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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

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 grasped. 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. 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

callstructures or units of historical understanding. Looking at them from the perspective of this book -

¹See M. FAZIO, *Due visioni della modernità*, in "Acta Philosophica" 2/1 (1993), 135-139

²L. KAHN, *Letteratura e crisi della fede*, Città Nuova, Roma 1978, p. 49

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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 Constanti nople to the hands of the Turksin 1453 endsthe one-thousand-yearsurvival 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

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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 on 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

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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 Renais

sance 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. Some times 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

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 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 Quadts 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 In the same period, Jean Fernel praised "our era, which sees the arts and sciences triumphantly reborn after twelve centuries of neglect."⁵ Thus came into being the self-referential concept of modernity, with its affirmation of

³F. Bacon. *Essays...with other Writings*, London 1902, p.433

⁴ Cited by J. Hale, *La civiltà del Rinascimento in Europa*, Mondadori, Milano 1994, p. 600.

⁵*Ibidem*, p. 601.

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 18th 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 Regum 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 nature⁶.

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 eighth 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 he 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, he holds that the Indians are effective masters of their goods, because "mastery is based on the image of God"⁸. Being the image of God is some thing 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. 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

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

⁷F. de VITORIA, *Relectio de Indis*, Corpus Hispanorum de Pace, BAC, Madrid 1967, p, 651.

⁸*Ibidem*, p.654.

⁹S.Th. I-II, 82, I, ad 3.

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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.

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 managed 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 factor¹¹. Vitoria, arguing against jurists of the category of Bartolo di

¹⁰ F de VITORIA, *Ibidem*, p.656.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 667-675

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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. 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. 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 co

ercion 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. 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

¹² *Ibidem*, p.676

¹³ *Ibidem*, p.678-682

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 695

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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. 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 of 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. 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. 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

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 708

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 721

¹⁷ *Ibidem*

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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* is one of the gates to pass from the medieval world to the modern world.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

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 wonder that came across

¹⁸ See M. FAZIO, *Francisco de Vitoria: Cristianismo y Modernidad*, Ciudad Argentina, Buenos Aires 1998

¹⁹ See P. HAZARD, *La crise de la conscience européenne*, Boivin, Paris 1935, pp. 8-17

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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 These people live surrounded by untold riches. So much so, that Columbus promises the Catholic Kings "as much gold as they may need"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 milder and more than any known region"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

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 aristocratic 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

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

²⁰ C. COLÓN, Carta anunciadora del Descubrimiento, in C.VARELA, Cristóbal Colón. Textos y documentos completos, Alianza, Madrid 1982, p. 82

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 141

²² A. VESPUCIO, *Viajes y documentos completos*, Akal, Madrid s.f.

²³ C. VARELA, *Cristóbal Colón...*, cit., pp. 220-221

²⁴ B. DE LAS CASAS, Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias, Sarpe, Madrid 1985, p.37

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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

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 *Tommaso 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 not 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 *Essays* 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

²⁵ A. USLAR PIETRI, *Obras selectas*, EDIME, Madrid-Caracas 1956, p. 1157

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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. 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. 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.

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 hosts²⁹.

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- 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 ascendancy, 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. 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 earth³².

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

²⁶ G. LANSON, *Les Essais de Montaigne*, Mellottée, Paris 1948, p.96

²⁷ M. de MONTAIGNE, *Essais*, La Pléiade, Bruges 1950, p. 1018

²⁸ *Ibidem*

²⁹ *Ibidem*

³⁰ See *Ibidem*, pp.1024-5

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 244

³² *Ibidem*

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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.

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.

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 contratsocial* 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

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 243

³⁴ J.J. ROUSSEAU, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, Garnier, Paris 1960, p. 8

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 of 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 Siena or the *Book of Good Love* of Juan Ruiz, Archbishop 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 orthodoxy³⁵. 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

³⁵ See ISERLOH, E., *Compendio di Teologia e Storia della Riforma*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1990

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. Melancthon, 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

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

³⁶ See G. REDONDO, *Historia de la Iglesia en España (1931-1939)*, Rialp, Madrid 1933, I, p.27

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 tendency 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 Calvinist 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

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

³⁷ See J.M. BURGOS, *Weber e lo spirito del capitalismo*, in "Acta Philosophica" 5/2 (1966), 197-200

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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 than 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

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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 con

victions. 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

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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 member³⁸.

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

³⁸ See J. BODIN, *Les six livres de la République*, Scientia Verlag, Aalen 1962

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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'Écriture 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

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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 can not 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,

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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.

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.

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

³⁹ J.B. BOSSUET, *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture Sainte*, Paris 1709, V, 4,1, p.240.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*

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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. There fore, *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.

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.

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

⁴¹ T. HOBBS, *Leviathan*, I, 11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, II, 17

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why the State must be conceived by Hobbes as a mortal god, to whom man, after the immortal God, owes his earthly life"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. 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

⁴³ M. D'ADDIO, *Storia delle doctrine politiche*, ECIG, Genova 1992, I, p. 443

⁴⁴ T. HOBBS, *Elementos de derecho natural y político*, II, 10, 5.

consolidates juridical positivism: it considers just only what has been established by the sovereign power, with no reference to higher sources of moral power⁴⁵.

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

⁴⁵ For a general outlook on Hobbes political doctrines, See M. RHONHEIMER, *La filosofia politica di Thomas Hobbes*, Armando, Roma 1997.

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 power⁴⁶.

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 process⁴⁷. The

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 ⁴⁷ See J. GODECHOT, *Las Revoluciones, Labour*, Barcelona 1977, p. 364-366; F. FURET and D. RICHET *La Révolution Française*, Fayard, Paris 1989.

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.

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 Des cartes, 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 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*,

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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, 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 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

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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

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

⁴⁸ See M. FAZIO - D. GAMARRA, *Historia de la filosofía moderna*, Palabra, Madrid 2002

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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

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 —

⁴⁹Was ist Aufklärung?, Ak VIII, 35.

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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.

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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

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

50 Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*, II.

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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

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 immor

ality 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

51 F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, V: From Hobbes to Hume.*, Continuum, London-New York 2003, p. 163

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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 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

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.

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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

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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*

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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

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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 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

53 E. DE CONDILLAC, *Traité des sensations*, in *Oeuvres philosophiques de Condillac*. P.U.F., Paris 1947, IV, 5, note

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 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

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 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,

54 MONTESQUIEU, *L'esprit des lois*, Paris 1945, I, 2.

55 *Ibid.*, III, 1.

56 *Ibid.*, XI, 3.

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*

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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 Rousseauian 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

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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

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

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

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

57 J.J. ROUSSEAU, *Du contrat social*, Garnier, Paris 1960, I, 6.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., I. 8.

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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, pie tistic 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

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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

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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 Königsberg. 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 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, Schelling and Hegel will give

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

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different answers to Kant, but those answers presupposed the philosophy of the master of Königsberg.

a) Life and works

He was born in Königsberg (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 Königsberg. 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 logic and metaphysics at the University of Königsberg. 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*

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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 Königsberg, 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

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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 *nóúmenos* 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

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as such, and thus limit the validity of sense knowledge⁶¹. 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. 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 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

⁶¹ See Critique of pure reason, A 255, B 311

⁶² *Ibid.*, A 298, B 354

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non-contradiction of the *nóúmenos* and the regulatory use of the ideas of reason. Kant will approach the world of *nóúmenos* 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 starts 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 Königs

berg 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 [m1] 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 of human 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

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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 or purpose. 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
- “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
- “Treat the idea of the will of every rational being, as a universal law”.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

⁶³ Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Ak IV, 421.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak IV, 429.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak IV, 434

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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 pre-suppositions, 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 possibility⁶⁶. 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

⁶⁶ Critique of practical reason, Ak V, 240.

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. The rule of law is found only within civil society, a stage subsequent to the state of nature, which Kant conceives not

⁶⁷ *Metaphysics of customs*, Ak, VI, 230

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 -some times 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 him self, 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 puzzle ment. 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 Königsberg 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 Königsberg 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.

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

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, it played a crucial role in the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism. *Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1803)* 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

⁶⁸ On the historical origin of Romanticism, See L. BRAJNOVIC, *Grandes figuras de la literatura universal*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1973, pp. 173-180

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 1801 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.

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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, man aged 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

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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 divine⁷⁰.

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

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.

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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 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 mind set: 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 irrational⁷². 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 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

⁷¹ J.M. VALVERDE, *Historia de la Literatura*, Barcelona: Noguer, 1959, III, p. 9.

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 thought”. See D. GAMARRA, *L’immagine illuministica e romantica: ragione critica e sentimento dell’infinito*, in I. YARZA (a cura di), *Immagini dell’uomo. Percorsi antropologici nella filosofia moderna*, Armando, Roma 1996, pp. 39-62.

⁷³ Not in vain did Victor Hugo write in the preface to *Cromwell* that “Romanticism is liberalism in literature”.

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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 searching⁷⁴. 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 co-exist: 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

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)

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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 Griechen 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

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for their own traditions, and a jealous guarding of the particular features of its national character."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*,

⁷⁵ F. CHABOD, *L'idea di nazione*, Bari: Laterza 1967, pp. 17-18.

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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 Wilhelm (1767-1845)* and *Frie*

drich 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 emphasizes 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 La martine (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 came 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*

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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 promessi 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 Słowacki (1809-1849)*, and *Zygmunt Krasiński (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 starting 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