority of history combines with man’s real freedom. Our role is simply to use our freedom responsibly.

1. See M. FAZIO, *Due visioni della modernità*, in “Acta Philosophica” 2/1 (1993), 135-139 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. L. KAHN, *Letteratura e crisi della fede,* Città Nuova, Roma 1978, p. 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. F.Bacon. *Essays…with other Writings,* London 1902, p.433 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cited by J. Hale, *La civiltà del Rinascimento in Europa,* Mondadori, Milano 1994, p. 600. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ibidem*, p. 601. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. T. URDANOZ, *Síntesis teológico-jurídica de la doctrina de Vitoria*, in F. de VITORIA, *Relectio de Indis*, Corpus Hispanorum de Pace, BAC, Madrid 1967, pp, XLVIII-XLIX [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. F. de VITORIA, *Relectio de Indis*, Corpus Hispanorum de Pace, BAC, Madrid 1967, p, 651. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Ibidem***,** p.654. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. S.Th. I-II, 82, I, ad 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. F de VITORIA, *Ibidem*, p.656. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Ibidem*, pp. 667-675 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Ibidem*, p.676 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Ibidem*, p.678-682 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Ibidem*, p. 695 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Ibidem*, p. 708 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Ibidem*, p. 721 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Ibidem* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See M. FAZIO, *Francisco de Vitoria: Cristianismo y Modernidad,* Ciudad Argentina, Buenos Aires 1998 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See P. HAZARD, *La crise de la conscience européenne*, Boivin, Paris 1935, pp. 8-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. C. COLÓN, Carta anunciadora del Descubrimiento, in C.VARELA, Cristóbal Colón. Textos y documentos completos, Alianza, Madrid 1982, p. 82 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Ibidem,* p. 141 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. A. VESPUCIO, *Viajes y documentos completos*, Akal, Madrid s.f. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. C. VARELA, *Cristóbal Colón*…, cit., pp. 220-221 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. B.DE LAS CASAS, Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias, Sarpe, Madrid 1985, p.37 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. A. USLAR PIETRI, *Obras selectas*, EDIME, Madrid-Caracas 1956, p. 1157 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. G. LANSON, *Les Essais de Montaigne,* Mellottée, Paris 1948, p.96 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. M. de MONTAIGNE, *Essais*, La Pléeiade, Bruges 1950, p. 1018 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Ibidem* [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Ibidem* [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See *Ibidem*, pp.1024-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Ibidem*, p. 244 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Ibidem* [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Ibidem*, p. 243 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. J.J. ROUSSEAU, Discours sur les sciences et les arts, Garnier, Paris 1960, p. 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See ISERLOH, E., *Compendio di Teologia e Storia della Riforma*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1990 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See G. REDONDO, Historia de la Iglesia en España (1931-1939), Rialp, Madrid 1933, I, p.27 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See J.M. BURGOS, *Weber e lo spirito del capitalismo*, in “Acta Philosophica” 5/2 (1966), 197-200 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See J. BODIN, *Les six livres de la République*, Scientia Verlag, Aalen 1962 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. J.B. BOSSUET, Politique tirée des propres paroles de l’Ecriture Sainte, Paris 1709, V, 4,1, p.240. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Ibidem* [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. T. HOBBES, *Leviathan*, I,11. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Ibid.,* II, 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. M. D’ADDIO, *Storia delle doctrine politiche*, ECIG, Genova 1992, I, p. 443 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. T. HOBBES, Elementos de derecho natural y político, II, 10, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. For a general outlook on Hobbes political doctrines, See M. RHONHEIMER, *La filosofia politica di Thomas Hobbes*, Armando, Roma 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. For the overall assessment of the Old and New Regime, we have partially followed J.L. COMELLAS, *De las revoluciones* al liberalismo, vol. X de la “Historia Universal”, EUNSA, Pamplona 1982, pp. 15-43 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See J. GODECHOT, Las Revoluciones, Labour, Barcelona 1977, p. 364-366; F. FURET and D.RICHET La Révolution Française, Fayard, Paris 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See M. FAZIO - D. GAMARRA, Historia de la filosofía moderna, Palabra, Madrid 2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Was ist Aufklärung?, Ak VIII, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Isaac Newton, Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica, II. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. F. Copleston, A History of Philosophy, V: From Hobbes to Hume., Continuum, London-New York 2003, p. 163 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Francis Hutcheson, Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue, in Collected Works of Francis Hutcheson, Olms, Hildesheim 1971, vol. 5, II, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. E. DE CONDILLAC, Traité des sensations, in Oeuvres philosophiques de Condillac. P.U.F., Paris 1947, IV, 5, note [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. MONTESQUIEU, L'esprit des lois, Paris 1945, I, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid., III, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., XI, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. J.J. ROUSSEAU, Du contrat social, Garnier, Paris 1960, I, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid., I. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Critique of practical reason, Ak V, 161-162. We quote following the edition of the Prussian Academy of Sciences (Berlin 1902-1942, 22 vols.). The roman numeral indicates the volume, followed by page number. In the Critique of Pure Reason, A and B mean first and second edition. The numbers refer to the pages in the original German editions [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See Critique of pure reason, A 255, B 311 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *Ibid.,* A 298, B 354 [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Ak IV, 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. *Ibid.,* Ak IV, 429. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *Ibid.,* Ak IV, 434 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Critique of practical reason, Ak V, 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Metaphysics of customs, Ak, VI, 230 [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. On the historical origin of Romanticism, See L. BRAJNOVIC, *Grandes figuras de la literatura universal*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1973, pp. 173-180 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. The name was originally proposed by the Swiss Christian Kaufmann, an enthusiastic admirer of Rousseau, a Friedrich Maximilian Klinger, an exponent of the movement, to give a better title to a drama of Klinger, due to be called *Wirr-Warr* (Caos, 1777). The expression was first used probably by A.W. Schlegel to name the movement some 30 years later, in his classes between 1901 and 1804. With such name he wanted to point out the violent incursion of protest and rebellion proclaimed by the group of young German writers who subscribed to it, and showed especially in the fields of esthetics and literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. There were other important figures of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, such as *F.M. Klinger (1752-1831); Jacob Reinhold Lenz (1751-1792),* a novel playwright who became mad and died in Russia; *Heinrich Leopold Wagner (1747-1779)*, also a playwright; *Johann Heinrich Jung (1740-1817)*; *Friedrich Müller (1749-1825)*, a painter; *Johann Anton Leisewitz (1752-1806)* and finally *Johann Heinrich Voss (1751-1826), who translated The Iliad and The Odyssey* to German. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. J.M. VALVERDE, *Historia de la Literatura*, Barcelona: Noguer, 1959, III, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Daniel Gamarra thinks that the nostalgia of God is one of the central elements of Romanticism, partially antithetical to the Enlightenment. We cannot say that the Enlightenment is an atheistic movement altogether, but views human existence *etsi Deus non daretur* (as if God did not exist), which has been called “the iciest thesis in the history of tought”. See D. GAMARRA, *L’imagine iluministica e romantica: ragione critica e sentimento dell’infinito*, in I. YARZA (a cura di), *Immagini dell’uomo. Percorsi antropologici nella filosofía moderna*, Armando, Roma 1996, pp. 39-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Not in vain did Victor Hugo write in the preface to *Cromwell* that “Romanticism is liberalism in literature”. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. We quote the following “rhyme” of Gustavo Adolfo Becquer as a paradigm of this Romantic attitude: *“I am ardent, I am brunette / I am the symbol of passion; / of cravings for joy my soul is full. / Are you looking for me? "--" No, it's not you. "/" My forehead is pale; my braids, gold; / I can give you joy without end; / Of tenderness I hold a treasure. / You call me? "/" No, it's not you. "/" I am a dream, an impossible, / vain ghost of fog and light; / I am incorporeal, I am intangible; / I cannot love you. "-" ¡Oh come, do come!"* (G.A. BECQUER, Rimas, in J. BERGUA, *Las mil mejores poesías de la lengua castellana*, Clásicos Bergua, Madrid 1995, p. 405) [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. F. CHABOD, *L’idea di nazione*, Bari: Laterza 1967, pp. 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. L. KAHN, *Letteratura e crisi della fede*, Roma: Città Nuova 1978, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid., p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. G.A. BECQUER, *Rimas*, quoted., p. 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. G. Hegel, *Primi scritti critici*, a cura di R. Bodei, Milano 1971, p.13 [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. J. BALLESTEROS, *Postmodernidad: decadencia o resistencia*, Tecnos, Madrid 1989, pp. 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. S. KIERKEGAARD, *My point of view*, Aguilar, Madrid 1988, p. 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. *Ibidem*, p.26. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Idem, *La malattia mortale*, I, A, in Kierkegaard, *Opere*, ed. C. Fabro, Sansoni, Firenze 1972, p. 626. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. C.FABRO, *La Fondazione metafisica della libertà* in Sören Kierkegaard, in *Riflesioni sulla Libertà*, Maggioli, Pertugia 1983, p. 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. See M. FAZIO, *Un sentiero nel bosco. Guida al pensiero di Kierkegaard*. Armando, Roma 2000 (translated into Spanish EDUCA, Buenos Aires 2006). *Kierkegaard: un’ermeneutica possibile*, in “Ermeneutica e Metafisica”, Città Nuova, Roma 1995, pp. 97-106; *Il singolo Kierkegaardiano: una sintesi in divenire*, “Acta Philosophica” 2 (1996), 221-249; *Diventire soggettivo*, “Il singolo” (Potenza) (2000), 61-84 [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. J.M. IBAÑEZ LANGLOIS, *Doctrina Social de la Iglesia*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1987, p.247 [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. C. DAWSON, *Dynamics of World History*, Sheed and Ward, London 1957, p.247 [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See J.-L. CHABOT, Histoire de la Pensée politique (XIX et XX siècle), Masson, Paris 1988, pp.8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. F DOSTOYEVSKY, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Part 1, II, 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. *Idem*, Part 1, II, 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. G. COTRONEO, *Liberalismo,* en *Dizionario di Politica*, Ave, Roma 1993, p.451. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. *Ibid*., p.454. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. F. DOSTOYEVSKY, *Crime and Punishment*, Part II, ch. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. The social conflicts created by the economic liberalism of the 19th century has been very well portrayed by the entire work of Charles Dickens. The greatest English author of two centuries ago pictures a set of characters who are well placed in society from a socio-economic perspective. It also contains many factors that help to understand the *forma mentis* of the different social groups. My opinion is that one of the *leitmotifs* of Dickens’ novels is the personal dignity of the poor, and a definite rejection of the economistic mentality. The criticism levelled at the economic, political and social system of Victorian England is framed in the context of deep Christian humanism: among other manifestations, the concern or sympathy for the neighbour in need. From this point of view the most famous of Dicken’s novels can be read with great benefit: *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Chimes*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, etc. Dickens was also a great communicator to the masses. Most of his novels were published in periodic magazines, sold by the tens of thousands. Dickens’ public readings of his own works were as successful in England as they were in the United States. This shows that, although the description of the desperate situations of the destitute are overstated, he managed to awaken the thinking that a social change was required. Cf. P. ACKROYD, Dickens, Mandarin, London 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. J. DEWEY, *Liberalismo e azione sociale*, la Nuova Italia, Firenze 1946, pp.33-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. N. BOBBIO, *Liberalismo*, en *Dizionario di filosofía*, directed by A. Biraghi, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano 1957, PP.617-618/ [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. G. BEDESCH, *Storia del pensiero liberale*, Laterza, Bari 1990, p.4 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See G. BURDEAU, Le libéralisme, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1979, pp. 7-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. See J.J. ROUSSEAU, *Du contract social*, Book I, Ch. VIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. G. BEDESCH, cit., p.47. Regarding the topic of the polytheism of values, See Various authors, *Democrazia, ragione e verità* (a cura di Roberto Gatti), Massimo, Milano 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. J.-L. CHABOT, Histoire de la Penseé politique, cit., p.43 [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. J. LOCKE, Second Treatise on Government, II, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. *Ibid*., IV, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. *Ibid*., II, 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. See J. BALLESTEROS, Postmodernidad: decadencia o resistencia, cit., p.56. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. M. D’ADDIO, *Storia delle doctrine politiche*, cit., II, p.48. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. W. v. HUMBOLDT, Idee per un “Saggio sui limiti dell’attività dello Stato”, in “Antologia degli scritti politici de W. v. Humboldt, Bologna 1961, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. *Ibidem*. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. *Ibid*., p.156 [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. B. CONSTANT, Mélanges de littérature et de politique, Paris 1829, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. See B. CONSTANT, Principes politiques applicables à tous les gouvernements, Genève 1980, p. 432. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. See *ibid*., pages 211-216. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. See A. de TOCQUEVILLE, *Démocratie en Amérique* book I, Part I, chap.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. See *Ibid*., book II, part I, Ch. 5; part II, cha. 16. The antipersonalistic tendencies of an excessively bureaucratised democratic society have been analysed, in line with Tocqueville, by Ch. TAYLOR, The *Malaise of Modernity*, Anansi, Concord (Ontario) 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. *Ibid*., book II, part I, Ch. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. J. BENTHAM, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation,* University of London, London: The Athlone Press,1970, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. J. S. MILL, *Utilitarianism*, London 1864, 2ª ed., pp. 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Id., *On Liberty*, Oxford 1946, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. On John Stuart Mill’s political utilitarianism, see G. CHALMETA, *Giustizia aritmetica? I limiti del paradigma politico utilitarista*, in “Acta Philosophica” (Roma) 1998, vol. VII, fasc. I, pp. 5-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. G. CHALMETA, *La justicia política en Tomás de Aquino*, Pamplona: EUNSA, 2002, p. 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. The social and economic policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt and of British labour fall within this ideological construct [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. See J. RAWLS, *A theory of Justice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 1972 [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. See J. RAWLS, Political Liberalism, Columbia University Press, New York 1993 [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. See Ch. LARMORE, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Mass. -New York 1987 [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. M. RHONHEIMER, *L’immagine dell’uomo nel liberalismo*, in I. YARZA (a cura di), *Immagini dell’uomo. Percorsi antropologici nella filosofía moderna*, Armando, Roma 1996, p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. See S. MACEDO, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1990 [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. See M. RHONHEIMER, *L’immagine*…, cit., pp. 98-108 [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. *Ibid*., p.125 [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. H. KOHN, *El Nacionalismo*, Paidós, Buenos Aires 1966, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. It is interesting to note that the political philosophers considered to be the founders of Modernity, like Machiavelli, the concept of State is almost always identified with dominion or political power. See F. CHABOD, *L’idea di nazione*, cit.., pp. 139-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. “The tragic inheritance of compulsory military service, conceived in fear by the French Revolution, made the Romantic thesis that modern war is the war of the whole people rising against the aggressors or the tyrants a tangible proposition to the multitude of common men. This meant a radical change in the social consequences of war. For a thousand years Europe had endured war like Jenner’s cows’ small pox. War meant misfortune for the soldiers and for those living in the theatres of military operations, but otherwise war did not change or interrupt the ordinary life of the majority of the population. After 1792 Europe became familiar with war waged by farmers, artisans, traders and employees torn away from their pacific occupations, forced to wear a uniform; a war as aggressive as a devastating epidemic for the whole of society, scuttling normal life, removing all its usual arrangements and thrashing its foundations” (I. BIBO, *Isteria tedesca, paura francese, insicurezza italiana*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1997, p. 96). [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. On the importance of the public school as a vehicle of nationalism, See G. HERMET, *Nazioni e nazionalismi in Europa*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1996, pp. 112-119. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. The history of Latin American independence, between 1810 and 1825, fits in the wider picture of the Atlantic Revolution. The ideological background of this process is based on two premises: the democratic doctrines that came out of the Salamanca School and of their disciples - mainly the theories of Francisco Suárez - and the ideas of the European Enlightenment, that were presented in political terms as liberalism. But there was a growing sense in the Latin American republics of their own national identities. Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín will drink from these sources. Due to various historical circumstances linked to the Spanish situation a liberal ideology combined with nationalism will the dominant element. This goes a long way to explain the wars of limits of the young American nations. I have studied this process in several books: *Ideología de la emancipación guayaq*uileña, Banco Central del Ecuador, Guayaquil 1988; *El Guayaquil Colombiano* (1822-1830); *El liberalismo Incipiente*, Corporación de Estudios y Publicaciones, Quito 1995, and in some articles: *Interpretaciones de la Evangelización. Del Providencialismo a la utopía*, in *Historia de la Evangelización de América*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1992, pp. 609-622; *Secularidad y Secularismo. Las relaciones Iglesia-Estado en la historia latinoamericana*, in *Qué es la historia de la Iglesia*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1996, 295-307; *Iglesia y liberalismo en Hispanoamérica durante el siglo XIX: el caso Sarmiento*, in *Atti del* *Simposio Los últimos cien años de la evangelización en América Latina* Librería Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, pp. 643-657*; La religión en el proyecto de Esteban Echeverria para una Argentina viable*, in “Tábano” (Buenos Aires) n. 2, pp. 20-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. See A. PELLICCIARI, *Risorgimento da riscrivere*, Ares, Milano 1998 [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. J. SLOWACKI, *Dziela*, Ossolinski Wroclaw 1959, I, pp. 250-251. See BUTTIGLIONE, *Il pensiero dell’uomo che divenne Giovanni Paolo II*, Mondadori. Milano 1998, pp.42-44 [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. One of the characters of the Brothers Karamazov, Father Pàisij says: “The Church is not to be transformed into the State. That is Rome and its dream. That is the third temptation of the devil. On the contrary, the State is transformed into the Church, will ascend and become a Church over the whole earth; (…) this is the glorious destiny ordained for the Orthodox Church. This star will arise in the east!” (Part I, book V, p.67. Guardini, in his famous book: *Dostoyevsky: il mondo religioso* (Morceliana, Brescia 1995), holds to a different interpretation of the legend of the Great Inquisitor, which is less anti-Catholic. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. See B. CHUDOBA, *Rusia y el Oriente de Europa*, Rialp, Madrid 1980, pp. 159-205. For the political theories of Slavophiles and Pan-slavists, See G. PIOVESANA, *Storia del pensiero filosofico ruso*, cit. pp. 106-134 and 213-240). [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. In order to understand the various intellectual trends and the social set up of Russia in the first half of the 19th century, it is useful to read some novels of *Ivan Tugenev (1818-1883)*. In particular, we recommend reading *Memories of a Hunter*, by *Rudin*, *Nest of nobles* and *Fathers and Sons*. See also L.SATTA, BOSCHIAN, *Ottocento ruso. Geni, diavoli a profeti*, Studium, Roma 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Quoted by H. KOHN, *El Nacionalismo*, quoted, p.191. Frederic Chabod maintains that the central ideas of Renan were already present in two key figures of Italian unity, Mazzini and Mancini. The Italian historian feels that the process of German unification responds to “naturalist” nationalism - what we call “objective” -, whereas the Italian nationalism would be classified as “voluntarist” nationalism. See F. CHABOD, *L’idea di nazione*, cit., pp. 68-and fol. See also J. E. Renan, *Che cos’è una nazione? E altri saggi*, Donizelli, Roma 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. R. BUTTIGLIONE, *Tradizione americana e pensiero cattolico*, in “Communio” (Milano) 1992, n.125, p. 66 [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. An extensive bibliography is available on the institutional aspects of the birth of the United States. See C. BECKER, *The Declaration of Independence*, Vintage Book, New York 1942; R. RUTLAND,*The birth of the Bill of Rights,* 1776-1791, Collier-Macmillan, New York 1966; B.BAILYN, *The origins of American Politics*, Vintage Book, Random House, New York 1967; M. WHITE, *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, Oxford University Press, NEW York 1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. R. BUTTIGLIONE, *Tradizione americana e pensiero cattolico*, in “Communio” (Milano) 1992, n.125, p. 68 [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. See H. KOHN, El Nacionalismo, cit., pp.193-197. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. See R. ARON, République imperial. Les Etats-Unis dans le monde (1945-1972), Calmann-Lévy, Paris 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. See H. KISSINGER, *Diplomacy*, Simon & Schuster, UK 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. J.-L. CHABOT, *Histoire*…. Cit., p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. See R. HORSMAN, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1981. The famous novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960) of Harper Lee shows how racist sentiments remained in some areas of the United States long after the American Civil War. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. See A. CASTALDINI, *L’ipotesi mimetica*, Leo S. Olschki Editore, Firenze 2001, pp. 54-75 [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. G. REDONDO, Historia Universal, cit., XII, p.251. Dawson points out the same idea: “The great Age of Western expansion has also been the age of secularisation of Western culture. What has expanded has been: - first, Western political and economic power; secondly, Western technology and science; and thirdly, Western political institutions and social ideals. Christianity has also expanded, but in a far lesser degree. During the nineteenth century, Liberalism, the creed of progress and Enlightenment, of liberty and humanity, was the effective religion of Western culture, and it succeeded in winning converts all over the world. (C. DAWSON, The dynamics of Universal History, Sheed & Ward, Library of Congress 1956, p. 408. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. See J.-L. CHABOT, *Histoire de la pensé politique*, cit., p.92 [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. See J. BALLESTEROS, *Postmodernidad; decadencia o Resistencia*, cit., pp. 113-115. Thoreau Will also have an influence on *Martin Luther King (1929-1968)*. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. The work of Joseph Roth deals with the climate of nostalgia and sense of loss caused by the fall of the Austrian Empire, and the contradictions of nationalism at that time. Whoever wants to go further into this environment, looked at from this perspective could read La *Marcha Radeztsky* (EDHASA), Barcelona, 2000, and *La Cripta de los Capuchinos* (El Acantilado, Barcelona, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. “The majority of new states built upon the ruins of the old empires were just as multinational as the old ‘prisons of nations’ they replaced”. (E. HOSBAWN, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990, p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. See C. DAWSON, *Religion and the Modern State*, Sheed & Ward, London 1935, p.44 [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Nuremberg Trial Proceedings, Vol 5. Thirty-sixth Day, 17 January 1946, pp. 373-378. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. See J. MORALES, *El Islam*, Rialp, Madrid 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. See F. TOSO, Frammenti d’Europa, Guida alle minoranze étnico-linguistiche e ai fermenti autonomiste, Baldini & Castoldi, Milano 1996 [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. See M. A. TABET, *David Strauss: La Vida de Jesús*, Madrid: Emesa, 1977. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. See E. COLOMER, *El pensamiento alemán*..., cit., III, p. 9; F. OCARIZ, *El marxismo. Teoría y práctica de una revolución*, Madrid: Palabra, 1975, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. L. FEUERBACH, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie*, in *Sämtliche-Werke* (henceforth = SA), Stuttgart: Frommann 1959, III, p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Id., Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft, § 32, in SA, IX, p. 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Id., Das Geheimnis des Opfers oder Der Mensch ist was er isst, in SA, X, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Id., Das Wesen des Christentums, in SA, VI, p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Id., Vorlesungen über das Wesen der Religion, in SA, VIII, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Id., Erläuterungen und Ergängzungen zum Wesen des Christentums, in SA, VII, p. 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Ibid., p. 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. L. FEUERBACH, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, in SA*,* VI, p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. A. CRUZ, *Historia de la filosofía contemporánea*, Pamplona: Eunsa 1987, p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. L. FEUERBACH, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, in SA*,* VI, p. 325. Concerning the influence of Feuerbach's religious doctrine in the twentieth century, see H. de LUBAC, *Le drame de l’humanisme athée*, Paris: Spes 1959, pp. 22-39 (Eng. Transl. *The drama of atheist humanism*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Utopic socialists were not the first ones to speak of communism, atheism and sexual promiscuity as key elements of the ideal society. In the 18th century in France, Jean Meslier, the strange case of an atheist priest, left a will in which he rejected all Christian beliefs, and put forward all these elements for his political utopias. In an analogous way, *The Code of Nature, or, the True Spirit of Laws* written by Morelly (possibly a pseudonym for Diderot), based all its utopic arguments on the disappearance of private property; Deschamps proposed a close relationship between atheism and social equality in his The True System. There were strong arguments against private property in 18th century England. Gerard Winstanley, a publicist within the group called the levellers, states that all social evils stem from private ownership of the land. We should also recall some of the classic utopias, like those of Plato and Aristophanes, or others written in the Renaissance following the discovery of America. For all these tendencies, see R. CAMMILLERI, *I mostri della Ragione*, Ares, Milano 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. G. PIOVESANA, Storia del pensiero filosófico russo, cit., p.167. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Many of Marx's works were written in collaboration with Engels. We will briefly give a few biographical details on this right-hand companion of Marx.

     Friedrich Engels was born on November 28, 1820, in Barmen (Westphalia). He belonged to a wealthy industrialist family. He knew a few of the Young Hegelians, and his first writings show an interest in theology, something completely lacking in Marx. Soon, under the de-mystifying lectures of David Strauss, one of the Young Hegelians, he went on to defend a militant atheism. By 1841 he was already a devout communist. In 1842 he went to Manchester to manage one of his father's factories. There he came into contact with the world of work, and he would write one book on the topic: *Situation of the Working Class in England*.

     In 1843, while in Paris, he met Marx. As we have seen already, he would write a few works in collaboration. In 1850 he returned to Manchester. When Marx retired from public life, Engels would be the principal spokesperson for Marxism and the greatest defender of its orthodoxy. The fruit of this defense is his *Anti-Dühring*, written in critique of the socialist Eugen Dühring. After Marx's death he published the second (1885) and third (1894) books of *The Capital*. He also wrote, among many other publications, *Dialectics of Nature*. He died in 1895. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. F. OCARIZ, *El marxismo*, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. K. MARX, *Ökonomisch-philosophische* *Manuskript*, in *Werke,* Ergänzungsband Erster Teil, p. 546. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. M. CLAVEL, *Ce que je crois*, Paris: B. Grasset 1975, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. K. MARX, Zur Kritik der hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung, in Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels Werke, Berlin: Dietz 1957-1969, II, p. 378. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Id. Die Deustche Ideologie, in Karl Marx..., III, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Id., Thesen über Feuerbach, in Karl Marx..., III, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Id., *Das Kapital*, I, chapter 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Id., Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte, cit., p. 577. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. With regard to this matter, Dawson states that «No economic change will suffice to change the spirit of a culture. So long as the proletarian is governed by purely economic motives, he remains a bourgeois at heart. It is only in religion that we shall find a spiritual force that can accomplish a spiritual revolution. The true opposite to the bourgeois is not to be found in the communist, but in the religious man – the man of desire. The bourgeois must be replaced not so much by another class as by another type of humanity. It is true that the passing of the bourgeois does involve the coming of the worker, and there can be no question of a return to the old regime of privileged castes. Where Marx was wrong was not in his dialectic of social change, but in the narrow materialism of his interpretation which ruled out the religious factor.” (Ch. DAWSON, *Dynamics of World History,* edited by J. MULLOY, Wilmington, DE: ISI Books 2002, pp. 221-222). [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. See Ch. DAWSON, *Dynamics of World History*, cit., p. 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. F. CAPUCCI, *Antonia Gramsci. Cuadernos de la Cárcel*, Emesa, Madrid 1978, p.143. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. See E. VENTURA, *Sobre hechos e ideas políticas*, Ciudad Argentina, Buenos Aires 1997, p.517. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. A. CHEKHOV, *Ward Number 6*, Ch. IX. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. There is abundant bibliography on the communist repression in the U.S.S.R., in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Third World. *The Black Book of Communism* has been published recently (Espasa-Calpe/Planeta, Madrid-Barcelona, 1988), with a detailed analysis of the communist crimes from 1917 to publication date. Literature also presents in vivid colours the existential drama of communist regimes. The whole work of Alexander Solzhenitsyn is dedicated to this topic. The *Gulag Archipelago* caused a great impression in the West when it was published in the 1970s. Another classic is *Animal Farm* (1945) the ironic fable of George Orwell. From the perspective of the history of ideas the book by F. FURET, The *History of an Illusion, The communist idea in the 20th century*, Simon and Schuster, New York 1995. Regarding the Chinese regime, see. J. CHANG, *Wild Swans: the three daughters of Chin*a, Harper-Collins, London 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Mr. Gradgrind, a character in Dickens’ *Hard Times*, explains in jest the positivist worldview of the second half of the 19th century: ‘Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!’ (C. DICKENS, *Hard Times*, The Project Gutenberg eBook #786, p.3) [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. A. COMTE, *Cours de philosophie positive*, 2ª ed., Paris 1864, vol. VI, p. 600. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Id., Cours de philosophie positive, vol. I, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Besides Brazil, Mexico is another Latin-American country that endured a deep positivist influence, especially during the long years (1876 to 1910) of Porfirio Diaz. As E. Krause writes: “Catholicism in Mexico was at the time (…) a heaven full of saints. During the time of Juarez and Diaz a parallel heaven was created: that of the heroes (and a parallel hell that of the wicked). The images of saints (paintings, bronze, ivory, stone or paper) were venerated on altars and niches of churches and private homes. When the period of freedom started, the idealised images of the heroes sprung up in public places: busts, statues, neo-classical paintings “a la David”, and like the saints, in little school cards. Priests preached the exemplary lives of the saints in their sermons and catechisms; liberal historians and orators remembered the heroic deeds, the famous sentences, the unforgettable deaths of the insurgents in books, poems and speeches. The calendar had always been called the “Santoral”, because it consecrated the dates of birth and death of the saints; the civil calendar included new “holy days of obligation”: Constitution Day, birthday of Juarez, the victory of Diaz in Puebla, etc. On the days of the patron saint of villages, suburbs, chapels, were occasions for feasting: feasts of love or death; in the civic days, with waving flags or flags at mid mast, Mexicans had from then onwards new reasons to celebrate” (E. KRAUSE, *Siglo de caudillos*, Tusquets, Mexico 1994, pp.320-321). The same can be said of all the other Latin-American countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. See H. DE LUBAC, *Le drame de l’humanisme athée*, cit., pp. 137-278. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. E. LITTRÉ, Auguste Comte et la philosophie positive, p.524 [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. E, RENAN, Dialogues, in *Oeuvres*, I, p. 675 [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. H. SPENCER, *First Principles*, London 1863, p. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Regarding the natural selection theories of Darwin and the philosophical theory of evolution of Spencer, see. E. GILSON, *De Aristóteles a Darwin (y Vuelta). Ensayo sobre algunas constantes de la bio-filosopfia*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1976. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. See J.L. COMELLA, *El último cambio de siglo*, Ariel, Barcelona 2000, pp. 84-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Quoted in *Idem*, p.35 [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. See C. DAWSON, *Religion and the Modern State*, quoted, p. XXI. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. *Ibidem*, p. 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. G. REDONDO, Historia de la Iglesia en España (1931-1939), cit., p.59. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. See F. GUGELOT, *La conversion des intellectuels au catholicisme en France* (1885-1935), CNRS, Paris, 1998; J. PEARCE, *Literary converts*, Harper Collins, London 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. See J.L. COMELLAS, *El último cambio de siglo*, cit., pp. 249-265. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Here we summarise part of the work of Professor Mercedes Montero: *La cultura del siglo XX*, in J. PAREDES (editor), *Historia Universal Contemporánea*, Madrid 1994, pp. 637-654. Daniel Bell documents the relationship between the elitist culture of the 1920s and the massive culture of the revolution of the 1960s in his classical book *The cultural contradictions of capitalism*, Basic Books, New York 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Translator’s note: if the author is referring to the relatively peaceful protests that took place in the early and mid-1960’s at UC Berkeley (e.g. the Free Speech Movement), then this is correct. However, it seems more likely that he is referring to the 1968 People’s Park riot which, in fact, had little to do with the student revolts that happened in the USA and elsewhere at about the same time. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. See M. FAZIO, Tre proposte di società Cristiana: Berdiaeff, Maritain, Eliot, “Acta Philosophica” 9/2 (2000), 287-311; Hillaire Belloc e la crisi della cultura della Modernità. “Annales Theologici” 14/2 (2000), 535-568; Religione e vita nei primi scritti di Christopher Dawson, “per la filosofia” 54 (2002), 97-105; Chesterton: la filosofía del asombro agradecido, “Acta Philosophica” 11/11 (2002), 121-142. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Bergson’s widow’s testimony shows the same burning desire her husband had to be baptized. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. H. BERGSON, Les deux sources de la morale et de la religión, in Oeuvres, Paris 1959, p.1189. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. J. MARITAIN, *La philosophie bergsonienne,* in *Oeuvres completes*, Fribourg-Paris, 1983, I, p. 548 [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. H. BERGSON, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, in *Oeuvres*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. C. IZQUIERDO, De la razón a la fe. La aportación de M. Blondel a la teología, Pamplona: EUNSA, 1999, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. M. BLONDEL, L’Action. Essai d’une Critique de la vie et d’une science de la pratique, Paris: Alcan, 1893, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. *Ibid*., p. VIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. *Ibid*., p. 388. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. See Letter from John Paul II to the Archbishop of Aix, on the occasion of the *Colloque du Centennaire de l’Action*, 19-II-1993 (Published in *L’Osservatore Romano*, 12-III-1993.) [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. See J. L. CAÑAS, *Gabriel Marcel: filósofo, dramaturgo y compositor*, Madrid: Palabra, 1998, p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. See G. MARCEL, *Journal métaphysique*, Paris 1927, p. 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Idem, *Être et avoir*, Paris 1935, p. 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. B. MONDIN, *Storia della Metafisica*, Bologna: ESD, 1998, III, p. 645. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. J. M. BURGOS, *El personalismo*, Madrid: Palabra, 2000, pp. 170-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. E. MOUNIER, *Manifiesto al servicio del personalismo*, Madrid: Taurus, 1967, pp. 75-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. See LEON XIII, Enc. *Aeterni Patris* (4-VIII-1879), ASS 11 (1878-1879), 97-115. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Among his works we mention: 1913, La philosophie bergsonienne; 1920, Art et scholastique; Introduction générale à la philosophie; 1923, Petite logique; 1924, Réflexions sur l'inteligence; 1925, Trois Réformateurs; 1927, Primauté du spirituel; 1932, Distinguer pour unir ou les dégrés du savoir; 1933, De la philosophie chrétienne; Du régime temporel et de la liberté; 1934, Sept leçons sur l'être; 1935, Science et sagesse; 1936, Humanisme intégral; 1939, Quattre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle; 1940, De la justice politique; 1942, Les Droits de l'homme et la loi naturelle; 1944, Principes d'une politique humaniste; De Bergson à Thomas d'Aquin; 1947, La personne humaine et le bien commun; 1951, Man and the State; Neuf leçons sur les notions premières de la philosophie morale; 1957, On the philosophy of History; 1958, Reflections on America; 1960, Philosophie dans la cité; Philosophie morale; 1966, Le Paysan de la Garonne. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. See J.-L. BARRÉ, Jacques et Raïsa Maritain. Les Mendiants du Ciel, Paris: Stock, 1996, pp. 306-323. See also P. CHENAUX, Entre Maurras et Maritain, Paris: Cerf, 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. For an analysis of the various stages in Maritain’s thinking, see J.M. BURGOS, Cinco claves para comprender a Jacques Maritain, in “Acta Philosophica” (Roma), 1995, vol. IV, fasc. I, pp. 5-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. J. MARITAIN, Le docteur angélique, in Oeuvres complètes, cit., IV, pp. 22-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. V. POSSENTI, Il nichilismo teoretico e la “morte della metafisica”, Armando, Roma 1995, pp. 7-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. F. NIETZSCHE Die fröhlische Wissenschaft, in Nietzsche Werke, Berlin 1969, III, fr. 125. (Translation taken from The Gay Science, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1974, pp.181-82.) [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. *Ibid.,* V, fr. 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Idem, *Also sprach Zarathustra, II: Auf den glückseligen Inseln*, vol VI/1, p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Idem, *Wille zur Macht*, I, fr. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Idem, *Die fröhlishe Wissenchaf*, IV, fr. 341 [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Id., *Wille zur Macht*, III, fr. 617. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Id., *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Vorrede 3, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Ibid., Vorrede 4, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. E. COLOMER, *El pensamiento alemán…*, cit., III, p. 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. F. NIETZCHE, *Wille Zur Macht*, fr. 1067 [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Id., Zur Genealogie der Moral, I, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Id., *Der Antichrist*, fr. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. See E. COLOMER, *El pensamiento alemán...*, cit., III, p. 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. E. HEMINGWAY *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*, http://www.url-der.org/a\_clean\_well\_lighted\_place.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. M. HEIDEGGER, Essere e tempo, Longanesi, Milano 1979, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. P. PRINI, *Storia dell’esistenzialismo*, Studium, Roma 1989, p.97. Regarding Heidegger’s nihilism, see L. ROMERA, *Assimilare la finitezza: con Nietzsche e Heidegger ad un bivio*, in “Acta Philosophica: 4/2 (1995), 267-283 [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. L. KAHN, Letteratura e crisi della fede, Quoted, p. 215 [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. See V. POSSENTI, *Il nichilismo teoretico e la morte della metafisica*, Rome: Armando, 1995, p. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. See G. VATTIMO, *Oltre l’interpretazione. Il significato dell’ermeneutica per la filosofia*, Bari: Laterza, 1994. See also F. BOTTURI, *“Immagine ermeneutica dell’uomo”,* in *Immagini dell’uomo. Percorsi antropologici nella filosofia moderna*, Rome: Armando, 1996, pp. 77-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. M. FOUCAULT, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Routledge 2002, p. 373. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. R. BUTTIGLIONE, *Le parole e le cose*, Rizzoli, Milano 1967, p.368. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Cf. A. POLAINO-LORENTE, *Acotaciones a la antropología de Freud*, Universidad de Piura, Piura 1984, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. A.DEL NOCE, Alle radici della crisi, in AA.VV. La crisi della società permissiva, Milano 1972, p. 112 [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. K. OFFEN, Definir el feminismo: un análisis histórico comparativo, in “Historia Social”, 1991 (9), pp.108-110. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. For a historical outlook of feminism, see G.SOLÉ ROMEO, *Historia del feminismo (siglos XIX y XX)*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1995. We have followed it in our presentation. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. M. SCHOOYANS*, Nuovo disordine mondiale*, San Paolo, Alba 2000, p. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. T. Malthus, *Essay on the Principle of Population*, London, 1789, Ch. 1, https://www.guteberg.org/files/4239/4239-h/4239-h.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. T. MALTHUS, *Essay on the Principle of Population*, London, 1789, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4239/4239-h/4239-h.htm . See also L. CANTONI, *Il problema della popolazione mondiale e le politiche demografiche*, Aspetti etici, Cristianità, Piacenza 1994 [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Regarding the relationship between ecology and population, see M. FERRER REGALES and A. PELAEZ LOPEZ, *Población, Ecología y Medio Ambiente*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1996; E. COLOM, *Ecología e popolazione*, in “Annales Theologici” 12 (1998), 485-531. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. J. BALLESTEROS, *Ecología personalista*, Tecnos, Madrid 1995, p.18 [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. See B. DEVAL - G. SESSIONS, *Deep Ecology: Living as If Nature Mattered*; Gibbs Smith 2001 [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Idem, p.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Quoted by A. BERQUE, *Mediance. De milieux en paysages*, Reclus, Montpellier 1990, p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. I refer the reader to the book by Ballesteros previously quoted to look further on the political and social consequences of personalist biologism. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. M. INTROVIGNE, *Il sacro postmoderno*, Gribaudi, Milano 1996, p.16. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. See *Ibidem*, pp.123-128 [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. See Idem, *New Age and the Next Age*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. The virulent anti-clericalism that followed the restoration of some institutions of the Ancien Régime by Charles X of Bourbon in France, and ended up with the liberal revolution of 1830, and the constitutional triennium in Spain (182-1823), following Ferdinand VII’s attempt to fully restore the Ancien Régime, can be read from the of clericalism-laicism point of view. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. We could include in this group all the political theories that necessarily relate monarchy and Catholic faith, like De Bonald (1754-1840) and De Maistre (1753-1840), and the zelanti, a group of ecclesiastics, who did not want to change anything in the social structure of the Papal States or in the relations between Church and State during the Pontificates of Pius VII, Leo XIII, Pius VIII and Gregory XVI, or the attitude of five legitimate bishops appointed by Louis XVI before the French Revolution, who refused to resign at the request of Pius VII, in order to make peace with Napoleonic France. More recently, Maurras’ *Action Française* proposed once more the alliance between the Church and political power. As a matter of fact, for agnostic Maurras, religion would only be an *instrumentum regni* at the hands of political power. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. The restructuring of Europe after the Congress of Vienna in 1815 partly explains the emergence of liberal Catholic groups. Belgium, with a Catholic majority, became part of officially Calvinist Holland. Most of Poland became part of orthodox Russia; Irish Catholics remained under the sovereignty of Anglican England. The new political structures ought to bring with them religious freedom for Catholics in these countries. A union policy between Catholics and liberals was pursued in Holland, with a lukewarm consent from Rome. In Poland the revolution of 1830 brought about a short- lived independence, fought by Gregory XVI’s brief *Superiori Anno* (VI-1831): the Pope himself was attacked by liberals in the Papal States, and Gregory XVI thought it better to negotiate with Tsar Nicholas I, in order to arrange assurances for Catholics, though opposing the revolutionary movement. In Britain, thanks to the policies of the Irishman O’Connell, laws were enacted in 1892 that allowed Irish Catholics to be elected, but with some restrictions. In France liberal Catholicism was much more radical (the unionist policy in Belgium was a political strategy, and the reaction of both Irish and Polish Catholics was mainly a patriotic policy). It was led by [Hugues] Félicité de Lamennais. He began as an ultramontanist, had a liberal period without breaking up with the Church, and in 1854 died estranged from the Catholic Church. He founded the newspaper *L’Avenir* in 1830 together with Lacordaire and Montalembert; its motto was *Dieu et Liberté* (God and freedom). It advocated for the separation between Church and State and using modern freedoms to carry out a Christian apostolate, but it did not make the point of the anthropocentric basis of those freedoms. In his Encyclical *Mirari vos* Gregory XVI condemned many of the newspaper’s editorial positions, but did not specifically mention it. Lacordaire and Montalembert were exemplary Catholics and sincerely obeyed Rome. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. There are numerous Encyclicals that deal with social and political issues. Among them we should quote *Diuturnum* (1881), on the origin of power; *Immortale Dei* (1885), on the relations between Church and State; *Libertas* (1888) on Christian freedom. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Regarding the historical framework and theological principles of *Rerum Novarum*, see E. COLOM, *Chiesa e società*, Armando, Roma 1966, pp. 175-271 [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. G. Redondo writes: “It is not easy to exaggerate Leo XIII’s task. He wanted to remove, as far as possible, the chance of having two separate worlds, closed in on themselves, and therefore enemies of each other: the civil society of liberalism and the traditionalist Christian society. There was only one world, and all men had to live together in it. It is difficult to exaggerate the quality of his effort, but in hindsight it is also easy to highlight its deficiencies. The clearest one was the fact that, being a man of his own time, Leo XIII held that the role of the State was the make-or-break factor in these matters. He had many valid points, of course, but the Pope always maintained that in social issues what mattered most was what the State could do, not what society itself could achieve. We should not be surprised by his attitude: in the late 19th century this view of social and political life was not only the patrimony of Leo XIII -or the whole of the Church’s hierarchy…- but the view of all the political rulers of the time. And, of course, the goal of the socialists was to achieve control of the State. Lenin himself, a social democrat, would achieve it in 1917.

     Leo XIII’s endeavour included the defence of Christian society from a mental attitude that upheld the primacy of rulers over the people ruled. This was true enough of the Church, a particular society, because of the truths of faith and the basic norms of mores, but it could not be so precise regarding the actions of Christians in the world with reference to their own responsibilities towards civil authorities and the other citizens. For instance, it is virtually impossible to find in Leo XIII’s doctrine an explicit acknowledgement of the legitimate pluralism in temporal matters linked to the personal responsibility of Christians. But it would not be appropriate to expect it or demand it. We have referred often in these pages to the progress of freedom. And every process has its own rhythm” (*Historia de la Iglesia en Espaňa*, quoted, p, 55). [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Saint Pius X faced up to modernism decisively in two well-known documents: the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* and the decree *Lamentabili sane exitu* (both in 1907). Another action of the Magisterium ratified an idea that was mentioned earlier: the Church’s mission is neither political, nor cultural, etc., but essentially religious. The Pope was very aware of how much was at stake. And with the assistance, among others, of the Jesuit and future Cardinal Billot, he had no hesitation to write and publish both documents. At the end of the Pascendi, Saint Pius X wrote “no one will wonder if we define it stating that it is a combination of all heresies”. Behind these words lies the modernist goal: to reduce Christian faith to the culture of Modernity. Along these lines, Alfred Loisy’s objection that he did not do theology, only exegesis and biblical history, and therefore did not understand the reason behind the convictions, may have been sincere, but it showed a severe misunderstanding (or possibly ignorance) of the basis of scientific thought and the original nature of Christian Revelation” (*Ibidem*, p.58). [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. AAS 14 (1922), p.676. We will include the references to AAS and the translation of Pius XI texts from <https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents> [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. AAS 14 (1922) p. 683. *Ubi Arcano*, n. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. AAS 14 (1992) p. 688. *Ubi Arcano*, n. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. AAS 14 (1992) p. 688. *Ubi Arcano*, n. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. AAS 14 (1992) p. 689. *Ubi Arcano*, n. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. AAS 14 (1992) p. 690. *Ubi Arcano*, n. 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. AAS 14 (1992) p. 691. *Ubi Arcano*, n. 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. AAS 17 (1925) p 600. *Quas primas*, n. 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. AAS 17 (1925) p 600-601. *Quas primas*, n.15-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. AAS 17 (1925) p 601-602. *Quas primas*, n.19 [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. AAS 17 (1925) p 608-609. *Quas primas*, n.31 [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. AAS 17 (1925) p 609. *Quas primas*, n. 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. AAS 17 (1925), pp. 609-610. *Quas primas*, n. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. AAS 17 (1925), pp. 604-605. *Quas primas*, n. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. AAS 17 (1925), pp. 604-605, *Quas primas*, n. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. AAS 16 (1924), pp.5-6. *Maximam gravissimamque*, n. 2. <http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_18011924_maximam-gravissimamque.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. AAS 16 (1924), p.10. *Maximam gravissimamque*, n. 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. AAS 24 (1932), pp.178-179. *Caritate Christi*, n.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. AAS 24 (1932), p.180. *Caritate Christi*, n.4 [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. See AAS 18 (1926), p.220 [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. AAS 24 (1932), p. 329. *Acerba animi*, n.14 [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. AAS 29 (1937), p. 200. *Firmissimam constantiam*, n. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. AAS 25 (1933), p.262. *Dilectissima nobis*, n. 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. AAS 25 (1933), p.264-265. *Dilectissima nobis*, n. 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. AAS 23 (1931), p.302. *Non abiamo bisogno*, n. 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. AAS 23 (1931), p.301-302. *Non abiamo bisogno*, n. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. AAS 29 (1937), p. 148. *Mit brennender Sorge*, n. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. AAS 29 (1937), p. 148. *Mit brennender Sorge*, n. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. AAS 29 (1937), p. 149. *Mit brennender Sorge*, n. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. AAS 29 (1937), p. 156-158. *Mit brennender Sorge*, n. 23-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. AAS 29 (1937), p. 167-168. *Mit brennender Sorge*, n. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. AAS 29 (1937), p. 72. *Divini Redemptoris*, n.14 [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. AAS 29 (1937), pp. 73-74. *Divini Redemptoris,* n.16 [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. AAS 21 (1929), pp. 691-692, *Mens nostra*, n. 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. For an original and clever assessment of fascism and its relation to the Church, see G.K. CHESTERON, *The resurrection of Rome*, Hodder & Stoughton, London [Digital Library of India Item 2015.527578](http://www.new.dli.ernet.in/handle/2015/527578) [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. In recent times Pius XI has been criticised because of his “silence” regarding the Jewish Holocaust. The documents that prove the tireless efforts of Pope Pacelli to save the victims of the Nazi persecution are so numerous and definite that accusations of being pro-Hitler are simply due to prejudice. On this matter we recommend the book of P. BLET, *Pie XII et la Seconde Guerre Mondiale d’après les archives du Vatican*, Perrin, Paris, 1997. See also A. GASPARI, *Los judíos, Pío XII y la leyenda negra*, Planeta Testimonio, Barcelona 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Many of the ideas developed in this book are inspired in the doctrine of Saint Josemaría. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. R. BUTTIGLIONE, *Il pensiero dell’uomo che divenne Giovanni Paolo II*, Quoted, p. 211. See R. BOSCA*, La libertad religiosa en el Magisterio de la Iglesia Católica*, *in La libertad religiosa en la Argentina*, Konrad Adenauer Stitfung, Buenos Aires 2003, pp. 83-112. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. See J. ORLANDIS, *La Iglesia Católica en la segunda mitad del siglo XX*, Palabra, Madrid 1999 [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. See V. POSSENTI, *Oltre l’illuminismo. Il messagio sociale cristiano*, Paoline, Roma 1993, pp. 74-75 [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. See S. FONTANA, *Dottrina sociale della Chiesa e società liberale*, in *La società liberale*, n. 3 (1993), p.475. The positive nature of the social teaching of the Church is highlighted, to overcome a polemical or purely defensive view. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. See V. POSSENTI, La doctrina sociale della Chiesa e l’apporto della filosofía, in *La Società* n. 1 (1991), pp, 30-42; *M. RHONHEIMER, Perché una filosofía política?*, in “Acta Philosophica” 2/1 (1992), 250-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. See J.M. IBAÑEZ LANGLOIS*, La Doctrina Social de la Iglesia*, quoted, p.251. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. *Laborem exercens*, n. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. *Ibidem*, n. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. *Ibidem*, n. 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. *Ibidem*, n. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. *Ibidem,* n. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. *Ibidem,* n. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. *Ibidem*, n.14. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n.42. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. See *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. *Centessimus annus*, n.34 [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. *Centessimus annus*, n.35 [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. *Centessimus annus*, n. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. J.M. IBAÑEZ LANGLOIS*, La Doctrina Social de la Iglesia*, quoted, p.260. See also E. COLOM, *Democrazia: libertà, verità e valori*, in “La società” (Verona) 1993, n.2, pp.243-364 [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. *Centessimus annus*, n. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. *Centessimus annus*, n. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. *Centessimus annus*, n. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. *Centessimus annus*, n. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. *Centessimus annus*, n. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. *Centessimus annus*, n. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. *Centessimus annus*, n. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. *Idem*, n. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. *Idem*, n. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. *Idem*, n. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. *Idem*, n. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. *Idem*, n. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. *Idem*, n. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. See *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. *Centessimus annus*, n. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Interview of D. CONTRERAS with Prof. A. RODRIGUEZ LUÑO, Boletín ACE-PRENSA, Servicio 127/93, Madrid, October 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. *Letter to Families*, n. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. *Evangelium vitae*, n. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Vatican Council II, Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor hominis*, n. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. SAINT JOHN PAUL II*, Address to the 50th General Assembly of the United Nations, 5 October 1995*, n. 1 in *L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 41 p. 8-10 [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. *Ibidem*, n. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. *Ibidem*, n. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. *Ibidem*, n. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. *Ibidem*, n. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. *Ibidem*, n. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. *Ibidem*, n. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. *Ibidem*, n. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. *Ibidem*, n. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. *Ibidem*, n. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. *Ibidem*, n. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)