



**Lex et Res Publica**

Polish Legal and Political Studies

Edited by Anna Jaroń

Volume 2

Stanisław Filipowicz

Democracy – The Power of Illusion

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**Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Cover Design:

© Olaf Gloeckler, Atelier Platen, Friedberg

This publication was financially sponsored by the Institut of Political Studies of the University of Warsaw.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Filipowicz, Stanislaw.

Democracy : the power of illusion / Stanislaw Filipowicz.

pages cm — (Lex et res publica. Polish legal and political studies ; v. 2)

ISBN 978-3-631-62894-2

1. Democracy—Philosophy. 2. Political science—Philosophy.

I. Title.

JC423.F4427 2013

321.8—dc23

ISBN 978-3-653-02925-3 (Ebook)

2013006949

DOI 10.3726/978-3-653-02925-3

ISSN 2191-3250

ISBN 978-3-631-62894-2

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Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften

Frankfurt am Main 2013

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Peter Lang – Frankfurt am Main · Bern · Bruxelles · New York ·  
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## Blurb

There are so many questions to be asked about this form of government known as democracy. Does it infuse one with hope or illusion? Could it be considered to be blooming? Conversely, is it declining or quite simply failing? The story could be described as being impalpable as unending efforts to endorse and explain democracy tend to leave us steeped in doubt and hesitation; the tumult of uplifting expectations and bitter disappointments seem inexorable. Is it possible to say where the truth lies? Hopes are blended with misgivings and it is said that if it is not controversial it cannot be about democracy. This begs the question: who is right – the custodians of promise or the prophets of decline? In his famous study of modern democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville depicted democracy as a strong current carrying us away into an abyss? Is that truly the reality and are we ready to face it?

The book focuses on doubt as the author endeavours to call attention to the weight of critical thinking, which seems to be somewhat underestimated. In order to defend democracy it is necessary to generate hope, but hoping may be a dangerous vessel in which to put ones trust. The necessity to protect hope leads one to believe that democracy – even if it is not a complete success story – by its very nature is indubitable and essentially justified. Doubts may relate to performance; however, the substance, it is maintained, is sane and solid. Is that really so and how much do we have to forget in order to be able to sanction this view? This is, in fact, the main question the book raises.

In a sense it tries to reinvigorate the art of remembering, offering voice to those who never, in their writing on democracy, used a flattering tone. Starting with the Greek giants – Plato and Aristotle – through to modern and most recent times; going through a broad field of revealing criticism, which leaves one with the unsettling feeling that democracy is something to be explained rather than to be celebrated. Lending an ear to Tocqueville, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Ortega y Gasset, MacIntyre – to mention only a few of the protagonists – one comes to the realisation that one's hopes are neither uncontroversial nor well-founded. Everything may be called into question. Democracy borders upon the vast kingdom of illusion. Living in democracy, lamenting its underperformance, this fundamental question must not be overlooked – to what extent do the disappointments reflect the 'art of forgetting', allowing one to cast into oblivion all serious doubts, underpinning critical discourse on modernity and democracy?



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# Introduction

Alexis de Tocqueville compared democracy to ‘a rapid river’. Moreover, he admitted that his famous study *Democracy in America* was born out of ‘terror’. It was, as he explained ‘produced in the soul of the author by the sight of this irresistible revolution that has marched for so many centuries over all obstacles, and that we still see today advancing amid the ruins that it has made.’<sup>1</sup> Thus, democracy is a power that annihilates; it transforms while ruining at the same time. It reshapes the world but this reshaping should not give rise to great expectations. ‘[P]laced in the middle of a rapid river’, writes Tocqueville, ‘we obstinately fix our eyes on some debris that we still see on the bank, while the current carries us away and pushes us backwards toward the abyss.’<sup>2</sup>

This is a threatening *memento* which, undoubtedly, has its own value. Tocqueville is a credible author: sober, conscientious and shrewd. He respects reality, avoids exaggeration and doesn’t try to overwhelm the reader with his opinions. His work needs no recommendation and *Democracy in America* is a book which indubitably contains much wisdom. Despite the passage of time the content has lost none of its sagacity. The impression is given that the nineteenth century is being referred to and also that it refers specifically to America. However, in reality, Tocqueville treats all facts as cryptograms for a particular historical situation which ought to be viewed in a much broader sense. Furthermore, although democracy has lost none of its impetus, the situation with regard to its ideology and practice remains deeply flawed. So... is the river still carrying us ‘towards the abyss’?

Alexis de Tocqueville was neither a naïve enthusiast, nor was he a fatalist. He accepted that it might be possible ‘to instruct democracy’, ‘to purify its mores, to regulate its movements’. He believed that for the time being, however, everything looks different to what one might have anticipated: democracy ‘was adored as an image of strength’ it has been left to its own ‘wild instincts’, ‘each person submitted with servility to its slightest desires’.<sup>3</sup>

In the interim, he argued, ‘a new political science is needed for a world entirely new.’ It is exactly this science that might make it possible to tame the dangerous tendencies and, thus, remove the dominance of the worshipers of ‘the symbol of force’. However, Tocqueville is sharp-tongued as circumstances seem not to be favourable. In the chapter ‘Of the Omnipotence of the Majority’ he

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1 A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 2009), Introduction, vol. 1, 14.

2 Ibid., 17.

3 Ibid., 18.

says: 'I do not know any country where, in general, less independence of mind and genuine freedom of discussion reign than in America.'<sup>4</sup> In America praise is the most valued form of evaluation and there is practically no place for criticism. 'No writer, whatever his renown may be, can escape the obligation of singing the praises of his fellow citizens. The majority, therefore, lives in perpetual adoration of itself.'<sup>5</sup>

Tocqueville touches on a very significant issue: in a democracy, *panegyric* thinking has been all important and continues to be experienced to this day. 'Self-adoration' has become a feature of the democratic proclamation of faith. The spectre of 'the abyss' has been replaced with the vision of a glorious 'end of history' that Francis Fukuyama, a famous enthusiast, has written about. Understanding democracy has clearly taken on *propagandistic* features. Interpretations that influence the general way of thinking drown in the deluge of platitudes; there is no scope for reflection. Politicians, ever-ready to stress their own contributions, have, of course, the most to say about democracy. Tocqueville has already written about this: 'Molière criticised the Court in plays that he had performed before courtiers. But the power that dominates in the United States does not intend to be made sport of like this. The slightest reproach wounds it, the least prickly truth alarms it, and one must praise it from the forms of its language to its most solid virtues.'<sup>6</sup>

The façade, therefore, looks very impressive; the flattering rhetoric most important. 'The abyss' is not allowed to enter into the field of vision and, in addition, the problem refuses to disappear. 'The tyranny of the majority' that Tocqueville writes about cannot, after all, be seen as the expected finale. Panegyrics, of course, use another language: they speak of 'the power of the people'. Schismatics condemn illusions and have been able to use serious arguments for some time now. Tocqueville was not the first, nor was it he who looked deepest into 'the abyss'. It was Plato who, for the first time and probably in the most uncompromising way, depicted the 'charm' of the power exercised by *demos*. His observations have neither lost their attractiveness nor their strength of persuasion. Plato's voice still rings true when he predicts the inevitable fall of the political system in which unrestrained passions are all important and the deceit of demagogues, feeding *demos* with flattery in order to hide their own treacherous ambitions, is considered to be the greatest wisdom. His shrewdness has withstood the passage of time. Plato is not only worth reading: Plato should be read! However, the author of *The Republic* definitely

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4 Ibid., 260.

5 Ibid., 262.

6 Ibid.

does not leave any illusions to be dispelled: democracy inevitably leads to *tyranny*.

Plato is interested in human character; he believes that specific likes and dislikes, as well as inclinations, shape each political system and that everything is rooted in character. Today we usually turn this rule upside down: we assume that the mechanisms of a political system are most important. We believe that good laws are the matrix for good characters; we think enthusiastically about democracy. This belief has, of course, its foundations in the Enlightenment whose ideas proceeded in that direction, glorifying 'human rights'. The opponents of despotism described the change of a political system as a cure, a treatment removing disfigurements, as the birth of 'a new man'. The new political system was supposed to pave the way for a great regeneration. The panegyric exaggeration that sets the tone of all 'correct' descriptions of democracy has its roots exactly in that 'original sin' of the Enlightenment.

Plato is 'incurable': he presumes that the truth lies in human character. That is why democracy is doomed to failure. 'A democratic type', let us use Plato's phrase, develops when base emotions dominate. It is they who 'multiply and increase' in times of chaos (democracy is born in chaos when people rebel against oligarchs!). More noble aspirations gradually lose importance. Finally, it turns out that 'the citadel of the young man's soul', as Plato says, 'is empty.'<sup>7</sup> It is then taken over by 'false and boastful ideas and notions'. Democracy gives power to desires; 'boastful ideas' are used to excuse any wickedness and eccentricity. Unrestrained ambitions cause more and more chaos. Everything becomes dangerously unstable.

'His life has neither law nor order', writes Plato when describing the protagonist. Everyone takes on a multitude of things but none do anything reliably. They don't know how to, inasmuch as deranged ambitions reign and all principles become irrelevant. In fact, man becomes slave to his own desires. 'He puts the government of himself into the hands of the one which comes first', says Plato, 'and wins the turn; and when he has had enough of that, then into the hands of another; he despises none of them but encourages them all equally.'<sup>8</sup> 'Boastful ideas', of course, give us the right to call such a situation freedom. In fact, however, disorder rules.

In disorder, flatterer-demagogues manage best, for it is they who stage the grand finale. Understandably, not all passions can be satisfied. Since nothing limits their power, all are, so to speak, constantly tormented. Unfulfilled desires and ambitions must result in conflicts. That is what actually happens. Even laws

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7 Plato, *The Republic* (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, 1973) Book 8, 560b.

8 *Ibid.*, 561b.

have to fall victim to ‘boastful ideas’ in the end. In a democracy, writes Plato, people ‘cease to care even for the laws, written or unwritten; they will have no one over them.’ From then on only the cunning of the demagogues counts; they become the guardians of justice. Interestingly, their main tool is *flattery*, which they use to entice *demos* with promises, while keeping up illusory hopes, even though everything drifts towards catastrophe. The oligarchy fell because it was impossible to satisfy everyone’s ‘insatiable desire of wealth’, reminds Plato. Democracy has to fall because nobody will be able to satisfy his desire with wrongly understood freedom, which in fact represents a lack of principles, therefore arbitrariness.

The people are euphoric, ‘they get drunk by drinking more than they should of the unmixed wine of freedom.’<sup>9</sup> It is precisely thus that the treachery of the demagogues becomes apparent. Everything is allowed: all lies are permissible, meanness can be called justice and all are always right. Words lose their significance. One can accuse randomly and blame without reason. ‘A teacher in such a community is afraid of his students and flatters them.’<sup>10</sup> Illusion gets ever stronger, lawlessness deepens. Confusion gets entirely out of hand, nobody feels safe. This chaos is ‘the abyss’ where everything will perish; the pretence of freedom will disappear. ‘Then,’ argues Plato, ‘I don’t suppose that tyranny evolves from any constitution other than democracy, the most severe and cruel slavery – from the utmost freedom.’<sup>11</sup> Minds clouded by ‘boastful ideas’ are easily deluded. Moreover, all are also tired of the disarray. There comes a time when the enthusiasts of freedom applaud with gratitude the cleverest of the demagogues who promises justice. He is the champion of the right cause who ‘with his impious tongue and lips tastes kindred citizen blood...He banishes some, kills others, and drops hints to the people about the cancellation of debts and the redistribution of land.’<sup>12</sup> He has, of course, many admirers who ‘readily assent to the famous request for a bodyguard; all their fears are for him, they have none for themselves.’ ‘The most noble-minded’ becomes a dictator. ‘The people who have given birth to a dictator will feed him and his friends.’ When they come to their senses it is too late, the tyranny has flourished. They will have to experience ‘the harshest and bitterest form of slavery,’<sup>13</sup> be burdened with lawless and infamous power that is born of imposture and, worst of all, ‘full of craze’. The roots of ‘a dictatorial type’ are firmly planted in the madness

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9 Ibid., 562d.

10 Ibid., 563a.

11 Ibid., 564a.

12 Ibid., 565e.

13 Ibid., 569c.

of democracy that abolishes all principles. So, the abyss of insanity ...the finale! This is how a philosopher sees it.

Casting our minds back to the Greek beginnings we should not, therefore, concentrate our attention exclusively on Pericles' famous speech. As accounted by Thucydides in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Pericles, praising the Athenian democracy, said: 'we do not imitate, but are a model to others'. Philosophers did not agree with panegyrics. Let us not forget that, although Aristotle viewed the world differently to Plato, and did not totally condemn democracy, he labelled it on a par with tyranny and oligarchy as a 'degenerate'<sup>14</sup> political system. In other words, he depicted democracy as a perverse system where it is impossible to build the 'good' life efficiently. The state, he claimed, is nature's creation 'it comes to existence for the sake of a mere life while it exists for the sake of a good life.'<sup>15</sup> Perversion means that this goal cannot be achieved. Thus, Aristotle associates the concept of 'nature' with that of a 'goal'. He wrote in *Politics*: 'for what each thing is when its growth is completed we call the nature of that thing.'<sup>16</sup> Or, to put it in really simple terms, nature is 'the attainment of a goal'. Aristotle's objections are very serious, indeed. In a democracy, man, a creature by nature destined to live within the state, simply cannot become fully himself. The *Telos* of his life is going to ruin. The flaws of democracy are by no means of minor importance. Democracy signifies the loosening of the teleological order that makes people's lives 'good'. In the most extreme case, warns Aristotle, 'the people who is now a monarch, and no longer under the control of law, seeks to exercise monarchical sway, and grows into a despot.'<sup>17</sup> His ambitions are constantly fuelled by 'flatterers'. Ultimately, a catastrophe is bound to take place. A democracy in which the voice of the 'flatterers' is stronger than the voice of law adopts despotic features. In fact, concludes Aristotle, 'a democracy of this sort is not a political system. For where the laws do not rule there is no political system.'<sup>18</sup> Total anarchy becomes a fact: 'the decrees of the people override the laws.' Aristotle issues a very important warning: the authority of the lawgivers should not be equated with the authority of the law. A huge effort is needed to prevent democracy from turning into anarchy which results in an absolute collapse of all principles and the triumph of fraudulent ambitions which are sanctioned by the superficially-understood 'power of the people'.

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14 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. By B. Jowett (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1885), vol.1, Book 3, 1279b.

15 Ibid., Book 1, 1252b.

16 Ibid., 1253a.

17 Ibid., Book 4, 1292a.

18 Ibid.

Thus, democracy was not a political system that could gain a good reputation. Modern political concepts, as was clearly visible in the Enlightenment, were born out of a dialogue with the ancient thought. Initially, however, nobody wanted to hear about *democracy*. Even when the American constitution was being written, democracy was perceived as a clear threat. *The Founding Fathers* equated it with the power of the mob, the urban crowd prone to exaltation and violent protests, easily influenced by demagogues who take advantage of the most basic instincts. *Mob rule* could only frighten. *King mob* was seen as a violent and dangerous despot. ‘Democracy’ was not to emerge as a fully legitimate cultural value in America, commanding more or less universal approval, until the 1830s with the appearance of a national system of mass political parties.’<sup>19</sup> It is also worth remembering Jean Jacques Rousseau’s famous opinion from the *Social Contract* where, while assessing the chances of democracy, he concluded: ‘if there were a people of gods, it would govern itself democratically.’<sup>20</sup>

Finally however, we must admit that the situation started to change fairly rapidly. The new rhetoric, stressing the principle of the ‘sovereignty of the people’, obviously played an enormous role here. A sovereign had to be majestic. Theoreticians, the image masters, would attempt to elevate and idealise the new ruler. They would fashion him into the divinity of modern times. ‘All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts’<sup>21</sup>, to recall this well-known thesis of Carl Schmitt. We are dealing here with clear parallels, largely concerning the concept of sovereignty. Thus, the threatening *demos* was to become a sovereign-people. Its voice speaks from the heights of infallibility. Rousseau argued that ‘the general will is always right and tends to the public advantage.’<sup>22</sup>

Of course, society was also to change. The aspirations of wide social circles were gradually becoming more significant. This was particularly visible in America. It was there that democratic mythology would be the first to gather the most impetus. It was there that the firmest matrices would be created and the first heroes would emerge, bathed in the glow of new tales.

The once dubious word ‘democracy’ was becoming a success. Soon it would become a *prima donna*; there would come a time when it would sound like a triumphant hymn. We know these times very well. The success was really

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19 S. Elkins and P. McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism. The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993), 451.

20 J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. by G.D.H. Cole (Cosimo Classics, New York, 2008), 70.

21 C. Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. by G. Schwab (MIT Press, Cambridge, Ma., 1985), 36.

22 J.J. Rousseau, op. cit., 34.

rather staggering, like a fairy-tale; it resembled the story of Cinderella. A word, which used to carry a stigma, had been put on a pedestal. It was, of course, the result of the ascent of the idea itself.

By the early nineteenth century, the situation had already begun to change. In America, Thomas Jefferson won the elections in 1800, at the very beginning of the new century. He was the first politician who decidedly sought the support of the masses and who had no fear of the idea of mass participation. During the presidency of Andrew Jackson democracy began its triumphant march forward both in real terms and in the language, the carrier of ideas. The moment of glorification came in Abraham Lincoln's era: democracy would turn into a word suffused with radiance, bathed in the glow of a powerful new myth. Lincoln himself was described as 'the greatest character since Christ'.<sup>23</sup> Today, Lincoln's *credo*, the statement in the *Gettysburg Speech* that democracy is 'the power of the people, for the people and by the people', has become the basis for the general proclamation of faith. In its oversimplified version, without depth of meaning, yet enormously empowered by the supportive media, it has created a closed horizon of the final truths about politics. It has transformed itself into a myth. After all, an idea has emerged that liberal democracy is the final form of the world, that we have reached the end. Francis Fukuyama has announced 'the end of history' to the world!

'Myth is a type of speech', here is the most succinct definition suggested by Roland Barthes.<sup>24</sup> He adds, however, 'of course it is not any type: language needs special conditions in order to become a myth; we shall see them in a minute.' Myth is really a *message*: 'a system of communicating'. Barthes is adamant in stressing this. Not every word can be transformed into a myth, not every story can become an expanse of messages. A 'live' story becomes a myth, the truth which circulates and stimulates the mind. Myths cannot be based on abstract ideas. On the other hand there are no 'substantial' barriers to hold things back, as Barthes puts it. Everything can be a myth: since it is 'a mode of signification, it is a form'. 'A myth', Barthes explains, 'is not defined by the object of its message but the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth; there are no substantial ones.'<sup>25</sup> We shall discuss myth precisely in this sense here.

The captivating tale created by the Enlightenment, depicting the idea of freedom and the power of the people in a variety of ways, finally became a

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23 R. Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (Vintage Books, New York, 1976), 121.

24 R. Barthes, *Mythology*, trans. By A. Lavers (Hill and Wang, New York, 2001), 109.

25 Ibid.



message which triumphed in the sphere of political discourse. The 'language' of myth is heard everywhere. Freedom, participation, sovereignty, representation, emancipation, human rights, justice, people power, all these words may appear, of course, in the most diverse configurations and pompous and contrived forms. Trailing behind each one of them is a muddle of the most diverse interpretations, hopes and beliefs. Of course, they provoke many disputes, but they never lose their power. They create a horizon beyond which political discourse does not try to reach. But what do these words really mean? That is it. Let us remember that myth is not innocent. 'Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing', Barthes points out, 'it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion.'<sup>26</sup>

Not everyone, however, has been looking through the magic glass. Schismatics, who never intended to pay tribute, were also part of the 'realm of reason'. We will let them speak here. It needs to be emphasised strongly, however, that the issue does not concern prosaic political criticism. The question is about the thought which disturbs the resonance of a myth, which disenchants the great tale. It refers to criticism that makes us ponder to what extent we succumb to the charm of big words. On the other hand, it also concerns certain themes of the plot of 'disenchantment' that have never turned into the refrains of the myth.

We shall therefore try to leave the mythical sphere giving voice to those who have never concealed their doubts: to Schismatics, sceptics, iconoclasts, authors who have openly vacillated when analysing the consequences of 'disenchantment' and who interpreted experiences associated with the 'rule of reason' and emancipation so as to spite the panegyrics.

This book is made up of two parts. The first is more general and reveals the area in which myth is born. It shows the waters in which 'it basks'. The second part is more concrete and depicts the message of this compelling narrative. The aim, however, is not to repeat all the inevitable refrains. Let us not forget that the main goal is to reveal all the 'inflected' issues. It is therefore not going to be a routine lecture about freedom, sovereignty or participation. There is something else at stake here: to present the reasons which incline to hesitation.

The book does not make magnificent claims. It resembles a question mark rather than an exclamation mark. Thus, it is not interested in the overwhelming criticism that dashes any hopes regarding democracy. The idea hangs on a different thread. The main goal is to provoke doubts about our understanding of democracy; about our better 'understanding of how we understand it'. This is why it is useful to sift through truths which have become 'the sacred truths' of the myth.

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26 R. Barthes, *op. cit.*, 129.

When the executioner held up the severed head of Mary Stuart to show it to the Lords, from underneath an auburn wig her head with close-cropped, grey hair tumbled to the ground... How very often a similar spectacle takes place in literature when a critic or time itself reveals to us the grand, adorned skull of a deceased luminary!

*Sándor Márai*



Part One

**The ‘Disenchanted World’  
– Temptations and Barriers**



## Chapter One

# The Iron Cage of Rationality

Søren Kierkegaard noted in the preface to his treatise *Fear and Trembling*: ‘In our age nobody stops at faith but goes further’.<sup>27</sup> Faith has become unnecessary and as Max Weber said, the world – ‘disenchanted’. This laconic expression captures most aptly the meaning of the changes accompanying the birth of modernity. It was made possible when the Enlightenment abandoned faith and waged a successful war against superstitions. Even earlier than that, piety was harshly criticized by Protestantism for being suffused with magic and a belief in miracles, which collided with the demands of reason. Indeed, Protestantism, and this has been alluded to quite often, has been accepted as being conducive to the development of rationality. This was done by rejecting religious exaltation and dismissing ‘superstition’ as Hegel would point out in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.

And so modernity is born. Reason is placed on a pedestal and at the same time ‘fear and trembling’ fall into oblivion. The symbolism of illumination raises great hopes as the light of reason is meant to dispel the darkness of ignorance. Everything would be explained to the last detail; all mysteries would disappear. Flooded with light – good and evil spells would become irrelevant. ‘Enchanted’ powers would have to give way; restrained would be the terror the world instills in us.

‘Disenchantment’ has been proclaimed many a time and in different ways. It has been advocated by the thinkers of the Enlightenment. Antoine Condorcet’s *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Spirit* can be treated as one of the important messages of the Age of Enlightenment. It outlines an impressive perspective of the transformation linked to the accumulation of rational knowledge. ‘There will come a time’, Condorcet intimates, ‘when the sun will shine only on free men who know no other master but their reason.’ This sounds encouraging. Condorcet claims Europe has already crossed the threshold of decisive shifts. ‘Everything forecasts the imminent decadence of the great religions of the East’, he predicted.<sup>28</sup> Generalising, in Condorcet’s spirit, on the mechanisms of historical change (accumulation of knowledge and the development of the systems of knowledge),

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27 S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010), 4.

28 A. Condorcet, ‘Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind’ in *Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012), 129.

August Comte would speak of the 'three phases of the development of reason'. By leaving behind the theological and metaphysical phase, the human mind is finally entering the phase of 'rational positivism' and becoming totally self-sufficient. Faith and speculation are no longer important while reason systematically broadens the reaches of its own power. Conscientious in their observations and explanations, the sages of the new age – focusing on facts alone – remove all mysteries making the world fully legible. Ever since it was recognized that 'the imagination must always be subordinated to observation', as Comte noted in *The Treatise on the Spirit of Positive Philosophy*, we have witnessed the development of science. 'There can be no real knowledge', the author added, 'but that which is based on observed facts'.<sup>29</sup>

The circle of the enthusiasts of 'disenchantment' and converts to disillusion is obviously vast and represents different orientations and schools of thought. Clearly, then, a uniform style of 'disenchanted' does not exist. What do Luis Feuerbach and Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill and Charles Darwin have in common? Not much really, apart from the fact that they are all advocates of a world without secrets, a world in which reason is to play a leading role. Even Hegel himself who deals with the 'phenomenology of spirit', in the course of his dialectic philosophy, disposes of mystery, depriving the 'absolute spirit' of all secrets and providing a full explanation of everything to the last detail. Thus, even before Nietzsche proclaims the 'death of God', everything is a foregone conclusion.

Yet, the world has taken a different path, and, as Kierkegaard insisted, it went 'further.' The flourishing of science leaves no doubt: reason indeed is triumphant, however, some misgivings remain. For instance, the flourishing of science alone will not settle everything. Is reason really totally self-sufficient? From the very beginning the, how typical, hesitations make themselves felt in the Age of Enlightenment and later on. Rousseau closes the *Social Contract*, his treatise devoted to great projects of the rational reconstruction of society, with a chapter on 'civic religion', thus rehabilitating faith. In the years to come, Comte would start speaking of 'the religion of humanity', of the new knowledge-related 'priesthood.' Positivism would finally turn into a peculiar confession of faith. Darwin's discoveries sometimes provoke extreme exaltation and are treated as the new revelation of truth. An interesting testimony is left by the Russian nihilists and anarchists – their excitement convinces us that 'materialism' sometimes resembled a peculiar confession of faith and that it had its real devotees. The nihilists' exaltation bordered on eschatological madness.

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29 A. Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, trans. by H. Martineau (Batoche Books, Kitchener, 2000), 29.

Let us quote Kierkegaard again. ‘To ask where they are going, would perhaps be foolhardy; however, it is surely a sign of courtesy and good breeding for me to assume that everyone [who wishes to go further, author’s note] has faith, since otherwise it would be peculiar to talk of going further.’<sup>30</sup> The new kind of faith separated from traditionally understood revealed truths is seeping in through all sorts of cracks; rationality is not a monolith. Actually, alongside the ‘disenchanted’ world and in opposition to it there is the world of faith, understood in the most traditional manner and related to the revelation. There are also sections of faith which Comte saw as being irretrievably defeated, and where *magic*, construed concretely and literally, plays a crucial role. The style of the *New Age* movement is densely imbued with esoteric and occult elements. Interestingly, the numbers of people pursuing careers which focus on magic (such as astrologists, healers or card-readers) have reached record highs in the view of Massimo Introvigne, the Italian sociologist of religion, who, in his book *Il Ritorno della Magia*, precisely speaks of ‘the return of magic’ in our age.

On the other hand, also at issue here is magic that has been kept *secret*, hidden in various formulas of rationality (or pseudo-rationality, at the very least!). This is an immensely important and characteristic phenomenon but can only be addressed later. Now we can already say that rationality is often only a certain camouflage. The vast majority of all the exploits that go into the adoration of the behemoth of consumption are magical. Advertising and marketing create a new magical *sacrum*, a *sacrum* of objects: spreading a new belief in miracles and creating new superstitions. This has been presented superbly by George Ritzer in *The ‘Magical’ World of Consumption*.<sup>31</sup>

Another important factor, and one which Spinoza drew attention to a long time ago, is the propensity to openly destroy the discipline of rationality, especially in politics. For instance, in *A Political Treatise* he emphasized: ‘We showed too, that reason can, indeed, do much to restrain and moderate the passions, but we saw at the same time, that the road, which reason herself points toward, is very steep; so that such as persuade themselves, that the multitude of men distracted by politics can ever be induced to live according to the bare dictate of reason, must be dreaming of the poetic golden age, or of a stage-play.’<sup>32</sup>

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30 Kierkegaard, op. cit., 4-5.

31 G. Ritzer, J. Stepnisky and J. Lemich, ‘The “Magical” World of Consumption: Transforming Nothing into Something’, *The Berkeley Journal of Sociology* ( vol.49, 2005), 117-36.

32 B. Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise*, trans. by R.H.M. Elwes (Cosimo Classics, New York, 2007), 289.



So, what is rationality? Is it really just a 'hazy hieroglyph' as Michael Oakeshott suggests in his essay *Rational Conduct*?<sup>33</sup> Again it is hard to generalize, as the plethora of interpretations and conceptions, disputes and controversies is so vast as to make any generalization doomed from the start. Thus, sticking to Weber's style, let us focus on the peculiarities of 'disenchantment.'

Max Weber is specific and precise in the way he presents the whole issue. He is interested in cultural shifts, changes in human conduct and a certain mode of activity which represents an appeal to reason. Weberian 'interpretive sociology' does not encroach upon areas reserved for metaphysics. The concept of rationality is assigned a relatively narrow meaning by Weber, where 'intelligibility' is of paramount importance. 'Rational' is that which can be 'explained *intelligibly*', that which is amenable to clarification.<sup>34</sup> 'The "understanding" of human behaviour achieved through explanation contains a qualitatively specific "obviousness", the 'degree' of which may 'vary dramatically.' After all, we can also understand (explain to ourselves) various deeds, the nature of which is beyond our full comprehension, for instance, as magic or sorcery; in which case our understanding is incomplete. We would not call these actions rational, of course, although they could still be understandable to a certain extent. 'The highest degree of obviousness', writes Weber, 'is that of an interpretation in terms of rational purposefulness. Purposefully rational behaviour is behaviour exclusively oriented to means (subjectively) considered adequate to attain goals (subjectively) clearly comprehended.'<sup>35</sup> It is this type of rationality that modern Western culture would hand down to posterity, forcing man into the 'iron cage' of reason.

This is a transformation which involves all aspects of human activity: the economy, practices related to governance and law-making, culture and customs and, also, implies the most far-reaching secularization. It is related to the predominant form of thinking at the heart of which lies the goal/means relationship. Indeed, this is the way Weber presented the *rationalization* process. 'Weber studies the rationalization of action systems' says Jürgen Habermas, 'only under the aspect of purposive rationality.'<sup>36</sup> He has established, as he explains later, that the 'capitalist modernization follows a pattern such that cognitive-instrumental rationality surges beyond the bounds of the economy and

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33 M. Oakeshott, 'Human Conduct' in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 1991), 99-131.

34 M. Weber, 'Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology' in Z. Krasnodębski, *M. Weber* (Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa, 1999), 119.

35 *Ibid.*

36 J. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action. Lifeworld and System. A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. by T. McCarthy, vol. 2, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1989), 303.

state into other communicatively structured areas of life and achieves dominance there at the expense of moral-political and aesthetic-practical rationality.<sup>37</sup> ‘Modernity’, contends Charles Taylor often following in Weber’s tracks, has ultimately become a ‘historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality).’<sup>38</sup>

Rationalization, therefore, signified a great historical change; abandoning the earlier ways of living associated with religion and the respect for tradition. This demanded ‘obviousness’ which meant that human conduct could be governed only by *legible* rules. Weber clearly emphasizes the limited scope of rationalization in the essay *The Peculiarities of Western Culture*. Rationalization would shape the face of the West. Within the confines of its territories, science would triumph, capitalist economies would develop and a bureaucratized political machinery would emerge, giving rise to the state, as Weber said. He argued that only in the West is the state understood to be a rational political institution.<sup>39</sup> To this let us add, the erosion of religious beliefs. Weber is clearly speaking of the ‘fundamental importance of the economy,’ but adding also: ‘the development of economic rationalism is partly dependent on rational technology and law, but it also requires people to have a favourable disposition toward adopting certain types of practical rational conduct.’ This ‘favourable disposition’ is largely associated with the elimination of religious influence. In the past, the way of living was primarily shaped by magical and religious forces and ideas of ‘ethical obligations’, over time however, these forces would be deprived of authority. Modernity’s message is clearly defined: it is to safeguard the dominance of *intelligibility* and the predictability of human behaviour. Modern rationality is being realized by forcing a discipline of aims, while discipline, itself, would become the ideal. Characterizing modernity, Michel Foucault, not without reason, would speak of the birth of ‘disciplinary society.’

Actually, ‘disenchantment’ has a double meaning as it denotes a historical change taking place spontaneously, but at the same time an ideal – a glorified conception of the world. After all, continuous ‘disenchantment’ is a fundamental postulate of reason: an imperative of rationality. Indeed, it is here that the ‘normative content of modernity’, as Habermas puts it, finds its expression. So, finally, disenchantment is a situation in which facts have taken on a normative meaning. The horizon has been closed off. We can think of no other world.

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37 Ibid., 304-05.

38 Ch. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, Durham, N.C. 2004), 1.

39 M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion), (J.C.B Mohr, Tübingen, 1988).

The reign of instrumental reason begins; the elimination of everything that does not meet the strict demands of 'intelligibility'. Conceptions of life colliding with *Zweckrationalität* are banished. Instrumental reason imposes tight restrictions: all that does not meet its requirements must be rejected as 'irrational.' Naturally, objections are raised, albeit with little effect due to the fact that they are incapable of shaking the system's foundations. 'This complaint against the "disenchantment" of the world', writes Charles Taylor, 'has been articulated again and again since the Romantic era, with its sharp sense that human beings had been triply divided by modern reason – within themselves, between themselves and, from the natural world.'<sup>40</sup> So, the complaint carries a very clear message, which falls on deaf ears; for the system has its own merciless requirements and is highly effective. The reign of instrumental rationality does not result from arbitrary decisions which can be rejected invoking a competitive system of values. Thus, moralizing criticism carries no weight. 'In a society whose economy is largely shaped by market forces', writes Taylor, 'all economic agents have to give an important place to efficiency, if they are to survive [...] the common affairs have to be managed to some degree according to the principles of bureaucratic rationality [...] we are forced to operate to some degree according to the demands of modern rationality [...] whether or not it suits our own moral outlook.'<sup>41</sup>

Intellectual opposition is of course possible and the temptation to think 'upside down' quite often makes itself felt. The question whether one can go beyond the horizon of modernity plays an important role nowadays. Habermas stressed, however, that the '[r]adical critique of *reason* exacts a high *price* for taking leave of modernity.'<sup>42</sup> The questioning of the recognized formulas of rationality results in one being relegated to the side-lines. Thinkers such as Adorno, Foucault or Derrida (it is them that Habermas has in mind) have found themselves in a sphere of deep dissonance. Their conceptions failed to shape new practical formulas of rationality. They failed to transform practice-organizing conventions. In spite of their renown they remained outsiders and, in the words of Habermas, these thinkers have created 'discourses without a place'.<sup>43</sup> Their conceptions 'denounce' modernity and are guided by new 'normative intuitions.' They suggest overcoming alienation is possible and promise to thwart the power of instrumental reason. They beguile with images

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40 Ch. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2000), 94.

41 Ibid., 97.

42 J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. by F.G. Lawrence (MIT Press, Cambridge Mass, 1990), 336.

43 Ibid., 337.

of ‘inviolable inter-subjectivity’; in other words, a total metamorphosis of the existing system of interrelationships. ‘With the counterconcepts (injected as empty formulas) of being, sovereignty, power, difference, and nonidentity, this critique points to the contents of aesthetic experience; but the values derived therefrom and explicitly laid claim to – the values of grace and illumination, ecstatic rapture, bodily integrity, wish-fulfillment, and caring intimacy – do not cover the moral change that these authors tacitly envision in connection with a life practice that is intact’.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, their concepts merely fuel the fever of eccentric desires, nonetheless the shell of ‘instrumental rationality’ is hard.

Can it not be cracked? Are the aspirations of eccentric minds of no import whatsoever? Has ‘bureaucratization’ become a ‘religion’ of sorts, a new form of idolatry, ruling out all criticism? Habermas reminds us that modernity was supposed to represent emancipation taking place according to the rules of rational *self-definition*. The idea was to affirm humanity inherent in the idea of *subjectivity* (treated as the opposite of objectification). Freedom was identified with the power of thinking. ‘Consequently, the *ne plus ultra* of inwardness, of subjectiveness,’ Hegel wrote, ‘is thought. Man is not free when he is not thinking; for except when thus engaged he sustains a relation to the world around him as to another, an alien form of being.’<sup>45</sup> Hegel believed that only thoughts are capable of absorbing themselves, of abolishing the stigma of objectification, and making continuous transformations.

A Hegelian interpretation stresses the importance of practices related to developing self-knowledge. The simple ‘I know’, glorified by the Age of Enlightenment, turned into a highly complex formula: ‘I know that I know’; I am striving to keep my awareness in constant motion, crossing the boundaries of objectification. ‘This is utter and absolute freedom’, writes Hegel, ‘for the pure ego, like pure light, is with itself alone.’<sup>46</sup>

Modern rationalism, of course, speaks with the language of *knowledge* – the language of science, which makes the power of reason more concrete. Revelling in its own power, human reason yields to the temptation of objectification. When referring to Hegel, it is worth noting that ‘the normative content of modernity’ cannot be separated from the concept of *self-knowledge*; for it is self-knowledge which realizes the truth of freedom. Hegel believes philosophy is the authentic source of self-knowledge. Thus, a normative concept of modernity should encompass the praise of philosophy. Without philosophy’s continuous

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44 Ibid.

45 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (Batoche Books, Kitchener, 2001), 458.

46 Ibid.

support the complete disenchantment of the world is impossible. Bereft of self-knowledge, reason would naturally be inclined toward new forms of 'seduction', while admiring its own fetishes. Even the most refined science can become an overpowering force, cramming human thought into the 'cage of reason.' In the Age of Enlightenment, Hegel noted, philosophy gained power over the human mind.<sup>47</sup> However, we should add, only for a short while.

Modernity is 'an unfinished project', to recall the well-known contention made by Habermas.<sup>48</sup> The project was designed to finally overcome all the barriers restricting the freedom of reason. In his words: 'people also considered themselves as "modern" in the age of Charlemagne... In the process culminating in the celebrated *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, the dispute with the protagonists of a classicistic aesthetic taste in late seventeenth-century France, it was always *antiquitas*, the classical world, which was regarded as a normative model to be imitated.'<sup>49</sup>

So we can speak of a break-up. The 'unfinished project' posits the absolute reign of reason. Modern rationality, however, would be realized in incomplete and flawed forms. Reason would not attain its goal. The rationality of esoteric academic discourse would become an isolated space. Reason would speak to us as an incomprehensibility.

The project of modernity' explains Habermas, 'as it was formulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century consists in the relentless development of the objectivating sciences, of the universalistic foundations of morality and law, and of autonomous art, all in accord with their own immanent logic. But at the same time it also results in releasing the cognitive potentials accumulated in the process from their esoteric high forms and attempting to apply them in the sphere of praxis, that is, to encourage the rational organisation of social relations.'<sup>50</sup>

However, things turned out differently. Not only was reason incapable of finding knowledge in 'esoteric' forms, it was also unable to connect the world of thought to that of *praxis*. The expansion of knowledge did not go hand in hand with the development of the new morality; the sphere of aesthetics got completely out of control. Instead of uniformisation we can speak of disintegration. The modern world did not assimilate the influence of reason in the manner expected by the authors of the modernity project. 'Partisans of the

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47 Ibid., 465.

48 J. Habermas, 'Modernity – an unfinished project', in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity. Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1996).

49 Ibid., 39.

50 Ibid., 45.

Enlightenment such as Condorcet could still entertain the extravagant expectation that the arts and sciences would not merely promote the control of the forces of nature, but also further the understanding of self and world, the progress of morality, justice in social institutions, and even human happiness.<sup>51</sup> Expectations were not met. Modernity got out of control. It is an ‘unfinished project’ primarily because it proved impossible to give shape to forms of life integrating knowledge, morality and art on the plane of reason.

All the same, the Enlightenment bore abundant fruit. The expansion of knowledge became truly impressive; nevertheless, not without a serious problem. ‘Science’ as Jean-François Lyotard stressed, ‘has always been in conflict with narratives.’<sup>52</sup> It eliminates tales which could blend the sense of diverse experiences together, and in so doing, prevent them from establishing – as they have always done – the ability to understand and transcend the formulas of instrumental rationality. Science creates patterns of instrumental thinking; its successes have to be paid for with the crisis of awareness, which falls apart and is dispersed. Thus, we are witness to the birth of, in Lyotard’s words, ‘postmodernist’ knowledge, which is testimony to the ‘crisis of narration.’ ‘Meta-narratives’ disappear – great stories which explain the sense of aspirations related to generating and using knowledge and shaping a consistent perspective for all endeavours. ‘Authorization through metanarratives’, as Lyotard explains, ‘implies the history of philosophy.’<sup>53</sup> Hence, the most general reading of all practices. This used to be the nature of the ‘Enlightenment narrative in which the hero of knowledge works toward an ethico-political end - universal peace.’<sup>54</sup> In time, however, the ‘hero of knowledge’ begins to lose orientation and the nature of knowledge changes. Nobody tries any more to authorize it by appealing to deliberations on the sense of history; nobody generates stories integrating dispersed themes. Knowledge is being born in enclaves created by various ‘language games’. They are ‘heterogenic’ in nature, to use Lyotard’s expression. Generalizations and the merging of diverse perspectives are out of the question. The status and nature of knowledge is changing. ‘To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative

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51 Ibid.

52 J. F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984), xxiii.

53 Ibid., xxiv.

54 Ibid., xxiii-xxiv.

language elements.<sup>55</sup> Thinking no longer involves reflection which takes in wider horizons and shapes the formulas of intelligibility, which transcend the range of instrumentally understood *effectiveness*. Thinking is losing its former significance conferred upon it by 'metanarratives.' Knowledge, Lyotard contends, is bowing to 'mercantilization'. It 'is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself.'<sup>56</sup> It serves the goals defined by instrumental reason. So, it is not building a plane of understanding; it is imperious: it imposes its requirements in the name of effectiveness. Thinking is becoming a question of a particular *technology*; it consists in the efficient use of modules produced beforehand. It is a skill which can be understood in a purely instrumental way. Education models which used to locate thinking in the sphere of ideals linked to emancipation and the development of moral capabilities are becoming insignificant. 'The old principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the training (*Bildung*) of minds, or even of individuals' Lyotard claims, 'is becoming obsolete and will become ever more so.'<sup>57</sup> In the new situation thinking is being placed on the level of *techne* – it is to serve the purpose of knowledge generation, while the place of narration must be taken over by *technology*. This is distinctly borne out by the increasingly obvious 'hegemony' of computer science, something Lyotard frequently underscores. And so, in the end, thinking is losing its emancipative character: 'knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major – perhaps *the* major – stake in the worldwide competition for power'.<sup>58</sup> The structures of instrumental reason leave no room for manoeuvre. Thinking is becoming a sphere of absolute subjugation; the development of science involves the expansion of imperious discourses which create a narrow space of instrumentally expressed (technological) intelligibility. Knowledge is directly becoming the mainspring of power.

The individual is pressurized by the requirements imposed by formulas of rationality– objectified in scientific discourse. Having to experience all this he emerges defenceless. Habermas recalls: 'Weber saw the noncoercive, unifying power of collectively shared convictions disappearing along with religion and metaphysics, along with the forms of objective reason in Horkheimer's sense of the term'.<sup>59</sup> The erosion of the narrative formulas of awareness increases the

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55 Ibid., xxiv.

56 Ibid., 4-5.

57 Ibid., 4.

58 Ibid., 5.

59 J. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.2, 301.

helplessness of man. The world as a whole ceases to be intelligible; besides, due to the fall of metaphysics it will no longer be perceived as a whole. The message of Nietzsche's critique is coming true: thinking is taking on a *perspective* nature, it is related to the rejection of illusions. As Nietzsche posits, illusions were brought into being by the 'colossal and awe-inspiring monster', hence, 'dogmatic philosophy.' It is philosophy which imposed the 'invention of the pure spirit and the good in itself.'<sup>60</sup> 'Who spoke of the spirit and good as Plato did', Nietzsche declares, 'stood truth on her head and denied *perspective* itself, the basic condition of all life.'<sup>61</sup> It follows then, that all knowledge is fragmentary and comes into being by mapping out a certain perspective. There is no glance which would enable us to grasp the whole or rise above the area of dispersion; there is no eye which sees more, breaking free from the merciless discipline of perspective.

The expansion of science, the freedom to act on the part of instrumental reason, unbridled by any requirements stemming from the search for truth (venturing beyond the sphere of effectiveness), marks the triumph of non-uniformity. Modern rationality is realized through dispersion. Technological reason rejects requirements related to the quest for a uniform perspective. 'A reason restricted to the cognitive-instrumental dimension was placed at the service of a merely subjective self-assertion', writes Habermas. 'It is in this sense that Weber spoke of a polytheism of impersonal forces.'<sup>62</sup> The verdicts of reason cease to inspire coherent convictions. The individual is made to face the most diverse requirements of 'rationality', which it does not really comprehend and which seem arbitrary and hostile. 'Polytheism' represents instability, the downfall of hierarchy and uniform value systems. We are thus dealing with the fragmentation 'of ethical totality.'<sup>63</sup>

'The purely subjective aspiration for asserting one's own position', which is typical of instrumental reason, is reflected not only in the audacity with which new areas of 'knowledge' are being created. It also makes itself felt in the form of extreme arbitrariness, exhibited by individuals who revel in the freedom of thought. 'As objective reason is stunted, becoming subjective, culture loses its strength and ability to reconcile particular interests with each other by means of convictions.'<sup>64</sup> Instrumental reason, then, is incapable of shaping *convictions*. It can exert coercion, forcing technological discipline. Yet still, it is incapable of

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60 F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. W. Kaufman (Random House Inc., New York, 1966), 3.

61 Ibid.

62 Habermas, *op. cit.*, 301.

63 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 347.

64 Ibid.



developing knowledge to facilitate orientation in the world, instead becoming a *commodity* revealing its usefulness only in the narrow scope of *Zweckrationalität*. The significance of this knowledge, irrespective of its nature or field, is purely technical. The discipline of the modern world is, as Weber had it, 'stringent'; it represents the victory of objectification. Modernity is but 'objectified intelligence'.<sup>65</sup> In no way does discipline resemble the virtues of antiquity; nor does it spring from personal aspirations. Rather, it is imposed from the outside by the exigencies of instrumental reason. It finds its most meaningful confirmation in *bureaucratization* which is becoming the leading principle of the modern world.

Objectified intelligence is also that animated machine, the bureaucratic organization, with its specialisation of trained skills, its division of jurisdiction, its rules and hierarchical relations of authority. Together with the inanimate machine [that is, a fabricating system – author's words] it is busy fabricating the shell of bondage which men will perhaps be forced to inhabit some day, as powerless as the fellahs of ancient Egypt.<sup>66</sup>

Rationality imposed by instrumental reason does not involve emancipation. Modern rationality fulfils itself as a power which shatters independence. The 'fellahs' of modernity are either condemned to a radical revolt undermining the rigours of the system or to blind subjugation. A 'conflict between system imperatives and the lifeworld imperatives' is becoming inevitable, Habermas argues.<sup>67</sup> After all, a revolt is only remotely possible. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the effective questioning of the whole, where the ability to think in terms of the whole is disappearing, where the growth of knowledge spanning across the horizons has been stifled. 'If society as a whole is no longer thought of as a higher-level subject that knows itself, determines itself, and realizes itself, there are no paths of relation-to-self upon which the revolutionaries could enter in order to work with, for, and on the crippled macro subject.'<sup>68</sup> In a bureaucratized reality there is no 'subject of a higher order.' The sense of a common fate is replaced by a particular discipline of subordination. We are merely dealing here with the 'intersubjectiveness of a higher order', as Habermas defines it, hence, with 'processes of the formation of will and public opinion.' This is not enough; these processes are just a peculiar conglomerate of dispersion; a wavering articulation of episodic preferences which are apt to change at any moment. 'None of the

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65 M. Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. by G. Roth and C. Wittich (Bedminster Press, New York, 1968), 1399-1403.

66 *Ibid.*, 1402.

67 Habermas, *op. cit.*, 349.

68 *Ibid.*, 357.

subsystems could occupy the top of a hierarchy and represent the whole the way the emperor could once do for the empire in stratified societies. Modern societies no longer have at their disposal an authoritative centre for self-reflection and steering.<sup>69</sup> Contrary to appearances, the state does not play this role. In the system of 'polytheistic powers' of instrumental reason the state is not creating a higher level of rationality; it takes its place alongside other petitioners imposing their own demands. 'As a matter of fact, today politics', writes Habermas, 'has become an affair of a functionally specialized subsystem; and the latter does not dispose over the measure of autonomy relative to the other subsystems that would be required for central steering, that is, for an influence of society as a totality upon itself, an influence that comes from it and goes back to it.'<sup>70</sup> Politicians can no longer appeal to some 'higher reasons.' In fact, concepts, such as reason of state or the common weal, have become incomprehensible. The only thing that is understood is that which functions in a simple, instrumentally constructed system of reference. The modern democratic state has kept the traditional attribute of sovereignty, that is, the ability to make law. However, law is already treated in a purely instrumental fashion; it is not entitled to the majesty of the law which in yonder days resulted from the belief in the superior mission of law and its objective importance. Indeed, in the 'iron cage of rationality' the authority of reason becomes disintegrated; the idea of rationality is split which only serves to exacerbate the condition of helplessness. The control of particular formulas of rationality is getting out of hand; there are no higher instances, no general truths and everything can be justified in the patterns of instrumental rationality. 'Polytheism' is a system which overpowers effective criticism and eliminates complete and authentic validation; it merely paves the way for arbitrary questioning.

Nevertheless, let us remember that the key to the 'iron cage of rationality' lies in the hand of the philosopher. Are we able to define new formulas of rationality while undermining the authority of instrumental reason? Indeed, how was it possible for a cluster of determinants to arise favouring the birth of the impersonal rule of 'polytheistic powers'?

Maybe we have to bring ourselves to take up very radical measures, 'revaluate all our values', as Hannah Arendt believes. Rethink the experience of modernity in terms of the fundamental controversiality of decisions which have determined the nature of modernity. For having made *manufacturing*, multiplying profits and the intoxication with growth the prime concern. *Homo faber* is a radical who destroys all the canons of wisdom which used to locate man above the sphere of *techné*. His dealings, despite the appearance of multiplying benefits, actually consist in

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69 Ibid., 358.

70 Ibid., 360-61.

bringing total destruction. It is a case of a nihilistic degradation in which the exhilaration with the will to power takes centre stage – an exhilaration which compensates for the sense of emptiness. The early days of modernity would conceal this sinister sense of the changes which allow for the glorification of manufacturing, but later on, the last illusions would be dispelled. Modernity would shamefully culminate in extermination; the 'factories of death' would be the site where the craziest exposition of the will to power would take place. This would represent definite instrumentalisation; the final degradation of the world – forced into the frames of a mad and murderous *techne*. These are destructive powers, the powers of modernity. Manufacturing involves processing; a metamorphosis which imparts on everything the nature of raw material. *Homo faber* acts with remorseless consistency and without scruples. There is an inexorable logic in all the steps taken. 'Here it is indeed true that the end justifies the means; it does more, it produces and organizes them. The end justifies the violence done to nature to win the material, as the wood justifies killing the tree, and the table justifies destroying the wood.'<sup>71</sup> In the end, everything can turn into a resource – even human life serving the mad ideas of 'fabricating' history, freed from the stigma of fault.

And so, modern rationality degrades thought turning it simply into a tool used in manufacturing. The autonomy of reason is out of the question. 'During the work process, everything is judged in terms of suitability and usefulness for the desired end, and for nothing else.'<sup>72</sup> This is a historical situation Arendt is speaking about. Fabrication reveals the fulfilled sense of modernity. Anything that is different, that does not serve the manufacturing process becomes 'irrational.' Thinking no longer involves the possibility of making a choice. Instead, it concerns the adaptation, in a narrow scope, of technological rationality. Venturing beyond this framework can take place solely thanks to the contrast imbued with the traits of illumination; by virtue of a flash of inspiration which rekindles the ability to think beyond the sphere of *techne*.

Indeed, the point is the ability to philosophize; the wisdom, which makes it possible to keep a distance toward the world and toward one's own experience. This is the reason why Arendt needs the Greeks.

In the world of the Greeks the sphere of manufacturing was clearly separated from the sphere of *praxis* – the sphere of human *activity*. And it was the latter that was awarded primacy. 'But life is action', wrote Aristotle, 'and not production.'<sup>73</sup> And he would add: 'for happiness is activity.'<sup>74</sup> Acting involves

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71 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998), 153.

72 Ibid.

73 Aristotle, 'Politics' in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 6, book 1, 1254a.

74 Ibid., book 7, 1325a.

the undertaking of risk as a result of which life improves. It embraces moulding one's own character; using the entire potential with which man, a rational being, was endowed by nature. This becomes possible through man's contacts with other people in the sphere of mutual relationships existing in a state. Through contact with other people, one learns how to be with oneself and what to do to change for the better. This is the sense of living together, and this is what acting is all about. It serves the purpose of revealing and realizing the potentials related to the rational nature of a human being. *Speech* is of fundamental importance here. 'Of all living beings', says Aristotle, 'man alone is endowed with speech.' And he adds: 'speech serves to define what is useful or harmful, as well as what is just and unjust.'<sup>75</sup> As we would say today, acting takes place thanks to communicative practices. They delineate the sphere of shared opinions, the sphere of decisions thanks to which the conception of the good life acquires a concrete shape. Acting signifies the recognition and practice of *virtues*; it affords possibilities for finding the road leading to happiness. According to Aristotle, it is so, because 'everyone gets a share of happiness which corresponds to the amount of virtue and reason he/she manifests.' Ultimately, then, 'the best life for each individual separately as well as the state as a community is a virtuous life.'<sup>76</sup> And this is the fundamental sense of acting.

Hermeneutics, which is repossessing the sense of the Greek experience, would imply a return to the sphere of *praxis*, destroyed by instrumental reason when it imposed its own priorities. This is the very purpose of the 'uncovering of the one acting through speech and acts', as Arendt has it. Only efforts of this kind can enable man to reach beyond the sphere of the degrading objectification in which *homo faber* has found himself: the unveiling of human 'difference', as Arendt puts it. 'Speech and action reveal this unique distinctness. Through them men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men.'<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the existence of the sphere of acting, the *praxis* sphere, is crucial. Outside this sphere humanity is mute. 'A life without speech and without action', writes Arendt, 'is literally dead to the world.' We arrive onto the world scene taking up action: 'with word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth... This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity, like labour, and it is not prompted by utility, like work.'<sup>78</sup> Man has a gift for providing the beginnings, for initiating. In this gift the truth about

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75 Ibid., book 1, 1253a.

76 Ibid., book 7, 1323b – 1324a.

77 Arendt, op.cit., 176.

78 Ibid., 177.

the human condition is revealed. 'Because they are *initium*', writes Arendt, 'newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action.' Instrumental reason, by intensifying production energy, at the same time reduces the ability to initiate. This spells a drastic degradation: man is doomed to narrowness. *Homo faber* must accept the pathetic routine. His reasonableness is realized exclusively on the level of *techne* – manufacturing capabilities in the broadest sense. The predominance of instrumental reason shows that, indeed, the sense of the human condition is concealed under a curtain made up of the concept of usefulness. Man-the-manufacturer becomes entangled in the mechanism of endless repetition, magnifying his alienation and inertia. 'The trouble with the utility standard', writes Arendt, 'inherent in the very activity of fabrication is that the relationship between means and end on which it relies is very much like a chain whose every end can serve again as a means in some other context. In other words, in a strictly utilitarian world, all ends are bound to be of short duration and to be transformed into means for some further ends.'<sup>79</sup> Gaining benefit entails the endless consumption of existing resources and processing becomes the only end. Utilitarian narrowness, actually, results in the gradual erosion of all values. Recognizing the imperative of usefulness, *homo faber*, unawares, is heading into nihilism. A situation whereby 'all values', as Nietzsche pointed out, 'are losing value'. '[I]f man-the-user', writes Arendt, 'is the highest end, "the measure of all things", then not only nature, treated by *homo faber* as the almost "worthless material" upon which to work, but the "valuable" things themselves have become mere means, losing thereby their own intrinsic "value".'<sup>80</sup> Thinking, in keeping with the imperative of usefulness, is in no way fit to decipher the mechanism of degradation; the entanglement in the structures of instrumental effectiveness is definite. The need arises for 'revaluation of all values'; the questioning of habits which *homo faber* has adopted at the beginning of his journey. Arendt is of the belief that philosophy needs to make the effort to initiate: define the new beginning and build a perspective which would enable venturing outside the patterns of productivity. To discard the stigma which is left by 'the modern merging into one of manufacturing and cognition', as the author of the *Human Condition* says.<sup>81</sup> Thought should once again become selfless. Language has to break free from the yoke created by the canons of instrumental productivity by returning to the sphere of praxis and illuminating the area of activity: the scene on which *man* can once again make his appearance.

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79 Ibid., 154.

80 Ibid., 155.

81 Ibid., 320.

Through Nietzsche, and later on through Heidegger and Arendt, the Greek reminiscences lead modern thought toward hermeneutics which breaks the barriers of instrumental reason. These recollections will reappear in Habermas in his deliberations confronting the discipline of instrumental rationality with the rationality rooted in the sphere of *praxis*, and with the rationality of communicative action. Like Arendt (and Heidegger earlier) Habermas believes that the whole impetus of modernity originates from the fusion of ‘manufacturing and cognition’.

However, it would turn out that what was to determine the strength of reason would become the cause of its weakness. Barring a narrow sphere of technical effectiveness, modern thinking is condemned to helplessness. Is it possible to regenerate the abilities wrecked in the interlacing of *episteme* and *techne*? Is it still possible to transform formulas of rationality in such a way so as to prevent them from imposing undisputed objectification? Invoking Aristotle, this is the question Habermas raises in *The Classical Doctrine of Politics in Relation to Social Philosophy*.

Habermas is interested in the changes knowledge undergoes when it directly organizes the sphere of human activity. According to Aristotle, this is ‘politics’, namely ‘the theory of the state’. ‘In Aristotle’s opus’, Habermas reminds us, ‘the politics is part of the practical philosophy.’<sup>82</sup> Aristotle lists political theory among ‘practical sciences’. They are concerned with things which can be different from what they are, unlike ‘theoretical sciences’ which deal with ‘that which cannot be different from what it is’. Politics, then, does not seek absolute truth (*episteme*); it is simply concerned with ‘a prudent decision’ (*prohairesis*). It is directly linked to the sphere of *praxis*. ‘Politics was understood to be the doctrine of the good and just life; it was the continuation of ethics’, Habermas noted.<sup>83</sup> It was supposed to develop abilities facilitating making judgments; organize the sphere of interrelationships mobilizing the speech apparatus, emphasizing mutual communication. ‘The old doctrine of politics referred exclusively to *praxis*, in the narrow sense of the Greeks. This had nothing to do with *techne*, the skilful production of artifacts and the expert mastery of objectified tasks. In the final instance, politics was always directed toward the formation and cultivation of character; it proceeded pedagogically and not technically.’<sup>84</sup>

Modern knowledge of politics would be born in an area created by the requirements of modern science, combining *episteme* and *techne*. It would

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82 J. Habermas, ‘The Classical Doctrine of Politics in Relation to Social Philosophy’ in *Theory and Practice*, trans. by J. Viertel (Beacon Press, Boston, 1974), 41.

83 Ibid., 42.

84 Ibid.

abandon the sphere of *praxis* and renounce pedagogical ambitions. It would focus its attention on 'the expert mastery of objectified tasks', referring to the authority of truth. It would thus give shape to totally different preferences and capabilities than practical philosophy does. It would neglect skills related to making 'prudent choices'. It would acquire significance as a 'political technique of correct state organization', in the words of Habermas. The *praxis* sphere would become a field of inspection imposing the discipline of *objectification*; the concept of the good life would be obscured by a fascination with the growth of manufacturing capabilities. Knowledge is to open the door to a victorious expansion – ruling in the sphere of objects. This is the way its calling is understood. Bacon's maxim *scientia propter potentiam* is triumphant.

Hobbes' concepts testify to the great breakthrough in the area of political thought. The author of *Leviathan* believes science settles the question of truth. The application of knowledge is of a technical nature. People do not have to be brought up; we should not be thinking about shaping their character. Instead, there needs to be a *system* created in which people would be forced to behave in a certain way. Habermas explains that according to Hobbes, 'the translation of knowledge into practice, the application, is a technical problem. With a knowledge of the general conditions for a correct order of the state and of society, practical prudent action of human beings toward each other is no longer required, but what is required instead is the correctly calculated generation of rules, relationships and institutions.'<sup>85</sup>

'Practical wisdom' becomes superfluous – only the criteria of technological effectiveness count. 'Human behaviour is therefore to be now considered only as the material for science. The engineers of the correct order can disregard the categories of ethical social intercourse and confine themselves to the construction of conditions under which human beings, just like objects within nature, will necessarily behave in a calculable manner. This separation of politics from morality replaces instruction in leading a good and just life with making possible a life of well-being within a correctly instituted order.'<sup>86</sup>

In spite of all this, knowledge of this sort raises great hopes. The 'system' would become one of the most powerful fetishes of modernity. It would turn out, however, that the reifying look was a source of disillusion. Increasingly, instrumental reason would begin to display its own helplessness. It would not suggest a coherent solution; it would lose control of its own 'objects', and consequently, its reputation.

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85 Ibid., 43.

86 Ibid.

Under these circumstances, more and more importance is being attached to the rehabilitation of practical wisdom. It consists in the transfer of knowledge about politics from the sphere of *theory* to the sphere of *praxis*, with the strongest emphasis possible placed on the rehabilitation of *communicative* skills and the abilities to develop judgments concerning the good life. Theory provided patronage to illusory wisdom, glorifying the discipline of objectification. It created formulas of rationality which in the tangle of 'systems' exhausted their sense, giving rise to 'the loss of hermeneutic power' and the erosion of the ability to understand, as Habermas maintains.<sup>87</sup> Thought, seized with the obsession of technological effectiveness, got bogged down in clichés.

The corset of instrumental rationality needs to be loosened; assets from instrumental rationality – carried to the sphere of communicative reason. 'The paradigm of the knowledge of objects', Habermas argues, 'has to be replaced by the paradigm of mutual understanding between subjects capable of speech and action.'<sup>88</sup> Cognition involves the incessant articulation of power rooted in the act of objectification (the object is under the control of the observing eye). Identifying 'an object' denotes the delineation of borders. An object is located and immobilized. Cognitive powers, which were also strongly emphasized by Michel Foucault, are powers which impose discipline and create rigour. Cognizant thought imposes its own rules and defines a certain order of things. It sets out the aims of action which are in keeping with revealed 'truth'. Moving reflection concerning politics from the sphere of *praxis* onto the plane of *episteme* is indicative of the fact that the 'regulation of social relations' would become the salient task – signifying the application of proven truths. The 'order of virtuous conduct' is becoming irrelevant.<sup>89</sup> Instrumental reason becomes the 'colonizing' power seeking to take over the 'world of life' (*Lebenswelt*). It imposes its own canons; creates systems of subordination; regulates and disciplines. It radically limits the role of the subject which must accept the imposed rigours of rationality. 'Colonization' implies that the only things that matter are the principles of usefulness coded in existing systems. The law, the bureaucratic machine, institutions of power (and later on the media) become the colonizers; they subordinate the subject to their own demands and create a broad sphere of forced subjugation.

'Communicative actors', explains Habermas, 'are always moving within the horizon of their lifeworld; they cannot step outside of it'.<sup>90</sup>

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87 Ibid.,44-45.

88 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 295-96.

89 *Theory and Practice*, 43.

90 *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, 126.



So it is a space in which they are, as it were, at home; in which their understanding of reality is unconstrained. It takes its shape thanks to communicative practices, unyielding to the supervision of foreign powers. The concept of 'the world of life', says Habermas, is a 'concept complementary to that of communicative action.'<sup>91</sup> Thus, the power of instrumental reason is not final; 'the iron cage of rationality' need not become a prison with the door sealed forever. The communicative mind can shape formulas of rationality which will have nothing in common with the rigid discipline of *Zweckrationalität*. It can rehabilitate abilities which have become insignificant in the system imposed by 'colonizing' powers. Thus, making 'sagacious insight' the main attribute of political wisdom once again. Countering the ambitions cherished by theoreticians Giambattista Vico, cited by Habermas, emphasized: "because one has to judge what is to be done in life according to the weight of these things and their encumbrances, which are called circumstances, and many of them may possibly be strange and incoherent, and some of them frequently wrong at times even opposed to the goal, the actions of men cannot be measured with the straight ruler of the understanding, which is rigid."<sup>92</sup> Communicative reason transcends these 'rigid rules'. It emphasizes 'topical conduct' related to a concrete situation. It allows for the renewal of the link between ethics and politics; a link that instrumental reason severs, once again raising the question about the idea of a good life. 'Communicative reason', Habermas explains, 'makes itself felt in the binding force of intersubjective understanding and reciprocal recognition. At the same time, it circumscribes the universe of a common form of life.' This is why it can produce the 'structures of rational life together'.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, the 'iron cage of rationality' does not entail a definitive reification. The 'normative sense of modernity' (the freedom and independence of the subject) has not been erased. The critique of instrumental reason has revealed the controversiality of modern formulas of discipline; it created a potential which makes it possible to question the sense of the practices found. Reaching beyond the sphere of meaning fulfilled by history, it put into question all the claims of instrumental reason. In extreme cases, this critique involved the rejection of the idea of history itself.

From the Age of Enlightenment, history has been portrayed as the history of reason, as a process of endless and necessary shifts securing the triumph of rationality. Michel Foucault would acknowledge that history is but a 'myth of

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91 Ibid.

92 Quoted after *Theory and Practice*, 45.

93 *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 324.

the West'.<sup>94</sup> In other words, it is a story of reason seeking to consolidate its power, a phantasmagoria involving elation induced by 'rationality.' History presented as the history of reason, Foucault would argue, is an illusion and a lie; it symbolizes imperious one-sidedness. It is not an innocent or impartial story. It serves the interests of reason, essentially formulating concealed imperatives of exclusion. Rationality, which acquires content by way of confronting reason with non-reason consists in triggering the mechanism of selection.

'Inside this history, which is our history', Foucault writes, 'as in all history, there is an identity: the same culture enables many human beings to say "we" together.' The problem is, however, that this identity 'is constituted through a series of exclusions.'<sup>95</sup> Foucault exposes the real sense of the expansion of reason veiled by the rhetoric of disinterestedness. Knowledge breeds power, whereas cognition implies taking control of the object. The feats of reason are expressed in the development of new forms of discipline. Rationality, in its own right, signifies the reinforcement of a strictly defined discipline of personification. Indeed, the modern world, as Weber would say, has its own 'fellahs.'

Foucault attempts to correct the 'normative content of modernity' by engaging in the ruthless criticism of the dogmatic concept of history. It is written from the position of victorious reason in the radical defence of the discredited subject. History presented as 'history of reason' glorified the notion of necessity. It was a discipline, as Foucault writes, 'by means of which the bourgeoisie showed, first, that its reign was only the result, the product, the fruit of a slow maturation, and that this reign was thus perfectly justified.'<sup>96</sup> So, it made the concept of continuity the principal tool of the blackmail. Foucault is creating his own story: 'the two fundamental notions of history as it is practiced today are no longer time and the *past*, but *change* and the *event*.'<sup>97</sup> This history has its own heroes and its own themes. In the foreground enters the rejected man – defined in such a way so as to make his exclusion possible. In the world of Michel Foucault the madman is an emblem-figure.

The new epistemology is supposed to reevaluate the elementary concepts of identity determining the face of Western culture. 'Perhaps', Foucault suggests, 'standing on this border line, the tip, the edge separating reason and non-reason, madness and non-madness one could grasp, both, what society acknowledges and accepts as positive, as well as that which the very same

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94 V. Descombes, *The Same and That. Forty-Five Years of French Philosophy (1933-1978)*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996).

95 Ibid.

96 M. Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (The New Press, New York, 1999), 423.

97 Ibid.

society excludes and rejects.'<sup>98</sup> 'The iron cage of rationality' as Foucault sees things, does not fill the entire space of the potential settling-in. By introducing a 'madman' onto the scene he changes the entire dynamics of self-definition. Incorporating non-reason, which thanks to the new interpretation of history appears in the field of vision, irretrievably transforms the history of 'reason.' Michel Foucault's new epistemology incorporates new politics; it implies a new conception of order.

Foucault believes that modern society cultivating the successes of 'reason' is, in essence, a 'disciplinary society'; a society which imposes the power of norms, flaunting the allegedly obvious difference between what is 'normal' and 'abnormal.' Normalization is in fact a strict and ruthless discipline of personification, reflecting the preferences encoded in the acknowledged systems of knowledge.

Nothing has been settled yet. Continuity in history is out of the question, Foucault believes. On the contrary, it is a general rule that it is absent from history, and break-ups are the norm. Describing the fundamental changes of European *episteme* in his *Words and Things*, Foucault destroys the mythology of reason, depriving history of the imperious majesty rooted in the idea of necessity. Our way of thinking about reality, he argues, in other words, the way we see the world is changing fundamentally. Thoughts do not follow the beaten track. The history of reason is not uniform. Thence, history is not an area of conclusive and definitive decisions.

Man is an 'empirico-transcendental doublet' Foucault says.<sup>99</sup> He exists within a framework of a certain established order of things. And yet he crosses it constantly: running past the horizon, creating new formulas of apperception, new canons of awareness, hence, new canons of identity. 'Man is a mode of being which accommodates that dimension – always open, never fully delimited'. He oscillates between the space of the act of *cogito* and the 'sandy plane of non-thinking', as Foucault calls it poeticizing with bravado.<sup>100</sup> Man has not been given a conclusive shape at all. The rules of apperception may yet change; other points may still be raised and new patterns may appear. This is borne out by the history of scholarly discourse which Foucault presents in his 'archaeology of human sciences', writing about the radical transformations of fundamental rules of thinking, about instances of breaking up, about the notable lack of continuity. As he puts it, the 'fundamental codes of culture – those

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98 Foucault, 'Madness and Society' in *Aesthetics*.

99 M. Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (Routledge, New York, 2002), 347.

100 Ibid.

governing its language, its schemes of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values and the hierarchy of its practices' are not permanent.<sup>101</sup>

So 'history' cannot be presented in terms of unity and continuity, in the sense of an imperious discipline, or an order which personifies in an absolute and conclusive manner. In essence, man has no 'history'. Foucault is paying tribute to Nietzsche. The former believes that history, imposing the primacy of causality, continuity and necessity should be replaced by 'genealogy'. Genealogy is *wirkliche Historie* (real history) as Nietzsche himself framed it. 'It rejects', Foucault explains recounting the views of the author of *The Will to Power* 'the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for "origins"'. Nietzsche also defies acquisitive metaphysics which destroys the authentic 'historical sense'.<sup>102</sup> He seeks to capture the real shape of the strangest configurations, the energy of dissonance and strength of paradoxes, the continual fluidity and fragility of shapes outlined.

Thus, the narrative which has established the domain of instrumental reason was rendered senseless by 'genealogy'. Genealogy regains the sense of experiences which open the door for questioning the 'normative sense of modernity' related to the primacy of technology and *Zweckrationalität*. Foucault's thought allows modern formulas of rationality to be treated as a project deprived of the historical sacrum; a project that can be processed – revealing its own genealogy; entering it into a register of cycles, and crossing it out from the register of ultimate truths. So, it can finally be said: the 'iron cage of rationality' is losing the power of the *fatum*. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that this is not tantamount to saying that it ceases to exist. The critique of instrumental reason enables us to say, that 'rationality' is at times no less mad than the madness it discredits. The conviction about the unquestionable credibility (and peculiar impartiality) of 'reason' is one of the most powerful illusions rationalism itself has created. An illusion, considerably weakened by the criticism which questions the rules of purposeful rationality.

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101 Ibid., xxii.

102 M. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in *The Foucault Reader* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1984), 77.



## Chapter Two

# Fruit from the Tree of Knowledge

John Stuart Mill wrote the following words at the beginning of *Utilitarianism*:

There are few circumstances among those which make up the present condition of human knowledge, more unlike what might have been expected, or more significant of the backward state in which speculation on the most important subjects still lingers, than the little progress which has been made in the decision of the controversy respecting the criterion of right and wrong. From the dawn of philosophy, the question concerning the *summum bonum*, or, what is the same thing, concerning the foundation of morality, has been accounted the main problem in speculative thought, has occupied the most gifted intellects, and divided them into sects and schools, carrying on a vigorous warfare against one another.<sup>103</sup>

Although the book was published in 1861, today, 150 years later, the same can be said all over again. ‘The little progress which has been made in the decision of the controversy respecting the criterion of right and wrong’ is an undisputable fact. On the other hand, something has changed beyond all doubt: it is increasingly difficult to believe that this controversy will be resolved in any way at all. The confusion is mounting while controversies escalate. The great hopes fuelled by the Age of Enlightenment in its declaration of war against ‘superstition’ and a promise to strengthen the rational bases of morality have misfired. In fact, signs of this impasse were already evident in the nineteenth century. Let us quote Mill once again: ‘Philosophers keep on grouping themselves under the same banners, fighting each other and neither the individual thinkers, nor the whole of humanity seems to be closer to agreement on this issue, than when young Socrates listened to the lessons of old Pythagoras.’

Today, philosophers are not the only ones squabbling. The battle for ‘values’ has become a typical ritual of the great market-place of ideas, styles and tastes spawned by the modern era. Those who participate in the scuffle belong to the world of power and the media, representing moralists and libertines, ‘authorities’, and bankrupts, minorities and majorities...., all. Furthermore, each one of them speaks with his or her own voice whatever he or she wants.

The disputes are uncompromising, sometimes becoming very harsh. Although their numbers are growing they actually testify to an overwhelming helplessness. ‘The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance’,

writes the well-known philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, 'is that so much of it is used to express disagreements; and the most striking feature of the debates in which these disagreements are expressed, is their interminable character.'<sup>104</sup> There is no way contesting positions can be reconciled or controversies resolved. No commonly acknowledged criteria or tests have been elaborated. But there is an abundance of mutually exclusive preferences and conceptions for living. What is equally important is that attitudes are fluid: for the clearly established principles are disappearing. Moral convictions are quite superficial and not treated in a consistent manner. What is more, their proponents are quick to abandon or change them, leading to an overall bewilderment. One can say that the moral practices of late modernity are testimony to an increasing confusion.<sup>105</sup>

A characterization thus presented probably does not stir much controversy nowadays. According to MacIntyre 'our capacity to use moral language, to be guided by moral reasoning, to define our transactions with others in moral terms' is diminishing.<sup>106</sup> By appealing to make 'independent use' of reason, to use Kant's words, the Enlightenment established the power of questioning. It became apparent rather quickly that moral discipline is fragile and its foundations are prone to erosion. The moral systems existing earlier were disintegrated. Today – MacIntyre contends – 'what we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.'<sup>107</sup> Where there is no place for a glance enabling us to capture the *telos* of human life, according to MacIntyre, the transition from 'is' to 'should be' is already impossible.<sup>108</sup>

We often hear today of the defeat of the Enlightenment project. After all, it failed to create a rational and universally approved conception of moral law. 'Yet both the thinkers of the Enlightenment and their successors', writes MacIntyre in his work *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 'proved unable to agree as to what precisely those principles were which would be found

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104 A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 2007), 6.

105 See J. Garcia, 'Modern(ist) Moral Philosophy and MacIntyrean Critique', in M. Murphy (ed.), *Alasdair MacIntyre (Contemporary Political Philosophy in Focus)* (Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 2003), 97ff.

106 MacIntyre, op.cit., 2; see also T. Pinkard, 'MacIntyre's Critique of Modernity' in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, 176-200.

107 MacIntyre, op.cit., 2.

108 Murphy, 'MacIntyre's Political Philosophy' in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, 156.

undeniable by all rational persons. One kind of answer was given by the authors of the *Encyclopédie*, a second by Rousseau, a third by Bentham, a fourth by Kant, a fifth by the Scottish philosophers of common sense and their French and American disciples.<sup>109</sup> The tutelage of reason proved ineffective. The Enlightenment promised ‘a conception of rationality independent of historical and social context.’<sup>110</sup> But it proved easier to reject ‘superstitions’ than to come to an agreement on rationally conceived requirements.

However, breaking with tradition was now a fact. In ‘western cultures’, writes John Gray, ‘the Enlightenment project irretrievably replaced traditional forms of knowledge and self-understanding.’ It was at the same time, as he recalls,

[...] connected to the much older intellectual and religious traditions, the destruction of which is currently obvious. The self-undermining of the Enlightenment project as I understand it’, he contends, ‘involves the disappearance of elements of western tradition – such as Christian humanism and the logo-centrism of Greek philosophy – which are the foundation and original element of this tradition.’<sup>111</sup>

Evidently, we are dealing here with a fundamental crisis concerning the ruin of the underpinnings of morality. ‘A key part of my thesis has been that modern moral utterance and practice can only be understood as a series of fragmented survivals from an older past’, writes MacIntyre explaining his standpoint.<sup>112</sup> The well-established canons have fallen and their place has been taken by impudent latitude. Concepts suggesting their own ties with moral practice (principles, laws and obligations) are losing their proper content. ‘A series of historical accounts which will show how moral countenance can now be given to far too many causes, how the form of moral utterance provides a possible mask for almost any face. For morality has become generally available in a quite new way. It was indeed Nietzsche’s perception of this vulgarized facility of modern moral utterance which partly informed his disgust with it.’<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, Nietzsche’s assessments leave no room for doubt. In the treatise *Beyond Good and Evil* we find the following profile of a ‘modern European’:

The hybrid European – all in all, a tolerably ugly plebeian – simply needs a costume; he requires history as a storage room for costumes. To be sure he soon notices that not one fits him very well – so he keeps changing. Let anyone look at the nineteenth

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109 A. MacIntyre: *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 2003), 6.

110 J. Horton and S. Mendus, ‘Alasdair Macintyre: “After Virtue” and After’ in J. Horton and S. Mendus, *After MacIntyre* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 1994), 3.

111 J. Gray, ‘Enlightenment’s Wake’, in *Post-Liberalism: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (Routledge, London, 1996).

112 MacIntyre, op.cit., 110-11.

113 Ibid., 110.



century with an eye for those preferences and changes of the style masquerade; also for the moments of despair over the fact that “nothing is becoming”. We are – writes Nietzsche – the first age that has truly studied “costumes” – I mean those of moralities, articles of faith, tastes in the arts and religions – prepared like no previous age for a carnival in the grand style.<sup>114</sup>

Nietzsche studies the ‘natural history of morality’. He follows the changes which are responsible for the transformation of moral concepts into a ‘warehouse of costumes’. Modern man climbs onto the pedestal of ‘truth’ and prides himself on his ‘ideals’ treating everything very seriously. But the more he yearns for solemnity, the funnier he becomes.

Nietzsche derides the ‘ludicrous naiveté’ of projects luring with their promises and juggling the concepts of ‘good’, ‘happiness’ and ‘justice’. In the same category are projects which appeal to the authority of nature, history, science and all the deities of modernity which eagerly grant their blessing. The nineteenth century continues to discover yet new ‘moral truths’ while their advocates assume the evangelists’ pose. By discrediting each other they are increasingly conspicuous in demonstrating their helplessness.

Hence, morality becomes a costume – moral ideals are masks. Nietzsche’s critique is, in the strictest sense of the term, of an *unmasking* nature. Nietzsche presents the Enlightenment’s promise to the rationalists aspiring to discover new ‘truths’ in the field of morality as a victorious illusion; an expression of expectations proclaimed in the name of reason and prevailing in defiance of reason. For reason would turn out to be a very suspicious custodian of principles. The ‘death of God’ irretrievably destroys the potential guaranteed earlier to morality by the period of prosperity estimated to last thousands of years.

Nietzsche is a thinker who portrays the effects of disenchantment with the most resolute and relentless consistency. According to MacIntyre, this is the ‘greatest philosopher of morality of modern times’. ‘It was Nietzsche’s historical achievement’, he argues, ‘to understand more clearly than any other philosopher – certainly more clearly than his counterparts in Anglo-Saxon emotivism and continental existentialism – not only that what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will.’<sup>115</sup>

Thus, Nietzsche puts the issue at a knife’s edge: morality is losing all its foundations. Ideals are but a projection of desires. The modern era is thinking of ‘rearing’ man. So, accordingly, it must ‘rear’ truths which could support this ambition. The modern era, therefore, aspires to create a ‘science of morality’. And

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114 F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by W. Kaufmann (Random House Inc., New York, 1966), 150.

115 MacIntyre, *op.cit.*, 113.

this gives rise to the biggest problem. The only possible science of morality, Nietzsche believes, is ‘to prepare a *typology* of morals.’<sup>116</sup> So the assumptions made by the thinkers of the Enlightenment were proven to be wrong: one cannot aspire to create a *metaphysics* of morality. Kant was mistaken when he posited in his treatise under the characteristic title *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, that using reason it is possible to define a sovereign point of view or provide a final justification of rules which would have a universal scope. Kant’s project is transcendental. It was designed to testify, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, to the full autonomy of reason. ‘[T]he ground of the obligation [of norms – author’s comment] here must not be sought in the nature of the human being, or in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but a priori solely in concepts of pure reason’.<sup>117</sup> Kant is of the view that reason can create ‘moral laws’. Philosophy is to support these efforts; the metaphysics of morality should formulate the criteria of the absolute importance of norms, protecting them from erosion. ‘But now the moral law in its purity and genuineness (which in practical matters is of the greatest significance) is to be sought nowhere else than in a pure philosophy’.<sup>118</sup>

Nietzsche mercilessly derides aspirations of this sort which go beyond the framework of an exegesis. ‘With a stiff seriousness that inspires laughter all our philosophers’, he writes ‘demanded something far more exalted, presumptuous and solemn from themselves as soon as they approached the study of morality: they wanted to supply a rational foundation for morality – and every philosopher so far has believed that he has provided such a foundation. Morality itself, however, was accepted as a “given”’.<sup>119</sup>

So, philosophers yielded to superstition; they always followed the superstition that morality ‘exists’, that it only needs an appropriate justification. Their teaching, says Nietzsche, is ‘clumsy and thick-fingered’. They cannot, and are not even trying to grasp ‘the vast realm of subtle feelings and differences of value which are live, grow, beget and perish’. Their verdicts are superficial:

Just because our moral philosophers knew the facts of morality only very approximately in arbitrary extracts or accidental epitomes [...] they never laid eyes on the real problems of morality; for these emerge only when we compare many moralities [...]. In all “science of morals” so far one thing was lacking, strange as it may sound: the problem of morality itself; what was lacking was any suspicion that there was something problematic here.<sup>120</sup>

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116 Nietzsche, op.cit., 97.

117 I. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, A German-English Edition, trans. by M. Gregor and J. Timmermann (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011), 7.

118 Ibid., 9.

119 Nietzsche, op. cit., 97.

120 Ibid., 97-98.

Such, then, was the nature of the different variations of 'justifying morality' created by philosophers. 'What the philosophers called a "rational foundation for morality" and tried to supply', Nietzsche claims, 'was merely a scholarly variation of the common *faith* in the prevalent morality; a new means of *expression* for this faith, and thus just another fact in a particular morality.'<sup>121</sup>

Here is the first objection: philosophy draws its strength from superstitions and strengthens them. Philosophers are ignoramuses who unawares speak with the voice of the common man. 'It is enough', says Nietzsche maliciously, 'to listen to, for example, with what almost venerable innocence Schopenhauer still described his task, and then draw your conclusions about the scientific standing of the "science" whose ultimate masters talk like children and little old women.'<sup>122</sup>

What if the advocates of the science of morality were to rise above superstitions and stop talking 'like children and little old women'? They would then discover that providing a 'rational foundation for morality' is impossible. Firstly, because morality is not a 'given' at all; so there is no single 'natural' object that they can turn to in their fervour. Secondly, there is nothing to make this really possible. Nietzsche dampens hopes for finding a rational foundation for morality, thus, undermining the main idea of the Enlightenment. For this very reason MacIntyre praises him, arguing that, Nietzsche demonstrates beyond all doubt that 'the rational and rationally justified autonomous moral subject of the eighteenth-century is a fiction, an illusion'.<sup>123</sup>

The philosophers of the Enlightenment failed to see this fundamental problem. They became ecstatic with the rhetoric which put the notion of 'reason' on a pedestal. It is thence they sought the source of 'truth' and the criteria for the hierarchy of the rules of conduct. Nietzsche's critique reaches into the very heart of things. Let us reiterate the most important question. Why is it impossible to provide a 'rational foundation for morality'? Nietzsche carries his unmasking tactics to the very end by tackling the problem of *truth*. Where the notion of truth becomes problematic, the notion of *good*, likewise, finds itself in the same category of problematic notions. How are we supposed to know that something is good, if we do not know what is or is not truth? The issues of morality are directly related to the matters linked to the status of truth, reason and thinking.

Nietzsche's verdict is uncompromising; he questions the holiest dogma of rationalism, the conviction that a 'rational being' always displays the 'will to truth'. The 'will to truth' – this is the Nietzschean *punctum*, the issue which will make him 'the moral philosopher of the modern age.'

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121 Ibid., 98.

122 Ibid.

123 MacIntyre, op.cit., 114.

‘What is the significance of all will to truth?’, asks Nietzsche in one of the last paragraphs of his famous treatise *From the Genealogy of Morality*. This is what he has to say:

[A]nd here I touch on my problem again, on our problem, my *unknown* friends (because I don’t *know* of any friends as yet): what meaning does *our* being have, if it were not that that will to truth has become conscious of itself *as a problem* in us? ... Without a doubt, from now on, morality will be *destroyed* by the will to truth’s becoming conscious of itself: that great drama in a hundred acts reserved for Europe in the next two centuries, the most terrible, most questionable drama but perhaps also the most rich in hope.<sup>124</sup>

And so, ‘morality perishes’. It is taking place while we are starting to suspect that the ‘will to truth’ is not what it always wanted to be taken for. The space the will to truth was born in and prospered, Nietzsche believes, was created by faith; a faith in the existence of a higher order of things. This faith was expressed in religion as well as in metaphysical philosophy seeking higher and finite truths. ‘The will to truth’ is a ‘remnant of an ideal’, its ‘kernel’.<sup>125</sup> The ‘death of God’ and ‘disenchantment’, obviously, signify the destruction of ‘ideals’. Only their substitutes will continue to appear, in other words, conceptions ‘bred’ in various incubators of ‘truth’ made by the modern world. Real ideals require real faith. The end of metaphysics means that the issue of truth itself is being ‘disenchanted’. This is the sense of Nietzsche’s revelations: truth is being ‘bred’; it emerges as a projection of certain objectives. It is no longer inherent, as was always believed, in the strong sense of the term ‘is’. So, broadly speaking, what can the will to truth be?

In the treatise *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche tries to transfix with his stare the ‘monstrous and awe-inspiring monster’: ‘dogmatic philosophy’. ‘The Platonic invention of pure spirit and good in itself’ was the monster’s original sin. The Platonic concept is a mistake, Nietzsche says, ‘the worst, most durable, and most dangerous of all errors so far’. ‘To be sure, it meant standing truth on her head and denying *perspective*’, he declares, ‘the basic condition of all life, when one speaks of spirit and the good as Plato did.’<sup>126</sup> So, let us repeat: truth is always the result of a projection. It emerges in the perspective formed by specific objectives. There can be many perspectives and they persist in changing incessantly.

Let us go back to the issue of the ‘will to truth’. The first part of *Beyond Good and Evil*, devoted to superstitions of philosophers opens with this very

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124 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. by C. Diethe (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), 119.

125 *Ibid.*, 118.

126 *Beyond Good and Evil*, 3.

tirade: 'The will to truth which will still tempt us to many a venture, the famous truthfulness of which all philosophers so far have spoken with respect – what questions has this will to truth not laid before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions!' <sup>127</sup> This is why we should ask: 'what really is this "will to truth" in us?' And then, and this is still a more 'fundamental question', as Nietzsche says, ask about the 'value of this will. Granted that we want the truth: *why not rather untruth?*'

We should not rush into supplying answers. Only the dogmatists, referring to their 'ideals', believed that the will to truth could be easily identified, and that there is a fundamental and unshakable difference between truth and untruth. According to Nietzsche, this is not so: all things waver and muddle continually, creating the strangest of entanglements. The borderline between 'truth' and 'untruth' is fragile. Only the 'thick fingered' philosophy of the dogmatists is unable to spot this. 'The fundamental belief of metaphysicians is the *belief in antithesis of values.*' Thus, they are persistently surprised: '*how could anything originate out of its opposite? For example, truth out of error? or the will to truth out of the will to deception?*' But, indeed, this is how things are. According to Nietzsche, things do not have '*an origin of their own*'. Metaphysicians will not allow the thought that everything is born in 'this turmoil of delusion and cupidity'. They are looking for pure sources: 'it is on account of this "faith" that they trouble themselves about "knowledge"'. <sup>128</sup>

Thus, the will to truth has no autonomous sources; it is being constantly pervaded by the will to deception. It is into these circumstances that the 'truths' are born which are to generate the underpinnings of modern-era morality. In a world freed from the yoke of dogma, truth has been disenchanted; everything can become truth. In one of his earlier (but immensely important) treatises, *On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense*, Nietzsche uses a qualification which would make a great hit: truth is 'a mobile army of metaphors'. 'The drive toward the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive' motivating people. <sup>129</sup> Nothing is ever expressed directly. There is no 'depth' from which to draw truth. Sheer staging, that is what truth is. Anything which holds any significance to people whatsoever is readily given the name of truth. Any desire, any passion, any shameful deed can pass for 'truth'. 'Truths' make do without the guardianship

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127 Ibid., 9.

128 Ibid., 10.

129 F. Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense' in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. by W.Kaufmann (Viking Press, New York, 1976).

of reason. Of ‘knowledge itself’ Nietzsche writes: ‘its most universal effect is deception’.<sup>130</sup> Reason provides only the tools (language!) which make the construction of metaphors possible. Their roots however are not in the language, but in the entanglement of desires beyond the threshold of consciousness: ‘in this turmoil of delusion and cupidity’. So, in fact, the will to truth is merely a mask for ‘cupidity’.

‘Being masked, the disguise of convention, acting a role before others and before oneself – in short, the constant fluttering around the single flame of vanity is so much the rule and the law that almost nothing is more incomprehensible than how an honest and pure urge for truth could have arisen among men’. This brings Nietzsche to assert that man is a slave of a ‘deceptive consciousness’.<sup>131</sup>

Nietzsche carries his deliberations on the rules of thought up to the point where the will to truth, to repeat the expression already quoted, ‘became aware of itself as a problem’. This is a breakthrough moment, a turning point, the moment the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ is being born. Philosophy loses its naiveté; from now on all interpretations can be viewed as suspicious; all ‘ideals’ become comical. The author asks:

I want to know how many shiploads of sham idealism, hero outfits and tinny rattle of great words, how many tons of sugared, alcoholic sympathy (distillery: *la religion de la souffrance*), how many stilts of “noble indignation” to help the spiritually flat-footed, and how many *comedians* of the Christian moral ideal Europe would have to export for its air to smell cleaner.<sup>132</sup>

On the rubble of discredited truths and ridiculed ideals ‘morality is dying’, leaving behind the foul smell of destruction.

Nietzsche’s diagnosis leaves no illusions. Morality which used to appeal to the authority of reason has been irretrievably disenchanted.

What then the conjunction of philosophical and historical argument reveals is that *either* one must follow through the aspirations and the collapse of the different versions of the Enlightenment project until there remains only the Nietzschean diagnosis and the Nietzschean problematic *or* one must hold that the Enlightenment project was not only mistaken, but should never have been commenced in the first place. There is no third alternative and more particularly there is no alternative provided by those thinkers at the heart of the contemporary conventional curriculum in moral philosophy, Hume, Kant and Mill.<sup>133</sup>

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130 Ibid., 184.

131 Ibid., 184 and 185.

132 *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 118.

133 MacIntyre, op.cit., 118.

Nevertheless, the problem is that the enthusiasts of the project of the Enlightenment have made every effort to avoid arriving at the 'Nietzschean problem'. We have thus been, and still are, dealing with numerous attempts to save ideals congruent with the concept of rational self-definition. However, these endeavours are not yielding the expected results. In a 'disenchanted' world all suggestions and interpretations fail when they seek to draw from the repository of traditional arguments. After all, as it transpired, the Enlightenment abolished the very 'conditions of possibility' (to use Kant's idiom) for establishing norms. The 'fabric' used for manufacturing normative systems ceased to exist. 'If the deontological character of moral judgments is the ghost of conceptions of divine law which are quite alien to metaphysics of modernity and if the technological character is similarly the ghost of conceptions of human nature and activity which are equally not at home in the modern world, we should expect the problems of understanding and of assigning an intelligible status to moral judgements both continually to arise and as continually to prove inhospitable to philosophical solutions'.<sup>134</sup>

The continuators of the Enlightenment project, in their persistent quest for defining the status of moral norms in terms of absolute significance, reside in the realm of shadows. They associate with the 'shadow of the concept of God's law' or with the 'shadow of the concept of human nature'. But reality itself stood up for giving a proper status to the 'Nietzschean problem'. Modern moral practices do not meet the requirements moulded in the phantom world of the rigorists. They have come to express *emotivism*. 'Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.'<sup>135</sup> The emotivist standpoint assumes that statements based on notions of good or evil hold no empirical content. Terms, such as 'good, or 'evil' do not refer to any objective features of objects; they only signal the existence of certain, often, subjective beliefs and preferences. MacIntyre intimates: 'C.L. Stevenson, the single most important exponent of the theory, asserted that the sentence "This is good" means roughly the same as "I approve of this; do so as well", trying to capture by this equivalence both the function of the moral judgment as expressive of the speaker's attitudes and function of the moral judgment as designed to influence the hearer's attitudes.'<sup>136</sup> Moral judgments are never statements in the proper sense of the word: they cannot be true or false. One cannot prove their veracity nor refute

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134 Ibid., 111.

135 MacIntyre, *op.cit.*, 11.

136 Ibid., 12.

them altogether. In the event of a collision between contradictory standpoints there is no place for rational arbitration. Precisely for this reason all disputes over values are intractable.

Emotivism is a concept framed in a philosophers' enclave but it is not the place where its history ends. 'Emotivism', says MacIntyre, 'has become embodied in our culture.' So, it turns out that even those who have never heard of it behave just as Stevenson saw it. 'One way of framing my contention that morality is not what it once was is just to say that to a large degree people now think, talk and act as if emotivism were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical standpoint may be.'<sup>137</sup>

And this is how the 'Nietzschean problem' is beginning to speak for its rights. The accessories of the machine-world, dazzling with its vision of rational discipline, are incapable of dimming the drastic conflicts of values. Modern culture has worked out rigid paradigms of subjugation corresponding to the rules of *Zweckrationalität*. By imposing the rigours of bureaucratization, it brought into being its own 'fellahin', to use Weber's words once again. It would thus seem that holding on to the conceptions of the rational self-definition of the Enlightenment was an easy and done deal.

Meanwhile, nodding in Nietzsche's direction, Habermas insists that 'Dionysian messianism' is beginning to play an ever bigger role (*The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*). We are dealing with a paradox here: the tighter the discipline, the less room there is in the 'iron cage of rationality', the more important the craving for free expression becomes. It is at this juncture that MacIntyre speaks of 'Nietzsche's prophetic irrationalism'.<sup>138</sup> The style of late modernity does by no means find its ultimate expression in 'the Weberian managerial forms of our culture'.

Whenever those immersed in the bureaucratic culture of the age try to think their way through to the moral foundations of what they are and what they do, they will discover suppressed Nietzschean premises. And consequently it is possible to predict with confidence that in the apparently quite unlikely contexts of bureaucratically managed modern societies there will periodically emerge social movements informed by just that kind of prophetic irrationalism of which Nietzsche's thought is the ancestor.<sup>139</sup>

These days we can already detect certain symptoms. Conceptions of identity shaped by liberalism, based on the proudly-sounding rhetoric of unshaken 'human rights' – tolerance and mutual acknowledgement – are at odds with

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137 MacIntyre, op.cit., 22.

138 MacIntyre, op.cit., 114.

139 Ibid.



practice, which is of a totally different nature and makes one think of emotivism. According to MacIntyre, the 'social content' of emotivism is symbolized by three typical figures: the 'manager', the 'aesthete' and the 'therapist'. Despite the obvious differences, different spheres and forms of activity, the three protagonists have something in common which allows us to speak of the existence of one matrix. All three cases exhibit a decided predominance of motivations which undermine the rationalistic canons of the Enlightenment and destroy the models which form the underpinnings of liberalism. These motivations are not in the least linked to the ideals of rational self-definition and mutual recognition. They are however easily justified in the sphere of desires and passions – leading a secretive life under the guise of platitudes – with which Nietzsche was occupied. The 'manager', the 'aesthete' and the 'therapist' are, as a matter of fact, greedy egoists with one thought in mind: to satisfy their own ambitions. For them the world is a vast pasture to graze upon. Their attitude is purely manipulative; they treat all situations and values instrumentally, striving to reach their own goals. The manager imposes a ruthless discipline; the aesthete wishes to bask in pleasures; while the therapist actually craves power: his activity boils down to gaining dominance (some therapy that is!). In all three cases we will find a quest for establishing one's own advantage; 'others' are transformed into objects of scrutiny or objects for acting upon. Mutual recognition is out of the question. The forms of the activity they pursue allow for maintaining a semblance of the liberal proclamation of faith, not precluding a deceitful rhetoric aimed at diverting our attention away from the crux of the matter. In essence however, this is a case of a thorough transformation which means that, in the sphere of human inter-relationships, arbitrary requirements are becoming widespread – in accordance with the logic of emotivism.

Moral culture in the 'disenchantment' phase is actually beginning to be fashioned by preferences which are obviously at odds with the ideas of liberalism which draws its strength from the humanism of the Enlightenment. This humanism, in turn, affirms human dignity and the inviolable nature of man's basic rights. According to MacIntyre this is a serious conflict which leads to the annihilation of the foundations on which, according to the rationalists, moral practices were based. Emotivism is taking advantage of its own potential, abolishing the distinctions which are of paramount importance in this field.

What is the key to the social content of emotivism? It is the fact that emotivism entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations. Consider the contrast between, for example, Kantian ethics and emotivism on this point. For Kant – and a parallel point could be made about many earlier moral philosophers – the difference between a human

relationship uninformed by morality and one so informed is precisely the difference between one in which each person treats the other primarily as a means to his or her ends and one in which each treats the other as an end.<sup>140</sup>

And as of today this difference has become irrelevant.

We are witnessing the waning importance of ‘impersonal criteria of the validity of which each rational agent must be his or her own judge.’<sup>141</sup> What counts most are personal motives and personal intentions; moral relationships, one could say, are being transformed into relationships of technical efficiency. The idea is to achieve goals; this accounts for the nature of mutual relations.

In this situation any rules governing mutual recognition – which could serve as the underpinnings of morality – are ruled out. Everything is determined by the criteria of technical efficiency and personal satisfaction. There is no room for principles which could lead to the questioning of the primacy of effectiveness.

Characteristically, conceptions which, it would seem, should contradict emotivism (as they cultivate the message of liberalism) have nowadays become its expression. As a reaction to the crises modern democracy is battling with (yielding to the pressures of subjective preferences), the idea of a *neutral* state has emerged.<sup>142</sup> This idea is in effect a *political expression* of emotivism. It finds its most outstanding representatives in the likes of John Rawls, Robert Nozick and Ronald Dworkin.

How does one reconcile conflicting claims and aspirations? How does one eradicate the feud between egoisms? Neutrality’s adherents take a position which is typical for emotivism: they believe disputes over values are intractable. No formula can be found for establishing universally approved preferences. In other words, one cannot link politics with morality. ‘Ronald Dworkin’, MacIntyre recalls, ‘recently argued that the central doctrine of modern liberalism is the thesis that questions about the *good life for man* or the ends of human life are to be regarded from the public standpoint as systematically unsettlable. On these individuals are free to agree or disagree. The rules of morality and law...are not to be derived from or justified in terms of some more fundamental conception of the good for man.’<sup>143</sup> To conclude, one should instead rely on the rules of technical efficiency. The concept of neutrality means that the, traditionally understood, political relations representing an interplay between real preferences and aspirations, will be replaced by a compromise conducive to maintaining a

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140 Macintyre, op.cit. 23.

141 Ibid.

142 On this subject see W. Krymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989) as well as S. Mulhall and A. Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1992).

143 *After Virtue*, 119.

balance. Thus the effectiveness criterion comes to the fore implying that technology prevails over morality. The public sphere is to become a realm of neutrality – a place of accord based on excluding the identity game. Preferences and all moral beliefs are to remain in isolation, in the private sphere.

In this way, expectations concerning the quest for defining fundamental rules of conduct were to be fulfilled. The advocates of neutrality go back to the point taken by the authors of the Enlightenment project. They are trying to revive the conception of rationality fashioned in abstract terms, outside the context of history and culture. They believe that 'rational beings' can relieve themselves of the burden of all conditioning and find rational solutions behind the 'veil of ignorance', as John Rawls phrased it in *A Theory of Justice*, forgetting their own preferences and convictions, aiming only at defining their standpoint in line with the demands of 'reason'.<sup>144</sup>

Ultimately, liberalism was to become 'political liberalism'. In a work under this very title (*Political Liberalism*), Rawls recommends a solution which, as he thought, would pave the way for abandoning traditional aspirations and allow for treating liberalism as a certain conception of life and the world. Liberalism is to relinquish all temptations generated by metaphysics. It should not be defending any 'truth' concerning the human condition nor imposing a hierarchy of values. It can no longer be, as Rawls explains, a 'comprehensive doctrine'.<sup>145</sup> It should not see in itself a conception which resolves fundamental issues and seeks to defeat its rivals. Earlier, liberals were determined to defend the canon of principles which were given the status of rational indisputability. Liberalism spoke from the heights of 'truth' securely established in the requirements of 'reason'. It transpired, however, that there are many rival conceptions of rationality. Therefore, in Rawls' opinion, liberalism must forsake the traditional point of view rooted in metaphysics. 'The problem of political liberalism is: How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical and moral doctrines? This is a problem of political justice, not a problem about the highest good.'<sup>146</sup> Justice, and this is Rawls' central idea, must be related to 'fairness', to the beneficial guardianship of the 'veil of ignorance'. This, undoubtedly, rules out the possibility of defining good, of designing rules of conduct which could invade the sphere of specific preferences. 'Political liberalism' can have nothing to do with the traditionally understood matter of

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144 See J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA., 1999).

145 J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2005), 3-32.

146 *Ibid.*, xxv.

morality, Rawls underscores emphatically. 'To use a current phrase, the political conception is a module, an essential constituent part, that fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it'.<sup>147</sup> It is merely a technical invention – a 'module'. 'In this respect a political conception of justice differs from many moral doctrines'.<sup>148</sup> Thus, it is to exist for the sole purpose of providing a space for 'rational beings' to engage in technical operations with a view to finding collision-free solutions.

Liberalism is, thus, abdicating; 'political liberalism' refuses to voice 'truth' of any sort; it only offers a set of tools: the knowhow. By giving up philosophy and the study of morality it is moving into the area of technology. The way we think about society is changing radically. The pursuit of principles establishing a specific hierarchy of values, which was a fundamental design of the Enlightenment, is replaced by a search for arrangements more akin to traffic regulations. All conceptions of political communities recognized earlier, always referring to some commonly acknowledged conception of good are being stripped of all significance by emotivism and neutrality. '[A] political conception of justice is presented as a freestanding view. While we want a political conception to have a justification by reference to one or more comprehensive doctrines, it is neither presented as, nor as derived from, such a doctrine applied to the basic structure of society, as if this structure were simply another subject to which that doctrine applied.'<sup>149</sup> Political liberalism, therefore, creates no conception of bonds; it only constructs a certain conception of balance, assuming that the existence of divisions *precludes* the quest for any form of unity. It takes to extremes the emotivist reading of the nature of mutual relationships, assuming that agreement cannot result from detectable similarities; agreement can only be negotiated; everything is determined by differences.

From the point of view of conceptions such as these, MacIntyre justifiably notices, our society is 'as though we had been shipwrecked on an uninhabited island with a group of other individuals, each of whom is a stranger to me and to all the others. What have to be worked out are rules which will safeguard each one of us maximally in such a situation.'<sup>150</sup> These of course are not moral principles. They form no order of values; suggest no good, no virtue. They are there for the sole purpose of ruling out 'collisions'.

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147 Ibid., 12.

148 Ibid. 13.

149 Ibid., 12.

150 *After Virtue*, 250.

In the end, MacIntyre adjudicates that the Enlightenment (liberalism being its most characteristic current articulation) has not met its own objectives. In this context, he praises Nietzsche by saying: 'It is yet another of Nietzsche's merits that he joins to his critique of Enlightenment moralities a sense of their failure to address adequately, let alone to answer the question: what sort of person am I to become?'<sup>151</sup> In this respect the concept of neutrality leaves no doubt. The Enlightenment project assumed that the most important task was the pursuit and justification of moral law: the definition of credible *principle* of conduct accepted by reason. The question about the 'good life' was never raised directly; all theology was eradicated. Nevertheless, indirectly, the nature of the final deeds was to be established by 'principles'. Implicit in them, at all times, was some conception of good.

The idea of neutrality indicates a definite break with this tradition. Liberalism recognizes its own helplessness and renounces the pursuit of all principles which could inspire and regulate human behaviour, thereby shaping human character. It effectively discards the idea of morality itself. The concept of neutrality is based on convenient assumptions that since man is a 'rational being', he will accordingly manifest an obvious tendency to 'rational' activity. The entire Nietzschean problem is ignored; the key issue of the 'will to truth', which must recognize in itself the will to illusion and lies, does not enter the field of vision. Thus, a structure is being raised which can only be treated as testimony to naïve and rash optimism.

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151 Ibid., 112.

## Chapter Three

### **The Delights of Thoughtlessness (Hagiography and Blasphemy)**

The Age of Enlightenment focuses on the advances made in knowledge and attaches the greatest importance to the achievements of reason. It develops a vision of history which allows us to speak of progress identified with the growth of the systems of knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge is treated as a 'natural' expression of human inclinations. We start with the impressions, Jean Le Rond d'Alambert stressed in the introduction to *Encyclopedie* ('nothing is more incontestable than the existence of our sensations'), to ultimately rise up to the 'heights of thought about the Almighty Intelligence'. This is the path we tread driven by the urge inherent in human nature: the thirst for thinking is haunting us. According to d'Alambert, the basis for all actions, 'the substance that wills and conceives' – is thought; ('It is not necessary to probe deeply into the nature of our body and the idea we have of it to recognize that it could not be that substance!'). It is thought, 'an all-powerful intelligence', which is the foundation and first principle. Ultimately, everything is determined by the potential of thought. The hero of the Age of Light – a new Adam – is to rise up from his fall thanks to the achievements of Reason. The great drama (the history of the human being) presents one after the other: 'man who is man directly, man forgetting what is humanity, and, finally, man who wants to be man and who by a twist in the direction of this will...recovers himself and renews his ties with nature'.<sup>152</sup> Nature, of course is a manifestation of the omnipotence of Reason.

Clearly, there are numerous concepts of the transformation and scenarios of regeneration. Thought in the Age of Enlightenment flows in a broad stream. A single uniform interpretation of the history of the 'fall and redemption' is not on the cards. However, a uniform message is taking shape, which we are going to associate with the tradition of the Enlightenment. Rational cognition is perceived as the mainspring of the changes which determine the fate of the world; the chaos of history is replaced by the cosmogony of Reason. This is where the seductive role of the Enlightenment lies. The conviction of the direct link between thought and reality, reason and light, is beginning to have far-reaching consequences. The Age

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152 S. Rials, 'La declaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen', quoted after J. Baszkiewicz in *New Man, New Nation, New World. The French Revolution in Myth and Reality* (Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2012), 37.

of Light is an era of revelation – it announces the power of the *logos*, it heralds its incarnation.

The tradition of the Enlightenment develops very distinct preferences; imposes a specific perspective; forces one's attention to focus on Reason's achievements; extols the triumphant thought; and clearly tends towards hagiography. The narratives developed within this current, present world history as a gradual illumination, an unstoppable expansion of truth. Outlines of this motif, in a canonical form, would already be found in Condorcet; a little later we would find triumphant *points* in Hegel. 'The inquiry into the *essential destiny* of Reason [...] is identical with the question, *what is the ultimate design of the World?*'<sup>153</sup> According to Hegel it is reason (spirit) which is the 'substantial factor'; all that exists is an expression of reason. In fact, history is the history of reason which aspires to self-knowledge.

This self-contained existence of Spirit is none other than self-consciousness – consciousness of one's own being. Two things must be distinguished in consciousness; first, the fact *that I know*; secondly, *what I know*. In *self-consciousness* these are merged in one; for Spirit *knows itself*. It involves an appreciation of its own nature, as also an energy enabling it to realize itself; to make itself *actually* that which it is *potentially*.<sup>154</sup>

Thus, we are dealing with a process here: the spirit seeks to 'make itself *actually* that which it is *potentially*' as Hegel would say. This precisely is the sense of history. Reality is reason, increasingly aware of its own power; triumphant reason.

This is a necessary process, since cognition is the essence of reason. It is 'destined' to emerge from the medley of opposites and find itself in its own truth. 'It may be said of Universal History, that it is the exhibition of Spirit in the process of working out the knowledge of that which it is potentially'.<sup>155</sup> The process is integral and objective. Hegel goes beyond the patterns of individualism, beyond the sphere of the 'subjective spirit'. The unique nature of his conception is expressed by the notion of 'objective spirit':

The source of the concept of 'Hegel's idea of objective spirit has its origin in the concept of spirit that stems from the Christian tradition, that is, in the concept of *pneuma* in the New Testament – the concept of the Holy Spirit. The pneumatic spirit of love, the genius of redemption, in terms of which the young Hegel interpreted Jesus, indicates precisely this common factor that transcends particular individuals.<sup>156</sup>

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153 G.W. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (Cosimo Inc., New York, 2007), 16.

154 *Ibid.*, 17.

155 *Ibid.*, 17-18.

156 H.G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. by D.E. Linge (University of California Press, Berkeley, Ca, 1977), 113.

This idea is going to play a decisive role in Hegel's oeuvre. Rationality, to put it as briefly as possible, finds its most immediate expression in the sphere of the general, in the sphere of the 'objective spirit'. So, it always has a certain concretely established objective form. It speaks with the voice of a specific era (culture); it crystallizes as a certain historical situation. This is also the nature of all the progress made by reason: achievements which produce ever more complete formulas of self-consciousness. Finally, a definitive transformation which Hegel identified with the successes of the Enlightenment.

As Hegel explains in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 'pure insight' becomes the principle of the Enlightenment. 'This pure insight is thus the Spirit that calls to every consciousness: be for yourselves what you all are in yourselves – reasonable.'<sup>157</sup> Therein an imperative is taking shape, one that is to determine the authentic (and definitive) transformation of reality. 'Naïve consciousness', as Hegel says, absorbs the new truth (this absorbency and helplessness is its basic feature), submits to its pressure with no objection. The Enlightenment gathers momentum precisely because 'naïve consciousness', incapable of creating any obstacles, is ultimately becoming the field of activity for reason. 'The communication of pure insight is comparable to a silent expansion or the diffusion, say, of a perfume in the unresisting atmosphere. It is a penetrating infection which does not make itself noticeable beforehand'.<sup>158</sup> Everybody, then, 'contracts' the propensity to think – this is the truth which determines the breakthrough importance of the Enlightenment. Thought will become the triumphant 'disease'. This is how destiny is played out. 'That the History of the World, with all its changing scenes which its annals present, is this process of development and the realization of Spirit – this is the true *Theodicaea*, the justification of God in History.'<sup>159</sup>

So reason strides proudly clad in the robes of triumphant power. Narratives, following the Enlightenment trend, have a forceful myth-generating power; they; are the 'message' which takes over the imagination. To a considerable degree, of course, it has also taken hold in the sphere of practices. This aspect should not be overlooked; as Jan Baszkiewicz wrote in his book *New Man, New Nation, New World*, the Enlightenment takes care of its truth. 'Naïve consciousness', to use Hegel's term, will come under intense pressure. The Enlightenment imposes its priorities with an absolute firmness. One of the most important aspects of the changes related to the culture of the Enlightenment is the care with which systems

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157 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1979), 328.

158 *Ibid.*, 331.

159 Hegel, *op.cit.*, 457.



of knowledge and educational practices are developed. It is even more striking at the time of the French Revolution, in the enthusiasm with which the question of promoting education is treated.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, knowledge is perceived as a healing medicine. The French revolution is a time of continual discussions and ceaselessly undertaken efforts designed to develop the most ideal mechanisms conducive to disseminating knowledge. This is, however, a complex issue and a very contentious one, as it will turn out. Reason will be unable to 'find itself in its own being' without suffering defeat. What is typical, the educational reform initiated by the French revolution would end in failure, in the opinion of Jan Baszkiewicz, the outstanding expert on its history.<sup>161</sup>

This is, however, not going to stop the expansion of reason. The advances made in knowledge and the progress of reason is, if we accept the point of view developed by the traditions of the Enlightenment, necessary and objective. In Hegel's view, through 'the awareness of self' the spirit 'creates itself'. Thoughts cannot be isolated from reality. What is not connected with thought is, in fact, *unreal*. This view could have become the source of great optimism (as it actually has done). However, it soon transpired that it raised serious doubts and was not substantiated by the facts.

As we will find out, the history of one and the same period (inaugurated by the Enlightenment) can be told in a number of ways, giving way to a conflict between differing narratives. Alongside hagiographical themes, with which the liberal tradition is imbued – highlighting the idea of freedom and progress related to the development of knowledge – blasphemous motives would also appear. This is very typical: there is no chance for a uniform characterization, the picture is dovetailing. The mythology of 'civil society', stressing the blessings of reason and progress in education and good manners would clash with the unmasking disapproval inherent in the descriptions demonstrating the ugliness of the *demos*'. The idea of civil society has its rivals: the concept of 'mass society', or the profiles of 'entertainment society' appearing later. Following in the wake of blasphemers profaning the majesty of the Enlightenment, we would speak of the defeat of reason while still remaining still in the same space (in terms of chronology and topography): in the 'garden' of pleasure and indulgence created by the Age of Reason.

Disappointments were quick to follow: critical voices had already been heard in the early nineteenth century. Alexis de Tocqueville's famous study *On Democracy in America* had an exposing nature. While confronting hopes with reality, Tocqueville shatters the myth of the Age of Light. 'So it is as difficult to

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160 See Baszkiewicz, op.cit., 63-111.

161 Baszkiewicz, op.cit., 102-11.

imagine a society in which all men are very enlightened, as a State in which all citizens are rich.’<sup>162</sup> Thus, an unlimited expansion of knowledge is out of the question; ignorance is an element which despite all expectations still matters. The symbolism of illumination embraced by the Enlightenment was the symbolism of triumph. Torrents of light were to disperse the darkness. The predominance of reason was to be an indication of the exclusion of ignorance and the final fall of ‘superstition’. Society imbued with wisdom was imagined to be a monolith.

‘So the greater or lesser facility that the people have for living without working sets the necessary limit to their intellectual progress. [...] for there to be no limit, it would be necessary for the people not to have to be occupied with the material cares of life; that is, for them no longer to be the people.’<sup>163</sup> Thus, progress in education cannot proceed unrestrained: there are insurmountable barriers. Knowledge must compete with ignorance. The impact of reason is quite limited, which Tocqueville’s example of American democracy was aimed to prove. Contrary to all expectations, the emancipation of reason did not turn into a trend of major significance. ‘I know of no country where, in general, there reigns less independence of mind and true freedom of discussion than in America.’<sup>164</sup> A new democratic society sees the birth of new superstitions; reason is not, by any means, an undisputed arbiter. What people think and say has little to do with the judgments of reason.

In the United States, the majority takes charge of providing individuals with a host of ready-made opinions, and thus relieves them of the obligation to form for themselves opinions that are their own. A great number of theories in matters of philosophy, morality and politics are adopted in this way by each person without examination on faith in the public; and, if you look very closely, you will see that religion itself reigns there much less as revealed doctrine than as common opinion.<sup>165</sup>

And so, thinking is becoming an unnecessary effort, an uncomfortable baggage to be disposed of easily. Tocqueville’s verdict is merciless: in a democratic society a tendency which “leads to total thoughtlessness” is gaining ground. ‘I notice how, under the dominion of certain laws, democracy would extinguish the intellectual liberty that the democratic social state favours, so that after braking all the obstacles that were formerly imposed on it by classes or men, the human mind would bind itself narrowly to the general wills of the greatest

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162 Tocqueville, *op. cit.*, vol.2, 315.

163 *Ibid.*

164 *Ibid.*, 417.

165 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 719.

number.<sup>166</sup> Despite the hopes of the Enlightenment the principle of rational self-definition has not become a priority. As it transpired the mind of an individual is timid and passive. It is overwhelmed by the powerful influence of the community. In Tocqueville's words: 'when he comes to envisage the ensemble of his fellows and to place himself alongside this great body, he is immediately overwhelmed by his own insignificance and weakness.' This also goes for eminent individuals. 'In America, the majority draws a formidable circle around thought. Within these limits, the writer is free; but woe to him if he dares to go beyond them. It isn't that he has to fear an auto-de-fe, but he is exposed to all types of distasteful things and to everyday persecutions. A political career is closed to him; he has offended the only power that has the ability to open it to him. Everything is denied him, even glory.'<sup>167</sup> Freedom of thought is highly debatable; the emancipation of reason faces barriers the crossing of which exposes people to 'distress and persecution'. 'The government of reason' the philosophers had dreamt about while condemning 'superstitions' has in effect become a gigantic school for idolatrous submissiveness and comfort-loving natures releasing them from the obligation to think.

In time, there would be growing concern over the tendencies Tocqueville highlighted. He saw the mismatch between the expectations raised by the Age of Light and reality. His analyses 'disenchanted' the symbolism of metamorphosis but did not in the least shatter all hope. On the contrary, the book, *On Democracy in America* is designed to warn and mobilize. In Tocqueville's view not everything is lost; capitulation has very little chance of coming about. The author believes that an awareness of the risks should make defying the 'tyranny of the majority' easier.

Contrasting overtones resound in Gustav Le Bon's reflections. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Le Bon published *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, where he argued that a new hero is entering the historical scene: the crowd, a dangerous beast which tyrannizes in an increasingly ruthless manner dashing all hopes for illumination, emancipation and the rule of reason. Le Bon's account makes us think of Plato's vision of degradation in which the people play the role of the 'beast': savage and untamed, deluded and kept in check by the demagogues by means of lies and flattery. But, this success is going to be short-lived only, as ultimately, everything is headed for destruction.

'The disappearance of conscious personality and the turning of feelings and thoughts in a definite direction, which are the primary characteristics of a crowd

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166 Ibid., 724.

167 Ibid., vol.2, 418.

about to become organized'.<sup>168</sup> This description sounds menacing. In the oncoming 'age of the crowds' the principle of a rational self-definition is going to play no role whatsoever. The fate of societies would be resolved by fervent crowds instead of advocates of reason participating in a debate. The world is feeling the pressure of yearnings which have nothing in common with the hopes expressed by philosophers. It is more appropriate to speak of the degradation of reason rather than its emancipation. The crowd will follow the voice of fervour; it despises mental effort and is impressed by strength; it finds the wisdom of intellectual refinement disgusting; it relishes energy. 'By the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs on the ladder of civilization. Isolated he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd he is a barbarian – that is a creature acting through instinct.'<sup>169</sup> Formulating his theses in a very radical way, Le Bon speaks without hesitation about 'the disappearance of brain activity' or 'the lowering of the intelligence and the complete transformation of sentiments'.<sup>170</sup>

'The age of crowds' represents a time when people are reduced to brutes; man forsakes the costume of a 'rational being'. The representative of the crowds is a barbarian set on destroying. He despises tradition and the achievements of civilization. He only respects his own desires; 'little adapted to reasoning, crowds, on the contrary are quick to act'.<sup>171</sup> He adores violence, does not think much of self-restraint and prudence. So, to him, discursive forms of language, evidence and arguments amount to little. Crowds create their own language, different from all other, based on an obsessive symbolism, directly linked to imperious passions. (Le Bon draws our attention to 'the simplicity and exaggeration of the sentiments of crowds'; 'this tendency of crowds towards exaggeration is often brought to bear upon bad sentiments.')

The mindset of the representative of the crowd is determined by the evocative power of the imagery – 'crowds being only capable of thinking in images are only to be impressed by images. It is only images that terrify or attract them and become motives of action.'<sup>172</sup> So symbols, naïve abstracts and refrains repeated continuously are taking on a decisive role. This is the type of language leaders of the crowd turn to. 'These image like ideas are not connected by any logical bond of analogy or succession and may take each other's place like the slides of a magic-lantern which the operator withdraws from the groove in which they were placed one

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168 G. Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Batoche Books, Kitchener, 2001), 49.

169 *Ibid.*, 55.

170 *Ibid.*, 48.

171 *Ibid.*, xi.

172 *Ibid.*, 84.

above the other.'<sup>173</sup> It is just the general impression that counts. 'Ideas' must correspond to the crowd's desires, for this makes them strong. The crowd yields easily to manipulation. By curbing the importance of reasoning we facilitate the hypnotizing of minds overcome by passions.

Astonishment is felt at times on reading certain speeches at their weakness, and yet they had an enormous influence on the crowds which listened to them [...]. An orator in intimate communication with a crowd can evoke images by which it will be seduced. If he is successful his object has been attained, and twenty volumes of harangues – always the outcome of reflection – are not worth the few phrases which appealed to the brains it was required to convince.<sup>174</sup>

We can of course criticize the author of *The Crowd...* for exaggerating and being biased; or his rash self-confidence caused by prejudice and aversion. This is partly true. Gustav le Bon was very apprehensive about the changes heralding the 'age of crowds'; he absolutely detested democracy. (We can even acknowledge that he lamented: 'While all our ancient beliefs are tottering and disappearing, while the old pillars of society are giving way one by one, the power of the crowd is the only force that nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the increase.') Nevertheless, we should not treat him with patronizing haughtiness, gazing at him from the heights of learned psychology – a discipline currently experiencing a spell of fabulous prosperity.

Le Bon sees tendencies that cannot be ignored. Some statements, unacceptable today, in no way detract from the weight of his observations. Indeed, it is difficult not to smile when speaking of the 'soul of the crowd'. On the other hand, the success of the great prima donna, the discipline called 'political marketing', calls for reflecting upon each and every line of Gustav Le Bon's text. 'Political marketing' is par excellence a manipulative skill. Its success is linked to the rapid erosion of 'reasoning facilities', to use Le Bon's words. The effectiveness of marketing is measured by how far we succeed in monopolizing opinion by means of techniques, which have nothing to do with the exigencies of discourse. The idea is to light up the 'the slides of a magic-lantern'. Pundits versed in winning support do not go about quoting philosophers. Just like Le Bon's heroes, they lead us into a world of symbols, abstracts and refrains; they abuse our emotions; they do everything in order to curb our faculty of critical analysis employing the hypnotic traits of 'ideas' generated by simplifications and the seductive force of images. A situation has prevailed which slowly reduced political wisdom to the art of 'casting spells'. So let us not treat Le Bon in a condescending manner; let us instead admire the

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173 Ibid., 79.

174 Ibid., 39.

pertinence and insightfulness of his observations. There is one thing he was unable to predict: that psychology was going to play such an important role in creating 'ideas' which feed the glow of the 'magic-lantern'.

The author who presented his opinions with slightly less emphasis and greater care for the precision of argument was José Ortega y Gasset. Still, the conclusions he reached in his book, *The Revolt of the Masses*, confirm Le Bon's diagnoses. This book became a warning, destroying the basis of rash optimism rooted in the patterns of Enlightenment thought resulting from the belief in the natural predominance of reason. Ortega y Gasset draws our attention to the tendencies heralding the inexorable erosion of the potential glorified by the Enlightenment. *The Revolt of the Masses*, when we think about the book's impact, marks a radical watershed in history. It generates a new reality and its own priorities. It forces one to redefine the stereotypes of rationalistic historiosophy and undermines all hopes offered by the concept of rational self-definition and participation understood in line with the canons of liberalism.

Never before have the 'masses' played a decisive role – this is Ortega y Gasset's fundamental thesis. But in the early twentieth century we should no longer harbour any illusions: the masses have won 'all social power'. But this victory does not represent the triumph of hope related to emancipation. *The Revolt of the Masses* is not tantamount to the definitive success of freedom. In fact, the situation that arises is giving cause for alarm. 'Europe', says the Spanish philosopher, 'is suffering from the greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations, and civilization.'<sup>175</sup>

What does the *revolt of the masses* really mean? Society is always a dynamic unity of two component factors: minorities and masses. The minorities consist of individuals or groups of individuals distinguished by certain specific characteristics. The mass is an assemblage of persons lacking distinctive qualities. 'By masses, then, is not to be understood, solely or mainly, "the working masses"'. The mass is the average man.'<sup>176</sup> So in short, we can say that it is the mediocrity which assumes power.

Toqueville has already written about this highlighting the fact that, inexorably, at times of equality people become similar to each other. The triumphant march of mediocrity, insistently asking for privileges and homage, has also been analyzed by Nietzsche when he depicted the inclinations of the 'herd man'. So Ortega y Gasset is not the one making the first step. His observations though make an unusually strong statement. This he accomplishes through strong

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175 J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., New York, 1993), 11.

176 *Ibid.*, 13.

and clever punch lines as well as his conscientious analysis of the 'fabric' of historical shifts. The author of *The Revolt of the Masses* deals with, as he himself frames it, the 'anatomy of the mass man'. By describing his hero's inclinations he reveals the behind-the-scenes activity of the great theatre of events.

Why is the seizure of power by the masses an undisputed fact? Why does *the revolt of the masses* signify giving up hope – hope which is fuelling the idea of *civil society*?

The rule of the masses is seemingly innocent. 'The mass is all that which sets no value on itself – good or ill – based on specific grounds, but which feels itself "just like everybody", and nevertheless is not concerned about it; is, in fact, quite happy to feel itself as one with everybody else.'<sup>177</sup> It is thus, benign power, one that we should not be afraid of, which cannot become annoying; power that everybody must understand. This is in fact a very convenient and effective formula capable of legitimizing the most extreme plans: they are easily justified by the sense of 'familiarity'. Politicians in democratic systems would be appealing to the needs and expectations of 'ordinary people' with great zeal. This phrase would become the cult platitude of the 'friends of the people'. The 'familiarity' rhetoric is one of the emblems of the 'revolt of the masses'.

This typical penchant for 'not ascribing particular virtues to oneself' is actually a weapon, an instrument of destruction. Climbing to the top of self-content, 'mass man' must perform an act of destruction. According to Ortega y Gasset, this is the new 'barbarian' who wreaks havoc while moving forward. 'The world which surrounds the new man from his birth does not compel him to limit himself in any fashion, it sets up no veto in opposition to him; on the contrary, it incites his appetite, which in principle can increase indefinitely.'<sup>178</sup> This is the effect of historical changes, emancipation, the triumph of rhetoric, equality as well as, what the Spanish philosopher calls, the 'raising of the level of history' and the 'expansion of life'. The world becomes an ever easier place, barriers disappear, new possibilities continue to crop up. 'An inborn, root-impression that life is easy, plentiful, without any grave limitations; consequently, each average man finds within himself a sensation of power and triumph'<sup>179</sup> is becoming a matter of great importance. The mass-man wants to stride forward unashamed of his cravings. 'This leads us to note down in our psychological chart of the mass-man of to-day two fundamental traits: the free expansion of his vital desires, and therefore, of his personality; and his radical ingratitude towards all that has made possible the ease of his existence.'<sup>180</sup>

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177 Ibid., 14-15.

178 Ibid., 57.

179 Ibid., 97.

180 Ibid., 58.

In the first place, 'mass-man' does not understand the fact that everything has its own price. He does not comprehend the idea of cultivation. 'The very perfection with which the nineteenth century gave an organisation to certain orders of existence has caused the masses benefited thereby to consider it, not as an organised, but as a natural system.'<sup>181</sup> The modern 'barbarian' in fact does not accept the idea of *culture*. He detests hardship, does not tolerate requirements which might limit the impetus of desires. Precisely this inclination marks the similarity which creates the new identity formula. 'Mass-man' is geared towards pleasure; he wants to acquire everything effortlessly. (He is clearly 'disposed to making play and sport the mainspring of life'!) He cannot fathom that he has entered a garden of delight which had come into existence only after great and long endeavours.

He is uncritical of himself: due to his being so enthusiastically self-assured 'he will tend to consider and affirm as good everything he finds within himself: opinions, appetites, preferences, tastes'.<sup>182</sup> 'The mass-man regards himself as perfect. The select man, in order to regard himself so, needs to be specially vain, and the belief in his perfection is not united with him consubstantially'.<sup>183</sup> The representative of the masses is never in a quandary. His self-confidence comes from his casual ignorance.

His self-confidence is, like Adam's, paradisiacal. The innate hermetism of his soul is an obstacle to the necessary condition for his discovery of his insufficiency, namely: a comparison of himself with other beings. To compare himself would mean to go out of himself for a moment and to transfer himself to his neighbour. But the mediocre soul is incapable of transmigrations.<sup>184</sup>

The representative of the masses has actually plunged into a narcissistic lethargy leaving no room for reflection. His habits decide everything; he is stuck in a self-important groove which determines his ways. The mass-man is unable to imagine a world that would look different. His aspirations are not subversive; all he is after is increasing the capital of pleasure and comforts which are already at his disposal. Generally, 'different' for him is 'more'. 'Once for all, he accepts the stock of commonplaces, prejudices, fag-ends of ideas or simply empty words which chance has piled up within his mind, and with a boldness only explicable by his ingenuousness, is prepared to impose them everywhere.'<sup>185</sup>

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181 Ibid., 59.

182 Ibid., 62.

183 Ibid., 69.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid., 70.



He breaks down all barriers which hold back the arbitrariness of his opinions. His 'ideas' are of a very peculiar nature. 'The "ideas" of the average man are not genuine ideas, nor is their possession culture. An idea is a putting truth in checkmate. Whoever wishes to have ideas must first prepare himself to desire truth and to accept the rules of the game imposed by it. It is no use speaking of ideas when there is no acceptance of a higher authority to regulate them, a series of standards to which it is possible to appeal in a discussion.'<sup>186</sup> The 'mass-man' despises discussions. He does not care about truth: all he wants is to have all the arguments in his favour. As Ortega y Gasset thinks, he resembles a 'spoiled child': at once naïve and arrogant. 'The latter is constantly catching himself within an inch of being a fool; hence he makes an effort to escape from the imminent folly, and in that effort lies his intelligence. The fool, on the other hand, does not suspect himself; he thinks himself the most prudent of men, hence the enviable tranquillity with which the fool settles down, installs himself in his own folly.'<sup>187</sup> And this is where the problem lies. 'A spoiled child' is confined in the abyss of its own conceit; it persists in the shell of self-admiration. 'The average man finds himself with "ideas" in his head, but he lacks the faculty of ideation. He has no conception even of the rare atmosphere in which ideas live. He wishes to have opinions, but is unwilling to accept the conditions and presuppositions that underlie all opinion. Hence his ideas are in effect nothing more than appetites in words, something like musical romanzas.'<sup>188</sup>

So from the sphere of semantics and logic we move over to the sphere of marketplace aesthetics. The ideas of 'mass-man' resemble a costume used for disguise at a fancy-dress party. The debates philosophers had in mind, assuming that truth would become a salient virtue of public life, have become totally unlikely. The principle of rational self-definition is tumbling down. The concept of the rule of law matters no more. 'Mass-man' has transformed ideas into a distorted facet of his own vanity; actually, ideas are something he can make do without. His behaviour is driven by desires which speak to him with their own voice, content not to seek justification in a debate. 'The old democracy was tempered by a generous dose of liberalism and of enthusiasm for law [...]. Today we are witnessing the triumphs of a hyperdemocracy in which the mass acts directly, outside the law, imposing its aspirations and its desires by means of material pressure.'<sup>189</sup>

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186 Ibid., 71.

187 Ibid., 69.

188 Ibid., 73.

189 Ibid., 17.

Remarks similar in tone are heard even today. The crisis mentioned by the author of *The Revolt of the Masses* was not a seasonal affair. The mismatch between the hopes flowing from the concepts of the Enlightenment and the reality of the emancipation taking place spontaneously, is still striking. The ‘emancipated reason’ is more and more frequently shown as a jester mocking philosophical conceptions.

In *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom focuses on relativism,<sup>190</sup> a theory, which the author thinks has a devastating effect. He believes that emancipation, understood radically, clearly bears the stamp of nihilism. An ‘emancipated’ thought, which ultimately severs all ties which used to restrain it, is becoming useless; immaterial. The author focuses his attention on academic circles; on the tendencies which impact the intellectual climate of university campuses. He, however, has a much broader message. The university campus in the book acts as a ‘magnifying glass’ which allows the author to scrutinize in detail the tendencies spreading beyond university walls.

Unbridled freedom thwarts serious thought and its place is taken by an enthusiastic balancing act; extravagance; ceaseless questioning. All truths are subjected to criticism; casual arbitrariness takes the upper hand. The latter is treated as testimony to freedom. The idea of truth clashes with the aspirations of various minorities which are eager to break loose from the control of dogma and rules. Truth becomes a suspicious anachronism: after all it imposes autocratic requirements. Hence, it is perceived as a lever restricting the freedom of expression as superstition. Characterizing American students’ attitudes, Bloom makes the following point: ‘The relativity of truth is not a theoretical insight but a moral postulate, the condition of a free society’.<sup>191</sup>

Epistemology is linked directly to ethics and politics. The questioning of dogmas becomes a gauge of authenticity. Relativism is transformed into a battle for identity. The idea of rational self-definition, forcing a rigorous conception of truth, no longer matters. Words are descending the heights to which philosophers and theologians had raised them. They are becoming a prop used in rituals of identity: they serve everybody in the same way setting no requirements restricting personal freedom.

The ultimate winner is narcissistic self-confidence. A society that has disavowed the truths which have absolute binding power changes into a constellation of minorities. ‘In twentieth-century social science, however, the common good disappears and along with it the negative view of minorities. The

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190 Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind. How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Soul of Today’s Students* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1988).

191 Ibid., 25.

very idea of majority [...] is done away with in order to protect the minorities.'<sup>192</sup> New systems of knowledge arise drawing their inspiration from relativism. The notion of nature and the concept of the law of nature slowly disappear from the horizon. The tradition which enables us to speak of man, history, society, with no qualifications, in the tone of generalities is becoming irrelevant. 'History and social science are used in a variety of ways to overcome prejudice. We should not be ethnocentric, a term drawn from anthropology, which tells us more about the meaning of openness. We should not think our way is better than others. The intention is not so much to teach the students about other times and places as to make them aware of the fact that their preferences are only that – accidents of their time and place.'<sup>193</sup> Knowledge moves into areas of subjective beliefs.

The cognitive aspirations of the human mind are treated with growing suspicion. The idea of cognition is linked to the idea of truth after all. In a relativist culture, thought is to be primarily a manifest of identity. It becomes one of the aspects of the 'politics of identity'. In a similar vein, thought delights in the taste of the notion of 'difference'.

This is what really follows from the study of non-Western cultures proposed for undergraduates. It points them back to passionate attachment to their own and away from the science which liberates them from it. Science now appears as a threat to culture and a dangerous uprooting charm. In short, they are lost in a no-man's-land between the goodness of knowing and the goodness of culture, where they have been placed by their teachers who no longer have the resources to guide them.<sup>194</sup>

Knowledge which imposes a sense of relativity ultimately leads to separation and enclosure. It is not at all conducive to 'openness' – so much revered by the opponents of dogmas. By sanctioning inclinations imbued with a sense of distinctness, knowledge justifies building divisions. It becomes a manifest of warring minorities. It takes on, so to say, a 'sectarian' nature. It attracts with its glow of otherness; it seduces with the notion of 'difference'. It, of course, exploits emotions, which are the most convenient justification for the belligerent eccentricity. Renouncing the burden of truth, thought becomes an emblem of 'sensitivity'. It serves a compensating function; thinking becomes a therapy formula. It is to enable a psychotherapeutic improvement: regenerate the sense of dignity which is most frequently emphasized by minorities.

Thinking itself is receding into the background, while 'expression' becomes a top priority. Thoughts will be subordinated to motor impulses; hence,

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192 Ibid., 31.

193 Ibid., 30.

194 Ibid., 37.

inevitably, we are entering Freud's world. Actually, this is typical: the language of psychoanalysis, simplified and trivialized, is becoming one of the slangs of pop-culture. It inspires the language of narcissist coquetry; it imbues the manifests of 'sensitivity' with an appropriate tone. Aroused eccentricity, searching for new and shocking modes of expression at all costs, is in Bloom's view, a 'gutter' phenomenon: 'this gutter phenomenon is apparently the fulfilment of the promise made by so much psychology and literature that our weak and exhausted Western civilization would find refreshment in the true source, the unconscious'.<sup>195</sup>

Thought entangled in the mechanisms of the psycho-game, moves away from the areas of intellectual refinement. Even serious ventures are increasingly less solemn. More frequently than not, they resemble caricatures. Terry Eagleton draws our attention to this in his sarcastic study of the fall of theory, called, *After Theory*.<sup>196</sup> The book devoted 'to the political implications of navel-piercing is to take literally the wise old adage that study should be fun.' Universities no longer fear such extravagance; on the contrary, flamboyance has become fashionable. Thought has left the academic 'ivory tower'; it has moved into the world of 'media and shopping malls'.<sup>197</sup>

By imposing the cult of authenticity and separateness, thought has become in the end a peculiar manifestation of folklore. Colourful and dressy, dazzling with its otherness, it stages spectacles which are to feed the sense of vanity, fulfil narcissist ambitions, in a word provide satisfaction. Under these circumstances, effort of any kind, requirements which may hurt a sense of 'sensitivity' are out of the question. Inevitably, thinking is becoming a form of play. It renounces seriousness in the name of bucolic melodiousness. It turns into twitter and babble. All the different voices are to enrich the great symphony of variety. 'Openness, as currently conceived, is a way of making surrender to whatever is most powerful, or worship of vulgar success, look principled.'<sup>198</sup>

Folk melodiousness and adjusting 'one's own' voice replaces serious discussions which could appeal to the commonly acclaimed criteria of significance. The public stage becomes an area of gaudy shows and balancing acts expressing truth which has a 'separate' and 'authentic' nature. It all resembles a large market place. Ideas which are required to be interesting and entertaining are becoming props: trinkets from the gigantic bazaar of pop-culture. Relativism, however, takes revenge on its advocates in a very

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195 Ibid., 79.

196 T. Eagleton, *After Theory* (Basic Books, New York, 2004).

197 Ibid., 3.

198 Bloom, 41.

unpleasant way. 'Historicism and cultural relativism actually are means by which to avoid testing our own prejudices and asking, for example, whether men are really equal or whether that opinion is merely a democratic prejudice.'<sup>199</sup>

This, however, is not something we should worry too much about. Philosophical questions are becoming immaterial. Thought is gradually becoming an unbearable burden. It is subject to a great many restrictions. In an age of the rapid development of electronic media the word has become a supplement of the image. It is being restrained and eliminated. Thinking has become passé – spoiling our play with its anachronism. This, in the simplest terms possible, is the main thought of Neil Postman's excellent book *Amusing Ourselves to Death. Political Discourse in the Age of Show-business*.

Postman refers to America as an example, but his assessment can be generalized as the tendencies he writes about are by no means only local. They stand as testimony to the erosion of the patterns developed in the Enlightenment. Television is not an American exception; the expansion of show-business cannot be treated as a regional oddity. Postman, no doubt, must have infuriated the high priests of the electronic crusade who glorify television's mission. He puts forward radical, bold and unmasking opinions. They reveal the mechanisms of the metamorphosis leading to 'the dissolution of public discourse in America and its conversion into the arts of show business.'<sup>200</sup>

Postman is interested in the changes communication practices are undergoing. They restrict the role of discursive statements. The growing role of television paves the way for the expansion of a new semantics – that of the image forcing upon us the priority of symbolic short cuts and simplification. Postman presents his key argument by invoking Plato's authority. 'It is an argument that fixes its attention on the forms of human conversation, and postulates that how we are obliged to conduct such conversations will have the strongest possible influence on what ideas we can conveniently express. And what ideas are convenient to express inevitably become the important content of a culture.'<sup>201</sup>

So what exactly is the 'way of conducting conversation in a world which adores the allure of pictures? 'I use the word "conversation" metaphorically to refer not only to speech but to all techniques and technologies that permit people of a particular culture to exchange messages.'<sup>202</sup> Technology is the crucial point here. 'For on television, discourse is conducted largely through visual imagery,

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199 Ibid., 40.

200 N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death. Political Discourse in the Age of Show-business* (Penguin Books, New York, 1985), 5.

201 Ibid., 6.

202 Ibid.

which is to say that television gives us a conversation in images, not words.<sup>203</sup> So, in fact, semantics is substituted by aesthetics. The key thing is that the image must be likeable; it should not be ugly or boring. It can be shocking, graphic even, but its appeal should never be open to doubt. After all, the only thing that counts is satisfaction and a sense of pleasure. This is the basic measure of value in a hedonistic culture. Ugliness, dread and cruelty can provide satisfaction, as well. The condition is that they fit within a certain waveband; maintain an appropriate balance; eschew hurting our feelings.

So in the world of imagery, satisfaction becomes an imperative. Images must please the eye (there are many forms of joy). Only if they meet this condition can they function in the public domain. If all turn their eyes away from them they will count for nothing. Hence, words must be censored, subjugated to the rules of effectiveness which determine the success of the picture. At best, words can be an addition to an image as they no longer are a linchpin of public discourse. In the television age everything is beginning to change dramatically. 'The emergence of the image-manager in the political arena and the concomitant decline of the speech writer attest to the fact that television demands a different kind of content from other media.'<sup>204</sup>

Television creates pictures – it *shows*; it is turning naturally into a branch of *show business*. There, the rules of skilful depiction become the main concern. No time is left for the art of words, for discussions which give full credit to the energy of human thought. No time for depth and reliability. An idea which is subordinated to the logic of imagery can survive only thanks to extreme simplification. Taking over the sphere of public debate, television places ideas in the repertoire of show-business. From now on it is to be for the purposes of play. Thought should not overwhelm with its weight or cause discomfort. It must meet the requirements of a show; offer entertainment. 'Of course, to say that television is entertaining is merely banal. [...] But what I am claiming here is not that television is entertaining but that it has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience.[...] The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining'.<sup>205</sup> Even when it is seemingly impossible as in the case of information which is not necessarily pleasant. 'To say it still another way: Entertainment is the supra-ideology of all discourse on television. No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching presumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure.'<sup>206</sup> We

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203 Ibid., 7.

204 Ibid.

205 Ibid., 87.

206 Ibid.

are thus dealing with 'news-shows'. Their drama is to help while away the time for us even when the subject seems to preclude that very purpose. This is when the style of imagery comes to our aid: superficiality and brevity. 'It is simply not possible to convey a sense of seriousness about any event if its implications are exhausted in less than one minute's time.'<sup>207</sup> Indeed, there is a 'high level of unreality' in the news provided by television. Reality becomes a bizarre spectacle in the end. Television imposes a convention which substantially limits the role of thinking in the creation of the image of reality. The media, as Postman rightly argues, involves not only the technology of broadcasting but 'epistemology' as well. Television enforces its own concept of truth. 'The decline of a print-based epistemology and the accompanying rise of a television-based epistemology has had grave consequences for public life'.<sup>208</sup> It totally annihilated serious thought subjecting everything to the rules of the show. This is the 'way of conducting conversation' that we ought to be talking about. At the same time, reflecting on the tendencies which shape the face of public discourse in the age of electronic media.

Those who have participated in public discourse have now turned into image-consumers. They have grown used to absorbing a certain way of thinking, agreeing to a tutelage which totally deprives them of self-reliance. Time has corroborated Postman's characterization. The new epistemology has rooted out all aspirations for developing one's own way of thinking. The mind of the information-consumer has become a prefab element; it is incapable of venturing outside the frames of the media-generated picture of reality. The patterns of pop-culture have become peculiar formulas of apperception. Being passive represents complete helplessness. Independent views are out of the question since it is futile to glance beyond the imposed patterns of thought.

A picture of the deepening moral decay is painted by the writer Curtis White (also an expert on literature, President of the American "Center for Book Culture", so no doubt a typographical mind) in a book published almost 20 years after Postman's work, *The Middle Mind. Why Americans Don't Think for Themselves*. Exactly, why don't Americans think for themselves? The new mind of the Americans, the Middle Mind, is responsible for everything. A conquering power, capable of taking over a vast expanse of culture and imposing its own priorities. 'The Middle mind won this war through stealth. It won our hearts and minds. It came to us in the same way the latest Harry Potter came to us, at midnight on release night. Harry Potter "passes" for art.'<sup>209</sup> And here is the novelty, here the crux of the matter lies. The war ran its course without a single

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207 Ibid., 103.

208 Ibid., 24.

209 C. White, *The Middle Mind* (Harper Collins Publishers, San Francisco, 2004), vii.

shot being fired but it wrought havoc. Harry Potter could stand on a pedestal only because an act of destruction took place beforehand. The bastions of refinement fashioned by elite culture and inaccessible to the masses came crumbling down. The ‘mediocre mind’ has won – the Middle Mind. A mind, which using pop-culture semantics created its own domain: that of easy delights and conventional charms, universal legibility and convenient approval. It is everywhere; always ‘in-between’, like an intermediary with endless capabilities. It has won everybody’s favours building an area of banal agreement and trivial unanimity.

Its strength lies in the clichés of pop-culture. The Middle Mind is a mechanism manufacturing esthetical and semantic matrices, canons of allure and legibility. It determines what stands the chance of being liked and being meaningful. The order is not haphazard. The fact is that only what is likeable can become legible. The origins of the Middle Mind go back to ‘strictly speaking’, as White insists, ‘the world of entertainment.’<sup>210</sup> It expands its influence by means of various extrapolations. But this is typical: matrices and prototypes originate in the kingdom of laughter and play.

The Middle Mind moulds its own sound on the basis of copy-cat practices. It has its own ‘great strategic coup of the Middle Mind, to “pass” for art.’<sup>211</sup> Simplify, make easy, trivialize at the same time keeping up the appearance of refinement. Process the charisma of the original, following the codes of pop culture. Imitate. This is how works of ‘thought’ and works of ‘art’ come into being, which the mass recipient acknowledges as his own, relishing at the same time in their high status. The Middle Mind is possessive: it wants to take over the imagination, dazzle, impress – just as Harry Potter has done. Since imitation lies at the heart of the matter it is unusually productive. Finally, says White with a sneer: ‘the Middle Mind’s version of thought is indistinguishable from non-thought, from what we should call mere product.’<sup>212</sup>

The Middle Mind is a formula that certainly should not be personified. It is not some mysterious power which lives in the depths of mass consciousness. It is more like a structure; an interdependence of certain codes imposed by pop-culture, thus building a semantics of shortcuts, aids and simplifications. The Middle Mind is a way of thinking acquired by a community. It is a system of patterns which organize the space of communication. They determine what enters the field of vision. The Middle Mind’s devastating force comes from its ubiquity. White believes the total destruction of imagination and originality is the most obvious sign of the predominance of the faceless vanquisher: the

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210 Ibid., 14.

211 Ibid., vii.

212 Ibid., vi.



Middle Mind. What used to be taken for art, in the days of yore, now lands in the field of pop-culture becoming a segment of the entertainment industry. All creativity is subordinated to the unconditional requirements of typicality. Otherwise it becomes illegible, thus incapable of entertaining and so, consequently, immaterial. The all-powerful trivialization also involves areas which have for a long time been an example of refinement. The Middle Mind easily forced its way into universities and the world of academia. It has taken control of learned discourse, imposing its strategy of typicality and simplification, cloaked in the pretence of originality. Universities have become the 'conceptual co-conspirator' of the world – the Middle Mind's domain – that is, the world of entertainment.<sup>213</sup> Institutions of higher learning do not belong to it directly but in fact provide a convenient resonance for the tendencies arising within the framework of entertainment. In the first place, this conspiracy primarily results in transforming intellectual endeavours into a form of entertainment or play. Scholarship must follow fads and agree to servitudes. This amounts to, above all, an agreement with banality and trivialization. At its most striking, it is to be found in an area which is currently most fashionable, that is in the area of cultural studies. They have now become an example of modern 'scholasticism',<sup>214</sup> White believes. Beckoning with the appearance of emancipation, they in fact tame minds, imposing the absolute power of paradigms. The continuous emphasis on difference, the celebration of otherness has been turned into a banality, a coquetry of sorts which is tantamount to an invitation to play a game. You only need to accept its rules: treat the affirmation of otherness as a holy dogma. In this way the alleged quest for originality becomes an extreme form of conformism. Superficiality and rut win; they are absolved by good intentions. Cultural studies – as is well known – have become the bastion of political correctness. They impose their own imperatives and excommunicate opponents of the cult of 'difference'. At the same time they create a fun atmosphere erasing all distinctions which were responsible for serious thought. In the area of cultural studies 'notoriously, Milton had had to share the stage with Madonna'<sup>215</sup> This is how a lexicon of great fun came into being. The idioms laid down by the Middle Mind offer the allure of superficiality. Trivialization is conducive to the emergence of codes which facilitate combining everything together at random so what emerges is light-hearted, as every good game requires – so that it does not become oppressive.

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213 Ibid., 14.

214 Ibid., 15.

215 Ibid., 14.

Naturally, the Middle Mind embraces politics, as well. It produces its own ideology but content is not the defining feature. Content can change. What matters above all is form, the semantics of simplifications, and the appropriate style of the message. Only what meets the requirements imposed by the formula of the game can have resonance. If the message overwhelms with its seriousness or lengthiness, bores or depresses (is over intellectualized, that is, bears the hallmark of reflection) it is incapable of acquiring any significance. It gets disqualified and excluded. In this fashion, politics frees itself from the ordeal of thinking. Absorbing the idioms created by the Middle Mind politics enters the world of pop-culture becoming one of its parts.



## Chapter Four

### Will to Power: the ‘Symptomatology’ of Modernity

Neil Postman’s sarcastic catchword: ‘amuse yourself to death’ sounds like a perfunctory manifest of nihilism. His observations confirm the accuracy of Nietzsche’s diagnosis. ‘The man of the age of [...] broken lights’, let us recall, adores masquerades. The modern era, Nietzsche believes, is prepared ‘as no other age has ever been for a carnival in the grand style, for the most spiritual festival – laughter and arrogance, for the transcendental height of supreme folly and Aristophanic ridicule of the world.’<sup>216</sup>

Gradually, everything is becoming irrelevant. Emptiness arises and it is filled with farce. The world reaches the ‘heights of the highest absurdity’. Laughter and mockery are obviously one of the symptoms of nihilism. ‘Values which lose value’ become an object of scorn. Mockery, however, is not the point which captures the whole truth. ‘Every profound spirit needs a mask.’ Nihilism, let us remember, has to do with a ‘masquerade’. It conceals its true nature. We are thus dealing with a ‘carnival’, a parade of joyfulness. Life is gaining momentum; the world is bathed in the glow of new expectations. The modern era is a time of euphoria.

So where is the emptiness? What is the sense of *nothing* in which the notion of nihilism has taken root? What is its most deeply hidden meaning? In what way does the truth of nihilism attain its full meaning?

Nietzsche’s reflections on the multifarious forms and manifestations of nihilism take up a substantial part of the *Will to Power* – a treatise which tackles the issue of nihilism in the most unambiguous way. ‘For why has the advent of nihilism become necessary? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals – because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these “values” really had.’<sup>217</sup> So, the louder the ‘values’ are voiced, the more inevitable their defeat. In its wake, the need for compensation; the need for generating new ‘values’. The carnival goes on; the modern era is a time of excitement and momentum; everything is in continuous motion.

Nihilism takes the most diverse forms. The fact that values wear out quickly leads to a typical ambivalence. On the one hand ‘It can be a sign of strength: the

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216 *Beyond Good and Evil*, 148.

217 F. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. by W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (Random House, New York, 1968), 4.

spirit may have grown so strong that previous goals ("convictions," articles of faith) have become incommensurate (for a faith generally expresses the constraint of conditions of existence, submission to the authority of circumstances under which one flourishes, grows, gains power). Or a sign of the lack of strength to posit for oneself, productively, a goal, a why, a faith.<sup>218</sup> This gives rise to confusion and difficulty in picking up the thread. The difference between determination and resignation is absolute but only on the surface; only seemingly so. Actually, in both cases the point is the *crisis* of values, a sense of want and disappointment. A belief that 'values have lost their value'.

So there is a bond, a common content which entitles us to place side by side the different examples of the carnival masquerade. Those who scream and those who are silent. Nietzsche speaks of 'active nihilism' and 'passive nihilism'. He, nevertheless, emphasizes that 'Nihilism represents a pathological transitional stage (what is pathological is the tremendous generalization, the inference that there is no meaning at all): whether the productive forces are not yet strong enough, or whether decadence still hesitates and has not yet invented its remedies.'<sup>219</sup> Both situations, both attitudes complement each other.

They conceal the truth hiding beneath a veil of carnival extravagance or 'ostentations fatigue'. Let us not forget: nihilism is an 'in-between stage'. It is an incomplete articulation lacking a definitive meaning. Clearly, what we have in mind is nihilism understood as a state of decay and degradation. There is not much of a difference between dramatic attempts at rescuing 'values' or resignation. Both courses of action coincide somewhere in a void which gradually replaces the values that have been destroyed. Nihilism, says Nietzsche, has to be 'lived through'; we have to thoroughly experience the sense of futility. Only then can we find the most important thread; think about creating 'new values'; 'revalue all values'.

Nihilist culture must deal its final blow to all conventions linked to the traditional perspective on 'values'. Let us repeat, they must draw 'as their ultimate conclusion' their own annihilation.

In the word nihilism *nihil* does not signify non-being but primarily a value of nil. Life takes on a value of nil insofar as it is denied and depreciated. Depreciation always presupposes a fiction: it is by means of fiction that one falsifies and depreciates, it is by means of fiction that something is opposed to life. The whole of life then becomes unreal, it is represented as appearance, it takes on a value of nil in its entirety.<sup>220</sup>

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218 Ibid., 12.

219 Ibid., 14.

220 G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by H. Tomlison (Continuum, London, 2002), 139.

Nihilism, then, involves the unmasking of fiction. It is an experience which enables us to understand the role of appearances, the mechanism of lying, which ultimately leads to the downfall of all feigned values. 'The idea of another world, of a supersensible world in all its forms (God, essence, the good, truth), the idea of values superior to life is not one example among many but the constitutive element of all fiction. Values superior to life are inseparable from their effect: the depreciation of life, the negation of this world.'<sup>221</sup> Nihilism, as Nietzsche would say, is ultimately a 'normal state'. It is a revelation which nobody can stop. Such is the logic of 'values' heading for self-annihilation.

Nietzsche's conclusions, especially if we mean their normative aspect and the affirmation of 'life' set against the fiction developing on the basis of 'values', can of course raise objections. Not without reason Martin Heidegger presents Nietzsche as a thinker of the borderline, who, on the one hand, undermines the foundations of all metaphysics, on the other, though, cannot overcome its temptation. Indeed, the concept of 'the revaluation of all values' with the message of the idea of 'superhuman' can give the impression of being yet another grand project. A project which has raised the same doubts Nietzsche had in mind when he presented each formula of 'truth' as a source of illusion.

Let us, however, put aside these conclusions which themselves are debatable. Let us focus on matters that are beyond dispute. One such indisputable issue is the courage it takes to 'philosophize with a hammer'.<sup>222</sup> In other words, to keep on unmasking the emptiness. At the same time, deriding the pretences of reason which is doing all it can to save 'values' (philosophy and learning). Nietzsche renounces the temptation of romantic messianism, something Habermas strongly underscores. 'It is now a question of totally turning away from the nihilistic void of modernity. With Nietzsche, the criticism of modernity dispenses for the first time with its retention of an emancipatory content.' Nietzsche does not put forward new and better concepts of personification, or suggest a new 'truth'. Nevertheless, the concept of 'superhuman' cannot be treated as yet another vision of the emancipation of the 'subject'. 'Subject-centered reason is confronted with reason's absolute other. And as a counter authority to reason, Nietzsche appeals to experiences that are displaced back into the archaic realm – experiences of self-disclosure of a decentred subjectivity, liberated from all constraints of cognition and purposive

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221 Ibid.

222 F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize With a Hammer*, trans. by R. Polt (Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1997).

activity, all imperatives of utility and morality.<sup>223</sup> This can serve as a vehicle for shaping criticism which is tantamount to merciless exposure – the tearing away of successive layers of masques.

Indeed, what are the implications of the statement: 'nihilism is a normal state'? Nietzsche's exegesis of illusions should be treated seriously. Nowadays, according to Alasdair MacIntyre, we understand modernity in the spirit of Weber and Nietzsche. In fact, Nietzschean motives have become the key theme of the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'.

Nietzsche is interested in the semantics of 'masquerade'. He studies the efforts facilitating the codification of 'values'. He researches the pose and pompous language of the era which has become the great manufacturer of 'truth'. Nietzsche's characterisations reveal hidden motives. They give us the right to certify what really is becoming the *content* of modernity. Hence, what is hidden in the emptiness shrouded with a veil of ideals? What conclusions must be drawn by the observer who would not succumb to the deception of consecutive sequences of the 'masquerade'?

Nietzsche sets about to 'auscultate idols'. 'There are more idols than realities in the world: that's my "evil eye" on this world, and my "evil ear" too... To pose questions here with a hammer for once, and maybe to hear in reply that well-known hollow tone which tells of bloated innards'.<sup>224</sup> Consequently, a false majesty, a majesty of appearances. This is what determines the nature of the spectacle. And, for the most part, this is true about the loftiest of ideas. And, especially, such an interpretation of human activity which presumes that practice is always tied to certain values; that human deeds reside in the sphere of *morality* and therefore are subject to evaluation from the point of view of higher reasons. 'That there are no moral facts', says Nietzsche.

Morality is just an interpretation of certain phenomena, or speaking more precisely, a *mis*interpretation.[...] Thus, moral judgments can never be taken literally: literally, they always contain nothing but nonsense. But they are semiotically invaluable all the same: they reveal, at least to those who are in the know, the most valuable realities of cultures and inner states that did not *know* enough to "understand" themselves. Morality is just a sign language, just a symptomatology: you already have to know what it's all about in order to get any use out of it.<sup>225</sup>

What can be said about the 'symptomatology' of the modern age? First of all, it has to be said that morality has become a formula of 'decadence'. A manifestation of the lies inherent in the assurance: 'we have become more moral'.

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223 Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 94.

224 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 3.

225 *Ibid.*, 38.

I allow myself, in reply, to pose the question of whether we have really become more moral. The fact that the whole world thinks so is already an objection to this claim... We moderns, very tender, very easily wounded, giving and receiving consideration in a hundred ways, actually imagine that this tender humanity that we represent, this unanimity we have achieved in considerateness, in helpfulness, in mutual trust, is a positive step forward.<sup>226</sup>

This belief is a symptom of decadence. It actually signifies a fascination with one's own weakness. This is what it means 'to feel attracted by "disinterested" motives'.

On the other hand, this belief is a testimony to lying. 'The poisonous vegetation which has grown out of such decomposition', says Nietzsche. It overwhelms and overpowers but in fact there is no truth in it. It is only a veil, one of the costumes used for the 'masquerade'.

My continuing objection to all sociology in England and France is that it knows only the *decaying forms* of society from its own experience, and with perfect naïveté takes its own decaying instincts as the *norm* for sociological value judgements. *Declining* life, the waning of all organizing, that is, separating forces, forces that open gulfs, that rank some above and some below, is formulated in today's sociology as an ideal... Our socialists are *decadents*, but Mr. Herbert Spencer is also a *decadent* – he sees something desirable in the triumph of altruism.<sup>227</sup>

This precisely is the nature of the new 'ideals'. But let us remember, 'values' are the emblem of illusions. Behind the veil of pompous declarations there lurks a completely different content. Let us also not forget that in the modern age 'values' lose 'value' faster. From the very beginning they give a false tone. Ideals are becoming a form of narrative which makes a play of pretences possible. They are to lend credence to the fiction of good faith. Sometimes, however, they are simply manifestations of lying. This is, at its most evident, in politics.

Keeping in mind the conclusions of Nietzsche's argumentation presented above, we can say morality is but a mask of resentment. And so it is a medley of different feelings which can have nothing to do with altruism, but rather with feeling sorry for oneself, with envy and contempt. New politics – inasmuch as it appeals to 'values', thereby, supporting the servitudes of morality – inevitably becomes a testimony to hypocrisy. This concerns all orientations and trends: socialism, liberalism, as well as radicalism taking the form of anarchism. Here is a short outline of the situation: 'one lacks the faith in one's right, innocence; mendaciousness rules and serving the moment.'<sup>228</sup> 'One lacks the faith in one's

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226 Ibid., 72.

227 Ibid., 74.

228 *Will to power*, 39.



right' – hence, hypocrisy. 'Symptomatology', which Nietzsche has in mind when speaking about the benefits of studying morality, reveals the decisive role of insincerity. The modern era prefers to use the rhetoric of good will and good faith thus producing an illusion of an easy agreement. 'Our virtues are conditional on, are provoked by, our weaknesses [...]. "Equality" as a certain factual increase in similarity, which merely finds expression in the theory of "equal rights", is an essential feature of decline. The cleavage between man and man, status and status, the plurality of types, the will to be oneself, to stand out – what I call the pathos of distance, that is characteristic of every strong age.'<sup>229</sup>

The conception of freedom is also a manifestation of hypocrisy. 'We no longer have any sympathy nowadays for the concept of free will: we know only too well what it is – the most disreputable piece of trickery the theologians have produced, aimed at making humanity "responsible" in their sense'. According to Nietzsche this is fraud. 'One has stripped becoming of its innocence when some state of being-such-and-such is traced back to will, to intentions, to acts: the doctrine of the will was essentially invented for purposes of punishment, that is, for purposes of wanting to find people guilty.'<sup>230</sup> The pathos of freedom is false; the politics of emancipation is senseless. All the concepts of freedom are burdened with the original sin of hypocrisy. The rhetoric of freedom masques the desire for dominance. 'The improvers of humanity' refer to this in a bid to impose their own power. 'Liberal institutions stop being liberal as soon as they have been established: from that point forward, there is nothing that harms freedom more and fundamentally than liberal institutions. [...]with liberal institutions, the herd animal is victorious every time.'<sup>231</sup> 'Freedom', therefore, is a grim propriety in a world in which independence has lost all its resonance. 'But that is a symptom of decadence: our modern concept of "freedom" is another proof of the degeneration of the instincts',<sup>232</sup> As Nietzsche emphasizes with contempt, it serves the purpose of 'breeding' a certain type of man and imposing certain forms of discipline. This modern conception of freedom is solely a 'breeding' program. Inherent in it is a pitiful conception of 'happiness' linked to prosperity; a belief in progress signifying a total abandonment of personal aspirations. It offers a promise of 'well-being'. Meanwhile, 'the human being who has become free, not to mention the spirit that has become free, steps all over the contemptible sort of well-being'.<sup>233</sup>

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229 *Twilight of the Idols*, 73.

230 *Ibid.*, 35.

231 *Ibid.*, 74.

232 *Ibid.*, 77.

233 *Ibid.*, 75.

Freedom is also treated as reason's blessing: the herd-man is a *rational* human being eagerly accepting the 'breeding' program. So it is rather the 'right to stupidity' that can have an emancipatory nature, in Nietzsche's view. It is not respected by philosophy, morality or politics. Hope can be found only in art. 'The evening man, whose "wild instincts have fallen asleep" (as Faust puts it), requires summer resorts [...]. In such ages art has a right to pure foolishness [...]. Pure foolishness restores'.<sup>234</sup> 'Our institutions are good for nothing anymore.'<sup>235</sup>

The symptoms are, therefore, obvious: weakness, helplessness, predilection to lying and posturing, in a word, decadence. Nietzsche's *symptomatology* gives us the means to understand more. All these symptoms have yet another obvious sense. They are a camouflage of sorts; weakness is only a mask. It conceals a void; but the greatest revelation is supposed to take place in this void. Nihilism, let us repeat Nietzsche's important observation, is something which has to be lived through. A continuous process of the 'revaluation of all values' is going on. And this process exposes the ultimate truth. Morality, after all is only a certain fable, 'a language of signs', a tale about weakness which holds only partial truth. We learn about it from a literal reading of the text. Reading alone is not enough though, as no tale is fully reliable.

We no longer think highly enough of ourselves when we communicate. Our real experiences are not chatter at all. They couldn't communicate if they wanted to. That means that there are no words for them. When we have words for something, we've already gone beyond it. In all speaking there is a grain of contempt. Language, so it seems, was invented only for what is mediocre, common, communicable.<sup>236</sup>

Let us reiterate: 'we have already gone beyond whatever we have words for'! So what is the sense of all fables, all narratives which just keep on growing in number? What truth lies hidden in the labyrinths of miscellaneous stories? An obvious truth: everything is heading towards the final 'revaluation of all values'. The more different stories there are, the bigger their momentum, the more obvious it becomes that they are becoming more irrelevant. Therein lies the urgent need for reincarnation; this is the source of all the confusion. Even so, the triviality and emptiness of the stories is becoming increasingly plain.

Gradually the most important revelation is taking place: on the rummings and scrap-heaps of unmasked and ridiculed 'truths', the *will to power* takes the upper hand. This is the deepest sense of 'revaluating all values'. In the hustle and bustle of the most diverse stories,

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234 Ibid., 67.

235 Ibid., 75.

236 Ibid., 65.

[t]he world appears as a network of distortions and interpretations for which no intention and no text provides a basis. Together with a sensibility that allows itself to be affected in as many different ways as possible, the power to create meaning constitutes the authentic core of the will to power. This is at the same time a will to illusion, a will to simplification, to masks, to the superficial; art counts as man's genuine metaphysical activity, because life itself is based on illusion, deception, optics, the necessity of the perspectival and of error.<sup>237</sup>

This is the proper *content* of modernity. Ultimately, this is the sense of the 'revaluation of all values'. By all means, the point is not to constitute new values which could potentially replace dethroned divinities. Everything is totally different. 'The valuing is to be new: not only what is posited as a value but above all else the manner in which the values are posited in general.'<sup>238</sup> This is where the concept of the 'will to power' is called for. 'The expression "will to power" designates the basic character of beings; any being which is, insofar as it is, is will to power.'<sup>239</sup> And here we come to the heart of the matter: '[d]emonstration of will to power as the basic character of beings is supposed to expunge the lies in our experience of beings and in our interpretation of them. But not only that. It is also supposed to ground the principle, from which the valuation is to spring and in which it must remain rooted. For "will to power" is already in itself an estimating and valuing.'<sup>240</sup>

The manifestation of the will to power, therefore, should not be treated as a curiosity of modern times (modernity merely imparts a more transparent sense to everything). Nihilism, likewise, is not a peculiarity of the nineteenth century – the time of the 'broken lights', as described by Nietzsche – weary with its own goings-on. According to Heidegger:

[n]ihilism means that the uppermost values devalue themselves. This means that whatever realities and laws set the standard in Christendom, in morality since Hellenistic times, and in philosophy since Plato, lose their binding force, and for Nietzsche that always means creative force. In his view nihilism is never merely a development of his own times; nor does it only pertain to the nineteenth century. Nihilism begins in the pre-Christian era and it does not cease with the twentieth century.<sup>241</sup>

The world has gone through various periods of the 'revaluation of values'. However, the modern situation is unique: it is the time when the experience of

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237 Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 95.

238 M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche* vol. 1, trans. by D.F. Krell (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981), 31.

239 *Ibid.*, 18.

240 *Ibid.*, 32.

241 *Ibid.*, 26.

nihilism becomes crucial. The time of unmasking is approaching: the age of disillusion. Actually, this is where the healing nature of nihilism lies according to Nietzsche. It is not 'mere collapse, valuelessness, and destruction. Rather, it is a basic mode of historical movement that does not exclude, but even requires and even furthers, for long stretches of time, a certain creative upswing.'<sup>242</sup>

The 'revaluation of all values' which is an act of initiation bringing out the sense of nihilism, primarily signifies that 'the very place for previous values disappears, not merely that the values themselves fall away. This implies that the nature and direction of valuation, and the definition of the essence of value are transformed. The revaluating thinks being for the first time as value. With it, metaphysics begins to be value thinking.'<sup>243</sup>

Thus, nihilism signifies liberation. The significance of barriers raised by faith and metaphysics recede into the past. There is no room for patterns which used to subject values to the supervision of higher truths. Patterns have been deciphered; exposed. As it transpired, the ideals growing out of truths are, merely, a peculiar recipe for 'breeding' values. So, values are not 'innocent'. They are in no position to demand unconditional recognition. They are after all, only a projection of desires. The unmasking force of nihilism is expressed in the fall of all desires related to the search for long-lasting support and definitive solutions. 'The need for values in their former shape and in their previous place – that is to say, their place in the transcendent – is uprooted.'<sup>244</sup>

Let us not forget, this new place will be called: *will to power*. The phrase names that from which all valuation proceeds and to which it returns. However, as we have said, the new valuation is not a "revaluation of all prior values" merely in that it supplants all earlier values with power, the uppermost value, but first and foremost because power and only power posits values, validates them, and makes decisions about the possible justifications of a valuation.'<sup>245</sup>

Thus, 'power' becomes the 'highest value'; the only source of values. It is easy for misunderstandings to occur here. There were always plenty of them. Nietzsche's complex argumentation can be transformed into slogans which take on at once, a menacing and desperately naïve tone. Such satanic 'Nietzscheanism' imposing the praise of 'power' associated with dominance and the manifestation of strength is a caricature. It is a manifestation of a propensity still not transformed in the 'revaluation of all values'. It is also as

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242 Ibid., 27.

243 M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. by D.F. Krell, vols 3 and 4 (HarperCollins, New York, 1991), 6.

244 Ibid.

245 Ibid. 7.

testament to the naïve idolatry linked to the traditional understanding of the world as a space where higher powers can speak. Associating 'power' with dominance is a total misrepresentation of Nietzsche's thought. 'Will to power', Heidegger emphasizes, does not mean simply the 'romantic' yearning and quest for power by those who have no power.<sup>246</sup> Sentimentality is alien to Nietzsche's thought. Literalness of any sort, possibly suggested by traditional metaphysics, is out of the question. The 'will to power' does not represent the demonstration of ambitions which make strongmen out of weaklings. Gaining the upper hand by controlling a certain area within the confines of the 'world' is an unlikely option. A traditionally understood world no longer exists. Let us not forget, the 'death of god' involves the downfall of metaphysics. All characterizations which could present the world as an ordered whole within which one could endorse one's own position are becoming peripheral. 'Beings themselves require a new interpretation through which their basic character may be defined in a way that will make it fit to serve as a "principle" for the inscription of a new table of values and as a standard of measure for suitably ranking such values'.<sup>247</sup>

This is the sense of the concept of the 'will to power': it outlines the 'borders of the area of what is being in its being'. This is the whole truth: traditionally understood 'reality' ceases to exist. The articulation of the will to power cannot signify the traditionally comprehended rule; there no longer is a field within which it could take shape. The world is not a 'thing' anymore. Similarly, it cannot become an 'object' of the will to power. This is why in the end it (the will to power) can only refer to itself. Actually, it is merely a continuous 'overcoming of the self'. 'It is' if it incessantly 'overpowers itself'.

And there it is: the truth that is going to determine the nature of the new order. 'If all being is will to power, then only what is fulfilled in its essence by power "has" value or "is" a value. But power is power only as enhancement of power to the extent that it is truly power, alone determining all beings, power does not recognize the worth or value of anything outside of itself.'<sup>248</sup>

Irrespective of the opposition this characterization could arouse – if only due to its slightly esoteric tone different from the common line of thought – its significance should be acknowledged. Nietzsche draws our attention to the change which determines the unique shape of modernity; an epoch which realizes the message of nihilism to the utmost degree. Here is a point of substance: 'will to power as a principle for the new valuation tolerates no end

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246 Ibid.

247 Ibid., 6.

248 Ibid., 7.

outside of being as a whole'.<sup>249</sup> The manifestation of the will to power becomes the one and only goal. As we already know, this manifestation represents the incessant 'overcoming of the self'. This is how all *foundations* disappear. All 'ideals' lead a short and miserable life. Their emergence alone suffices to spark off the questioning. The only value, one could say, is to question the value. Disputes are not a sign of a quest leading in a specific direction. 'Ideals' are only the costumes which the will to power boasts about. However, each costume would be rejected. Everything is to be foiled, as such is the logic of the 'overcoming of oneself'. In the end, we should not be expecting a moral or a solution. The will to power imposes a ceaseless repetition; the same scenes must be repeated all over again – establishing and rejecting. Here is the most important idea: 'the basic character of being as will to power names itself as "eternal recurrence of the same"'. Since all 'being as will to power that is, as incessant self-overpowering must be a continual "becoming," and because such "becoming" cannot move "toward an end" outside its own "farther and farther" but is ceaselessly caught up in the cyclical increase of power to which it reverts, then being as a whole too, as this power-conforming becoming, must itself always recur again and bring back the same.'<sup>250</sup>

Clearly, then, modernity feeds on emptiness. 'Achievement' or 'fulfilment' of any sort is out of the question. The only thing that counts is the increasing force of the 'will to power', which, let us remember, 'does not allow any other goal'. This emptiness should not be treated literally, of course. The point is not to annihilate in the most prosaic sense of the word: destroying without leaving a trace. Taking place is a continuous destruction but it is done in a different dimension, beyond our view. So, the world perceived in accordance with all the obvious habits is maintaining its old form. It is not coming to ruin. The will to power is conducive to, and indeed, favours expansion. Expansion sometimes gets out of control leading to destruction, in the simplest terms. It is the spasms of the will to power which explain the build-up of historical cataclysms. However, the point is not the cruelty of war and the mad passion of devastation which in these circumstances comes to the fore. Destruction has another sense: destroyed are all foundations on which values could have been based. 'Values' become the articulation of the will to power. Their status is being radically transformed. We know they are being formed, that they are always part of some 'project'; that we can discern only strange 'priorities' and 'preferences' in them. This unmasking of values is going on. They are being exposed in an increasingly bold and merciless fashion. This, incidentally, is the way in which the force of

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249 Ibid.

250 Ibid.

the will to power is manifested: in the long run, it cannot tolerate any values so it ruthlessly seeks to expose them, obviously, only to make yet another evocation.

Modernity is, of course, still hiding behind its mask. The truth about nihilism is clearing the way for itself with difficulty. Due to the habits of the eye, the constructions themselves are more important than the movement which makes them cease to exist. 'Those who have abandoned God cling that much more firmly to the faith in morality.'<sup>251</sup> Thus, modernity is respectable and is making every effort to remain that way. It pays attention to principles; celebrates projects and programs. There can be no contempt for 'values'. In politics, the rhetoric of 'human rights' is taking centre stage; everything is to be governed by principles. However, a problem arises, namely the fickleness and ease with which principles are questioned. But now, nothing can arrest the devaluation of subsequent programs. They are ephemeral; becoming sheer episodes bereft of deeper meaning. Trying to tie them with a common thread is futile: there is no whole within the confines of which they could take on a deeper meaning. They are testimony to helplessness; a desperate attempt at stiffening the fragile construction. Non-stop *posturing* is underway: after all, everything is studied; everything is only a project which reveals the radicalism of the will to power. Seriousness of any ilk, let us not forget, ultimately bears the hallmarks of a 'masquerade'. 'The most universal sign of the modern age: man has lost dignity in his own eyes to an incredible extent.'<sup>252</sup> This is the cause of the scuffle, the balancing act, which is to pave the way for restoring hope.

So, the last seal has still not been broken. 'But as soon as man finds out how that world is fabricated solely from psychological needs [...] the last form of nihilism comes into being: it includes *disbelief in any metaphysical world* and forbids itself any belief in a *true* world. Having reached this standpoint, one grants the reality of "becoming" as the only reality'.<sup>253</sup> This final *unmasking* of pretences requires courage of which there is still not enough. Nietzsche is of the view that depressed by his own fall, modern man feels best in the climate of a 'masquerade'. This is why new sets and decorations are being made and so much is being said about values. Modernity is looking for substitutes for faith, new guarantees of happiness and perfection which the perspective of eternal life once made possible. It finds them easily: in the madness of technology which is, at the same time, a magnified and most prosaic expression of the will to power. It is technology which promises a metamorphosis; becomes a new vision of a

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251 *Will to Power*, 16.

252 *Ibid.*

253 *Ibid.*, 13.

radical change: a substitute for salvation. Technology has taken the place of religion. It is the latest profession of faith of modern man who is defending himself against the truth of 'becoming', the last stronghold of hopes pinned on the climate of metamorphosis, a definitive change of the human condition. Technology, then, is becoming an area of expectation, a semblance of eschatology. This theme would be noted by Martin Heidegger. Sustaining Nietzsche's characterization of the will to power, he portrays technology as the most powerful deity of modernity; the last deity – but one that attracts countless believers. Technology, at once, exposes and conceals the truth rooted in the will to power. Modernity is thus an embodied paradox – the anticipation of a solution.

In the thought of will to power, metaphysical thinking itself completes itself in advance. Nietzsche, the thinker of the thought of will to power, is the *last metaphysician* of the West. The age whose consummation unfolds in his thought, the modern age, is a final age. This means an age in which at some point and in some way the historical decision arises as to whether this final age is the conclusion of Western history or the counterpart to another beginning. To go the length of Nietzsche's path of thought to the will to power means to catch sight of this historical decision.<sup>254</sup>

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254 Nietzsche, (vols. 3 and 4 ),8.





## Chapter Five

### The Dialectics of the Enlightenment: the Return of the Myth

While presenting the main conflict of the Enlightenment in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel insists that ‘pure insight only manifests its own peculiar activity in so far as it opposes itself with faith.’<sup>255</sup> ‘In *pure insight*, however, the notion is alone the actual’ he explains.<sup>256</sup> So, one can say, pure insight is a direct voice of reason. Reason must conquer religion; deal with the ‘bad insight of the multitude and the bad intentions of the priests’, the great allies of ‘despotism’.<sup>257</sup>

In ‘pure insight’, reason turns against all forms of knowledge, against all authorities which enforce their alleged ‘truths’, and seeks to ‘disenchant’ reality. This is seen most clearly in the dispute with faith. But, in the end, the point is to question all convictions which allow us to see all that exists as holy, ‘true’ and untouchable. Thus, reason is waging a decisive battle. The first step is rejection – radical negation. ‘Pure insight has, therefore, in the first instance, no content of its own, because it is negative being-for-self.’ This is a ‘spiritual process which focuses itself in self-consciousness, a process which is confronted by consciousness of what is positive, the form of objectivity or of picture-thinking, and turns against it’.<sup>258</sup>

Hence, reason stands in opposition to reality; insight is to signify criticism, the shattering of existing truths. The Enlightenment would define as superstition all the knowledge about reality which evades the requirements of criticism. Reason demands knowledge originating from pure sources, not mixed with faith. It craves absolute certainty; it wishes to delight in its own strength; gain undivided power. All that is alien is to be annihilated. Pure insight disregards compromise; everything is rejected. Let us remember, all that is ‘positive’, becomes *an opposite*. The world as an ‘object’ ceases to matter. Pure insight cannot seek certainty with the object which has been formed by false convictions. ‘[P]ure insight’s own object’, Hegel explains, ‘is only the pure “I”’.<sup>259</sup>

Reason takes up the battle on its own and has only itself to count on. ‘Pure insight’ inevitably creates a void: it questions, discredits, dismantles and

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255 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 329.

256 *Ibid.*, 326.

257 *Ibid.*, 330.

258 *Ibid.*, 324.

259 *Ibid.*, 323-24.

demonstrates the strength of reason. Critical thought can ill-afford any solidarity responses; the world is alien. Assimilating what has become *an opposite*, even in the smallest part, is out of the question.

These are the beginnings of the great drama of reason in-revolt, the drama of solitude. Incessant criticism and seeking certainty signify the inevitability of repeated rejection. A critical thought cannot take root; it has to carry on in its own isolation. Reason cannot negotiate with the reality it has rejected at the outset. Will it be able to create its own reality? What is the nature of rationality established in the system of the Enlightenment? Has reason been able to generate an area of unlimited expansion? In its helplessness, hasn't critical thought become embroiled in contradictions by tending towards new forms of faith? Merciless criticism, persistent challenging would have no doubt created a purely *abstract* power out of reason – forever getting rid of all content. Respite for thought leads to the emergence of superstition. Content becomes a burden. Is it not so, that constant and ruthless criticism inevitably leads towards nihilism? Is not the only way to safeguard against a void, a compromise between knowledge and faith?

Hegel was perfectly aware of the strength with which 'pure insight' was endowed. 'It therefore seeks to abolish every kind of independence other than that of self-consciousness, whether it be the independence of what is actual, or of what possesses *intrinsic* being, and to give it the form of notion.'<sup>260</sup> We can thus say, what used to be *truth* is becoming a *description*, a characterization. Instead of reality we are dealing with certain ways of speaking about reality. All 'independences' are transferred into areas of discourse – and becoming subject matter. This is the critical move made by the thought of the Enlightenment. It deprives the world of the splendour that faith bestowed upon it. The word 'is' is gradually losing its strength. What was treated as the order of existence is beginning to be treated as a way of thinking.

In Hegel's view, this is the only way one goes about defeating the alienation that reason has plunged into. In other words, reason needs to present itself as its own object immersing itself in the world. Will modernity actually represent the return of reason to its own sources? Are the formulas of rationality created by the Enlightenment – rejecting faith – going to be consistent and uniform? Will the Enlightenment generate a truth which will meet the discipline of 'pure insight'? Or will it tumble into the abyss of superstition, unable to withhold the tension caused by merciless criticism?

Hegel maintained that 'pure insight' takes up the battle against faith and superstition in the full battle-gear of self-knowledge. 'Pure insight is not only

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260 Ibid., 326.

the certainty of self-conscious reason that it is all truth: it *knows* that it is.<sup>261</sup> Hence, reason, must be consistent; it has acquired knowledge about its own calling. Will it not buckle? Will it produce a lucid, dazzling ‘all-truth’? What will be the ultimate fruit of the Enlightenment?

It has to be said, Hegel’s conclusions are not panegyric. The author of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* was well aware of the existing difficulties. Barriers continually appear in front of ‘pure insight’. Hegel points out: ‘its activity [...] is directed against the impure intentions and perverse insights of the actual world’.<sup>262</sup> The world speaks with its own language ‘this language is that of a distracted mind, and the pronouncement only some twaddle uttered on the spur of the moment, which is again quickly forgotten’. Reason must take control over ‘argumentation and chatter’. Pure insight ‘will clear up the confusion of this world’.<sup>263</sup> At what price?, seems an appropriate question.

As we already know, former authorities would be knocked off their pedestals. Reason would unmask the emptiness of ‘idle chatter’. ‘Knowledge about the essence’ would rise above ‘the scarcity of knowledge’. What sources is it going to have? ‘As regards its content’, says Hegel speaking of the Enlightenment, ‘it is in the first instance an empty insight’. And what is most interesting ‘it finds it given in the shape of a content which is not yet its own, as something that exists independently of it, finds it given in faith’.<sup>264</sup> This is the paradox: reason is closer to its own truth in faith, rather than in the ‘twaddle uttered on the spur of the moment’, in the moralizing which is a manifestation of secular wisdom! Faith rises above the muddle of the world; reveals the ultimate truth; finds what is most important while rejecting ‘chatter’. So, reason has a rival which, as it turns out, is standing on the same side. After all, faith turns against conceited ambitions of naïve thought, never going beyond the sphere of appearances. By dethroning faith, reason would not reject faith’s aspirations. It wants to reach the same heights – the heights of the absolute. Proclaiming its ultimate truths, reason is to take the place of faith. Hegel explains: ‘It is just this that Enlightenment rightly declares faith to be, when it says that what is for faith the absolute being, is a being of its own consciousness, is its own thought, something that is a creation of consciousness itself. Thus what Enlightenment declares to be an error and a fiction is the very same thing as Enlightenment itself is.’<sup>265</sup>

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261 Ibid.

262 Ibid., 328 .

263 Ibid. , 328-29.

264 Ibid., 333-34.

265 Ibid., 334.

Reason thus is *related* to faith. Turning always from the 'chatter' of the world it will have to seek its own content in faith, and establish its own majesty, taking away from faith that which constituted its essence: the ultimate truth. Otherwise, reason would have to languish in a void, in a sphere of vacuous abstraction generated by criticism and rejection. Reason must fill itself with content, 'recognize itself in its own being', reach the absolute.

According to Hegel, the Enlightenment will deal with 'perverting faith'. 'The absolute being of the believing consciousness' is 'pure thought'.<sup>266</sup> In his reflexions on the reason of the Age of Enlightenment, which was launching its criticism, Hegel would say, 'in apprehending the object of faith as insight's own object, it already does faith a wrong.'<sup>267</sup> This is how the 'perverting' of the sense of faith is being accomplished. 'For it is saying [the Enlightenment – author's comment] that the absolute being of faith is a piece of stone, a block of wood, which has eyes and sees not'.<sup>268</sup>

It would, however, transpire very quickly that reason creates its own 'piece of wood or stone'. There is nothing strange about this. Rational insight striving after the absolute, abolishing ignorance and superstition, slips in to take religion's place. It is in religion that it seeks its deepest truth, the truth about thought which broke with the 'chatter' of the world. Now, reason will have to present its own song: its story about the absolute, or remain in the sphere of incessant criticism, contradicting itself, and giving up on its quest for establishing truth. The Enlightenment is in a dilemma. It generates the potential for the critique eager to attain the heights of absolute truths and it ends up entangled in contradictions. Coming down to the level of worldly matters, enthroning reason as an authority abolishing faith, it must present its own standpoint. 'If all prejudice and superstition have been banished, the question arises, What next? What is the truth Enlightenment has propagated in their stead?'<sup>269</sup> The Enlightenment must show its 'positive content'. By jeering at the objects of faith, presenting them as individual, real things (tree, stone, and the like) the Enlightenment demolishes the idea of the absolute: 'absolute being becomes for it [the Enlightenment] a vacuum' and it is in this void that the man of the Enlightenment will have to live. Faith can only make him laugh. Reason must seek its own absolute.

But how? Reason wants to reach the heights of the heavens, too. Deists and the concept of the Highest Being would become apparent; reason is copying faith.

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266 Ibid., 336.

267 Ibid., 337.

268 Ibid.

269 Ibid., 340.

However, the new Revelation takes the form of pompous rhetoric. Reason's new religion is hardly convincing; from the point of view of the tradition of faith – it is naïve. 'This wisdom, peculiar to Enlightenment, at the same time necessarily seems to faith to be undiluted platitude, and the confession of platitude; because it consists of knowing nothing of absolute being or, what amounts to the same thing, in knowing this quite flat truism about it, just that it is only absolute being'.<sup>270</sup> So, throwing its weight around on the top-most echelons of reason is a void. The ultimate truth is still out of reach, so the search is on. Deism, of course, is but an episode. The Enlightenment wrecks the naïve confidence and is proud of this. It would not settle for any partial results. Reason is not giving up its right to question, nor its high-flying aspirations; it must touch the absolute truth – the absolute being. 'In regard to that absolute being, the Enlightenment is caught up in the same internal conflict that it formerly experienced in connection with faith'.<sup>271</sup> Enlightenment thought would split into two. As Hegel notes, two trends would appear: 'One party of the Enlightenment calls absolute being that predicateless absolute which exists in thought beyond the actual consciousness [...] the other calls it matter'.<sup>272</sup> The philosophy of the absolute plunges into purely abstract speculation or enters the lower classes of society morphing into an apotheosis of a new idol – matter. Let us also add 'usefulness', hence, 'the truth which is equally the certainty of itself', in the words of Hegel.<sup>273</sup> This is the new realm of reason, the realm of truth, which has yet to be realized in an unambiguous form.

The ambiguity is vital. Enlightenment's message is not that obvious. The following questions arise: what results has the criticism of superstition and faith yielded? In what direction is reason leading? What should a sense of certainty be based on? Indeed, in what way should rationality be realized in thought and in action? What decisions should practical reason present defining the order of values originating from the criticism?

The Enlightenment leaves behind no homogenous concept of life consistent with reason, nor an unequivocal format of moral law. It is transforming itself into a tradition embroiled in disputes about the most salient issues to do with thinking and acting. In this sense, according to the critics of whom there are many, the Enlightenment suffers defeat. Reason has not generated a consistent 'metanarrative' as we can say resorting to a term fondly used today. It was incapable of coalescing all contradictions. No 'story' has emerged which could satisfy all the advocates of criticism and the new truth it has anointed.

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270 Ibid., 343.

271 Ibid., 350.

272 Ibid., 351.

273 Ibid., 355.

Despite its tremendous influence, the Enlightenment, no doubt, would not seize dictatorial power. On the contrary, weariness with philosophers' disputes would make itself felt quite rapidly and lead to the rejection of rationalism. Searching for other sources of wisdom – an undertaking developing under the patronage of the romantics – would become crucial. This is, of course, no place for an in-depth and full description of the romantic opposition. Let us, then, focus our attention on an issue which is not only highly typical but also of paramount importance. It is the grand arch-rival of philosophy, one that can successfully diminish its clout – *myth*. The allure of myth would be appreciated by the nineteenth century – bored with the moralization of philosophers. This is the beginning of a long story. The return of the myth, which the Enlightenment eagerly tried to dispose of, would become one of the most symptomatic features of modernity.

'I plead with you only not to give in to disbelief in the possibility of a new mythology,'<sup>274</sup> appeals Friedrich Schlegel in his *Talk on Mythology* given in 1800. Romanticism is becoming a great evocation of myth. It is searching for truth which could bring back to human wisdom its strength taken away by dithering philosophers. A truth capable of uniting all aspects of knowledge, reconciling all points of view, overcoming the doubts of reasoners and pedants. A truth not resembling the specious disquisitions of philosophers. A truth that is conquering and imposing. In his criticism of the reasoners, Schlegel notes: 'Mere representation of man, passions, and actions does not truly amount to anything, as little as using artificial forms does, even if you shuffle and turn over old stuff together millions of times.'<sup>275</sup> Hence, Enlightenment's wisdom is nothing but an 'artificial form'; insight has made no progress. It is just the heaps of 'old stuff' that are mounting in the junk room.

A totally different examination of reality is required. The most extreme form of scrupulosity on the part of the philosophers is of no import here; philosophy cultivates the knowledge of appearances. But one needs to look deeper inside and decipher the 'hieroglyphs'. Schlegel asserts that in this way a new mythology will be born which would be the 'hieroglyphic expression of surrounding nature.'<sup>276</sup>

The point is to find inspired knowledge, which is born thanks to the force of illumination rather than the pains of reason. Schlegel is of the view that one has to find the 'glare of divinity' in man. It is man who is the 'proper soul' and

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274 F. Schlegel, 'Talk on Mythology' in *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, trans. by E. Behler and R. Struc (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), 82.

275 *Ibid.*, 85.

276 *Ibid.*

inspiration of all poetry. The poet, of course, is to be the high priest of the new revelation. He must deliver the new story which will fill the void made by the rationalists' barren criticism. Poets are the new myth-makers. Thanks to poetry a new mythology would come into being which will become the new form of cognition: the ultimate cognition reaching the heights of the absolute; freeing one from hesitation, offering a sense of complete certainty. 'Mythology has one great advantage. What usually escapes our consciousness can here be perceived and held fast through the senses and spirit like the soul in the body surrounding it, through which it shines into our eye and speaks to our ear.'<sup>277</sup> Thanks to the power of the new mythology man would be fed with the absolute truth, just as our eyes feed on the image of the world.

A belief in the myth-creating, liberating power of art would become the most characteristic trait of romanticism. Schlegel is not the only thinker to vindicate the wisdom of myth. It should rather be said, that searching for a more intense inspiration, linking the conception of truth to the idea of initiation through art, would take on the weight of an archetype. Esthetics intertwines with epistemology and ethics. Art is perceived as the most perfect form of critically examining important truths. The artist creates the language for the gods to speak again. Art replaces religion and philosophy. 'Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart.'<sup>278</sup>

And so initiation it is. The poet, the servant of the muses, discovers the most important path: words which evoke myths. Myth is to become a power altering the shape of the world. 'In the forms of a revived mythology, art can reacquire the character of a *public* institution and develop the power to regenerate the ethical totality of the nation.'<sup>279</sup> As the highest form of cognition merging all truths, the myth is also to be the new perfect binding material of identity.

Nietzsche would make the most critical impact on revaluations paving the way for the rehabilitation of myth. Revaluations will no longer have anything to do with the romantic exaltation linking new mythology with the ideal of the 'ethical totality of the nation'. Nor will they offer any hope for philosophy. Nietzschean criticism would ruin the romantic projects of saving philosophy by leading it into the sanctuary of art. It would be harsh and ruthless. Nietzsche

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277 Ibid.

278 F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. by P. Heath (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1997), 231.

279 *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 88.



would turn to fighting 'philosophers' superstitions'. Dazzling with the concept of 'truth', philosophers have in fact become stallholders showing off their 'village-fair motleyness and patchiness'.<sup>280</sup> Wisdom, the source of which he is seeking in archaic Greece, is to be liberated from the burden of philosophy. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes the 'victory of the Apolline illusion' which indicates the eradication of the 'Dionysiac' element.<sup>281</sup> It used to be different in the beginning. The 'Dionysiac-Apolline genius' implied a merger between two impulses tied in an open conflict but at the same time inspiring each other.<sup>282</sup> This was the nature of the 'mysterious unity'.<sup>283</sup> However, the separation – the division of the two elements becomes a fact. From thence on, 'Apolline culture' would set the tone for Antique Greece. Socrates would become its triumphant mentor.

'[A]n opposition can be observed which corresponds to that between the Apolline and the Dionysiac', which, in turn is portrayed by the opposition 'of *dream* and *intoxication*', Nietzsche explains.<sup>284</sup> Apollo was the patron of dreams. Greeks treated dreams as an area of initiation where under the gods' care the ability to *see* would be cultivated. The Apolline element would be represented in *painting*. Clarity of vision, the sharpness of the contours, the distinctiveness of shape: these are Apolline attributes. Let us note, however, that the ability to present is fed by the wisdom of the dream. Apollo reveals the secret: this is the only way the art of seeing is able to develop.

In time, *to see* would take on a new meaning connected to the word *to know*. Following in the footsteps of the painters *philosophers* would enter the Apolline trail. They want to know, that is, they want *to see*. They believe reason would allow them to behold truth. So, in fact, if we are to accept Nietzsche's suggestions, philosophy is a mere parallel of painting. An incompetent imitation; or, if we are to reach as far as possible: a weird *metaphor* of a dream. What can the philosophers see? What are their distinctions worth? What is the significance of their creations? Apolline boastfulness comes out victorious. In fact 'a profound delusion, which first appeared in the person of Socrates, namely the imperturbable belief that thought, as it follows the thread of causality, reaches down into the deepest abysses of being and that it is capable, not simply of understanding existence, but even of *correcting* it.'<sup>285</sup> Under Socrates'

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280 *Beyond Good and Evil*, 15.

281 F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. by R. Speirs (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999), 25.

282 *Ibid.*, 28.

283 *Ibid.*

284 *Ibid.*, 15.

285 *Ibid.*, 73.

leadership, philosophers begin their full-dress dance. Apolline prudence would be irretrievably degraded. 'The Apolline tendency has disguised itself as logical schematism'.<sup>286</sup> In 'Socratic culture' the 'theoretical man' would become the leading figure, a pathetic figure: a blind man immersed in abstractions; the poor wretch roaming the emptiness of barren speculations, bored out of his mind. The modern stallholder touting his 'motley' as the great achievements of reason.

Thus, the fall of philosophy is sealed. From the very beginning it would lose itself in *fiction*. In the end, fiction becomes so boring so as to be of no use to anybody. Nietzsche's diagnosis is merciless. The rejection of Dionysus brings disaster, because only his patronage entails the ability to delight in the taste of life. *Elation is a Dionysian element*. It is expressed in music, in the field of art in which the 'Dionysian spell', embracing the joy of life, speaks directly. Music intensifies the ecstatic tone of the Dionysian experience; it entraps; uplifts in the flow of the moment; and signifies venturing beyond the narrow scope of consciousness. The Dionysian ecstasy is an elation with the moment, a total abandon representing the smashing of all barriers, boundaries and distinctions; a liberation resulting from the discovery that everything is happening 'now', and that apart from this, there is nothing else. This is the nature of Dionysian euphoria: it allows us to spot the ultimate sense in the currents of passing time, heedless of the future or the past, which are imposed by thought searching for boundaries.

The Dionysian experience, then, is regenerative, for it fills up the void. It is in this area that the new mythology should be born, which would liberate modern man from a sense of futility. 'Dionysiac art, too, wants to convince us of the eternal lust and delight of existence; but we are to seek this delight, not in appearances, but behind them. We are to recognize that everything which comes into being must be prepared for painful destruction'.<sup>287</sup> Therefore, there is a need for reversing the sense of the truths forced upon us by philosophers unravelling their 'thread of causality'. From this reversal the new mythology must draw its strength.

'Nietzsche's Dionysian messianism', to use Habermas's expression, is the most extreme and at the same time typical example of the opposition to the domination of philosophy enforced by the Enlightenment. The aim of connecting art to the idea of a myth-creating mission would become one of the typical traits of decadent modernity.

The most interesting thing, however, is not that which speaks directly in its own voice, expressing an open opposition against philosophy and its requirements. More interesting than that is camouflaged myth-creation –

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286 *Ibid.*, 69.

287 *Ibid.*, 80.

mythology encoded in the structures of Enlightenment reason. A mythology unaware of its own nature or deceitfully hiding its own countenance. This very problem is undertaken by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their work *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment*. The point is the mythology hiding in formulas of rationality; the clandestine return of the myth.

The passage reads: 'In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet, the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant. The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy.'<sup>288</sup> So it transpired that 'knowledge' is little more than a fetish. That reason grappling with 'fancy' is incapable of leaving the land of shadows; that all its constructions, like myths, are simply 'stories'. However, this is not discreditable. The German authors recall: 'In the scientific calculation of occurrence, the computation is annulled which thought had once transferred from occurrence into myths. Myth intended report, naming, the narration of the Beginning; but also presentation, confirmation, explanation: a tendency that grew stronger with the recording and collection of myths. Narrative became didactic at an early stage.'<sup>289</sup> Knowledge would come up with similar claims. Describing the calling of science, Francis Bacon explained that it is not decided upon by 'plausible, delectable, reverend or admired discourse, or any satisfactory arguments, but in effecting and working, and in discovery of particulars not revealed before for the better endowment and help of man's life'.<sup>290</sup> 'Help of man's life' is a goal all mythical stories aspire to. The same aspirations, the same main goal... In reflecting on the relationship between myth and knowledge, the central idea is not to make some bizarre insinuations.

Still unresolved is the question of *validation*. To all appearances, everything seems obvious. Myths present revealed truth; knowledge seeks its authorization in criticism. Let us not forget, however, it is the Enlightenment which imposes biased, expedient, and discrediting characterizations of myth. But myths are also a certain format of knowledge. Criticism, glorified by the Enlightenment, would in the end result in knowledge demanding acts of faith. This is the sense of 'the dialectics of the Enlightenment'. Criticism is to dispel all our illusions, eliminate all opponents of reason: destroy all delusions which are assaulting reason. Thus,

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288 M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by J. Cumming (Verso, London, 1997), 3.

289 *Ibid.*, 8.

290 F. Bacon, *Valerius Terminus: of the Interpretation of Nature*, quoted after *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

becoming a ruthless censor of formal reliability. One is allowed to speak only of what 'is'. Reason is putting up a relentless fight with the fictions of language. The Enlightenment questions and debunks; spoils its own output. Criticism does not create foundations. New concepts and theories continually make appearances. Finally, Enlightenment's general message must take shape as an act of faith of sorts. Whatever it is that the Enlightenment affirms has nothing to do with the 'truth' that it itself demands. The two German philosophers would write: 'Its untruth does not consist in what its Romantic enemies have always reproached it for: analytical method, return to elements, the dissolution through reflective thought; but instead in the fact that for Enlightenment the process is always decided from the start.'<sup>291</sup> The Enlightenment, then, is being arbitrary in the extreme. 'In the anticipatory identification of the wholly conceived and mathematized world with truth, Enlightenment intends to secure itself against the return of the mythic.'<sup>292</sup> It also believes that the question of validation has been resolved once and for all. But sure enough, standing in the way is the unlimited power of questioning. Reason incessantly degrades all its revelations to the rank of stories. The history of learning is the history of stories which were taken to be true at some point in the past. So what is left is the purely abstract act of faith, that learning is the source of truth. In this way, the modern era would create its own 'heaven' and its own hieroglyphs. The signs are that, in spite of Bacon, 'delectable, reverend or admired discourse' is what the modern age values the most. But the benefits this brings, if any, have for years sparked bitter controversy.

We are thus dealing with 'stories' and systems of validation which require faith. 'In the enlightened world, mythology has entered into the profane. In its blank purity, the reality which has been cleansed of demons and their conceptual descendants assumes the numinous character which the ancient world attributed to demons.'<sup>293</sup> The world is still enchanted. Reason has become a fashion designer of sorts, suggesting new fascinating subjects and new compelling designs. The new stories are to serve as remedies for fear, frustration and boredom. Science melts into the current of pop-culture which is a space of intensive myth creation. Truth has become a second-rate motive. 'And this in a world that verified only evidential propositions and preserved thought, debased to the achievement of great thinkers – as a kind of stock of superannuated clichés, no longer to be distinguished from truth neutralized as a cultural commodity.'<sup>294</sup>

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291 Ibid., 24.

292 Ibid., 25.

293 Ibid., 28.

294 Ibid., 40.

So truth has become 'neutralized'; in the mass of various tales it has lost its solemnity. The problem of validation is disappearing from sight. There is nothing to hold back the expansion of myth which is capable of capturing the imagination, imposing its new, and alluring concepts of 'knowledge' and its own interpretation of the world.

Thence, as time goes by, the ubiquity of myth is making itself felt more and more distinctly. Let us recall Roland Barthes' laconic expressions: 'myth is a word'. 'But what must be firmly established at the start is that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message.'<sup>295</sup> A tale is not like a monument, hoisted up to the heights of revealed truth. Today, myth dwells in the fabric of pop-culture and appears in all of its areas. Its influence is seen in literature, art and politics. And, finally, in the pop-culture like trivialization of faith, which is indicative of the zealous use of the style of mass messaging. Actually, anything can become the making of a myth. 'Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no 'substantial ones.'<sup>296</sup> In the appropriate circumstances every 'truth' can change into the truth of the myth. This happens when the truth is situated in an area of continuous repetitions, replicas and reproductions. When it generates an expansive field of signs engaging the mass imagination and becoming the object of adoration of sorts. Myth, in fact, is a specific 'semiological system'.<sup>297</sup> Its influence comes from the codification of meaning; from imposing formulas and conventions. And it is not absolutely vital that the 'truth' of the myth be thoroughly understood; from the point of view of the discerning outsider it can even be something vague. What is important is that the truth of the myth reaches its target; that certain habits and associations are formed to facilitate the 'reading' of the signs, and that it concerns the whole community. Doubts, objections, the revolt of critically inclined minds are of no importance; only the habits of 'reading' count. Myth lives outside the space of critical discourse. Its truths are 'revealed'; its presence is manifested in an imperious manner. 'We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.) however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth.'<sup>298</sup> Myth would lay down its own meaning. For this purpose any system

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295 R. Barthes, 'Myth Today' in *Mythologies*, trans. by A. Lavers (Hill and Wang, New York, 2001), 109.

296 Ibid.

297 Ibid., 111.

298 Ibid., 114.

of signs would do; myth can harness anything, including 'ideas'. It can easily become a certain system of thought which makes the 'reading' of reality easier. In an overbearing way myth inflicts a certain pattern, a certain way of comprehending, demands ceaseless repetitions. This is after all the myth's semantics, this is the way it demonstrates its presence. Thoughts become signs present in myth's space; a constantly repeated message which is to take control of the imagination. Its 'truthfulness' is manifested in the effectiveness of the tale's impact on the formation of widely disseminated attitudes. And now we get to the crux of the matter. 'We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature.'<sup>299</sup> That which results from a certain type of practice, that which is problematic or dubious is changed into what is obvious, imperious, doing without any justification, in other words, into what is 'natural'! Myth covers up its tracks, mystifies its own identity. It wants to become the natural 'truth', at any cost. It would do anything to distract attention from the conditioning which constitutes a part of the history it is involved in. It wants to dazzle, to be admired without causing doubts. Barthes provides his answer to the question, what is myth? 'To transform a meaning into form. In other words, myth is always a language-robbery.'<sup>300</sup> Myth petrifies meaning, holds back the train of thought, allows for the treatment of certain truths as 'natural', substantially limiting the role of reason in the formation of myth. This is of paramount importance especially at the time of the dramatic expansion of various media which seek to win over the mass audience.

Democracy has revealed an enormous myth-generating potential. Contrary to the expectations of philosophers, it turned out that rational debate is not a decisive condition of validation. This has already been suggested by Tocqueville and argued unequivocally by Max Weber (we will come back to this later on). The ability to shape mass attitudes has become the most important thing. In a democratic system politics becomes estranged from philosophy. 'The popular view of the German literati quickly disposes of the question about the effect of democratization: The *demagogue* will rise to the top, and the successful demagogue is he who is most unscrupulous in his wooing of the masses.'<sup>301</sup> He becomes the hero, the apostle of all obvious and 'natural' truths which the voters should believe in. Truths that are difficult, that demand some serious thought, which could complicate the picture of reality and interfere with the 'mating calls' of politicians are becoming uncomfortable. So they are being strictly

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299 Ibid., 129.

300 Ibid., 131.

301 Weber, *Economy*, 1449.

eliminated. All debate is shaped on the basis of tales invented by demagogues. The concept of 'debate' changes its meaning; it is subjugated to the power of the myth. Debating has turned into a liturgy, into rituals of words focused on the message of ideas involving 'recruitment'. As we are fully aware today, the art of thinking has been replaced by 'political marketing' – something akin to magic. Political marketing determines the effectiveness of the 'recruitment', dazzling with the glow of appropriately stylized 'truths', beguiling with the allure of 'images'.

Part Two  
**Wavering Truths  
and Floundering Moral Lessons**





# Chapter One

## Emancipation

‘A very droll spectacle it was in the last century’, wrote Montesquieu recapturing the past, ‘to behold the impotent efforts of the English towards the establishment of democracy. As they who had a share in the direction of public affairs were void of virtue [...]; as the prevailing parties were successively animated by the spirit of faction’. All this has led to chaos; dictatorship itself was unable to put an end to it. ‘[T]he people, amazed at so many revolutions, in vain attempted to erect a commonwealth. At length, when the country had undergone the most violent shocks, they were obliged to have recourse to the very government which they had so wantonly proscribed.’<sup>302</sup> In view of this, democracy should seek support in virtue. Only then, Montesquieu believed, persistent spectres of anarchy and tyranny disappear from the horizon and in their wake freedom follows. However, generally speaking, this was very seldom the case. In fact, there is a long history (going back to antiquity) of governments that have failed in which the people have participated.

Nevertheless, at least government representatives recognized the principle itself. ‘The politic Greeks, who lived under a popular government, knew no other support than virtue’, Montesquieu recalled. ‘The modern inhabitants of that country are entirely taken up with manufacture, commerce, finances, opulence, and luxury.’<sup>303</sup>

What can be the sense of freedom in a world in which all one hears about are: ‘manufacturing, finances and luxury’? The question we have raised using Montesquieu’s words is crucial. Again, what happens when ‘virtue is banished’? There is no doubt about the answer: ‘ambition invades the minds of those who are disposed to receive it, and avarice possesses the whole community. The objects of their desires are changed; what they were fond of before has become indifferent; they were free while under the restraint of laws, but they would fain now be free to act against law; and as each citizen is like a slave who has run away from his master.’<sup>304</sup>

The last point is important to realize: intoxicated with the desire for freedom the heroes of the new era resemble ‘runaway slaves’! They rush headlong driven by their own ambition, hounded by fear, fleeing from the murky labyrinths of

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302 Montesquieu, *The spirit of Laws* (Batoche Books, Kitchener 2001), 38.

303 Ibid.

304 Ibid., 38-39.

despotism. Where to? What is the sense of *emancipation*? On what do the fugitives count?

In a metaphoric abstract, Montesquieu depicts a situation which should make us think. The expectations involving liberation are immense, although it is difficult to chart their course. Flight resembles a scuffle: an explosion of desires and passions. Let us quote another wise and significant remark made by Montesquieu: ‘There is no word that admits of more various significations, and has made more varied impressions on the human mind, than that of liberty’.<sup>305</sup> This is the crux of the matter: ‘the word liberty’ has no obvious meaning. In that case, what does *emancipation* signify? Democracy beckons with a panoply of charms. ‘The Government of the People’ has always been contrasted with that of tyrants, despots and degenerate aristocrats. But what was it actually that the ‘people’ wanted? Not without derision Montesquieu observed: ‘A certain nation for a long time thought liberty consisted in the privilege of wearing a long beard.’<sup>306</sup>

And what about us? What are we likely to ‘take for liberty’? Providing an answer is not a straightforward task, and yet, it would be inappropriate to go on at length about it. We are dealing with a matter that should be treated with restraint, unpretentiously and without excessive zeal.

It is precisely the fact of *experiencing emancipation* that gives modern democracy its specific character. To be sure, the claims made about the idea of liberty are becoming increasingly radical, to the point of undermining the framework of the project created by the Enlightenment. What we today ‘take for liberty’ no longer resembles the conceptions raised by the Age of Enlightenment.

Following this further, three different conceptions of emancipation will be offered. We will begin with emancipation understood as *rational self-definition*. The next step will take us to reflections on emancipation identified with *expression*. And finally, emancipation seen as *self-creation*. These are three situations treated as models, or patterns. In practice the boundaries between them might not be very distinct, causing them to overlap. However, all in all, we can definitely say that the influence of the Enlightenment tradition is waning.

Taking up the first issue, let us once again turn to Montesquieu: ‘It is true that in democracies the people seem to act as they please; but political liberty does not consist in an unlimited freedom. In governments, that is, in societies directed by laws, liberty can consist only in the power of doing what we ought to will, and in not being constrained to do what we ought not to will.’<sup>307</sup> Liberty, therefore, should not be confused with *latitude* since the concept of liberty

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305 Ibid., 171.

306 Ibid.

307 Ibid., 172.

invokes the concept of *duty*. The thinkers of the Enlightenment were at pains to stress this. ‘Liberty is a right of doing whatever the laws permit, and if a citizen could do what they forbid he would be no longer possessed of liberty, because all his fellow-citizens would have the same power.’<sup>308</sup>

The development of the modern concept of liberty was under the heavy influence of Stoic models. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, witnesses to the great debates, would identify liberty with rational necessity: with the choice of the rule of conduct in line with reason. The seventeenth-century reception of Cicero familiarized Europe with views inducing the association of the idea of liberty with that of the rule of law; moreover, with the idea that everything should be decided upon by the ‘the highest reason implanted in nature’. It is the same reason, Cicero insisted, which exists ‘in man and God’. So, to recognize the higher necessity, defined by the laws of reason, brings no discredit to anybody. Rational necessity is a power which does not inflict violence. Man as a rational being is eagerly reconciled with reason’s demands. In performing the act of rational *self-definition* he chooses the rule of conduct – he becomes free. He gains independence from the power of coincidence and the whims of his own nature; others behave similarly. The decisions reached by reason become law. As a result, the threat of oppressive lawlessness – the sign of tyranny or anarchy – fades away.

Thus, we see the making of the idea of the law of nature, so much favoured during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This idea would determine the linking of the program of emancipation with the conception of discipline. It would put forward the notion of unquestionable rules as its centrepiece. The study of natural law, as Paul Hazard wrote in *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century from Montesquieu to Lessing*, spread across the whole of Europe, thus bringing to a close the age of the creator and initiating the age of the professor. The creators, however, did not depart without leaving a mighty important message, to be found, among other places, in *Elementa Juris Naturae et Gentium* written by Johan Gottlieb Heinecke. Natural law is a body of laws, the author stated, which God had conferred upon the human race through just reason; so if it is to be analysed as an object of study, natural jurisprudence would be the practical way of learning about the will of the ‘Highest Lawmaker’. ‘Natural jurisprudence’ is the essence of rational self-definition, a practice which specifies the requirements made by reason, imparting a precise form to these requirements. Freedom cannot denote an inner struggle or audacity. There is actually just one road to be taken, as J. Ch. Wolff wrote in *Jus naturae methodo scientifica pertractatum*. Since, in his view, nature is

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308 Ibid.

inseparably tied with truth, it does not tolerate contradictions – the immemorial foe of truth – thus, it requires that human actions be defined by the same causes as natural acts, and thereby jointly aim at one and the same objective.

The choice of the rules of conduct must carry with it the affirmation of universally accepted principles. Human will should be controlled by the power of reason. Only then can we avoid the contradictions leading to degeneration. Identity should not be, as we would say nowadays, an individual project. Rational self-definition delineates the boundaries within which we can speak of humanity in a non-arbitrary manner. The road is easy to find. There is no mystery clouding the principles of the law of nature. Finding them is made possible by *ratio recta*: ‘right reason’. It was this that Grotius tried to persuade us of as early as the seventeenth century, summoning the expression used by the Stoics. ‘Natural right is the rule and dictate of right reason, showing the moral deformity or moral necessity, according to its suitableness or unsuitableness to a reasonable nature, and consequently, that such an act is either forbidden or commanded by God, the author of nature.’<sup>309</sup>

Rational action, then, must consist in the recognition of the power of rules that have absolute authority. Freedom speaks with the voice of law. Thomas Hobbes put this idea into words in the most evocative way demonstrating thereby his disquieting vision of the state of nature.

In the state of nature one can only rely on one’s own ingenuity. There are no laws to abide by, therefore *rights* are crucial. ‘The right of nature, which writers commonly call *jus naturale*, is the liberty each man hath to use his own power as he will himself for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life; and consequently, of doing anything which, in his own judgment and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto’.<sup>310</sup> Thus, natural freedom is tantamount to lawlessness: a tendency to ‘use his own power as he will’, which is exactly the way all people behave for they cannot find any other protection.

However, this protection is essential since in nature all are a threat to each other. Natural equality is a source of great trouble which inevitably leads to collisions. ‘[T]he difference between man and man is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others that are in the same danger with himself.’<sup>311</sup> So, all are potential rivals and all

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309 H. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace in Three Books* (Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 2005), 151.

310 T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008), 86.

311 *Ibid.*, 82.

must live in fear of each other. 'From this equality of ability ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only) endeavour to destroy or subdue one another.'<sup>312</sup>

It is in the nature of conflicts to be unavoidable. The risk is huge since all act under the pressure of threat, nobody trusts anybody. 'And from this diffidence of one another, there is no way for any man to secure himself so reasonable as anticipation; that is, by force, or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can so long till he see no other power great enough to endanger him'.<sup>313</sup> Mutual relationships in the state of nature are relationships of force. All are distressed by the fear of death. All try to hurt others, for only in doing so can they keep their own hopes alive.

The effects of this can, indeed, be disastrous. 'Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war'.<sup>314</sup> And it is actually irrelevant whether a real war is being waged at any particular moment. 'For war consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known'.

No one can count on a moment of peace and quiet, and thus the state of nature brings misery 'and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'.<sup>315</sup> Freedom is out of the question. 'Liberty, or freedom, signifieth properly the absence of opposition (by opposition, I mean external impediments of motion)'.<sup>316</sup> In the state of nature, it goes without saying, we can hardly speak of such an 'absence of opposition'. Each gesture, every intent on the part of another human being can become a hurdle. This is a case of total arbitrariness; people try to tyrannize each other all the time. The life of each human being depends on the whims of another's will. Nobody can be sure of their own future; the freedom to act always hangs in the balance. At any moment somebody stronger can turn up. All the people – and this is of the utmost importance – are troubled by the persistent *fear* of death. It is a power which enslaves them and ruthlessly dictates its needs. Man in fear cannot be free.

These are the pitiful results of lawlessness which feeds on individual *power*. Freedom would become possible only when in place of rights *laws* are

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312 Ibid., 83.

313 Ibid.

314 Ibid., 84.

315 Ibid.

316 Ibid., 139

implemented; when necessity would enforce its own power (according to Hobbes the concept of freedom is closely and directly linked to the concept of necessity). So what is law? 'A law of nature, *lex naturalis*, is a precept, or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same'.<sup>317</sup> This is the sense of rational self-definition; this is the only way humankind can realize itself: thanks to the discipline which rules out lawlessness. 'Because right consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear; whereas law determineth and bindeth to one of them: so that law and right differ as much as obligation and liberty, which in one and the same matter are inconsistent.'<sup>318</sup> Where lawlessness comes in, there is no room for freedom. Freedom takes shape thanks to law-enforced *coercion*. Only then the arbitrary nature of will recedes into the background and an 'absence of opposition' comes to the fore.

So freedom involves coercion as well as rational necessity. The latter stands for the power of rules dictated by reason. Freedom in fact entails the rule of law; only then does the threat generated by the selfish ambitions of others go away. This law is responsible for prohibiting certain actions and creating a space where one can go about freely. These laws are guaranteed by the sovereign. Or, as Hobbes says, *a mortal divinity*, thus glorifying the sovereign's absolute power which does not come under anybody's control or criticism. Hobbes does not trust human predilections; he is of the view that only fear can keep selfish passions in check. The authority of the law is to be dependent upon the power of the government to induce humility and acceptance of the sovereign's unquestionable supremacy.

Hobbes's concept of freedom had its adherents as well as opponents. The most troublesome question one could ask the author of *Leviathan*, is whether freedom is reconcilable with fear? Fear, as the stoics underlined, is a feeling which overpowers and degrades, transforming people into slaves. Cicero would argue in the treatise *De Re Publica* that it is the 'sense of shame' rather than the fear of 'threat and punishment' that should determine the strength of law. Hobbes' views would be denounced by Spinoza writing in his *Political Treatise* that 'Besides, that commonwealth, whose peace depends on the sluggishness of its subjects, that are led about like sheep, to learn but slavery, may more properly be called a desert than a commonwealth.'<sup>319</sup> In the words of Spinoza freedom is a 'virtue'. And thus we return to the issue which was worrying Montesquieu. The rule of law makes sense only when the law is just; when

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317 Ibid., 86.

318 Ibid.

319 Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, 314.

virtue, precisely, keeps a tight rein on the law. The great flaw of democracy – which we have known about since Plato and Aristotle – is that it ruins laws just as easily as it makes them. That is when everything hinges upon the selfish intents of the fighting parties.

Thus, the conception of freedom identified with the rule of law (Spinoza is just one example among many) also implies referring to rules which do not remind us of the forbidding majesty of Leviathan. In their repository, chief amongst them is shame not fear. In other words, the rule of law must be linked to a certain type of mores. After all, it is mores which set up the invisible barriers which force upon us the most basic requirements. Emancipation, then, rules out debauchery it should also ensure that good manners keep wild temperaments in check.

Consequently, an alliance between law and good manners is called for. Only then can we speak of freedom. This leads us to the concept of civil society. Civility, let us keep in mind, stands for refinement, for ‘being civilized’. Indeed, this is the way Adam Ferguson portrays things in the treatise *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* which has become one of the emblems of the liberal tradition. Civility is an idiom which allows us to identify a certain type of culture. *Civil society* is a community of mores and virtues. It can morph into a formal union, imposing a certain type of legal bond, which can be associated with the notion of citizenship. But the order is as follows: a free union of citizens – *civil society*, comes into being when it transpires that people wish to set up a voluntary association based on mutual recognition, on mutual respect. And this, precisely, spells the real end of despotism, thus diminishing the significance of fear and violence. Kindliness and willingness to cooperate become more and more important. At that very moment political relations can undergo a metamorphosis. The way is paved for a social contract – a freedom-guaranteeing pact.

Let us stress, emancipation is taking place according to the rules of civility, in other words, the rules of refinement and friendly approval. This is the form of the liberal archetype developed in the Age of Enlightenment. The erosion thereof, the rejection of the idea of civility – driven out by other much more radical concepts of emancipation – would become one of the typical aspects of instability which today’s democracy is wrestling with. As it turned out in the end when we speak about ‘civilizing’ we mean changes and tendencies of a limited scope. Indeed, writing about ‘the emergence of civil society’, Marvin Becker points out that it was a notable ‘privileged’ moment in the history of not many societies.<sup>320</sup>

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320 M. Becker, *The Emergence of Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind., 1994).



Typically, the ideals of civility have intertwined with the rhetoric of ‘natural law’. This was the making of the grand illusion as cultural standards were treated as a standard of ‘nature’. Today we know this illusion is indefensible. The concept of ‘natural law’ has a rather symbolic meaning like the concept of ‘nature’ itself. There is no going back to John Lock’s arcadia where, side by side, he placed the concepts of civil society and ‘natural law’, presuming that the tie between the two was organic, as it were. In his *Second Treatise on Government* he outlined a more encouraging vision of transformation involving the birth of ‘civil society’. He thought that, essentially, everything was a done deal and that nothing could defeat the voice of ‘natural law’. ‘[R]eason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all *equal and independent*, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions’.<sup>321</sup> Why would ‘mankind’ do otherwise? This is of course a purely rhetorical question, since all rational beings, as long as their intellectual capacities are not limited by some specific cause, ‘seek the advice’ of their reason. They conclude a contract with themselves. ‘Civil society’ comes into being; natural laws are formally sanctioned. Natural freedom comes under the custody of law supported by ‘public authority’, which is vested with legal coercion. This is a relationship between principles and values, the roots of which, as Locke believes, are deeply hidden.

People are free and equal because this is how they have been formed. Nature imposes its own priorities before laws sanctioned by public authority set in. Civility is in fact a precisely defined formula of *personification*; this is how people have been *created*. Locke says it very clearly: ‘for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent, and infinitely wise maker; all the servants of one sovereign master, sent into the world by his order, and about his business; they are his property, whose workmanship they are’.<sup>322</sup> The consequences of this statement are many. Any spontaneous emancipation is out of the question. Everything must remain within clearly defined boundaries. But this is exactly where the benefits of the act of creation lie; this is where the privileges of the state represented by the concepts of civility and civil society originate from. ‘Every one, as he is *bound to preserve himself*, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, *to preserve the rest of mankind*’.<sup>323</sup> Furthermore, ‘God, having made man such a creature that, in his own judgment,

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321 J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Orion Publishing Group, London, 2000 ), 117.

322 Ibid.

323 Ibid.

it was not good for him to be alone'.<sup>324</sup> Thus mutual recognition and kindness take centre stage, putting everything on its proper course. Locke quotes Hooker's evangelical theses with approval: natural equality is 'the foundation of that obligation to mutual love amongst men'.<sup>325</sup> This is, precisely, the only sense emancipation can have. Everything looks extremely encouraging and is actually predetermined. 'Thus we are *born free*, as we are born rational.'<sup>326</sup> Man is a rational being after all, so there is nothing to be afraid of. More than 200 years later John Gray, John Locke's namesake, described liberal anthropology, captivating with the notion of rationality, as a testament to 'hallucinations'.<sup>327</sup>

Civility then becomes a synonym for freedom, a matrix, a pattern. It can be associated with the image of a *gentleman*; someone who is *gentle* – delicate and docile. He is capable of renouncing violence; treats others in a friendly manner; never tries to force his will upon others, taking care to keep the right tone. The conception of civility would shape a perspective in which emancipation would be associated with a certain clearly defined type of conduct. The American Revolution would be dubbed a 'gentlemen's revolution'. In a very interesting work on the patterns of transatlantic culture at an age portending the march of liberalism, Caroline Robbins presents a figure, which one could say, is an exclamation mark.<sup>328</sup> It is the *Commonwealthman*. The child of its age – only too happy to take advantage of all the blessings this age has to offer: advances made in knowledge, changes in political institutions, morality and customs. A man who can combine the refinement of freedom with a sense of responsibility issuing from the concept of virtue. Commonwealthman stands above divisions which are forced upon us by various conflicts concerning faith, philosophy and power. He symbolizes the coalescing of various traditions in the melting pot of republican freedom. This is somebody who would use the 'idiom of John Milton and James Harrington', as one interpreter sees it, as a model of culture, as a rule of practical action, thus contributing to the generation of a new type of relations which will precipitate the refinement of freedom.<sup>329</sup> Commonwealthman is a

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324 Ibid., 153.

325 Ibid., 116.

326 Ibid., 144.

327 J. Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake. Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (Routledge, London and New York, 1995).

328 C. Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstances of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1959).

329 J.C.D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994).

figure of whom enthusiasts of freedom on both sides of the Atlantic are proud. Celebrating its message, the eighteenth century – one hundred years of reason – would shroud the ideals of emancipation in a patina of good manners.

In time, however, it would become apparent that pride would give way to disappointment. Discipline, gloated over by the proponents of rational self-definition as well as enthusiasts of the natural order and advocates of civility, would be stigmatized as an expression of new despotism. New, more radical concepts of emancipation would emerge. The idea of freedom would acquire a new meaning. The conviction that freedom must seek its articulation in free *expression* was gaining ground. The conception of emancipation would be approached in a new way; its ties with the idea of rational self-definition would become irrelevant.

Let us begin with a quotation and give the floor to an author who can be considered as the patron of a new trend. The year 1859 would see the publication of John Stuart Mills' treatise *On Freedom*. His would be a very firm stance. In an uncompromising manner he would reject the whole emancipation mythology fashioned on the fulcrum of the idea of rational self-definition. That is the glorification of law, allied to the praise of goodness and customs, the stronghold of civility. Mill emphasizes the 'tyranny of the majority'. The conception of emancipation he puts forward stressed the principle of isolation, discrediting the rule of the majority in all forms. 'Like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still vulgarly, held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of the public authorities.'<sup>330</sup> Whereas society itself can become the tyrant. 'Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough: there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices'.<sup>331</sup> The whole drama of freedom is moved, as it were, to the sphere of customs. The uniformity of mores, sanctioned by the formula of rational self-definition falling back on the idea of universal laws of reason, are, according to Mill, just a mark of despotism throttling emancipation. With Mill the idea of emancipation changes its sense. The general, that which falls under the category of universal norm, is beginning to be treated as a *barrier*.

The seed, however, had earlier been sewn. The conception of emancipation which can be linked to the idea of *expression* would appear as early as the seventeenth century in Spinoza's writings. This is directly related to Spinozan pantheism. The author of *Ethics* believes that being is a whole; that everything

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330 J.S. Mill, *On Liberty* (Batoche Books, Kitchener, Ontario 2001), 9.

331 Ibid.

exists in God who is an expansive and thinking substance. Spinoza's god is an all being. In his *Ethics* we can read, 'By *God*, I mean a being absolutely infinite – that is, a substance consisting in infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality.' So, everything that exists is absolutely justified; it exists out of necessity. 'God is the indwelling and not the transient cause of all things.' There is no schism, no rift; the all being envelops everything. Each, even the most minute commotion is justified in the idea of the all-encompassing whole – 'expresses the eternal and infinite essence of thought'.

These theses will become acutely important when we move from the most general issues to the most specific ones which involve human action. Spinoza would expound views which would make it possible to question claims based on the idea of natural law. However, he himself readily used this term. So, what is nature? He does not agree with the interpretation which would stress bifurcation, juxtaposing the actual order of things with an imaginary natural order. In consequence, though, such an interpretation allows for treating natural law as rigour which keeps a tight rein on human actions, imparting to them a necessary character, in keeping with 'nature'.

For Spinoza everything that exists is of a 'natural' character: everything is a manifestation of the *all being*. Everything can be justified; one can hardly speak of 'unnatural' actions. Let us keep in mind that god is 'being that is absolutely infinite'. The idea of existence is directly tied to the notion of infinity. Nothing limits the resources of existence, the all being has an 'infinite number of attributes'; the potential is inexhaustible. In the *Political Treaty* Spinoza would write: 'If anything, therefore, in nature seems to us ridiculous, absurd or evil, it is because we only know a part'.<sup>332</sup> We should not pass hasty judgments.

Can we hope to establish a normative order in this situation? What can our demands be and in the name of what? In Spinoza's view everything is subject to the judgment of reason (god is a thinking substance!). But we have to be careful. There is no simple and easy road of which the supporters of the 'natural law' speak; at the same time presenting the objective and obvious requirements of reason which rise above the entanglement of the world. Spinoza imparts to the notion of 'natural law' the shape which fulfils the requirements of pantheism. Keeping in mind that 'the power whereby natural things exist and operate is the very power of God itself, we easily understand what natural right is. For as God has a right to everything, and God's right is nothing else, but his very power, as far as the latter is considered to be absolutely free; it follows from this, that

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332 B. Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise, and A Political Treatise*, trans. by R.H.M. Elwes (Cosimo Classics, New York, 2005), 202.

every natural thing has by nature as much right, as it has power to exist and operate'.<sup>333</sup>

Unlike Hobbes, Spinoza treats the concept of 'power' as a formula for a definitive justification. The idea of 'law' is tied to the concept of 'power'. According to Hobbes, as opposed to Spinoza's theory, the concretization of the discipline of natural law (sovereign's orders) signifies the curbing of the arbitrary will of individuals; the reigning in of their 'power'. To quote from the *Political Treaty*:

And so by natural right I understand the very laws or rules of nature, in accordance with which everything takes place, in other words, the power of nature itself. And so the natural right of universal nature, and consequently of every individual thing, extends as far as its power: and accordingly, whatever any man does after the laws of his nature, he does by the highest natural right, and he has as much right over nature as he has power.<sup>334</sup>

Spinoza would present a thesis that no current proponent of the most radically understood emancipation would be ashamed of, rejecting all variants of 'objective rightness'. '[T]he law and ordinance of nature, under which all men are born, and for the most part live, forbids nothing but what no one wishes or is able to do'.<sup>335</sup> These are the horizons of emancipation. Actually it is Spinoza who imparts a totally new meaning to the issue of freedom, treating the concept of 'natural law' and that of 'power' as one.

This is not the same as saying that freedom has been equated with arbitrariness. To a considerable degree even Spinoza draws heavily from the stoic tradition. Freedom is linked to the notion of rational necessity. Let us remember that all that exists is included in the concept of the all-being. God is the highest reason; everything must run its inevitable course; nothing happens as a coincidence. 'The more, therefore, we consider man to be free, the less we can say, that he can neglect to use reason, or choose evil in preference to good; and, therefore, God, who exists in absolute liberty, also understands and operates of necessity, that is, exists, understands, and operates according to the necessity of his own nature'.<sup>336</sup> It follows then, that human freedom involves acting in accordance with the requirements of reason, and the recognition of rational necessity.

Nevertheless, the conception of rational self-definition falls apart and Spinoza sheds the stoic tradition. He gives up the idea of subordinating human

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333 Ibid., 292.

334 Ibid.

335 Ibid., 294.

336 Ibid., 298.

action unequivocally and absolutely to the rigors of reason. ‘Experience, however, teaches us but too well, that it is no more in our power to have a sound mind, than a sound body.’ ‘Each is attracted by his own delight’<sup>337</sup>. So a normative order based on unilaterally treated requirements of reason would be senseless. Spinoza would make a very strong point of this, saying: ‘Philosophers conceive of the passions which harass us as vices into which men fall by their own fault [...] Whence it has come to pass that, instead of ethics, they have generally written satire’.<sup>338</sup>

So, what should be the final decision on freedom, without the stigma of satire? ‘For liberty is a virtue, or excellence. Whatever, therefore, convicts a man of weakness, cannot be ascribed to his liberty.’<sup>339</sup> Drifting involuntarily in a stream of passion can have nothing in common with freedom; similarly, emancipation does not imply Dionysian debauchery.

Freedom is possible only under the rule of law. But ‘common law’, as Spinoza says, should not seek its support in nature. Natural law ‘is not opposed to strife, hatred, anger, treachery, or, in general, anything that appetite suggests.’<sup>340</sup> What is needed are ‘laws of human reason, which do but pursue the true interest and preservation of mankind’. Laws should match the criteria of *usefulness*. The idea of usefulness should be free of the attributes of ‘satire’. Let us remember, natural law ultimately ‘forbids nothing but what no one wishes or is able to do’. Emancipation is thriving and spreading out. There are many routes to be taken: ‘the all-being consists of an infinite number of attributes’. For Spinoza as opposed to Johann Wolff, natural law does not require people’s actions to be aimed ‘jointly towards achieving the same goal’.

At this point, let us go back to Mill. What should we make of emancipation which signifies the overcoming of barriers set up by the majority? How are these barriers raised? We know they are protected by *customs*. It is precisely ‘[t]he effect of custom, in preventing any misgiving respecting the rules of conduct which mankind impose on one another, is all the more complete because the subject is one on which it is not generally considered necessary that reasons should be given, either by one person to others or by each to himself. People are accustomed to believe, and have been encouraged in the belief by some who aspire to the character of philosophers’.<sup>341</sup> This belief contradicts freedom; therefore, it should be eradicated. Mill believes the past is no argument and

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337 *Ibid.*, 293.

338 *Ibid.*, 287.

339 *Ibid.*, 294.

340 *Ibid.*

341 *On Liberty*, 10.

tradition cannot have sanctioning powers. All rules of conduct should be judged by reason. However, this is not the case as people are guided by their likes and dislikes. They treat their own inclinations as the norm and when justification is needed they refer to ‘a similar preference felt by other people’. ‘To an ordinary man, however, his own preference, thus supported, is not only a perfectly satisfactory reason, but the only one he generally has for any of his notions of morality, taste, or propriety’.<sup>342</sup> This is the making of the despotism of customs: not in the least less troublesome than even the most severe instruments of direct coercion. Customs determine what we recognize as admissible behaviour. They impose patterns of personification. Customs are a mighty force. The tyranny of the majority, Mill speaks of, is no rhetorical exclamation mark, it is really meaningful. The opinions of the majority take advantage of a convenient camouflage, that is, the weight of truths which allegedly do not require proof. In step with Mill we must shed the language of the American Declaration of Independence; part with self-evident truths. At the same time, keeping in mind that the majority ‘practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself’.<sup>343</sup>

Thus emancipation must step outside the circle of freedoms involving the rejection of despotism understood literally, that is, associated with the practices of government. Explaining what freedom is, Mill speaks in general terms about ‘freedom of conscience and freedom of thought’. But he will also speak of, and this is extremely important, freedom of feeling; adding that freedom requires ‘*absolute* [emphasis mine] freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological’.<sup>344</sup> And finally an issue of paramount significance which adds an almost revolutionary edge to Mill’s conceptions. Freedom ‘requires liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow: without impediment from our fellow creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong’.<sup>345</sup> So, the conclusion is that freedom consists in the rejection of conventions. Mill’s argumentation leaves no room for doubt: all ceremony which calls for humbleness towards respectable patterns is in effect a sign of ‘moral repression’. This strikes a blow to the order which

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342 Ibid.

343 Ibid., 9.

344 Ibid., 15.

345 Ibid., 16.

observes the rules of civility, the world of the gentleman enjoying the appeal of good tone, and so it disappears from the horizon. It existed thanks to the power of norms and the predominance of the law which appealed to the principles of reason. Mill, on the other hand, speaks about the 'freedom of sentiment'; consequently, linking both, the conception of emancipation to that of expression. Thereby setting the scene for treating norms and generally adopted principles with suspicion. Let us remember, freedom 'requires' that we mark our own distinctness – 'framing the plan of our life to suit our own character'. Everybody should find an independent formula for personification and being oneself in one's own way. Mill puts it very clearly that '[t]he only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way'.<sup>346</sup> In the end he reaches conclusions which are not much different from the idea, nowadays fashionable, of 'desublimation', which is one of the typical properties of 'therapeutic culture'. He openly questions the tradition which appeals to the stoic idea of virtue and links the ideal of the good life with the curbing of passions. 'To a certain extent it is admitted that our understanding should be our own: but there is not the same willingness to admit that our desires and impulses should be our own likewise; or that to possess impulses of our own, and of any strength, is anything but a peril and a snare.'<sup>347</sup> The patterns for 'perseverance' have a very strong underpinning in the Christian faith which glorified it for a long time. With a particular dislike Mill speaks of Calvin's theories which compel us to adopt the view that '[a]ll the good of which humanity is capable, is comprised in obedience'. Moreover, Mill insists religion is responsible for thrusting upon us 'this narrow theory of life' and contributing 'to the pinched and hidebound type of human character which it patronizes.'<sup>348</sup> How are we to comprehend emancipation which unfolds in a climate affected by such ideas? Mill counters by saying '[t]here is a different type of human excellence from the Calvinistic: a conception of humanity as having its nature bestowed on it for other purposes than merely to be abnegated'.<sup>349</sup>

This raises the following question, is a man who no longer 'abnegates' his nature forced to reject conventions? And also, what should the rules of mutual recognition be in a world in which the power of virtue has been questioned, where the faith-related restraints count for nothing, and where there is no place for fear-induced submissiveness? Mill puts forward the issue of sensitivity, since, according to him, it should take centre stage, replacing coercion and any

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346 Ibid.

347 Ibid., 56.

348 Ibid., 58.

349 Ibid.



formally instituted rigours. 'It is not because man's desires are strong that they act ill; it is because their consciences are weak.'<sup>350</sup> In Mill's own words, 'strong impulses are only perilous when not properly balanced; when one set of aims and inclinations is developed into strength, while others, which ought to co-exist with them, remain weak and inactive.' Stated differently, 'strong impulses are only perilous' when we are dealing with deformations. Another important point is that 'human beings thus cramped and dwarfed', tamed by the dogma of 'perseverance' do not possess ever-lasting powers. 'Yet desires and impulses are as much a part of a perfect human being as beliefs and restraints'. Setting them free would expand the registry of sensitivity, possibly becoming the most effective guarantee of mutual recognition among people; a measure much more effective than the blind coercion of law and tyranny of custom. This is the direction emancipation should pursue.

In a world subordinated to the rules of sensitivity, law can no longer play the role of the highest priority. With Mill, the conception linking freedom to the rule of law is clearly beginning to waver. Mill is not particularly enthusiastic about law as it is, after all, the most striking emblem of the 'narrow theory of life'. For this reason the significance of the idea of the rule of law should not be overestimated. It is in fact bounded with the false ideals of Christian morality which '[i]n its horror of sensuality, it made an idol of asceticism, which has been gradually compromised away into one of legality'.<sup>351</sup> 'The idol of legality', the false deity should be overthrown. There should be less and less law and its domain should cease growing. This is the cardinal condition of emancipation. According to Mill a very clear boundary should be set for 'the authority of society over the individual'. 'But society has now fairly got the better of individuality; and the danger which threatens human nature is not the excess, but the deficiency, of personal impulses and preferences [...] every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship'.<sup>352</sup> Squeezed by conventions, modern man 'has no character, no more than a steam-engine has a character'.<sup>353</sup> But, all this can still change. In *utilitarianism* Mill voices the conviction that 'moral associations which are wholly of artificial creation, when intellectual culture goes on, yield by degrees to the dissolving force of analysis'.<sup>354</sup> Advances made in knowledge and education should be conducive to emancipation. *Usefulness* is the test of all rules leaving no place for dogma or

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350 Ibid., 56.

351 Ibid., 47.

352 Ibid., 57.

353 Ibid., 56.

354 J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Batoche Books, Kitchener Ontario, 2001), 32.

fictional authorities. All ‘moral feelings are not innate, but acquired’.<sup>355</sup> So it is not feasible to dictate a normative, static concept of ‘human nature’, using it as an instrument of coercion and blackmail. Crucially, according to Mill, the conception of ‘human nature’ can be of a descriptive character only. In the essay *On Liberty* he does not hesitate to stress the significance of the ‘egotist’ features of human nature. Those, indeed, should become the mainspring of emancipation, enabling the crossing of barriers raised by the ‘narrow theory of life’. ‘Egotist virtues’ can act as a counterbalance for stuffy conventions and reveal a colourful palette of new possibilities.

The stand taken by Mill is a very typical manifestation of the ‘expressivist turn’ as Charles Taylor describes it in his work devoted to the ‘birth of modern identity’.<sup>356</sup> This turn involves the rejection of the concept of ‘nature’ – identified with the objective order of things – imposed by rationalist metaphysics and the faith-related conception of the act of creation. It will be replaced by the image of ‘nature as source’. The idea of nature will be interiorized leading to the understanding of nature as the ‘internal source’. ‘The philosophy of nature as source was central to the great upheaval in thought and sensibility that we refer to as romanticism’.<sup>357</sup> From that time onwards living in accordance with ‘nature’ would signify the capture and revelation of what sits inside, in a word, expression. ‘This notion of an inner voice or impulse, that idea that we find the truth within us, and in particular in our feelings – these were the crucial justifying concepts of the Romantic rebellion in its various forms.’<sup>358</sup>

In this way ‘expressivism’ is taking shape and its significance no doubt goes well beyond the framework of a romantic rebellion. It will soon become an idiom of modern culture shaping new patterns of identity. It will impart a firm tone to new claims involving emancipation. Taylor offers the following explanation for this: ‘If our access to nature is through an inner voice or impulse, then we can only fully know this nature through articulating what we find within us. This connects to another crucial feature of this new philosophy of nature, the idea that its realization in each of us is also a form of expression.’<sup>359</sup>

We are dealing here with a very wide spectrum of possibilities, of course. One way of approaching expression is to treat it as a divulgence of internal ‘truth’, that is a formula commanding discipline, ruling out nonchalance and recklessness. We have to keep in mind that romanticism glorifies a sense of

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355 *Ibid.*, 31.

356 Ch. Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012).

357 *Ibid.*, 368.

358 *Ibid.*

359 *Ibid.*, 374.

mission. In time, however, the romantic figure of the poet/high-priest, the apostle of truth, would be overshadowed by a figure of ‘the man of broken lights’ Nietzsche speaks of: the participant in a masquerade interested only in new costumes and stimulating experiences.

Masquerades are a celebration of contrived incarnations: new costumes symbolize new births. Identity becomes a project and expression enters the track of auto-creation. In expressivist culture, notes Taylor, it is difficult to clearly distinguish the ‘medium’ from the ‘message’.<sup>360</sup> As a matter of fact, expression involves shaping; and in the case of ‘this kind of expressive object, we think of its “creation” as not only a making manifest but also a making, a bringing of something to be’.<sup>361</sup> Thus the act of creation promises a dual pleasure, no wonder it is the source of many temptations. Consequently, it would be right to keep them in mind when we discuss the issue of emancipation as well. Expression stimulates the craving for *auto-creation*, soon, this urge would acquire significance.

The notion of expression remains important as long as one can talk about deeply hidden jewels; as long as we believe something exists which needs a voice and which has already taken a certain form. It will become insignificant when the final cut with metaphysics takes place; when concepts such as ‘nature’, ‘substance’ and ‘essence’ disappear from view. Let us, therefore, focus on the birth of pragmatism since it is under its impact that emancipation will be seen as auto-creation.

‘Metaphysics has usually followed a very primitive kind of quest. You know how men have always hankered after unlawful magic, and you know what a great part in magic words have always played. If you have his name, or the formula of incantation that binds him, you can control the spirit, genie, afrite, or whatever the power may be.’ For a long time philosophy and ideas of life related to it remained under the influence of magic. Metaphysics places words on a pedestal. ‘That word names the universe’s *principle*, and to possess it is, after a fashion, to possess the universe itself. “God”, “Matter”, “Reason”, “the Absolute”, “Energy”, and so many solving names. You can rest when you have them.’<sup>362</sup> Pragmatism implies resisting the temptation of magic and metaphysics; it deprives the word of the aura of holiness. It undermines the classical conception of truth which treated the word as an image of independently existing things. Language then would be the mirror in which reality would be looking at itself; truth would be determined by the adequacy of the image. For a

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360 Ibid., 374.

361 Ibid.

362 W. James, *Pragmatism* (Penguin Classics, New York 2000), 28.

long time all philosophy wanted was to be the ‘mirror of nature’, Richard Rorty concluded.<sup>363</sup> ‘[T]he notion of knowledge as a matter of rightly ordered inner representations – an unclouded and undistorting Mirror of Nature – was due to the notion that the difference between the man whose beliefs were true and the man whose beliefs were false was a matter of “how their minds worked.”’<sup>364</sup> Counter to this, as the proponents of pragmatism argue, our knowledge is of a totally different nature. The word is not an image developed in the mind of things within the natural order. The word, as James observed ‘appears less as a solution, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed*.’<sup>365</sup> Language is not a registry of ultimate truths; rather it offers a chance to experiment and gain experience. Ideas, so James asserts, are ‘but parts of our experience’; ‘they work’ in its flow. ‘The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its verification.’<sup>366</sup> Since results determine everything, any absolute criteria for truth and categorical or final decisions are out of the question. ‘Any idea upon which we can ride’ is true, says James playing with words. He explains it in the following way: ideas ‘become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience’.<sup>367</sup>

So, clearly, pragmatism offers a conception of truth which is in essence a conception of activity, and ultimately, let us stress this clearly, an idea of a very good life at the heart of which lies the assumption of an extremely radical understanding of emancipation. But let us bear in mind, there are no ultimate truths: ideas constitute only one aspect of our experience. So, this leads to the conclusion that all barriers holding back our activity should be abolished. The fact is, we do not fully know who we are; truth is a ‘process’, and words are the ‘program’. Everything can always change its shape. Reality is constructed by man. The way we think, the ‘idea’ that is tested, at the same time becomes a way of life. Truth, as James maintains, is actually, ‘one species of good, and not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good, and coordinate with it. The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons.’<sup>368</sup> We identify various ‘goods’, performing

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363 R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1980).

364 *Ibid.*, 262.

365 *Ibid.*, 16

366 *Ibid.*, 58

367 *Ibid.*, 18.

368 *Ibid.*, 23.

feats as riders to find out which ideas we can ‘ride’ upon, in James’s understanding of the term. Consequently, thinking is always an experiment and so, all forms of good are only temporary. Nothing should stand in the way of free exploration, since, as practice reveals, a fortunate configuration can always occur. Truth, as James suggests, is actually ‘what it is better for us to believe’.<sup>369</sup>

In conclusion we can say pragmatism rejects all dogma. The absolute, James notes, is ‘like the sick lion in Aesop’s fable, all footprints lead into his den’.<sup>370</sup> All things coincide at a single point. Authentic emancipation should enable free reconstruction. All categorical truths, related to the idea of the Absolute, James asserts, are a sign of a ‘moral holiday’. Genuine freedom should be understood as self-creation; in fact identity is a construct. ‘Pragmatism, on the other hand, asks its usual question. “Grant an idea or belief to be true,” it says, “what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone’s actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth’s cash-value in experiential terms?”’<sup>371</sup> Therefore, all steadfast convictions should be abandoned, even the most obvious ones. For nothing is settled and done for. We should always give thought to the ‘specific difference’ which is brought into being by the ‘truthfulness’ of some new idea, hence, an idea upon which we can ‘ride’. No experiences should be erased, or plans shattered. Using the ‘cash-value in experiential terms’ one can acquire the right to unimpeded experiments. This does not imply a praise of frenzied wantonness. The ‘cash’ should not be fake; the weight of the new ideas and practices would always depend on whether it would be possible to link them in a fortunate way with the type of experience already in existence. In this context, an inevitable moral and social sanction is vital. Another necessity is the right to overcome barriers. Rejecting values which have turned into absolutes means that life has to become an opportunity for experimentation. James’s conclusions leave no room for doubt: “The true, to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as “the right” is only the expedient in the way of our behaving. Expedient in almost any fashion;[...] Experience, as we know, has ways of boiling over, and making us correct our present formulas.”<sup>372</sup>

With time these corrections would become increasingly important. James is dealing with a world which still sets a very high value on the patterns tested and, as we would say today, still has many inhibitions. As time goes by, the

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369 Ibid., 24.

370 Ibid., 22.

371 Ibid., 58.

372 Ibid., 64.

revolution in the area of mores will accelerate and gain in radicalism. In no way does the late twentieth century resemble its beginnings. The role of social conventions is waning while the role of experiment is on the rise.<sup>373</sup> The idea of self-creation would spread its wings. James' encouragement would take on practical significance. Emancipation will enter the phase of re-evaluation consisting in questioning – devoid of all inhibitions. The barriers related to faith, morality and law are beginning to wobble. Bold ideas inspire practices which tie the conception of freedom with the longing for desublimation. Characterizing these radical changes, Christopher Lasch speaks of 'the abolition of shame'.<sup>374</sup> Furthermore, it is an important sign of our times and a typical trend that terms of a Freudian provenance are becoming successful. 'Desublimation', 'abolition of shame' and various other expressions originating in the language of psychoanalysis allow us to perceive the next turning point: the birth of a new type of culture, called the 'culture of the therapeutic contact' or simply 'therapeutic culture'.<sup>375</sup> It is precisely within the framework of this culture that emancipation would ultimately be hauled to the heights of self-creation. From now on, emancipation is to stand for reconstruction, or, understood literally, project-implementation. Also in this category of terms are: the transformation of personality following the logic of the therapeutic session – a change of the configuration, liberation, breaking down barriers, revealing new possibilities and releasing new sources of energy. 'The vacuum left by secularization has been filled by a permissive culture that replaces the concept of sin with the concept of sickness'.<sup>376</sup>

The staggering success of psychoanalysis is intriguing. The therapeutic slang modelled after the language of psychoanalysis would become one of pop-culture's trends. And in particular it will become the jargon of a new confession, commanding its own formula of awareness, a new conception of identity presuming that the ceaseless overcoming of barriers set up by convention denotes a creative affirmation. 'In the second half of the twentieth century therapeutic concepts and jargon have penetrated so deeply into American culture

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373 On this subject: G. Himmelfarb, *The De-moralization of Society. From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (Vintage Books, Vancouver, WA, 2005).

374 Ch. Lasch *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 1995).

375 See R. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart. Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (University of California Press, Berkeley, Ca., 1996); Ch. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism. American Culture in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (Warner Books Edition, New York 1979); F. Furedi, *Therapy Culture. Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age* (Routledge, Oxford, 2004).

376 Lasch, op.cit., 216.

– most recently in the guise of a broad-gauged campaign to raise people’s “self-esteem” that it has become almost impossible to remember how the world appeared to those not yet initiated into the mysteries of mental health.<sup>377</sup>

Philip Reiff took up for the first time the subject of the ‘triumph of the psychotherapeutic element’ as early as 1966.<sup>378</sup> The process he described has ever since continued to embrace a very wide field. For instance, trivialized Freudian motifs became the focus of Alan Bloom’s book *The Closing of the American Mind*. In this volume the author addressed the erosion of the conception of freedom which draws its strength from the idea of the rule of law and normative ordering. ‘Freud was unknowingly following in the line of Hobbes, who said that each man should look to what he feels – feels, not thinks; he, not another. Self is more feeling than reason, and is in the first place defined as the contrary of other.’<sup>379</sup>

The ‘abolition of shame’ Lasch speaks of is bound with the cult of authenticity and the idea of creative change, which is supposed to become the true expression of freedom. It is, at the same time, the final conclusion of ‘disenchantment’ and marks the rejection of the conception of identity which refers to the act of creation. ‘The collapse of religion, its replacement by the remorselessly critical sensibility exemplified by psychoanalysis and the degeneration of the “analytic attitude” into an all-out assault on ideals of every kind have left our culture in a sorry state.’<sup>380</sup> Therapeutic culture spells the rejection of the normative idea of good; in other words, good of any kind can only be understood in a purely descriptive fashion, as specific values recognized by specific people. ‘Ideals’ are perceived as a formula of ‘repressiveness’ and treated as an unnecessary bridle. Normative conceptions of identity are replaced with the glorification of the self. It is apparent that the culture we are speaking about is purely narcissistic: it panders to desublimation practices. Unblocking is seen as a release, an authentic liberation. But in doing so, therapeutic culture turns against conventions and rules, thus entailing the rejection of normative requirements. Therapy is to replace morality. The therapist makes no judgments; he/she is charged with assisting in the transformation that is the overcoming of barriers. Today, ‘narcissism’ has become a fundamental ‘metaphor for the human condition’.<sup>381</sup> This notion has broken free from the templates of clinical practice and today its meaning includes all ‘forms of “vanity”, “self-

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377 *Ibid.*, 219.

378 P. Reiff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill., 1987).

379 *The Closing of the American*, 174.

380 *The Revolt of the Elites*, 221.

381 *The Culture of Narcissism*, 71-103.

admiration”, “self-satisfaction” and “self-glorification” when it refers to individuals, as well as all forms of parochialism, ethnic or racial prejudice and “fanaticism” when it pertains to groups.<sup>382</sup>

Thus, it follows that current priorities include giving consent, fulfilling one’s own desires, and justification. Consistent with this is the refusal to include evaluation in this category as it could be taken for criticism. In a culture dominated by narcissist demands it is difficult to venture out beyond narrowly understood personal preferences. Those practices which require the taming of one’s ego (*amour propre*) are receding into the background, as is the concept of virtue because it is becoming useless. In the words of Gertrude Himmelfarb we are moving ‘from virtues to values’.<sup>383</sup> Great importance is being attached to hedonistic cravings which are articulated in a bid to avoid all inconvenience. This is the sort of outcome being promised by therapy. In the same manner, in a narcissist culture, psychotherapy replaces religion becoming the new formula for salvation. It offers a promise of a magical transformation: a release from all worries. Psychotherapy creates new areas of sacrum: new rituals and new mythology. The idioms of therapeutic culture become the new patterns of emancipation. It is easy to assert that freedom evolving in a climate of therapeutic reconstruction becomes in effect a formula for disintegration.

The idioms of therapy very clearly collide with the patterns encoded in the concepts of *civility* and *civil society*. Those two concepts have laid the groundwork for practices which imparted the specific shape to concepts of emancipation rooted in the Enlightenment tradition. Civility is a formula of a friendly interaction which imposes the objective of creating a public space such as would allow for the reconciliation of one’s own aspirations with an acceptance of the benefits of cooperation. It is to consist in enhancing capabilities conducive to mutual approval; aspiring to overcome the barriers of isolation and distrust; and the joint affirmation of the benefits ensured by the advancement of reason and freedom. Antithetical to this are the standards of therapeutic culture. Where therapy becomes the symbolic generalization of social practices we are dealing with a severance, or at best, the loosening of ties. ‘Compared to the practices members of a traditional family, church or town share over a lifetime, the therapeutic relationship leaves us with relatively little to do together except communicate, and much less time in which to do it.’<sup>384</sup> The ‘therapeutic relationship’ is, indeed a very peculiar one. ‘For all its genuine emotional content, closeness, and honesty of communication, the therapeutic

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382 Ibid., 71.

383 Himmelfarb, op.cit.

384 Bellah, op.cit., 123.



relationship is peculiarly distanced, circumscribed, and asymmetrical.<sup>385</sup> As an illustration of this, the therapist is at the same time a partner and a dominant figure. He/she invariably imposes a certain form of reconstruction. In a therapeutic culture, and this is a matter of utmost gravity, manipulative abilities take centre stage. Manipulation makes the sense of therapy concrete; the therapist is to provide treatment with a view to transforming personality. He must, therefore, be an able manipulator.

First of all, therapeutic culture, as Frank Furedi insists, should be associated with a particular ‘way of thinking’ as well as a ‘therapeutic imagination’ of sorts. It is thus not a question of a solely literal understanding of therapeutic practices. On the contrary, what counts most is the generalized sense: therapy is becoming a certain type of experience which in a very decisive way affects new attitudes and aspirations. In Furedi’s words, it is a certain ‘script’ which offers new personality patterns and creates ‘a vocabulary through which we can make sense of an individual’s relationship to society.’<sup>386</sup>

What are these relationships like? It should be said that they are highly superficial and unstable. Robert Bellah maintains that the idioms of therapeutic culture collide with the traditional concepts of participation resonant with the idea of the commonwealth, common faith and common beliefs. Therapy generates its own priorities and casts away any claims going beyond bilateral relations. The ‘giving-getting’ formula expressed generally in the ‘therapeutic contractualism’ is decisive.<sup>387</sup> It indicates that we are moving away from morality, faith, the conception of virtue to the sphere of negotiation where absolute priority is given to concrete interests and the rules of equivalent exchange. Identity and the scale of personal entitlements become the object of auctions and negotiation. Therapeutic susceptibility in effect results in the annihilation of the world of morality and politics. ‘The therapeutic view not only refuses to take a moral stand, it actively distrusts “morality” and sees therapeutic contractualism as a more adequate framework’.<sup>388</sup> Reasoning in the categories of rules and obligations is substituted by a calculation which focuses on the gains and losses understood concretely. Codes are replaced with spread sheets. What features prominently is the question of how to imagine the results of our own action rather than how we should behave. There simply is no place for the idea of duty in therapeutic ‘course books’. ‘Values’ consist in the direct projection of desires and expectations. Therapeutic susceptibility implies focusing attention

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385 Ibid., 122.

386 Furedi, *op. cit.*, 22.

387 Bellah, 128-34.

388 Ibid., 129.

on the world of one's own experiences and highlighting the 'differences regarding values'. The belief that 'you can only be responsible for your own actions' is gaining ground.<sup>389</sup> So this actually rules out any evaluation of a general nature. All opinions must be at the same time declarations of 'contractual' reliability – demonstrating their own premises and, at the same time, acknowledging the inevitable nature of mutual questioning. Therapeutic culture, in Bellah's view, imposes a certain type of 'moral asceticism'. It eliminates free interaction, dictates extreme caution and a continuous and rigorous 'self-assessment'. In order to ensure that the 'contractual' practices are effective one should persistently continue to measure one's own assets and keep an eye on the 'ratings' which particular value systems are subject to. In a word, we should analyse the 'market of values' while developing a strategy of one's own conduct. 'Contractualism' then creates certain rigours of intersubjective importance. But this has nothing to do with traditionally understood political practices. The therapeutic attitude is usually a manifestation of 'frustration, disappointment, and disillusionment with politics.'<sup>390</sup> Political persuasion is perceived as a formula of 'repressiveness'. Any conception of teaming up, including first and foremost, the idea of majority rule, is judged as an indication of dehumanizing coercion. The priority attached to 'face to face' relations makes all mechanisms which exclude direct contact seem extremely suspicious. It thus comes as no surprise that the recognition of the world of politics is out of the question. Therapeutic culture dictates patterns of separation and dissemination. 'Contractualism' can /should be treated as a formula of episodic exchange; the mismatch between the systems of value makes it impossible for a 'commercial code' to be established. Because of the divergence and fluidity of the systems of value all transactions are unique. The triumph of the self denotes social disintegration. A world is coming into existence 'without politics, and almost it would seem, without community.'<sup>391</sup>

The conception of freedom which can be linked to therapeutic culture dictates a narcissist isolation. Freedom is not an expression of the reign of generally acknowledged rules. The principles of law and justice are becoming insignificant since therapeutic justice is associated purely with empathy and free communication. The conception of 'guilt-excluding justice' appears on the horizon.<sup>392</sup> All objective gauges of fairness become redundant as the notion of

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389 Ibid.

390 Ibid., 131.

391 Ibid., 133.

392 J. Nolan, *Reinventing Justice: The American Drug Court Movement* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.Y., 2001).

truth itself becomes irrelevant. In therapeutic practice the latter can be treated exclusively as a superfluous anachronism. Effectiveness fills in for truth. ‘Philip Reiff has documented with devastating insight a number of the ways in which truth has been displaced as a value and replaced by psychological effectiveness.’<sup>393</sup> In therapeutic culture the disappearance of the distinctions between ‘manipulative and non-manipulative’ aspects of human activity becomes a fact.<sup>394</sup> Actually, nothing can stand in the way of our freedom of action, barring the criterion of effectiveness and the calculation of pleasure. ‘Values’ lose their binding power. In therapy they are treated as raw material to be used. Their status is uncertain; no lasting conception of good is possible. Identity becomes an area for experimentation which is to safeguard the success of new corrections: this is the sense of emancipation.

In our bid to find a message let us for a moment take a look at Richard Rorty’s declarations which transport the idea of freedom to the foundation of ‘liberal utopia’. In the end, what is the sense of emancipation in a culture which abandoning religion and metaphysics, accepting the patronage of Nietzsche and Freud, frees itself from the yoke of all superstitions, especially those which are related to identity?

Rorty is of the opinion that the ideas of emancipation related to the Enlightenment referred to the ‘vocabulary’ of metaphysics. Different variations of fundamentalism which imposed the dogma of ‘subjectivity’, binding the question of isolating with the idea of necessity were at the root. While questioning this tradition he speaks of the ‘contingency’ – a pivotal role in his deliberations – of self. ‘Post-Nietzschean philosophers like Wittgenstein and Heidegger write philosophy in order to exhibit the universality and necessity of the individual and contingent. Both philosophers became caught up in the quarrel between philosophy and poetry which Plato began, and both ended by trying to work out honourable terms on which philosophy might surrender to poetry.’<sup>395</sup> According to Rorty this capitulation must imply the rejection of false anthropology; there simply is no traditionally understood ‘individual’. This verdict can seem shocking. But if we treat the idea of ‘contingency’ with due seriousness we would have to, so thinks Rorty, change our mind. Our sense of reality is fluid; it is shaped in the current of events. The language we use is actually a formula of self-creation. ‘The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to

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393 *After Virtue*, 30.

394 *Ibid.*

395 R.Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 1995), 26.

hold beliefs.’<sup>396</sup> A turn in the direction of new ‘truths’ is always possible. We can’t grasp this lending credence to priests’ and philosophers’ tales which glorify the alleged ‘language of the world’, cajoling us with the charms of fiction, the picture of creation, history and the way of nature. This is the way we are ‘programmed’. We seek to find ‘ourselves’ in fiction. Rorty encourages us to read Freud. ‘Freud thus helps us take seriously the possibility that there is no central faculty, no central self, called "reason" – and thus to take Nietzschean pragmatism and perspectivalism seriously.’<sup>397</sup> This knowledge is liberating for it renders it possible to part with anachronistic vocabulary, which forces upon us the concept of ‘human nature’, and to replace it with the vocabulary of ‘self-creation’. Rorty approvingly recalls Heidegger’s standpoint: ‘For Heidegger – early and late – what one is is the practices one engages in, and especially the language, the final vocabulary, one uses. For that vocabulary determines what one can take as a possible project.’<sup>398</sup>

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396 Ibid., 6.

397 Ibid., 33.

398 Ibid., 109.



## Chapter Two

### Opinions: Reason in the Marketplace

What is the value of opinions, in fact, what are they? Contrasting authentic knowledge with that which is only apparent, Plato speaks of a life ‘in dreams’ and a life ‘in reality’. There is a dialogue between Glaucon and Socrates in *The Republic* concerning truth, beauty, knowledge and the perfect system. ‘Look; by dreaming, don’t we simply mean the confusion between image and the reality of which it is an image, whether the dreamer be asleep or awake’<sup>399</sup> So it is possible to dream while awake; dreams do not belong solely to the realm of sleep, they do not always use the cover of the night. When Plato speaks of ‘dreams’ he means situations in which reality is shrouded by appearance; ‘musing’ minds sleep continuously. ‘Knowledge’, says Plato is only that ‘state of mind’ which ‘believes in absolute Beauty and can see both it and the particular things which share its character, and does not confuse the particular thing and universal character’. Only such minds are ‘really awake’ and only then one’s ‘state of mind is one of knowledge’. The state of mind which contends itself with delusive, incomplete knowledge, Plato calls ‘believing’; thus, he ‘who only believes’, the author explains, is somewhere ‘between knowledge and ignorance’.<sup>400</sup>

Opinions, which concern different issues, not only the problem of beauty, give the appearance of knowledge, while, in fact, they fuel massive confusion. There are not that many philosophers – who are ‘lovers of wisdom’. All philosophers, however, attach a great importance to what they are thinking about and all are afflicted by the aim ‘to learn’. Plato’s Glaucon says ‘Your philosophers will be an odd crowd, then. For theatre-fans and music-lovers are anxious enough to learn, and so fall under your description; but they are an odd crew to class as philosophers’.<sup>401</sup> Since they belong to a group of ‘theatre fans and music-lovers’ they cannot become any wiser for this. They are stuck in a world of unstable images; their knowledge is more akin to fantasizing. It bears only ‘some resemblance’ to philosophy. Although they continue to be ‘devotees of the minor arts’ they do not understand anything thoroughly and they are unable to explain anything. However, they are not discouraged and walk with their heads held up high: in the hustle and bustle of city life one can always hear

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399 Plato, *The Republic*, V, 476c.

400 Ibid., 477b.

401 Ibid., 475d.

their voices, eager to adjudicate and preach. Let us not forget, however, that only ‘the object of knowledge is what exists’<sup>402</sup>, whereas opinions, since their object cannot have this nature, take us into the sphere of delusions.

In democratic systems governments are based on the strength of opinion, as the sophists asserted, that which is ‘taken for truth’ becomes truth. The same is true for justice: everything is determined by the beliefs of the majority. Indeed, Plato describes the ‘democratic individual’ in these words: ‘he takes to politics and is always on his feet saying or doing whatever comes into his head’.<sup>403</sup> Focusing on ‘minor arts’ allows one to go very far, it is an activity in which mentors, who merely ‘resemble philosophers’ engage in. They speak of truth, justice and law and then announce their verdicts; nevertheless, their world is one of appearances. The rule of opinion was seen in a slightly more favourable light by Aristotle. In his rejection of Plato’s theory of knowledge, he was able to assess more leniently the efforts of common reason for which the heights of philosophy remain unattainable. ‘And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state.’<sup>404</sup> For him, jointly reached judgments are pivotal, since it is due to these that a community of people can spring into being and man can live in harmony with his nature. Precisely for this reason, knowledge concerning community life cannot be abstract. Truth which we must avail ourselves of, in the search for the best solutions, does not ensue from ‘ideas’, that is, abstract forms separate from the field of first-hand experience, as Plato makes us believe. The truth about human life is directly linked to experience and belongs to the sphere of *praxis*, the sphere of human activity. According to Aristotle knowledge about life in the *polis*, namely issues such as justice, beauty and good, belongs to the sphere of *practical* knowledge and embraces that ‘which can be different than it is’, that which undergoes change. It is divested of the properties of ultimate perfection, of the sort Plato had in mind when he juxtaposed knowledge with opinions.

Opinions, therefore, can have a value of their own, although Aristotle did not agree with the sophists who treated the concept of truth as a prop of sorts. Knowledge inherent in opinions, as he thought, had to be concerned with reality; it could not be illusory. Truth is not a stage production which comes into being by means of clever rhetorical measures. Aristotle uses the concept of ‘nature’ and believes that truth implies an agreement between concept and object. However, as we remember, in the sphere of human activity everything can

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402 Ibid., 478e.

403 Ibid., 561d.

404 Aristotle, ‘Politics’ in *The Complete Works*, 6, Book 1, 1253a.

change its form. An ‘object’ is in motion; ‘matter’ undergoes continuous development. So we are not seeking ultimate truths here but rather those which have a limited range. In politics, as Aristotle will go on to say, ‘probability’ actually suffices. ‘It is clear, then, that the technical study of rhetoric is concerned with the modes of persuasion. Now persuasion is a sort of demonstration (since we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated)’. It follows, then, that the evidence of truth, understood precisely, is not what we are seeking, as the development of ‘convictions’ is subject to other rules. Continuing his argument Aristotle says: ‘the orator’s demonstration is an enthymeme, and this is, in general, the most effective of the modes of persuasion’. It does not decide on the question of truth merely defining the probability. Having said that, this does in no way take away from the importance of persuasion. ‘For the true and the approximately true are apprehended by the same faculty; it may also be noted that men have a sufficient natural instinct for what is true, and usually do arrive at the truth. Hence the man who makes a good guess at truth is likely to make a good guess at what is reputable.’<sup>405</sup>

Given the above reasons we should not fear opinions. Aristotle does not try to discredit the significance of common wisdom, or put differently, wisdom resulting from experience. He does not disparage practices resulting from the common participation in public matters or unconditionally associate popular assembly sessions with the defeat of reason. In the often-quoted passage of *The Politics* he underlines the following:

For the many, of whom each individual is but an ordinary person, when they meet together may be better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively, just as a feast to which many contribute is better than a dinner provided out of a single purse. For each individual among the many has a share of excellence and practical wisdom, and when they meet together, just as they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses, so too with regard to their character and thought.<sup>406</sup>

Aristotle, however, approaches his own arguments with some incredulity we should note. He certainly does not glorify opinions, instead balancing the optimistic characterization of mediocrity, augmented by the force of scale, with an assertion expressing compelling doubts. He raises the following question: ‘what power should be assigned to the mass of freemen and citizens’? Is this to be unlimited power, power which paves the way to the ‘great offices’? Certainly

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405 Aristotle, ‘Rhetoric’, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. by J. Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984), 1355a14.

406 Aristotle, ‘Politics’, 1281a 42.



not. 'There is still a danger in allowing them to share the great offices of state, for their folly will lead them into error, and their dishonesty into crime.'<sup>407</sup>

In fact, Aristotle is not an advocate of the idea of democracy, arguing that a system wherein the opinions of a majority play a crucial role, questions the *telos* of a political association, and does not generate mechanisms which would make life better. In *The Politics*, speaking about 'appropriate' systems and 'degenerate' ones, he counts democracy (alongside tyranny and oligarchy) among *degenerate* systems! Explaining this position, he draws attention to the instability of opinion and the fact that the basis of joint action is fragile. Too often, the status of the law depends on actions performed on the whim of the moment. When 'not the law, but the multitude, have the supreme power' there is no place for justice.<sup>408</sup> Finally, to quote from Aristotle again: 'Such a democracy is fairly open to the objection that it is not a constitution at all; for where the laws have no authority, there is no constitution.'<sup>409</sup> Although, unlike Plato, Aristotle did not juxtapose opinion to truth, he did not hold out much hope for the government of opinions, either.

In contrast to this, the modern era would place opinions on a pedestal, at least in the beginning. Opinions would become the synonym of truth: free, independent, saying 'nay' to superstition and identified with the voice of reason. The glorification of opinion is one of the characteristic traits of the Enlightenment. 'It is not just that the eighteenth century decided to pin Cartesian medals on the opinion of mankind.' A belief in the infallibility of the, peculiar, collective act of *cogito* was becoming vital and public opinion was perceived 'as a kind of discourse, emanating from reason'<sup>410</sup>. Elucidating the principles of the American Constitution in *The Federalist* No. 49, James Madison remarked without hesitation, 'all governments rest on opinion',<sup>411</sup> and goes on to say: 'the strength of opinion in each individual, and its practical influence on his conduct, depend much on the number which he supposes to have entertained the same opinion.'<sup>412</sup>

*Public opinion* would become the new arbiter of truth and the new mentor. 'The reason of man, like man himself, is timid and cautious when left alone, and acquires firmness and confidence in proportion to the number with which it is

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407 Ibid., 1281 b 25.

408 Ibid., 1292 a 4.

409 Ibid., 1292 a 30.

410 Ch. Taylor, 'Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere' in *Philosophical Arguments* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Ma., 1995), 265.

411 J. Madison, *The Federalist Papers* (Penguin Books, London, 1987), 314.

412 Ibid.

associated.’<sup>413</sup> Madison accedes that human judgment, indeed, can yield to the influence of *passion*. In the end, however, the way power is exercised should be determined by the judgment of ‘the reason, alone, of the public’.<sup>414</sup>

Affected as the eighteenth century was by the symbolism of illumination, it was also inclined to treat public opinion as a tribunal of truth. Transparency was associated with unmasking and the exposition of lies and superstitions, but it had just as much to do with revealing views which earlier had been discriminated against. Hence, the public sphere has become a space of confrontation, which, thanks to unrestricted criticism, was to facilitate the consolidation of authentic credibility. This way becoming the breeding ground for a belief in the salutary effect of governments which appeal to the authority of opinion. ‘Jacques Necker, whose *Compte rendu au roi* (1781) caused a sensation by publicly exposing, for the first time, the financial condition of the French monarchy, likened *opinion publique* to the highest law-giving tribunal, which filters and refines the inchoate opinions of the speaking and listening public, and submits its rulers to judgement, forcing them to act peacefully and in the open.’<sup>415</sup>

It can be said without exaggeration that public opinion was being stylized as a deity of truth, as an oracle we could turn to for a just decision. What paved the way for the great expectations related to public opinion were certain historical associations linking the concept of public opinion with the *ethos* of noble impartiality. The high priests of public opinion have entered the space organised by ‘the republic of the men of letters’, a common term adopted towards the end of the seventeenth century by members of academic communities engaged in corresponding with each other. This phenomenon was a precursor of the public sphere and responsible for influencing its form. As Charles Taylor writes in his *Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere*, a ‘republic’ emerged, established outside the domain of politics, or as one could say, an independent ‘republic of truth’.

What is more, a truth which became increasingly powerful. The concept of public opinion was synonymous with the rapid development of knowledge which was clearly visible in the writings of J.A.N. Condorcet. In his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* he observed that, ‘[u]p till now, the history of politics, like that of philosophy or science, has been the history of only a few individuals’.<sup>416</sup> This changes with the unrestrained flow of opinion, producing a new situation: the quick accumulation of knowledge by many. Freed from the guardianship of superstition and the burden of political

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413 Ibid.

414 Ibid., 315.

415 J. Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (T.J. Press, Padstow, Cornwall, 1991), 40.

416 Condorcet, ‘Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind’, 124.

servitudes, minds quickly multiply the capital of truth. Widespread openness and free criticism serve to consolidate minds; barriers which earlier could have constrained the influence of reason now disappear. Rational opinion becomes an authentic power. 'If we glance at the state of the world today we see first of all that in Europe the principles of the French constitution are already those of all enlightened men. We see them too widely propagated, too seriously professed, for priests and despots to prevent their gradual penetration even into the hovels of their slaves'.<sup>417</sup> Thus, an authentic breakthrough takes place which sees world history moving into uncharted territory. The reign of ignorance and errors naturally leading toward despotism draws to an end. Truth liberates. Thus, hopes raised by the government of independent opinion are enormous.

This was expressed most emphatically in *What is Enlightenment?* by Immanuel Kant when he wrote about leaving the state of 'self-imposed immaturity' It would be possible, he argued, owing to 'the freedom to use reason publicly in all matters.' The emergence of the public sphere is decisive, the sphere of unrestrained contact, which set the scene for a confrontation between convictions. The public, as Kant noted, is in a much more advantageous situation than the individual. 'For there will always be a few independent thinkers, even among the established guardians of the great masses, who, after having themselves cast off the yoke of minority, will disseminate the spirit of a rational valuing of one's own worth and of the calling of each individual to think for himself.'<sup>418</sup> The change Kant is describing is to involve the overcoming of childish humbleness, together with the 'rules and formulas', hence 'those mechanical aids' which 'are the shackles of a permanent minority'. Reflection should become a primary concern: 'the rational valuing of one's own worth'. After the ballast of 'formulas' is rejected, all views will be able to flourish owing to a direct confrontation between contrasting standpoints; thanks to the criticism which renders the all-mighty habits of judgment irrelevant (Kant denounces 'laziness and cowardice'). These are the benefits of emancipation, but, there is still a lot to be done according to Kant: man's 'minority' which 'has all but become his nature', or the fact that 'he has even become fond of this state'. Nevertheless, looking into the future Kant suggests: 'we do have distinct intimations that the field is now being opened for them to work freely in this direction and that the hindrances to universal enlightenment or to humankind's emergence from its self-incurred-minority are gradually becoming fewer.'<sup>419</sup>

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417 Ibid., 127.

418 I. Kant, 'What is Enlightenment?' in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. by M. J. Gregor (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996), 17-18.

419 Ibid., 21.

It turned out, however, these were not permanent indications. The hopes raised by the confrontation of opinion, as John Keane rightly remarks, ‘extrapolated from the face-to-face model of communication of the Greek *polis*. It supposed that in complex, modern societies all citizens could enter public life on equal terms; that their freedom to express and publish their opinions would enable them to form themselves into a unified public body which would deliberate peacefully about matters of general concern.’<sup>420</sup>

However, things turned out differently: the emancipation of reason did not meet the expectations set by philosophers. In no time at all the ‘jester’s bells’ permitted themselves to be felt and it transpired that ‘laziness and cowardice’ played an important part even at a time when despots had all but left the stage. The eighteenth-century apotheosis of reason had misfired; wisdom, freed from the poison of ‘statutes and formulas’, was applauded prematurely. Apparently, the ‘public’ showed no selfless inquisitiveness and, so, reason turned to new dogmas. The nineteenth century would speak of ‘public opinion’ differently than the eighteenth century. The spell was broken; the adored deity would be knocked off the pedestal.

The naked goddess is ugly, as Alexis de Tocqueville would point out to his readers. His depictions of American democracy expose the ineptness of the ‘emancipated reason’ and ridicule Enlightenment rhetoric. The author himself harbours no more illusions, aware that the rationality formulas glorified by the philosophers are deceptive. His descriptions sound like epitaphs: the great expectations regarding the Enlightenment are best buried.

Tocqueville renounces the symbolism of illumination. ‘So it is as difficult to imagine a society in which all men are very enlightened, as a state in which all citizens are rich’.<sup>421</sup> The emancipation of reason has a limited scope; one cannot count on the final and total eradication of ignorance and opinions must remain in the dark to a considerable degree. Emancipation itself is highly problematic as well. Let us recall Madison’s words already quoted: ‘The reason of man, like man himself, is timid and cautious when left alone’. This is a view shared by Alexis de Tocqueville who, when analysing this issue, so puzzling to Madison, would go much further, albeit, unprotected by faith in the salutary influence of the ‘public mind’.

‘If man was forced to prove to himself all the truths that he uses every day, he would never finish doing so’.<sup>422</sup> It is clear, therefore, that man cannot entirely rely on his own convictions, particularly because his mind is becoming fearful

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420 J. Keane, *op.cit.*, 39-40.

421 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol.2, 315.

422 *Ibid.*, vol.3, 714.

and irresolute. Contrary to expectations, such are the effects of emancipation because independence forces upon us isolation. On top of this let us add the burden of doubts which ought to be treated as a gauge of truth and, what is obvious, contempt towards faith. Tocqueville does not agree with the philosophers' rash verdicts. He does not think faith is the poison which overwhelms reason, thus rejecting the principal thesis of the Enlightenment. He is convinced there is no natural conflict between faith and freedom, on the contrary, he asserts that 'if religion does not save men in the other world, it is at least very useful to their happiness and to their grandeur in this one. This is above all true of men who live in free countries.' Faith can protect the mind from confusion; compensating the effects of uncertainty brought about by the habit of questioning. 'There are very false and very absurd religions. You can say however that every religion that remains within the circle that I have just pointed out [...] imposes a salutary yoke on the intellect.'<sup>423</sup> It underlies the unshaken conviction which determines the strength of the mind. In a democracy however, emancipation rhetoric wins, diminishing the influence of faith, even if, like in America, nobody has wrecked alters and religious beliefs continue to play a substantial role. This is because a new authority appears, a new arbiter: majority opinion, which plays a pivotal role. Concluding, Tocqueville remarks 'if you look very closely, you will see that religion itself reigns there much less as revealed doctrine than as common opinion.'<sup>424</sup>

So, 'commonly accepted views' are salient. Independent thought involving emancipation is actually ruled out. According to Tocqueville, emancipation is fiction; human reason is unable to bear the weight of independence. 'So men who live in times of aristocracy are naturally led to take as guide for their opinions the superior reason of one man or of one class [...]. As citizens become more equal and more similar, the tendency of each blindly to believe a certain man or a certain class decreases. The disposition to believe the mass increases, and more and more it is opinion that leads the world.'<sup>425</sup> This is not the deity of truth Enlightenment philosophers used to pay homage to. The birth of public opinion has nothing do with the habit of critical judgment, or the confrontation of different positions which are to serve the quest for truth. On the contrary, uncritical approval of the opinion of the majority is of overriding importance. 'In times of equality, men, because of their similarity, have no faith in each other'. They yield to the authority of mass opinion: 'It does not persuade, it imposes its beliefs and makes them penetrate souls by a kind of immense

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423 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 3, 744.

424 *Ibid.*, 720.

425 *Ibid.*, 717-18.

pressure of the mind of all on the intelligence of each.’ Everything is determined by a certain type of faith or, as Tocqueville says, using a less favourable expression, a new form of ‘total thoughtlessness’. Nobody even bothers to be independent; public discussions have little in common with a confrontation of views. ‘In the United States, the majority takes charge of providing individuals with a host of ready-made opinions, and thus relieves them of the obligation to form for themselves opinions that are their own. A great number of theories in matters of philosophy, morality and politics are adopted in this way by each person without examination on faith in the public.’<sup>426</sup> Minds reconciled with the majority view inexorably take on sycophantic traits. ‘For there is nothing more familiar to man than recognizing a superior wisdom in the one who oppresses him.’ The alleged freedom of thought becomes in effect a testimony to servility. The majority will always impose dogmas, the adoration of which produces the foundations for a cult, thereby dashing the hopes cherished in the Enlightenment. ‘It is to be believed that [...] whatever the political laws may be that govern men in centuries of equality, you can predict that faith in common opinion will become a sort of religion whose prophet will be the majority.’<sup>427</sup>

Tocqueville was by no means a lonely eccentric, although, his treatise *On Democracy in America* was the first step, the first attempt at ‘disenchanted’ the power boasting about being ‘public opinion’. In time, this unmasking inquisitiveness would gradually gain more ground. Nietzsche, for one, would be busy ‘breaking idols’ testifying to his daring uncompromising nature. Although Tocqueville compares society to a ‘herd of timid beasts’, he is nevertheless willing to speak of ‘society’. Disparaging the ‘new type of mindlessness’ he acquiesces that ‘the human mind develops thanks to the joint effort of many’, he adds that in a time of democracy ‘there is less perfection but more fecundity in works.’<sup>428</sup> His opinions, then, are not categorical, nor do they express a total loss of hope. ‘This new society which I have sought to portray and which I want to judge, has only just been born. Time has not yet set its form; the great revolution that created it is still going on, and in what is happening today, it is nearly impossible to discern what must pass away with the revolution itself, and what must remain after it.’<sup>429</sup>

In time, however, it would all change: blasphemous and ruthless criticism would come into the picture bearing testimony to a total loss of hope. Tocqueville speaks about society; Nietzsche, let us note, about a ‘herd’; le Bon, about

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426 Ibid., 719.

427 Ibid., 724.

428 Ibid., vol.4, 1281.

429 Ibid., 1280.

‘crowds’ and Ortega y Gasset about ‘masses’, even contemptuous and stigmatizing definitions appear. Depictions of the habits of crowds, primarily, bring to mind the suggestions voiced by Plato, who, with the *demos* and ‘opinions of the crowd’ in mind, remarked: ‘Suppose a man was in charge of a large and powerful animal, and made a study of its moods and wants; he would learn when to approach and handle it, when and why it was especially savage or gentle, what the different noises it made meant, and what tone of voice to use to soothe or annoy it.’<sup>430</sup> A ‘large and powerful animal’, what the demagogues know only too well, has to be fed with flattery. This is the true value of ‘opinion’; it is the echo of flattery, spawning many variations developing on the basis of adulation. The *demos* seeks no wisdom; its behaviour is spurred on by ‘desires’. Everything that goes against the crowd’s desires can only exasperate it. The art of beguilement becomes the centrepiece; the entire acumen of demagogues consists in knowing ‘from which side to approach’ and ‘how to touch’.

Thus, the term ‘opinion’ can be disorientating. Perhaps, ‘opinions’ are merely concealed *passions*; or is it ‘lust’ dressed in words? After all, the concept itself produces a convenient alibi, suggesting that we are moving about in a sphere subordinate to the authority of reason. This should be the focus of our attention especially in the present day, a time when ‘opinion polls’ have become one of the most sacred rituals shaping the everyday life of ‘plebiscitary democracy’. Polling ‘opinion’, to stay within the style of Plato’s argumentation, would be tantamount to sounding out emotions and surveying the bad habits in order to establish what to feed the ‘great beast’ and ‘from which direction to approach’ it.

The radical criticism brought by the end of the nineteenth century would undermine the priorities of the Enlightenment and dethrone ‘opinions’. The ‘people’, as portrayed by Nietzsche, Le Bon, Weber or Ortega y Gasset, truly resemble the ‘great beast’. They lack heroic features; they fit ill the role they were cast in by the philosophers creating their conception of rational reconstruction. The proud sovereign who was to proclaim infallible decisions – manifestations of judicious will – has turned into an apathetic crowd prone to fits of hysteria.

The modern era, as Nietzsche asserts, has gained the ‘right to stupidity’.<sup>431</sup> ‘The weary, slow-breathing worker who looks around good-naturedly and lets things go their own way: this typical figure whom you come across now, in the age of work (and of the “Reich”!-), in all social classes’.<sup>432</sup> Accommodation has

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430 *Republic*, 493b.

431 Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, 57.

432 *Ibid.*

become the pinnacle of wisdom; ‘go their own way’ this is the nature of all ‘opinions’. Mindlessness, the cult of accommodation and the belief in the sense of the changes underway have become a certain formula of ‘physiology’; in fact, according to Nietzsche, everything resembles ‘a tremendous physiological process’.<sup>433</sup> He predicted that in the future ‘the over-all impression of such future Europeans will probably be that of manifold, garrulous workers who will be poor in will, extremely employable, and as much in need of a master and commander as of their daily bread’.<sup>434</sup> Let us emphasize, these people would be *talkative*. The exploitation of garrulousness would become one of the basic techniques of power, one of the key formulas of social engineering and of how we speak today.

Opinions have been stirring quite a muddle; the adoration of opinions dictates the way we pursue politics. Lending a ‘voice’ to opinions is one of the most dignified rituals consisting in an apotheosis of revealed wisdom (precisely by means of opinions). Modernity raises the altars on which garrulousness is surrounded with an aura of holiness, thereby opinions exercise their power. The reality is, however, that we are dealing with a mystification. Clearly, nobody is looking for any truth whatsoever as we live in the age of the masses which ‘grovel on their bellies before anything massive. In *politics*, too.’<sup>435</sup> ‘Great’ is the name given to a politician ‘who rears up for them a new Tower of Babel’, increasing the turmoil and fuelling the confusion; who panders to talkativeness bringing about utter chaos which sweeps away all the requirements which could impair the ‘right to stupidity’.

Crowds hate subtleties and distinctions protecting thoughts from becoming confused. Gustav le Bon is very emphatic about this in the *Psychology of the Crowds* where he points out, that crowds are only capable of acquiring ideas which ‘assume a very absolute, uncompromising, and simple shape’ and ‘are only accessible to the masses under this form.’<sup>436</sup> But crowds are incapable of drawing distinctions between ideas. ‘A chain of logical argumentation is totally incomprehensible to crowds, and for this reason it is permissible to say that they do not reason or that they reason falsely and are not to be influenced by reasoning.’<sup>437</sup> If crowds do adopt a view, they do so only under strong pressure: ‘how powerless they are to hold any opinions other than those which are imposed upon them’. So what is the value of ‘opinions’?

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433 *Beyond Good and Evil*, 176.

434 *Ibid.*, 176.

435 *Ibid.*, 174.

436 Le Bon, *op.cit.*, 36.

437 *Ibid.*, 39.



The preferences of the ‘masses’ were viewed with a clear distaste and alarm by Ortega y Gasset: ‘The command over public life exercised to-day by the intellectually vulgar is perhaps the factor of the present situation which is most novel, least assimilable to anything in the past. At least in European history up to the present, the vulgar had never believed itself to have “ideas” on things.’<sup>438</sup> It is hardly possible to speak of ideas and ambitions which instill hope. The quotation marks point to the uniqueness of the whole situation. The ‘ideas’ common folk brag about, present thought in the form of a parody. The ‘mass-man’ is endowed with an intellectual capacity but ‘that capacity is of no use to him; in reality, the vague feeling that he possesses it seems only to shut him up more within himself and keep him from using it. Once for all, he accepts the stock of commonplaces, prejudices, fag-ends of ideas or simply empty words which chance has piled up within his mind, and with a boldness only explicable by his ingenuousness, is prepared to impose them everywhere’.<sup>439</sup> All opinions are born in the cemetery of ideas, created from ‘empty words’, so clearly, they have more in common with a manifestation of feelings and emotions rather than with attention to the reliability of thought. More often than not, opinions are an expression of feverish excitement, rashness and haste which impart a typical tone to the ambitions and dealings of the masses. The representative of the masses, Ortega underlines, ‘has lost the use of his hearing.’ ‘Why should he listen if he has within him all that is necessary? There is no reason now for listening, but rather for judging, pronouncing, deciding.’<sup>440</sup> The new arbiter discloses an inclination towards uncompromising evaluations and violent moves, while his opinions are the ‘banners’ of revolt and a testimony to grievances rather than convictions. ‘The average man finds himself with “ideas” in his head, but he lacks the faculty of ideation.’<sup>441</sup>

To recall Max Weber’s point, opinions are a mere façade in a ‘plebiscitary democracy’, what is at the heart of this system, instead, is the ‘charisma’ of the leader. This type of democracy, Weber explains, ‘is a variant of charismatic authority, which hides behind a legitimacy that is *formally* derived from the will of the governed. The leader (demagogue) rules by virtue of the devotion and trust which his political followers have in him personally.’<sup>442</sup> Naturally, ‘his political followers’ can be substituted by the ‘electorate’. Let us keep in mind that Weber is in favour of a broad treatment of the concept of ‘plebiscitary

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438 *Revolt of the Masses*, 70.

439 *Ibid.*, 47.

440 *Ibid.*, 48.

441 *Ibid.*

442 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 268.

democracy'. He speaks about dictators 'who emerged in the revolutions of the ancient world and of modern times' and mentions Cromwell next to Grakchus but his comments also refer to parliamentary democracy. For the mechanism is always the same, the author of *Economy and Society* clearly speaks about 'plebiscitary rule' having in mind a certain separate type of rule rather than a specific historical situation, for as he maintains, 'the modern party leaders' in the modern state are the most striking example.<sup>443</sup>

The factors which determine whether one achieves and maintains a position in a 'plebiscitary' system owe little to the authority of reason or the great celebration of rationality which the Enlightenment calls for. Ideas have no role to play here; seriously treated criticism is not that important either. The measure of truth is, after all, charisma; various 'opinions' do matter; so do beliefs, expectations and imaginings. However, everything is determined by a certain type of trust which has the most in common with faith. 'It is characteristic of the Führerdemokratie that there should in general be a highly *emotional* type of devotion to and trust in the leader. This accounts for a tendency to favour the type of individual who is most spectacular, who promises the most'.<sup>444</sup> Rational decisions play no part in this system; in fact the opposite is true, the strength of the support is driven by a hypnosis of sorts; wooing by making promises. 'The plebiscite', Weber explains, 'is not an "election".' Precisely, it serves to facilitate 'the recognition of a pretender as a personally qualified, charismatic ruler'.<sup>445</sup> This is to be the purpose of democratic elections; this is, basically, the nature of parliamentary democracy. The 'plebiscite' factor is predominant. Of course, in time, as Weber underlines, the charisma 'wears off', there is no place for great elation anymore and hypnosis takes on prosaic forms. Charisma becomes dissipated: it becomes the domain of 'party notables', to use Weber's expression. Stability which makes for the emergence of the system and the growing power of party machinery inevitably leads to the 'castration of charisma', as Weber bluntly puts it. Impoverished charisma is deprived of the stigma of holiness; it speaks the language of propaganda but it still has a role to play, even when 'party notables' are replaced by 'bureaucrats', in other words, when democracy is bureaucratized. After all, the point remains to hypnotize rather than inspire. A confrontation between opinions does give the appearance of a rational debate but it is the wooing that throughout remains the objective. Participants in the debate resemble fighting gladiators. The image matters more than the word, so the style of discourse is replaced by the style of *revelation*. We

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443 Ibid., 267.

444 Ibid., 269.

445 Ibid., 1126.

must remember that *promises* are what count the most. Rational criticism plays no significant part here. Nobody is interested in convincing; the point, rather, is to win support and inspire faith. In turn, faith takes the shape of uncritical belief in the justification of certain points of view: this is the sense of practicing party propaganda. It is aimed at limiting the role of independent judgment. ‘Opinions’ become an echo of the concepts developed earlier, indubitably however, in the words of Weber, the idea is to ‘*recruit* votes.’

By facilitating a confrontation between different positions, parliamentary democracy was to be a vehicle for the development of rational opinion, but it did not turn out this way at all. *Demagogues* take centre stage while ‘democratization’ leads to a situation whereby the ‘demagogue will rise to the top, and the successful demagogue is he who is most unscrupulous in his wooing of the masses.’<sup>446</sup> Demagogues remain key figures also in parliaments. For it is not the politically passive “mass” that produces the leader from its midst, but the political leader recruits his following and wins the mass through “demagogy.”<sup>447</sup> What hopes can we pin on parliamentarism? ‘An idealization of the realities of life would be useless self-deception. [...] Democratization and demagogy belong together’, writes Weber. The parliament is not an arena for debates designed to satisfy the demands of reason; it is a place where demagogues clash. Weber believes that we should abandon sentimental interpretations of parliamentarism as modern democracy is clearly turning towards ‘a caesarist mode of selection.’<sup>448</sup> Parliamentary procedures (debates, disputes about fundamental arguments) are almost insignificant. ‘Active mass democratization means that the political leader is no longer proclaimed a candidate because he has proved himself in a circle of *honoratiores*, then becoming a leader because of his parliamentary accomplishments, but that he gains the trust and the faith of the masses in him and his power with the means of mass demagogy.’<sup>449</sup> That seems to be enough.

A ‘plebiscite’, returning to Weber’s main thought, ‘is not an ordinary vote or election, but a profession of faith in the calling of him who demands these acclamations.’ So ‘faith’ plays the most important part in all this. Reason is to stage the show in which the act of faith will take on the airs of respectable credibility. The advocates of ‘reason’ are cast in the role of jesters: they are to entertain the public. The gravitas of thought is in a decline, but ‘opinions’ are in high demand, since juggling without props is impossible.

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446 Ibid., 1449.

447 Ibid., 1457.

448 Ibid., 1451.

449 Ibid.

Weber, let us note, is trying to be objective: his characterization of ‘democratic caesarism’ is not a mark of a biased picture of reality, of leaving out whatever fits ill the thesis. The author of *Economy and Society* admits that in a modern society we are faced with a ‘contrast between the *plebiscitary* and the *parliamentary* selection of leaders’.<sup>450</sup> However, contrary to expectations, parliaments have not become a pantheon of impartiality. Weber notes that ‘the largely voluntaristic character of the partisan pursuit of politics and hence also of the parliamentary parties’ is symptomatic.<sup>451</sup> The ideas placed centre stage by the Enlightenment have receded into the background: what counts are party interests and the dexterity of the demagogues. In this system debates are to decorate the façade while authentic reflection is not on the cards. ‘Their store of ideas has largely been fixated in propaganda literature and the party press.’<sup>452</sup> The language of debates does not serve the purpose of looking for truth, it is to make the ‘recruitment’ of followers easier and dictate conventions. The symbolism of illumination enhanced by the Enlightenment is becoming irrelevant; it is no longer the point to imbue the picture of the world with the glow of truth, on the contrary, the overriding concern is to conceal authentic intentions (that is voluntaristic, as Weber says) and confer upon them the appearance of impartiality.

The Age of Enlightenment had raised high hopes. The concept of rationality was bound with the Cartesian symbolism of the act of cogito, which suggested the continuous ‘watch of reason’. Hence, it was acknowledged that a readiness to confrontation and criticism would become all-important and that this would be the ‘everyday’ of emancipated reason.

Refuting Cartesian rhetoric, Martin Heidegger argues that ‘the everyday being of the “there”’ points to a totally different situation. The constant ‘watch’ of thought is impossible. Analysing the problem of ‘being-in-the-world’ describing the modality of ‘being’, speaking of the ‘falling of Dasein’, Heidegger underlines the inevitability of splitting. Being is a project; ‘care’ is the fundamental content of ‘being-in-the-world’. On the other hand, this ‘everyday being’ implies submissiveness and resignation. ‘[A]s something which is every day’, let us quote Heidegger’s famous formula, ‘maintains itself in the kind of Being of the ‘they’.’<sup>453</sup> This ‘they’ of course excludes all authenticity. ‘Does the “they” have a state-of-mind which is specific to it, a

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450 Ibid., 1452.

451 Ibid., 1457.

452 Ibid., 1458.

453 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1962), 210.

special way of understanding, talking and interpreting?’ Of course it does, but the being thus analysed has everything on the outside, beyond itself. Is not Dasein, as thrown Being-in-the-world, thrown proximally right into the publicness of the ‘they’?<sup>454</sup> Of course it is. And here we arrive at the crux of the matter. The language used by the ‘Dasein’[there-being; consciousness capable of understanding its own being; self-awareness] involves, as Heidegger has it, ‘idle talk’.<sup>455</sup>

Authenticity of thought or independence is hardly possible. Instead of the act of *cogito* there is drifting within the confines of speech. ‘The expression “idle talk” is not to be used here as a disparaging signification.’ What is meant is a peculiar basic element, a current which carries all thoughts. ‘In language, as a way things have been expressed or spoken out, there is hidden a way in which the understanding of Dasein has been interpreted. [...] Proximally and with certain limits, Dasein is constantly delivered over to this interpretedness, which controls and distributes the possibilities of average understanding and of the state-of-mind belonging to it.’<sup>456</sup> Let us emphasize this statement: ‘possibilities of average understanding’ are defined by ‘idle talk’ and it is found at the very beginning. What is more: ‘Discourse which expresses itself is communication. Its tendency of being is aimed at bringing the hearer to participate in disclosed being towards what is talked about in the discourse.’<sup>457</sup> Speech which finds its voice in ‘idle talk’ is peremptory; it scoops up, truly resembling a rapid torrent, so that one cannot resist it. Man has always had to deal with ‘idle talk’, ‘proximally, and with certain limits’, as Heidegger observed, ‘Dasein is constantly delivered over to this interpretedness’. Idle talk creates the horizon which is a ‘natural’ horizon of understanding, so to say. ‘The way things have been expressed or spoken out is such that in the totality of contexts of signification into which it has been articulated, it preserves an understanding of the disclosed world and therewith, equiprimordially, an understanding of the Dasein-with of Others and of one’s Being-in.’<sup>458</sup> Accordingly, ‘idle talk’ carries all thoughts; the sheer acts of speech themselves become more important than their references: ‘the primary relationship-of-Being towards the entity talked about is not “imparted” by communication; but Being with-one-another takes place in talking with one another and in concern with what is said-in-the-talk.’<sup>459</sup>

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454 Ibid.

455 Ibid., 211.

456 Ibid.

457 Ibid., 211-12.

458 Ibid., 211.

459 Ibid., 212.

This is the proper sense of ‘idle talk’ mentioned by Nietzsche, but “idle talk’ fails to produce solid foundations of legibility. It is care-free; it disrespects the obligations of speech which philosophers earlier had in mind; it fails to put forward truths of concern to the world.

The Being-said, the *dictum*, the pronouncement [Ausspruch] – all these now stand surety for the genuineness of the discourse and of the understanding which belongs to it, and for its appropriateness to the facts. And because this discoursing has lost its primary relationship-of-Being towards the entity talked about, or else has never achieved such a relationship, it does not communicate in such a way as to let this entity be appropriated in a primordial manner, but communicates rather by following the route of *gossiping* and *passing the word along*.<sup>460</sup>

‘The genuineness of the discourse and of the understanding which belongs to it’, let us note, are ultimately expressed in ‘gossip’. This is the sense of the circulation of opinion; opinions are born in the habitat of ‘idle talk’. However, thinking intertwined with idle talk lacks foundations – it is up in the air, in a way. ‘Idle talk discloses to Dasein a Being towards its world, towards others, and towards itself – a Being in which these are understood, but in a mode of groundless floating.’<sup>461</sup>

Thus, it must be recognised that all opinions are the product of practices which resemble a mass trance. ‘Idle talk’ is a *dictum* which rules out the freedom of thought; the openness it offers is highly problematic. It always starts with the fanfares of ‘messages’ resounding, so one feels obliged to lend an ear, there are things to be learnt. This is how the horizon of understanding is charted: it all rests on hearsay, on what ‘one’ knows.

‘Idle talk’ has its own heralds. Clearly, modern society does not allow for immediate contact; a ‘natural’ space of understanding simply does not exist. The circulation of opinion is determined by intermediaries, that is, the *media*. In fact, the media have become the great manufacturers of opinion: they encode a certain vision of the world and carve the grooves through which all the messages flow. They inform and comment – but the meaning of the terms we have used here, let us note, is very dubious. What is ‘information’; what epistemology can we refer to when we speak of ‘facts’? What is the nature of the ‘image of the world’? What do we have in mind when we use these expressions?

There is no dearth of supporters of naïve naturalism. ‘Facts’ are facts, there is nothing to argue about, but at the same time, we are aware that it is a very complex issue. Disputes concerning what constitutes ‘a fact’ encompass the whole history of philosophy. A ‘fact’ is always a certain interpretation of

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460 Ibid.

461 Ibid., 221.

reality. We are well aware that there is no ‘natural’ image of the world. Let us not forget, we are participating in ‘idle talk’! At all times, our way of thinking contains a message. The public sphere is actually a battle field. ‘Opinions’ are never innocent; nor are they witnesses of the ‘natural’ dispositions of the mind and impartial spontaneous transmission. Opinions are messages, created and targeted. Naturalism, which imposes the rhetoric of impartiality and selflessness can only be treated as a camouflaged strategy for wielding power. In times of great dissipation, the idea of ‘a fact’ becomes yet another banner of hypocrisy.

The notion of the ‘image of reality’, likewise, has become less important, and, at the same time, increasingly controversial. Nietzsche ridiculed the belief in the power of the gaze which sees everything and takes in the whole horizon. Lyotard, today, speaks about the erosion of ‘great tales’ (metanarratives) and the ‘heterogeneity’ of the ‘language games’ played.<sup>462</sup> Can we still somehow coalesce disparate perspectives? The lack of commonly acknowledged ‘great tales’ puts us in a difficult situation, becoming a case of the broken mirror: all knowledge is broken up into fragments. What could be the value of opinions which do not appeal to any general criteria of credibility? Is it not so that they have become mere impressions, unstable phantasies of a troubled mind, roaming the battlefield of ‘great tales’?

According to Lyotard, we are dealing with an increasing ‘atomization’ of the ways of thinking, despite the huge pressure from the rules imposed by bureaucratization.

This “atomization” of the social into flexible networks of language games may seem far removed from the modern reality, which is depicted, on the contrary, as afflicted with bureaucratic paralysis. The objection will be made, at least, that the weight of certain institutions imposes limits on the games, and thus restricts the inventiveness of the players in making their moves. But I think this can be taken into account without causing any particular difficulty.<sup>463</sup>

The real power of institutions stems from the authentic strength of intellectual authorization which determines the effectiveness of the strategy of government employed by these institutions. Where this authorization begins to falter – growing freedom becomes a fact. ‘We know today that the limits the institution imposes on potential language “moves” are never established once and for all (even if they have been formally defined). Rather, the limits are themselves the stakes and provisional results of language strategies, within the institution and

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462 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. by G. Bennington and B. Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984), 9.

463 *Ibid.*, 17.

without.<sup>464</sup> The criteria shaped by the Enlightenment are becoming peripheral and ‘rationality’ is no longer the unquestionable premise of authorization; it is becoming the subject of the bitterest controversies. There can, indeed, be a host of diverse ‘narratives’ in social circulation which in no way appeal to the strict discipline of impartially interpreted ‘rationality’.

Emancipation related to dissipation is becoming a fact. This is not to say that opinion-forming institutions will cease to operate but it does entail a change of strategy on their part and a search for new formulas of authorization. In this way they acquiesce to the tendencies which testify to the decreasing gravitas of thinking and the growing role of entertainment and play – an inexorable erosion of Enlightenment ideals. Science no longer offers indisputable credibility and philosophy is pushed into the margins, consequently, opinions and various conceptions of life are, from now on, born on another level. Meaningful attempts at coalescing have nothing in common with the traditional ‘tales’. The appearance of substitutes for metanarratives can be seen, but the impact they have is totally different. Advertising, as Hanno Hardt says, is becoming the new ‘literature of the masses and a source of their social knowledge’.<sup>465</sup> For a long time, in keeping with the patterns shaped by the culture of antiquity, the conceptions of the good life were developed by philosophy (this is still evident where the influence of the Enlightenment has not worn off). Nowadays, they are to be found in *advertisements* in the new jargon of beauty replacing the anachronistic definitions made by philosophers. Advertising is becoming a form of very aggressive and effective *propaganda*. It dictates behavioural patterns creating a new and perfect image of the world – while discrediting all that jars with its paradisiacal style. Hence, advertising is a *myth-generating* power when it creates a vision of magical regeneration, turning upside down the sense of all interpretations which underscore the imperfections of the world. Advertising produces a gleaming façade which conceals reality; it is, in fact, an astute lie which paints an image of illusory change: a hope of redemption consisting in the elimination of all flaws of the human condition. This is how the new lexicon of happiness comes into being, a new language which determines the content of ideas shaping the mass imagination. As Hardt observes, advertising is the ‘the rhetoric of mass society’.

Clearly, we are dealing with a commercialization of the conceptions of the good life. From the sphere of philosophical discourse these conceptions move to the sphere of marketing stage-productions, Hardt, for one, speaks of the growing ‘commercialization of human relations’.<sup>466</sup> The space of mutual understanding

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464 Ibid.

465 H. Hardt, *Myths for the Masses* (Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Ma., 2004) 23.

466 Ibid., 6.



changes into an area of transactions; intellectual practices no longer have anything in common with the impartiality postulated by philosophers, while the rationality of these practices is being realized as a calculation formula integrated into the ‘mass production of information’.<sup>467</sup> Selfless pronouncements (the speciality of philosophers) affecting the conceptions of the good life in days of yore are becoming less and less significant, in the same manner, there is no selfless public debate to speak of. ‘Opinions’ have become tradable commodities manufactured with the purpose of making a profit. What is more, politics itself is succumbing to commercialization, thereby, increasingly resembling entertainment and pop-culture.

We have to be very cautious when we evaluate the opinion-forming role of the mass media. What can be the current value of sentimental interpretations based on a peculiar ‘presumption of pure intentions’? Or interpretations which picture the media as a benevolent power selflessly serving the pursuit of truth? Those were derived from the conceptions of the Enlightenment: the pathos of the struggle for ‘freedom of expression’ which was juxtaposed with remorselessly discredited ‘despotism’. The press, as it was the press they had in mind then, was presented as a reliable, devoted and uncompromising ally of freedom. To a certain extent the reality of the eighteenth century justified such a mind-set, but much has changed since then. John Keane writes about this in *The Media and Democracy*, where he says in particular that ‘the buying of press support with laundered public money’ was a frequent practice of the eighteenth century in which, both, the Tories and Wigs indulged. Still, in spite of this, ‘[a]t Whig banquets, “the liberty of the Press” was a favorite toast’.<sup>468</sup>

Evidently, the purest of intentions can swiftly turn into fiction when various entanglements, which eliminate independence, begin to hold a prominent position, among them, naturally, commercialization takes centre stage. The sphere of information and opinion evolves to become one of the segments of the market while the eighteenth century sees the emergence of the printing industry. Lofty principles waver under the pressure of temptations; they waver and yield.

Publishing was not a gentlemanly game played according to the ruses of honour. Some parts of the publishing trade more closely resembled *brigandage*, a kind of “booty capitalism” marked by scratching and scrambling in quest of the money and power brought by successful risk-taking in the market. Publishers were sometimes surrounded by pirates and spies and cut-throat rivals. For commercial reasons, they often suppressed public debate and political themes.<sup>469</sup>

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467 Ibid., 5.

468 *Media and Democracy*, 34.

469 Ibid., 46-7.

It can thus be seen that the press simply was not the impartial ‘provider’ of information it was meant to be.

Today, it is appropriate to say that the ideal of the ‘information flow’ itself, in virtue of which ‘free expression’ flourished, was a manifestation of a simplified naturalistic epistemology, which accepted as an obvious the existence of clearly formed ‘objects’, that is, information. According to Keane, there was a total disregard for the fact that the ‘information-flow paradigm failed to represent the ways in which the media of communication themselves pre-structure or “bias” the reception of opinions by individuals located in space and time.’ There was no recognition for the fact ‘that “information” is itself structured symbolically, that its “codes” are subject continually to acts of interpretation by individual citizens, who are themselves in turn shaped by these same codes.’<sup>470</sup> Consequently, the circulation of ‘information’ is more like the *creation* of the image of reality rather than its transmission, in keeping with the naturalist symbolism of ‘facts’. Today, we are all very much aware of this.

The ‘fourth estate’ knows how to take advantage of its powers. What we currently take for ‘reality’ almost entirely emanates from media-generated images. Characterizing the role of the American media Ben Bogdikian wonders which would more adequately convey the message: whether the symbolism of a ‘supermarket’ or that of the ‘assembly line?’<sup>471</sup> Both options are very important. The media, at the most literal level, manufacture their message; they churn out ideas, symbols, meanings; they interpret reality and impose specific formulas of understanding. They create clearly developed epistemological matrices, without which public discourse is impossible. In this sense, we can say they ‘produce’, among other goods, ‘public opinion’ and offer a certain choice, thus, resembling a colourful street stall. The choice is between tastes and colours: what is already lying on the counter, but any meaningful influence over the manufacturing process of information itself is unlikely. The public is not let in on the secrets of manufacturing, so there is no chance of venturing beyond the framework of the vision of the world presented, or holding debates liberating the potential of independent thought or facilitating inquisitiveness. It is important to stipulate that the media are not keen on ‘creating’ opinions in the sense which the eighteenth-century philosophers afforded to the concept of rational opinion. Media create *paradigms*. The giant supermarket of ideas operates according to the rules of commercialization which also determines the nature and form of all

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470 Ibid., 37-38.

471 B. Bogdikian, ‘The US Media Supermarket or Assembly Line?’ in *Do the Media Govern? Politicians, Voters and Reporters in America* (Sage Publications, London, 1997), 66-77.

its ploys. 'Truth' is not an autonomous value anymore; prime importance is attached to the mechanisms which allow for the incessant *copying* of paradigms in the name of effectiveness. In the process, when it comes across discrepancies and differences which hamper the manufacturing procedure, the giant manufacturing machine must eliminate them.

Contrary to the frequently and eagerly repeated declarations, the mass media are not a natural ally of independent opinion. Let us repeat, the former are mostly concerned with 'manufacturing', that is, the production of information and opinion, and driven, primarily, by their own interests rather than imagined ideals of impartiality and objective rightness. 'Information is no longer an instrument for producing economic merchandise, but has itself become the chief merchandise. Communication has been transformed into heavy industry'.<sup>472</sup> The mass media, in Habermas's words, have become one of the 'colonizing' powers. Confronting the concept of 'system' with that of 'lifeworld' Habermas points to the operation of mechanisms fettering the freedom of communication practices.<sup>473</sup> The 'lifeworld' is under the constant pressure of organized forms of activity which signify the exclusion of freedom and spontaneity, and the imposition of the discipline of the 'system'. The invasion by the system of the area of 'lifeworld' results in its 'colonization' and subjugation to the system's own goals; the annihilation of independently developed rules of understanding and the concepts of life linked with it. 'If, as usual in the tradition stemming from Humboldt, we assume that there is an internal connection between structures of life worlds and structures of linguistic worldviews, language and cultural tradition take on a certain transcendental status in relation to everything that can become an element of a situation.'<sup>474</sup> 'Colonization' represents the destruction of those transcendental frameworks and from that time on, the language of the 'colonizers' becomes the predominant one.

The concept of 'colonization' is in close proximity to Weber's concept of 'bureaucratization', which in the eyes of Habermas merits continuous emphasis. Broadening Weber's interpretation he asserts: 'capitalist modernization follows a pattern such that cognitive instrumental rationality surges beyond the bounds of the economy and state into other, communicatively structured areas of life and achieves dominance there at the expense of moral-political and aesthetic-practical rationality'.<sup>475</sup> This phenomenon is not restricted solely to the practices

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472 U. Eco, 'Semiologia quotidiana', in *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. by W. Weaver (Harcourt Brace and Company, San Diego, Ca., 1986), 135.

473 *Theory of Communicative Action*.

474 *Ibid.*, 124.

475 *Ibid.*, 304.

involving existing capitalist enterprises and the state apparatus. The sphere of invasion is being extended considerably and 'lifeworld' is becoming ever more dependent. 'This dependency, resulting from the mediatisation of the lifeworld by system imperatives, assumes the socio-pathological form of an internal colonization'.<sup>476</sup>

Here is the clue. Modernity still implies a growing pressure of 'systemic imperatives'. This is becoming increasingly obvious today at a time when traditionally understood 'class societies' are becoming obsolete. 'The subsystems differentiated out via the media money and power make possible a level of integration higher than that in traditional class societies, and that they force a restructuring of such societies into economically constituted class societies.'<sup>477</sup> There are many colonizing powers, including various subsystems: apart from the administrative apparatus and organizations involved in manufacturing, also institutions of the world of politics (parties), various 'expert cultures' (as Habermas says) and the media. The media play a double role as manufacturers who solicit for selling their goods (information) and as 'conductors' of the public debate. Obviously, the 'selflessness' of the 'bearer' is totally unlikely. The media are not impartial animators of opinion; they simply have their own interests. They operate within a certain arrangement; according to Habermas, their main aim is taking care to support the rules of 'cultural reproduction' which trigger the success of 'colonization'. Only under such conditions can the enormous and colourful supermarket function. Thus, the idea is to restrict rather than to broaden the horizon. Bright and glossy magazines, one of the hallmarks of consumerism, resemble strings of colourful beads which used to symbolise colonization – the 'real' one of days gone by.

Eighteenth-century interpretations glorifying the impartiality of the 'free world' are, of course, the most convenient form of camouflage. Representatives of the world of media make every effort to protect their image against criticism. Accordingly, a lot is said about noble intentions, but as the tree is known by its 'fruit' we have to judge by what is done. Criticism should not amount to the unconditional discrediting of all actions; after all what really matters are the mechanisms not the intentions. Without doubt we are dealing with good intentions: the Watergate affair certainly will remain a symbol for a long time exciting people's imaginations. In the end however, an unmasking style is one of the key aspects of the success strategy (commercial too!). Let us not forget also that it is the 'fourth estate' which unmasks the remaining three – thus

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476 *Ibid.*, 305.

477 *Ibid.*

strengthening its own position. ‘As a profession, journalism views itself as supporting and strengthening the roles of citizens in democracy.’<sup>478</sup> Journalists like to idealize their own doings but ‘the profession’s pursuit of its ideals’ is no easy deal. ‘However, journalists are employed professionals working for mainly commercial news media that try to supply what the news audience will accept and what advertisers will pay for.’<sup>479</sup> The imperatives of ‘cultural reproduction’ are definitely stronger than personal motives.

For this reason there is little sense in analysing the limitations placed on the ‘free word’ if we are to focus on the question of intentions. Let us, then, move on from the plane of intentions to the plane of epistemology. In the second half of the twentieth century, as Neil Postman suggests, we are witnessing a very important change: ‘the decline of the age of Typography and the ascendancy of the age of Television’.<sup>480</sup> The role of the written word was diminishing while the role of pictures was growing, thus causing very grave consequences. The impact was not restricted to the, superficially understood, life style or changing interests; it reached much deeper, to the very foundations. It also determined the shape of communication practices. ‘Each medium, like language itself, makes possible a unique mode of discourse by providing a new orientation for thought, for expression for sensibility.’<sup>481</sup> The media always lay down their own epistemology, for ‘although culture is a creation of speech, it is recreated anew by every medium of communication – from painting to hieroglyphs to the alphabet to television.’<sup>482</sup> The medium is our pair of glasses, a ‘naked’ glance is unattainable. Every medium produces its own matrices of inspection and its own way of codifying meaning so it can directly influence the way we see the world, the way we think and the nature of communication practices. ‘They are rather like metaphors, working by unobtrusive but powerful implication to enforce their special definitions of reality’. The media ‘argue a case for what the world is like’.<sup>483</sup> The sensation of reality in the era of typography must be totally different to the sensation of reality in the era of television: the printed word codifies reality differently and when it is the predominant medium this implies a different manner of acting in the sphere of communication practices. The era of Typography was a golden age of opinion. The pronounced role of the spread of print was emphasized by Condorcet in *The Sketch for the Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*; in these circumstances, he insisted, ‘public

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478 H. Gans, *Democracy and the News*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004), 21.

479 Ibid.

480 Postman, *Amusing Ourselves*, 8.

481 Ibid., 9.

482 Ibid.

483 Ibid., 9-10.

opinion' was born.<sup>484</sup> Thanks to the 'art of printing', as he says, 'independent and pure knowledge' is spreading.<sup>485</sup> The printed word, whose roots are hidden deeply, is a sign of reflexion, especially serious reflexion; it confers upon thought a dignified form. Books would become the herald of the free word and in the eighteenth century newspapers would follow in their wake. What is also important, print has been conducive to the cultivation of narrative forms of thinking and creating an environment in which opinions could develop and the exchange of ideas flourish. This established a new tribune for conveying one's thoughts, as said by Condorcet, ensuring higher and more durable control over minds, indubitably leading to the dissemination of truth, because the potential for enlightening people has grown while that for leading them astray has diminished. Reading requires thought and induces reflection; it allows ample time for us to develop our own judgement. The 'typographical mind' is by the nature of things a manufacturer of opinions. The printed word disciplines our characters and minds; reading requires patience. 'The printing press makes rather stringent demands on our bodies as well as our minds. Controlling your body is, however, only a minimal requirement. You must also have learned to pay no attention to the shapes of the letters on the page. You must see through them, so to speak, so that you can go directly to the meanings of the words they form.'<sup>486</sup> Reading develops the ability to think abstractly – the printed word becomes a vehicle of ideas and the 'topographical mind' can generate tales about ideas and this gives rise to opinions.

In contrast to this, the gradual elimination of print leads to the diminishing importance of narration and from narration we go to *information*. 'You can search the indexes of a hundred books on the Enlightenment (I have almost done it), and you will not find a listing for "information".'<sup>487</sup> 'Information', that is statements which are not linked to narratives of any considerable length, suggest no moral and serve no 'truth', and would only emerge later on. To a large degree this new development results from the 'invention of telegraphy and photography in the 1840s', as Neil Postman observed. 'Telegraphy in particular created the idea of context-free information – that is, the idea that the value of information need not be tied to any function it might serve in social and political decision-making and action. The telegraph made information into a commodity, a "thing".'<sup>488</sup> Times of dispersion are setting in. Interpretations,

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484 'Sketch for a Historical Picture', 98.

485 *Ibid.*, 101.

486 Postman, *op.cit.*, 21.

487 N. Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future* (Vintage Books, New York, 2000), 82.

488 *Ibid.*, 88.

lengthy narratives are a coveted commodity no more. This would become abundantly clear in the era of Television which works through pictures. In the same manner, words begin to play the part of pictures, as now they are aimed to impose certain strong feelings; they are to be short and evocative; words are to participate in a *spectacle* so they can no longer play an independent role. They are incapable of encouraging the development of opinion because following the logic of pictures they are to establish a certain image. In this fashion, the habits of the 'typographical mind' become uprooted and, one can say, that 'the way of thinking of the camera' takes over; everything is subordinated to the conception of a show. Turning to Umberto Eco we read in *The Semiology of Everyday life*, that, increasingly, even natural events are adjusted to fit the needs of a television broadcast.<sup>489</sup> It is in this sense that thinking becomes one of the areas of show business. Opinions must disappear as there is no room for them any longer. Without doubt, not every form of verbal expression is an opinion just as there is no inevitable link between speaking and thinking. Words harnessed by the rules of a show do not necessarily carry ideas.

However, the concept of opinion has not disappeared below the horizon. It is doing very well, in fact becoming one of the key elements of political camouflage diverting our attention from the erosion of eighteenth-century ideals. We are talking about 'public opinion polls', of course, which apart from the voters themselves, is the most important formula for legitimization. But let us be careful, from the mere fact that there are books about dwarfs it does not necessarily follow that dwarfs do exist. It is a similar story with 'public opinion' polls which are a fact, but what is their significance? Can you survey what *is not there*? Are we not part of a grand fictitious ritual, which is, at once, a ritual of political sacralisation? After all, even if we limit ourselves to the way the questions are posed in the various surveys, we can say that *opinions* are not the point. What is at stake are emotions, intuitions, as well as hazy (and arbitrary) convictions. 'Are you in support of', 'do you trust', 'are you satisfied'...these certainly are not questions which enter the domain of reflection, the sphere of fully established convictions arising from critical thought. They strike at the strings of our emotions and attitudes related to our emotions. Fear, anger, bitterness, hope, anxiety, impatience...these are precisely the areas we are dealing with, beyond the domain of knowledge based on reflection. The conception of 'opinion' polling dictates a false image of the world of politics: *opinions* are not the point here. Opinion polls have become a huge fetish in politics. 'Plebiscitary democracy' is beginning to resemble fetish rituals; opinion

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489 Eco, op.cit.

polls impose a formula of feigned rationality based on the astute manipulation of associations related to the concept of opinion.

The whole conception of ‘polling’ is very much outdated:

Public opinion polling is a form of mass communication that benefited from the rising popularity of science in the nineteenth century and the subsequent reduction of all fields of knowledge to the dimensions of a natural science. It is cultivated by pollsters (and journalists) and recreated by scientific methods that are compatible with earlier definitions of the individual as a machine and the world as a mechanism.<sup>490</sup>

So it should be accepted that ‘public opinion’ *exists* in the same way as all objects described by science *exist*. It has a very clear consistency of *a thing*, hence, it should undergo precise measurements and employ all fancy methods with a view to achieving the highest possible precision ensuring that *the gauge* is accurate. The language which is a flagship of the polling domain leaves no doubts. The mystery of ‘polling’, of ‘the scientific measurement’ is the quintessence of the positivist cult of the method. The world already exists. We can find out what it is like when we take a microscope or probe and peer deeper inside. The opinions are there, it is just a question of measuring them. This is how fiction wins. The subject (researcher) is on the one side and the ‘object’ on the other. The scientific symbolism of ‘polling’ is the symbolism of illusion. It ignores what lies at the heart of the problem: the decisive and creative role of language and practices related to its use. ‘Polling’, to repeat after Hardt, is but a ‘form of mass communication’. Opinions are created by us. ‘Polling’, in effect, denotes a projection of the world which is encoded in the questionnaire; the projection of a certain formula of rationality which is geared to authorize the system and decide about its credibility. ‘Polling’ can in no way be treated as an example of impartial scientific practices. It is one of the most significant aspects of political logomachia; it is to serve the purpose of sustaining faith in the integrity of democratic rule. ‘Plebiscitary democracy’ makes it possible to speak about refuting priorities developed by the culture of the Enlightenment: ‘a primary interest in opinions and opinion-making rather than in knowledge or systems of knowledge.’<sup>491</sup> Knowledge in the domain of politics becomes redundant. Masses have to be kept in the ‘order of sense’ in every system, writes Jean Baudrillard.<sup>492</sup> Alas, ‘the masses scandalously resist this imperative of rational communication. They are given meaning: they want spectacle. No effort

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490 Hardt, *op.cit.*, 33.

491 *Ibid.*, 34.

492 J. Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2007), 61.



has been able to convert them to the seriousness of the content, nor even the seriousness of the code. Messages are given to them, they only want some sign, they idolise the play of signs and stereotypes'.<sup>493</sup> All 'opinions' have become a part of the spectacle, one, however, which lacks consistent dramatic effect. Opinions do not make a complete whole as they are not tied to systems of knowledge so they thwart the 'seriousness of content matter'. The masses, in Baudrillard's words, have destroyed all 'schemes of reason'. Plebiscitary democracy has nothing to do with the concepts of the Enlightenment. Since 'opinions' have become an Harlequin providing entertainment, 'polling' them – is part of the show.

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493 Ibid., 40.

## Chapter Three

### Representation: Metaphor and Dogma

The principle of representation is of key import and seemingly quite obvious. In words which carry a solemn tone, Alexander Hamilton outlined the intentions which lay behind the writing of the American Constitution. He explained that the objective was to ascertain ‘whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.’<sup>494</sup> Thus, ‘establishing good government’ would be a realization of the sovereign will of the ‘people’. All government was to work on its behalf. ‘Nothing is more certain’, wrote James Madison in the *Federalist No.2*, ‘than the indispensable necessity of government, and it is equally undeniable, that whenever and however it is instituted, the people must cede to it some of their natural rights in order to vest it with requisite powers.’<sup>495</sup>

Most authors of the Age of Enlightenment had no doubts in this regard: the people cannot rule directly, *in gremio*. This arrangement, practiced in Greece in days of yore was, to their mind, not a pattern to be followed. The *New Science of Politics* of which the Founding Fathers were so proud, derived to a considerable degree from the criticism of Greek failures. The principle of representation is to testify to the hope-inspiring advances made by reason. It is treated as an underpinning allowing us to break loose not only from the Greeks but also, as Paul Rahe emphasizes, the patterns of ‘classical republicanism’<sup>496</sup>. To defeat the doom of the vast expanse of space; to forget the doubts which still tormented Montesquieu – convinced that a republican government can be effective only in a limited area. This, in the end, would be the standpoint shared by most authors, moreover not only in America. The principle of representation had gained universal recognition making it hardly possible to speak of modern constitutionalism without referring to it.

Nonetheless, is it really an eighteenth century ‘invention’? Had not the conception of representation appeared earlier? Let us recall the famous statement made by Carl Schmitt: ‘all significant concepts of the modern theory

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494 A. Hamilton, ‘Federalist No.1’, *The Federalist Papers* (Penguin Putnam Inc., New York, 2003), 27.

495 J. Madison, ‘Federalist No.2’, 31.

496 P. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern. Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 1992), 581.

of the state are secularized theological concepts<sup>497</sup>, adding later, ‘whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver’. The author of *Political Theology* finds that we are dealing with ‘a conceptually clear and systematic analogy, and not merely that kind of playing with ideas, whether mystical, natural-philosophical, or even romantic, which, as with everything else, so also with state and society, yields colourful symbols and pictures.’<sup>498</sup>

So, indeed, this is a very interesting question. A change of the language does not necessarily signify a change in the repertoire of imagery. ‘Tocqueville in his account of American democracy observed that in democratic thought the people hover above the entire political life of the state, just as God does above the world, as the cause and the end of all things, as the point from which everything emanates and to which everything returns.’<sup>499</sup> It is his will, let us reiterate, that is to be represented in the democratic system of power just as the Creator, in the days of yore, used to be represented in monarchies. Turning to Jan Baszkiewicz we discover that it was a typical trait of medieval culture to be strongly influenced by, what the author called, ‘royal religion’.<sup>500</sup> ‘Kings of the early medieval period considered themselves to be the secular deputies of God on earth; in their states they were “second only to God” and participated in God’s rule over the world’.<sup>501</sup> As ‘substitutes’ they had to represent the supreme will. This conception has the force of an archetype which in the ‘disenchanted’ world would be transformed, but would not disappear.

The reign of the monarch, wielding power *dei gratia*, was decided, primarily, by the act of anointment, since only through this ritual, as Gerardus van der Leeuw writes in *The Phenomenology of Religion*, the fitting royal empowerment was conferred upon the ruler. Anointment, thus, initiated the mystery of power by integrating two orders: the earthly and the heavenly. Divinity represented by the monarch implied that the latter was to perform whatever the Creator himself wished to do, resulting in an unambiguous formula of ‘theocratic kingship’.<sup>502</sup> In his book, *The King. Myths and Symbols*, Jean Paul Roux regarded the ceremony which saw the monarch consecrated for office as a sign of an alliance between God and king, and as the most profound symbol of this alliance. The presence of ‘the anointed’ is a hierophany, a manifestation of

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497 C. Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. G. Schwab (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005), 36.

498 *Ibid.*, 37.

499 *Ibid.*, 49.

500 J. Baszkiewicz, *Władza*, (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, 1999), 27.

501 *Ibid.*

502 J. Canning, *A history of Medieval Political Thought 300-1450*, (Routledge, London, 1996), 18-20.

holiness; God speaks through his lips and all his actions carry the weight of symbols. 'Everything not directly consecrated by a hierophany becomes sacred because of its participation in a symbol'.<sup>503</sup> The domain of power is rooted in the symbolism of sanctification and based on signs which make references to the majesty of the heavens. Signs determine the effectiveness of authority and contribute to their being perceived as sacred. A symbol is 'a prolongation of hierophany', as Eliade notes, and it is the direct sign of a metamorphosis, representing (while creating at the same time) a higher order of things. As it would turn out, this is fundamentally important not only under monarchic systems cultivating 'royal religion', but also under systems which invoke the principle of the 'sovereignty of the people' and seek to construct their own symbolism of sanctification. What is more, the secularization of the world of politics, generated by modernity, would prove to be debatable. Max Weber makes a note of that saying that 'disenchantment' does not rule out a charismatic concept of governing, and, more than that, authority had not been completely 'disenchanted'. This is clearly in evidence where 'royal religion' has been replaced by the 'religion of sovereignty' glorifying its own deity – the sovereign people.

The 'religion of sovereignty', however, failed to develop a consistent conception of the world of politics, settling instead for a combination of mutually exclusive elements and uniting vague (quasi-religious) inspirations, from which the faith in the 'people' drew its strength, with Newtonian pedantry. The medieval conception of representation ruled out literalness: at that time representation consisted in a symbolic exposition of the higher order of things. The presence of symbols had created a mystery play. If we consider the strict sense of the term symbol, Eliade underlines, it has to be treated as a 'revelation' because the symbol, at all times, exposes the basic unity between different spheres of reality. Eliade draws our attention to another crucial point: any object which becomes a symbol seeks to identify itself with the *whole* just as hierophany strives to incorporate the sacred in its totality. On this occasion he speaks of the 'imperialism of religious figures'. Thus, the conception of representation which could be found in the thought of the early Middle Ages raised no doubts, as the monarch, *vicarious dei*, was a symbol-figure whose presence was a message of sorts related to the 'language of symbols'. It does not carry within it the promise that one may touch heaven with 'one's finger'. The interpenetration of both orders carried the traits of a mystery play.

The 'sanctity' of the people, in line with the modern conception of representation, was to become tangible, no symbolic substitute was considered.

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503 M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. by R. Sheed (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Na., 1996), 169.

According to the conventions of the era which worshipped Newton, representation was associated with the *mechanism* aimed at rendering the power of the sovereign concrete. The sovereign was the ‘people’ ascending the heights previously occupied by gods and perceived, at the same time, as a certain specific group and an idealized subject of power. A tension arises between these two mutually exclusive points of view which deprives the whole conception of representation of its stable foundations. After all, nobody knows what one should take into consideration: whether the prosaically understood opinions or the idealized ‘rational will’ of the sovereign, both points of view ceaselessly merging with each other leading to confusion and serious instability.

So what exactly is ‘representation’ supposed to mean? Let us reiterate: in the Age of the Enlightenment it was just a certain mechanism, for instance, in the *Social Contract*, Rousseau clearly spoke of the device and operation ‘of the political machine’.<sup>504</sup> The structure of this ‘machine’ is very peculiar, as it is, after all, a ‘body politic’ brought to life as a result of a union provided for by a contract. ‘At once, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party’, Rousseau explains, ‘this act of association creates a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly contains votes, and receiving from this act its unity, its common identity, its life and its will.’<sup>505</sup> That is quite a lot.

It is thus apparent, the machine-like-body has its own will. The people as a whole are sovereign and it is their will that is to be represented. Turning to Rousseau again, we find that sovereignty is ‘nothing less than the exercise of the general will’ and also: ‘the Sovereign, which is simply a collective being, cannot be represented by anyone but itself’.<sup>506</sup> Sovereignty is indivisible and inalienable; ‘the power indeed may be transmitted, but not the will’, so states the author of the *Social Contract*. ‘General will’ is determined by a ‘common interest’, as Rousseau makes clear, ‘the general will is always right and tends to the public advantage’. Although, we might add, it is a puzzling abstraction. Speaking about the infallibility of the common will, Rousseau does not hesitate to add: ‘but it does not follow that the deliberations of the people are always equally correct.’ Further on he describes the people as ‘a blind multitude, which often does not know what it wills’ only to utter the famous statement: ‘The general will is always rightful, but the judgment which guides it is not always enlightened. It must be brought to see things as they are, and sometimes as they ought to appear to it’.<sup>507</sup>

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504 J.J. Rousseau, *Social Contract*, trans. by G.D.H. Cole (Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1968), 64.

505 *Ibid.*, 61.

506 *Ibid.*, 69.

507 *Ibid.*, 83.

Rousseau is confusing two orders; on the one hand, the empirical order which induces caution and, on the other, the normative order which allows for the glorification of the idea of contracts. This makes the entire conception of representation, bound with the conception of ‘common will’, extremely convoluted. We learn, that the ‘people’ in order to become itself – and be able to express ‘common will’ – must cease being itself. ‘Whoever ventures on the enterprise of setting up a people must be ready, shall we say, to change human nature, to transform each individual, who by himself is entirely complete and solitary, into a part of a much greater whole from which the same individual will then receive, in a sense, his life and his being’.<sup>508</sup> Only then could the people ‘represent itself’. The whole conception is entangled in the mechanism of a vicious circle, of which Rousseau is well aware ‘and men would have to have already become before the advent of law that which they become as a result of law. [...] For a newly formed people to understand wise principles of politics and to follow the basic rules of statecraft, the effect would have to become the cause.’<sup>509</sup> These are the difficulties we encounter when we link the principle of representation with the conception of the ‘common will’, fearing that the prosaically understood majority principle is incapable of demonstrating the salutary intentions of the ‘people’ in their full majesty and purity. The symbolism of sanctification is introduced by Rousseau in the last chapter of *The Social Contract* when he mentions ‘civil religion’. This does not however save the project.

In the end, the majority principle won. The creators of the American constitution appealed to it. They, too, found it difficult to establish how to understand ‘representation’. They were in fact unable to prevent a major dispute concerning this issue from breaking out. Recommending the principle of representation during the Constitutional Convention session, James Madison argued that it should imply ‘successive filtrations’ of popular demands with a view to ‘refining’ them.<sup>510</sup> Thus, what he had in mind was a system that would allow for the ‘straining’ of voices and opinions; selecting them and differentiating between them, making sure that political decisions would be devoid of excessive passions and destructive one-sidedness. To Madison’s mind that was to be the difference between the ‘republican system’ and democracy – the latter helpless in the face of the unbridled desires of the *demos*.

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508 Ibid., 84.

509 Ibid., 86-7.

510 *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, ed. M. Farrand (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1911).

Madison was of the belief that the condition for safeguarding freedom was the exclusion of the spontaneous consolidation of interests and opinion which pave the way for the tyranny of the majority. He posed the question: 'By what means is this object attainable?' He replied: 'Evidently, by one of two only. Either the existence of the same passion or interest in majority at the same time must be prevented, or the majority, having such coexistent passion or interest, must be rendered, by their number and local situation, unable to concert and carry into effect schemes of oppression.' ('Federalist No. 10'). Thus a mechanism is required which would make a simple and immediate articulation of demands and opinions impossible. This is the sense the makers of the Constitution ascribed to the principle of *representation*. 'From this view of the subject it may be concluded that a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction. A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concert result from the form of government itself'.<sup>511</sup>

This calls for the inevitable brakes – thresholds and barriers – mechanisms requiring patience and care. First and foremost, however: keeping one's distance so that no decisions are made under the influence of the persistent intrusion of emotions. Public debates need to be different. Arguments and discussions are needed; the ceaseless confrontation of opposing opinions. On the surface it appears that the system of 'representation' is simple: as Madison states, the 'people' do not exercise power 'directly'. Its representatives operate; calm reflection takes centre stage. This leads to the elimination of the direct pressure of selfish passions, of which Madison does not approve. We must admit, the typical Rousseauian tone has never stopped resounding throughout this conception. Madison specifically speaks of the 'guardians of the public weal', in his view, the sort of people that should be elected. The 'chosen body of citizens' is to act independently. It is members of this body, Madison assumes, who 'may best discern the true interest of their country'.<sup>512</sup> So, indeed, 'representation' would in effect amount to the enforcement of a *normative* point of view.

It follows, then, there is only a pretence of simplicity. The majority decide. But the point is not to *present* the already existing views, which exist in nature, as it were. The aim is, as we already know, to establish views in accordance with the 'true interest of the state'. Representation in Madison's comprehension, lacks detailed literalness. By the same token, there is no word of symbolic representation which once imbued the Medieval doctrine of power with a

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511 J. Madison, 'Federalist No. 10', 76.

512 Ibid.

cohesive sense. Obviously, modern representative practices lack the properties of a religious mystery play. The ‘people’, a precisely understood group, is to speak with the voice of its representatives. This is to be a voice expressing the interest of the state; hence the idea of ‘filtering’ the spontaneously developed preferences. Substitution is a fact: the people do not act directly, nevertheless, it should be accepted that substitution facilitates the presentation of ‘true interests’. The whole structure is somewhat complicated.

This is why it would be subjected to a devastating criticism, as an example of mendacious sophistry. Madison’s opponents argued that the ‘representation’ put forward by *the federalists* was just a ploy allowing for concealing the tyrannical designs of concentrated power. *The Antifederalists*, opponents of the Constitution, supported the conception of ‘reflection’ in the belief that all decisions should be the mirror image of ordinary, directly manifested preferences, as only then would, they insisted, ‘representation’ make any sense at all. For this reason, also, they support smaller political associations which would dispense with the distance between the ‘people’ and its representatives and which would be able to preserve the ties between them. In his statement during the ratification debate, one of the main adversaries of the Madisonian project, Melancton Smith, argued: ‘The idea that naturally suggests itself to our minds, when we speak of representatives, is, that they resemble those they represent.’ Representatives ‘should be a true picture of the people, possess knowledge of their circumstances and their wants, sympathize in all their distresses, and be disposed to seek their true interests’.<sup>513</sup> The most important thing, he suggested was ‘similarity’ between the voters and their representatives – not the ‘talents’ with which they can hold the opinion in check while trying to ‘filter it’. This has been a highly contentious issue. The concept of representation is, in essence, ambiguous. The literalness which the Enlightenment demands, depriving politics of the features of a religious mystery and disenchanting the idea of representation, embroils it in paradoxes. How do you combine a normative point of view, imposed by the principle of ‘common good’ with an acceptance of divisions and the fluctuation of opinion? What are the decisions of the majority really to be? What is the sense of these decisions? Just what do they ‘represent’ and how?

Analysing the views of the makers of the American Constitution, Morton White writes about the evident dilemma they were facing.<sup>514</sup> The Constitution

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513 *The Debate of the State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, vol.2 (Philadelphia, 1866).

514 M. White, *Philosophy, The Federalist, and the Constitution* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1989).



had two patrons: John Locke and David Hume. Locke exerted a profound influence on the ‘normative theory of natural rights’ as well as on his ‘epistemological reflections about how to support that theory’.<sup>515</sup> Hume’s conception, which rejected the normative, moralizing understanding of the theory of politics went in the opposite direction. It was Hume, as White points out, who persuaded the federalists to move the study of politics from the plane of ethics to that of ‘political technology’. Thereby the study of politics gives up its normative nature which had been conferred upon it by the concept of the law of nature. Two incompatible tendencies clashed in the views espoused by the federalists: the normative approach which enables us to speak of ‘primary truths’, and empiricism, which rejects all dogmas. Thus, the typical divide: the confidence of the rationalists – a tendency to stress requirements dictated by reason (Madison’s ‘real interest of the state’!) and, at the same time, the reserve advocated by the ‘political technologists’ convinced that the fabric of politics is shaped solely by fluid preferences, at the source of which lie whimsical emotions and wavering opinions. Two separate epistemologies which make up two different models of political rationality.

There is a wider significance to this issue not only due to the specific context produced by the American Constitution. The divide mentioned is typical of the way politics is understood in the tradition of the Enlightenment which has imbued the principle of representation with this paradoxical sense. The important question persistently recurs: when we speak of representation, should we have in mind the quest for ‘truths’ enabling us to lift ourselves beyond the level of unstable opinions? Or is the opposite true, and we should accept the wavering, in our recognition of Hume’s conclusion that cognition is never complete or final. Going further, this position, of course, rules out completely all decisions appealing to general and unchangeable principles. Is representation to denote ‘filtering’, or just the astute association of various opinions, making it possible to strike a balance, securing against dangerous tilts? Is majority to be understood literally, arithmetically, or perhaps in a more sophisticated manner, as a certain project in keeping with the rules of selection as demanded by ‘reason’? What is ‘majority will’? ‘I regard as impious and detestable this maxim that in matters of government the majority of a people has the right to do anything, and yet I consider the will of the majority is the origin of all powers.’<sup>516</sup>

This is the problem: the principle of representation is embroiled in paradoxes which explain the reserve many commentators felt from the very

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515 Ibid., 13.

516 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, vol. 2, 410.

beginning. Analysing the concept of representation, Tocqueville reflects on the perils of the ‘tyranny of the majority’. What precisely does appealing to the criterion of arithmetical majority mean? After all, this is what is required by the representation mechanism if one looks at it concretely. Philosophical dilemmas should not have a say in developing political practice. What finally counts in practice is the number of votes, although this stance can raise serious questions. ‘The moral dominion of the majority is based in part on the idea that there is more enlightenment and wisdom in many men combined than in one man alone, more in the number than in the choice of legislators.’ As expected, this premise is imposed by the equality principle. ‘It is the theory of equality applied to minds. This doctrine attacks the pride of man in its last refuge.’<sup>517</sup>

The fundamental criterion regarding legitimacy in effect lacks a reasonable justification; the weight of argument is substituted by the number of votes. The ‘rationality’ of the system of representation is based on a peculiar supposition which is beginning to play the part of an inviolable dogma. Nonetheless, everything looks different in practice.

[U]pon my arrival in the United States, I was struck with surprise to find out how common merit was among the governed and how uncommon it was among those governing. Today it is a constant fact in the United States that the most outstanding men are rarely called to public office, and we are forced to recognize that this has occurred as democracy has gone beyond all its former limits.<sup>518</sup>

Tocqueville concludes: ‘Clearly the race of American statesmen has grown singularly smaller over the past half century.’

What is more, it is not only ‘statesmen’; the degrading mechanism spreads far and wide. How come, contrary to all expectations, ‘it is not always the capacity to choose men of merit that democracy lacks, but the desire and the taste.’<sup>519</sup> Everything is determined by desires spawned by the equality principle; this is the mainspring. ‘[T]he fact must not be concealed that democratic institutions develop the sentiment of envy in the human heart to a very high degree [...]. Democratic institutions awaken and flatter the passion for equality without ever being able to satisfy it entirely.’ Tortuous ambitions never cease: ‘at the moment when people believe they have grasped complete equality, it escapes from their hands and flees’. Envy calls for retaliation. ‘They get agitated, grow weary, become embittered. Then, everything that is in some way beyond them seems an obstacle to their desires, and there is no superiority,

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517 Ibid., vol.2, 404.

518 Ibid., vol.2, 315.

519 Ibid., vol. 2, 316.

however legitimate, that they do not grow tired of seeing.’<sup>520</sup> This is the reason why ‘the capacity to choose men of merit’ fails. So what is the sense of the conviction that a majority possesses the natural, as it were, predominance of merit and reason? The representatives of the ‘people’ are not chosen according to these criteria; in fact, they represent human envy.

Tocqueville’s argumentation would be repeated by John Stuart Mill in the treatise *Considerations on Representative Government*. We are in the second half of the nineteenth century already (the book was published in 1861) and doubts are mounting, as the following comment seems to indicate: ‘the natural tendency of representative government, as of modern civilization, is towards collective mediocrity’.<sup>521</sup> Used as an instrument of majority rule, the principle of representation is useless, which is what Mill has in mind when he speaks of ‘true’ and ‘false democracy’. ‘In the false democracy which, instead of giving representation to all, gives it only to the local majorities, the voice of the instructed minority may have no organs at all in the representative body.’<sup>522</sup> The principle of arithmetic majority is in essence, this is where the criticism is aimed, a convenient alibi for those who do not want to consider an authentic counterbalance to despotism. ‘Democracy as commonly perceived and hitherto practiced, is the government of the whole people by a mere majority of the people, exclusively represented.’ Mill is of the view that this conception is totally false as it consists in ‘a government of privilege, in favour of the numerical majority, who alone possess practically any voice in the state.’<sup>523</sup> This sort of government is despotic; it enforces its own requirements appealing to the criterion of force (the force of votes), instead of the criterion of rightness.

But what can replace arithmetic when making a decision? The rules of rightness...? Mill seems to believe so. He identified ‘true democracy’ with the system whereby ‘representative of all, and not solely of that majority – in which the interests, the opinions, the grades of intellect which are outnumbered would nevertheless be heard, and would have a chance of obtaining by weight of character and strength of argument an influence which would not belong to their numerical force’.<sup>524</sup> It would have been much easier to defend this solution on the grounds of the normative conception of political order required by the idea of the law of nature, than on the grounds of empiricism – advocated by Mill

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520 Ibid.

521 J. S. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (Parker, Son, and Bourn, London, 1861).

522 Ibid., 146.

523 Ibid., 132.

524 Ibid., 155.

himself. Is there a point in space, however, where normativism and empiricism are balanced? Or is it the case that as long as we embrace the majority principle, all lengthy discussions on rightness and relevance are merely a case of devious rhetoric? Once we have accepted the decisive role of voting, are we in a position to do otherwise than vote-count?

Representation, then, is essentially a conception without a natural 'message', so to speak. Its reputation depends on the astuteness of the exegetes: interpretations are more important than the procedures themselves. 'The various nations or social and economic groups', writes Carl Schmitt, 'who organize themselves "democratically" have the same subject, "the people", only in the abstract. *In concreto* the masses are sociologically and psychologically heterogeneous.'<sup>525</sup> Therefore, the sense of representation is always debatable. The people become a monolith only at the heights of abstraction – glorification in order to achieve uniformity always boils down to the abandonment of sociology for the sake of theology.

Schmitt subjected parliamentarism to very harsh criticism even though he accepted its merits to a certain extent. He acknowledged that 'the parliamentary enterprise today is the lesser evil, that it will continue to be preferable to Bolshevism and dictatorship'.<sup>526</sup> However, only thus far. In his view, this practice does not provide a solid foundation; its credibility is increasingly debatable. 'Parliamentary practice' makes sense only when certain premises are taken seriously. 'All specifically parliamentary arrangements and norms receive their meaning first through discussion and openness. This is especially true of the fundamental principle that is still recognized constitutionally, although practically hardly still believed in today, that the representative is independent of his constituents and party.'<sup>527</sup> The public sphere morphs into a sphere of party rivalry, into a sphere of the struggle for power. Essentially, it fades away; it becomes a battleground in which the principle of the public interest is crushed. Deputies serve party interests (as emphasized very strongly by Max Weber, as well), thereby making impartiality impossible. So what is the point of the principle of representation? Is it not merely to conceal party political interests? Schmitt believes parliamentarism has become a giant pedestal of illusion and hypocrisy, the three of them existing in a symbiosis, and facilitating successful courtship. 'What numerous parliaments in various European and non-European states have produced in the way of a political elite of hundreds of successive

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525 C. Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. by Ellen Kennedy (MIT Press, Cambridge, Ma., 1988), 25.

526 *Ibid.*, 2.

527 *Ibid.*, 3.

ministers justifies no great optimism.’ In fact, ‘politics, far from being the concern of an elite, has become the despised business of a rather dubious class of persons.’<sup>528</sup>

Representation seen as the quest for primary truths, as the makers of the American Constitution imagined it to be, has become an unfulfilled dream. ‘Parliamentary practice’ does not consist in the victory of the canons of rationality. Parliamentary debates are not an expression of the concern for the ‘true interest of the state’ as Madison would say, actually, it is even difficult to use the word ‘debates’ in this context. ‘To discussion’, as Schmitt perceptively observes, ‘belong shared convictions as premises, the willingness to be persuaded, independence of party ties, freedom from selfish interests.’<sup>529</sup> Parliamentary debates represent a rejection of all these conditions. So this is a case of a play of appearances with care being taken to keep up the pretence. ‘Representation’ has become a platitude; it is really unclear to what this term should refer. Party strife and the struggle for power leave no place for the concern for substance. The only thing that counts is the effort taken to win a majority. Surely, this is more akin to warfare than a quest for ‘primary truths’, reflecting the selflessness of reason striving after truth.

The model fashioned in the Enlightenment can be treated only as a testament to laudable hopes. Practice has taken its own path. Schmitt’s writing, quoted above, came into being in 1923 but it sounds timely and convincing. The twentieth century lesson involving the drastic abuse of power in totalitarian systems did not turn out to be a cathartic experience; it did not contribute to heal parliamentarism. Schmitt’s observations correspond perfectly well to the reality of ‘parliamentary practice’. ‘The situation of parliamentarism is critical today because the development of modern mass democracy has made argumentative public discussion an empty formality. Many norms of contemporary parliamentary law, above all provisions concerning the independence of representatives and the openness of sessions, function as a result like a superfluous decoration, useless and even embarrassing, as though someone had painted the radiator of a modern central heating system with red flames in order to give the appearance of a blazing fire.’<sup>530</sup>

So, in short, they are an anachronism; ‘the real fire’ is burning elsewhere. To what extent can we agree with Schmitt today? The principle of representation has no ‘natural’ significance, one that would be visible to the naked eye. It requires interpretation. The extent to which everything is intricate and

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528 Ibid., 4.

529 Ibid., 5.

530 Ibid., 6.

contentious becomes evident when we remember that 'representation' is primarily a certain concept of truth, a certain epistemological formula. This is the sense in terms of source. Political analogies are testimony to the transfer of ideas from epistemology to the area of practice, hence, they become relevant in a wider context; they refer to a certain conception of knowledge and a certain conception of the world.

Today, however, they are often treated as an anachronism, as testimony to the illusions politics has drawn from metaphysics. The criticism undermining the idea of 'representation' is one of the typical motives of protest signifying the parting of ways with the tradition of the Enlightenment. In a direct way it concerns epistemology and, implicitly, a host of other areas, politics being one of them of course. It has a very distinct message of its own. In fact, it deprives the conception of representation of philosophical support; it strikes at its heart and weakens its rational credibility. If representation is *tout court* a misguided idea, what could be the sense of political representation?

It would be worthwhile to take a look at the arguments which, although ignoring political matters, portray the issues of representation from the angle of epistemology, therefore in a direct way apply to politics. Conclusions treated consistently must be very radical. Taking into account the radical criticism of the ideal of 'representation' we should accept that parliamentarism is in effect a structure with no foundations, resting, as it is, on premises which deserve to be approached as good old superstition. Superstition which serves as an asylum for demagogues and hypocrites who enjoy playing the part of 'the representatives of the sovereign people'.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the pragmatists delivered a huge blow to the idea of representation. They rejected the classical conception of truth which refers to the agreement between the concept and the object and treats words as a mirror in which the world can look at itself, the world which 'appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed*.'<sup>531</sup> The conception of *representation* foundered; words are not a mirror to show us the reflection of things; and language does not serve to *represent* reality. It is an instrument, an instrument of creation. The attachment to the classical conception of truth which showcases the majesty of words, which must inhere in themselves the essence of things, is, according to James, proof of propensities which continue to bear the mark of magic. After all, what is the sense of the bond between words and things suggested by metaphysics? Words must live the same life that things live; they must fit tightly together;

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531 W. James, *Pragmatism and Other Works* (Penguin Group Inc., New York, 2000), 28.

reveal their essence, and in the end, provide control over things. Another reference to James reveals: 'Metaphysics has usually followed a very primitive kind of quest. You know how men have always hankered after unlawful magic, and you know what a great part, in magic, *words* have always played. If you have his name, or the formula of incantation that binds him, you can control the spirit, genie, afrite, or whatever the power may be'.<sup>532</sup> The temptation is high. Abandoning metaphysics, James believes, requires parting with inclinations shaped by magic.

And what do we get in return? We get freedom. Our effectiveness no longer requires astuteness in the area of magic. We do not have to know 'truth' of any kind before we get down to doing things. Our words are simply instruments in the service of practices which do not require the blessing of high priests and philosophers. Pragmatism allows for the treatment of all ideas in a purely *instrumental* fashion leading to the collapse of the conception of representation. A conception of truth matures, one that awards top-priority status to practical effects. James indicates that 'ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience.'<sup>533</sup> Concluding, the author recognizes as 'true' '[a]ny idea upon which we can ride, so to speak'. Language, then, is one of the areas of the more broadly understood practice. Pragmatism deprives words of the sacred: from the heights of absolute truths it drags them down to earth. Truth is to be determined by the practically understood *effects*. Through words we cannot *represent* anything; we can merely organize certain practices. Speaking about the role of language we should think about the formulas of *creation*, rather than the rules of *representation*. There are no 'things' which have frozen in a majestic expectation to be represented.

As time went by, the criticism treading in the direction set out by James would become more and more unyielding, attracting many new allies for pragmatism, while the numbers of the opponents of metaphysics swelled. Richard Rorty, the most significant figure among contemporary pragmatists, whilst engaging in the criticism of the idea of representation moves across a very broad area. He refers to Nietzsche, Heidegger and Freud who provide him with the necessary support for treating the idea of representation as an indication of naïve naturalism; as an echo of the belief (developed by metaphysics) in the existence of a 'world' flaunting its shapes. Similarly, he often gives the floor to the philosophers of language: Wittgenstein, Quine and Davidson who describe language as a certain formula of practice, stressing its creation-related functions.

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532 Ibid.

533 Ibid., 30.

Rorty likes to speak of the participants of the ‘pragmatic tradition’.<sup>534</sup> Hence, direct identification is not an important matter, so Rorty treats the circles of allies very broadly. It allows him to see the crusade against the idea of representation as an immense impulse, an important aspect of the criticism targeting paradigms of thought, as well as the – tainted by routine – practice of philosophy and politics.

Very clearly, epistemology alternates here with politics. The rejection of the concept of representation also entails the rejection of the classical variant of representative democracy. Today pragmatism is a variant of political radicalism. ‘Pragmatists hope to break with the picture which, in Wittgenstein’s words, ‘holds us captive’ – the Cartesian-Lockean picture of a mind seeking to get in touch with a reality outside itself.’<sup>535</sup> Implicitly inherent in this picture is the whole program of ‘political representation’ allowing for *representation* to be treated as a fundamental criterion of credibility. The symbolism of the mirror becomes the premise of validation and affects the hopes pinned on the representative system.

On the road leading to this goal there is a dangerous and powerful monster that needs to be conquered: it is philosophy which sees itself as a ‘mirror of nature’. Thus, the work *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* arises where Rorty exposes as false ‘the notion of a "theory of knowledge" based on an understanding of "mental processes"’.<sup>536</sup> It is an idea rooted in the seventeenth century which laid down the conception ‘of "the mind" as a separate entity in which "processes" occur’.<sup>537</sup> At the same time an important parallel would develop: a vision of a body politic, an ‘assembly of representatives’ which becomes a characteristic ‘mind’ of a whole group; the group’s ‘reason’ where processes facilitating the representation of ‘truth’ would unfold. “Philosophy” became, for the intellectuals, a substitute for religion. It was the area of culture where one touched bottom, where one found the vocabulary and the convictions which permitted one to explain and justify one’s activity’.<sup>538</sup> Apart from intellectuals, authors of political doctrines and apostles of new truths proclaimed in the name of Reason would draw benefits from philosophy. In this way ‘the religion’ of representation would be born – ‘the religion’ of the representative system.

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534 R. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, vol.1(Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999), 23.

535 R.Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Penguin Books, London, 1999), xxii.

536 R.Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980).

537 *Ibid.*, 3-4.

538 *Ibid.*, 4.



Today the 'revealed truths' of this religion are beginning to waver. Alongside the idols of philosophy alters of politics are burning. Proponents of 'representationalism' who think that 'the essential feature of language is its capacity to represent the way things are' are subject to stark criticism.<sup>539</sup> The 'conception of language as a set of social practices', under the patronage of Dewey and Wittgenstein has gained prominence.<sup>540</sup> This standpoint invalidates the credibility of the idea of 'representation' and puts its followers in a difficult situation.

What is the value of institutions which refer to fiction? What could be the nature of representation if the use we make of words involves primarily the construction of meaning in the course of practice, which, in turn, creates the framework of our world? Thus, the criticism which would follow in the wake of the philosophy of language should not come as a surprise. We can shed a different light on the matter, looking at things from the perspective of practices related to the operation of the 'representative' system. This, after all, was the sense of the devastating criticism of parliamentarism delivered by Weber or Schmitt, criticism that demonstrated the total uselessness of the language of 'representation'

Quoting Robert Brandom's view, Rorty points out that 'representationalist' systems 'take truth to be the basic concept in terms of which a theory of meaning, and hence a theory of language, is to be developed'.<sup>541</sup> Severing links with 'representationalism', according to Rorty, consists in the 'de-epistemologisation of the conception of truth'. The whole weight of truth is not linked to 'learning' about what lies on the outside of language, in 'reality'. Rather, it is tied to the coordination of practices involving the use of words so that language maintains its credibility and operationality (usefulness?). This is, naturally, a compelling problem, one that the philosophy of language grapples with in its search for the equivalents of the traditionally (after the 'representationalist' fashion) understood criteria of meaning, while trying to answer the question: what is the sense of designation?

We are, however, still faced with this issue when we descend the acme of philosophy to reach the nadir of politics. Politicians, proponents of the system of representation, have eagerly taken up the 'de-epistemologisation' of truth (achieving not the worst of results, which is clear today). Ultimately, truth is, as the sophists once suggested, what is taken for truth. Truth is the accepted

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539 R. Brandom, 'Truth and Assertability', quoted in R. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999), 151.

540 Ibid.

541 Rorty, op.cit., 152.

assertion which enters into the circulation of opinions so its ties with ‘reality’ are, in fact, not that important. “Media truth’ is a very successful notion today; it is a certain structure, a *stage production* with resonance. So indeed, truth is *staged*, rather than represented. Machiavelli was already well aware of this. Reflecting on the question of effective support he wrote: ‘but one must know how to colour one’s actions and to be a great liar and deceiver.’ Doing nothing to hide the bitter truth he recalled: ‘nonetheless contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly...who have known how to trick men with their cunning, and who, in the end, have overcome those abiding by honest principles.’<sup>542</sup> So the magic wand and the ability to woo become omnipotent – the insignificant accessories work as the staffage of an old painting ready to be used by the ruler who defines the rules of the game. Credibility is determined by the evocative style of the means of expression: not the notion of *adaequatio*. In politics, ‘truth’ develops with the power of the spells cast. This is, actually, as Weber would later explain, the sense of ‘representation’.

The conception of representation is not a godsend of course, quite the opposite is true, it belongs to the repertoire of history. Michel Foucault deals with the changes of the epistemological matrices and the subordinate systems of knowledge in *Words and Things* where he provides an account of the historical setting of the idea of representation. He indicates that this notion would become decisive only in the classical era, as in the sixteenth century it had still not been considered. The Renaissance idea of power had its roots in the idea of resemblance:

‘up to the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.’<sup>543</sup>

‘All figures of knowledge’, as Foucault says, are ‘organized’ by the objective to capture resemblance. ‘The semantic web of resemblance in the sixteenth century is extremely rich’.<sup>544</sup> There are many different ways of speaking about resemblance, a whole complex network of categories allowing for the capturing of diverse forms, aspects and manifestations of resemblance. For instance, *convenientia*

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542 N. Machiavelli, *Prince*, trans. G. Bull (Penguin Books, London, 2004), 74.

543 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 19.

544 *Ibid.*, 20.

(responsibility) is altogether a different thing to *proportio* (proportion). Many other notions exist which allow us to speak about resemblance with great precision – as required by the diversity of their forms. An incredibly rich and complex language comes into being which reveals knowledge concerning resemblance in impressive and sophisticated characterisations. ‘In the vast syntax of the world, the different beings adjust themselves to one another; the plant communicates with the animal, the earth with the sea, man with everything around him. Resemblance imposes adjacencies that in their turn guarantee further resemblances.’<sup>545</sup> A mind which looks for the traces of resemblance deals with an infinite variety of forms. Relishing in this dazzling richness it creates knowledge which is at once, as Foucault says, ‘limitless’ and ‘poverty-stricken’.<sup>546</sup> For we are dealing with an incessant repetition of the same motif: resemblance. And so it goes without end. ‘Resemblance never remains stable within itself; it can be fixed only if it refers back to another similitude, which then, in turn, refers to others’.<sup>547</sup> Richness turns into poverty. In the sixteenth-century current of refinement we find monotony. We move within the confines of the same province, just as Don Quixote (an emblem figure in Foucault’s argumentation) symbolizes bifurcation and as a hero dwells on the brink of two worlds; one which still lives with the obsession of resemblance and the other which has forsaken it. ‘With all the twists and turns, Don Quixote’s adventures form the boundary [...]. Don Quixote is not a man given to extravagance, but rather a diligent pilgrim breaking his journey before all the marks of similitude. He is the hero of the Same. He never manages to escape from the familiar plain stretching out on all sides of the Analogue, any more than he does from his own small province.’<sup>548</sup> His meticulousness has the appearance of madness. ‘His whole journey is a quest for similitudes: the slightest analogies are pressed into service as dormant signs that must be reawakened and made to speak once more.’<sup>549</sup> As we know only too well, in this world even an idiot can proclaim another reality.

Knowledge engendered by the idea of resemblance is quite peculiar.

It was this same necessity that obliged knowledge to accept magic and erudition on the same level. To us, it seems that sixteenth-century learning was made up of an unstable mixture of rational knowledge, notions derived from magical practices, and a whole cultural heritage whose power and authority had been vastly increased by the rediscovery of Greek and Roman authors. Perceived thus, the learning of that

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545 Ibid.

546 Ibid., 33-4.

547 Ibid., 34.

548 Ibid., 51.

549 Ibid., 52,

period appears structurally weak: a common ground where fidelity to the Ancients, a taste for the supernatural, and an already awakened awareness of that sovereign rationality in which we recognize ourselves'.<sup>550</sup>

The seventeenth century would radically limit this inconsistency. Classicism would thrust its harsh restrictions and the discipline of 'sovereign rationality' would become all-important. The new concept of knowledge is developed under the patronage of the idea of representation. The Classical Period would aspire to *represent*, penetrate and probe inside and reach the essence of things and represent *truth*.

Let us for a moment return to Don Quixote, the symbol of bifurcation. The knight from La Mancha reaches the boundary which, once crossed, the belief in the power of analogy is doomed to collapse. The subsequent downfalls, observes Foucault, testify to the delusional nature of the senses involved in resembling; this delusional nature 'transforms the sought-for proof into derision and leaves the words of the books forever hollow'.<sup>551</sup> So in the end 'Don Quixote is a negative of the Renaissance world; writing has ceased to be the prose of the world; resemblance and signs have dissolved their former alliance; similitudes have become deceptive and verge upon the visionary or madness; things still remain stubbornly within their ironic identity; they are no longer anything but what they are'.<sup>552</sup> In other words, things set their own stiff requirements and impose their own truth, they do not agree to the magical schemes which would allow them to be immersed in the ocean of similarities and analogies. They crave clear, precise and literal evidence in addition to the severance of links with magic, which provides the means to treat signs as *codes*, facilitating the search for a deeply hidden resemblance – some other reality. This is how the idea of *representation* is born and, alongside it, new systems of knowledge. This idea would lend its support to the mighty structure of science, the pride of modernity, and at the same time, it would become successful in politics, as we all know. The conceptions of political representation emerge, to use Foucault's words, within 'classical *episteme*', squarely based on the idea of representation.

So Don Quixote vanishes beyond the horizon, while Francis Bacon enters the stage with his '*quiproquo* doctrine'. Creating the theory of idols, Bacon unmask the deceptive play of similarities; 'he shows them, shimmering before our eyes, vanishing as one draws near, then re-forming again a moment later, a little further off'.<sup>553</sup> Idols are the mind's fictions which once defeated and unmasked must

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550 Ibid., 35-6.

551 Ibid., 52.

552 Ibid., 53.

553 Ibid., 57.

disappear. The new type of knowledge would demand precision and fidelity, it is to serve the purpose of discovering the truth which is inherent in things; it is to make *representing* possible. Signs no longer suggest similarities: they simply represent. The nature of knowledge related to this new canon is, indeed, highly complex. There are many forms of designating and many limits of semantic credibility. So a natural simplicity of designation is unattainable. The reading of Michel Foucault's *Words and Things* leaves no doubts in this respect, as the author states 'it is now possible to define the instruments laid down for the use of Classical thought by the sign system.'<sup>554</sup> And classical thought would put it to very good use. The triumphs experienced by the systems of knowledge which refer to the conceptions of representation would be truly impressive. Could the same be said of political representation? Certainly not. Even in their prime these conceptions raised many fundamental doubts, as has already been pointed out. Thus, political practices related to the idea of representation are indeed dubious. Let us not forget also that the sheer conception of *representation* is not an epistemological absolute either. And this is to what Foucault draws our attention. We are not going to expound his views in detail, as that is a subject which merits a separate discussion. The key thought however, must be strongly underscored; *representation* creates the bedrock for 'classical *episteme*'. The nineteenth century would already witness a significant turning point and systems of knowledge based on other rules would start emerging. 'The last years of the eighteenth century are broken by a discontinuity similar to that which destroyed Renaissance thought at the beginning of the seventeenth century'.<sup>555</sup> The great 'table of identity' which used to glorify 'classical *episteme*' invoking the idea of representation disintegrates. 'Knowledge takes up residence in a new space', in Foucault's words.<sup>556</sup> The idea of history would come to the fore; 'new empiricisms' would be developed, as the author says. A new adventure is beginning. Conceptions concerning the world of politics would of course participate – this is an exciting adventure, especially in this day and age, when the criticism of metaphysics, Platonism and foundationism has become a call to arms of all opponents of the enfeebled authority of science which offers 'objective truths'. It is surprising, however, that despite all changes in circumstances, the idea of political representation has frozen in the position of an untouchable deity. It morphed into the foundation of 'democratic' politics despite all doubts spawned by the Enlightenment, despite the (as today we are entitled to say) classical twentieth-century criticism which, quite a long time ago, dispelled all illusions. We shall return to this point once again giving the floor to Weber and Schmitt.

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554 Ibid., 69.

555 Ibid., 235.

556 Ibid.

The concept of representation is plainly becoming grotesque in the light of the latest criticism which is an expression of the radical revolt directed against the anachronisms of metaphysics, with its insistence on the dogma of 'reality'. The French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard, simply says: 'reality does not exist'.<sup>557</sup> So what would become the object of *representation*?

*Simulation* reigns supreme in this day and age, as Baudrillard makes clear and recalls: 'To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence.'<sup>558</sup> In the words of the French sociologist, the world changes into a 'procession of simulacras'. Baudrillard explains: 'Simulation is no longer that of territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.'<sup>559</sup> *Simulacrum* is fiction upon which we impart the appearance of reality, which we then represent *as* reality. According to Baudrillard, the trouble is that when all the stable points of reference disappear we are no longer in a position to distinguish appearance from reality – to the point when appearance, achieving incredible intensity, simply becomes the only reality. This is the situation we have found ourselves in; this is the sense of the 'procession of symulacras'.

The point is not the growing role of fiction which intersperses with reality. 'It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say, of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double'.<sup>560</sup> Since we live in a world of images, that which is not transformed into a picture becomes insignificant. This is the outcome of the development of the technology of transmission, the expansion of television and the fascination with virtuality. Images have become more important than things; they are no longer required to have points of reference. Baudrillard believes we are losing the ability to 'imagine' a world which has not been directly *shown* to us. Hence, we are losing all control over the content of the transmissions. The *simulacrum* predominates. 'A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary'.<sup>561</sup>

Softening somewhat the slightly apocalyptic tone of Baudrillard's observations, we can say that late modernity has made the texture of the transmissions so dense, as to finally make their references utterly meaningless. Where is the world, we can ask? We are dealing with a weird tangle of various

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557 J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. S.F. Glaser (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1994).

558 *Ibid.*, 3.

559 *Ibid.*, 1.

560 *Ibid.*, 2.

561 *Ibid.*, 2-3.

pictures which push and shove against each other, fight, destroy and disavow each other, inflicting their own intrusive style. They never cease persuading and inducing – introducing the ubiquitous motif of *advertising* into every sphere they possibly can. Images contribute to the effect of a tacky colourfulness designed to be attractive to the eye, fascinating and engaging. Owing to the incredible success of political marketing, the style of advertising is becoming the dominant motif of politics as here, too, *simulacrum* fights successfully for its rights. What counts is the *image*, intended to distract attention from whatever is inconvenient and, at the same time, seduce with the allure of pictures. It is only appropriate to ask in this context, what is the sense of *representation*?

Max Weber had long ago tried to provide an explanation. Depicting ‘bureaucratization’ as a principle which keeps all potentials of modernity in check, he opposed the sentimental interpretations of politics patterned on the pathos of the Enlightenment. Bureaucratization realizes the strict rigours of instrumental reason, imposes the power of the system and embraces all spheres of life. Naturally, it also concerns politics which has increasingly come under the pressure of political-party activity and bureaucratized organizations scrambling for influence in a bureaucratized system of power. Consequently, any spontaneous action on the part of ‘emancipated’ reason is out of the question. Rationality is articulated within the framework of the system, it is not testimony to the surges of independent thought. Ultimately, it should be associated, first and foremost, with the various forms of discipline and coordination which makes dissipation impossible.

The free exchange of opinion in politics is gradually losing ground, similarly, independent verdicts on the part of ‘reason’ have no chance of coming to the fore. Weber gets down to the point; his analyses ruin the pathos of the Enlightenment. The abstractions which Condorcet was able to use, when he showed ‘public opinion’ to be the tribunal of truth, are replaced by observations which reveal the true operation of political mechanisms. Rationality is brought down to earth from the pinnacles of abstraction. This earthly life of rationality goes against the expectations shaped by slogans which put freedom, truth, popular sovereignty and representation on a par. Indeed, many of these slogans collide with the inexorable requirements of bureaucracy. This includes in an obvious way the principle of representation.

Actually, the sense of the idea of representation is being reversed. It is not the institutions which represent the position taken by the ‘people’, it is the ‘people’ (who then become a population of voters: the ‘electorate’) who are to represent the interests of institutions. ‘The extension of the franchise ineluctably means the spread of political associations to organize the electorate, whose interests in most circumstances (the exceptions being national emergencies and wars) are

fragmented and divided' – so reads Weber's *dictum*.<sup>562</sup> Political parties are getting down to action. They must organize (in fact, create), their own electorate, they must win votes; this is what is required by the system's regulations. Any naively understood 'presentation' of existing opinions is ruled out. Weber rejects naturalist fiction: in no way are political parties a 'mirror' showing a faithful picture of spontaneously developed convictions. They deal with, let us recall the expression already quoted, the *recruitment* of opinion.<sup>563</sup> Representation is out of the question; parties are recruiting organizations. Subsequently, this is a case of *creation* rather than representation. Conceptions and programs need to be created so that the 'electorate' begins to identify with the organization's standpoint. Bureaucratization ensures that political parties possess a natural advantage: they have qualified staff at their disposal; they know how to move freely in the tangle of systems; they dazzle with their professionalism, cutting an impressive figure. This is the way they gain the trust of the voters who, on their part, feel helpless in the realm of systems and await the 'good news'. 'Even in mass parties with very democratic constitutions, the voters and most of the rank and file members do not (or do only formally) participate in the drafting of the program and the selection of the candidates'.<sup>564</sup> The party is focused entirely on shaping the community in which the man saying yes takes centre stage, as Weber describes it, ultimately, this is the sense of 'representation'. The 'representative system' gives the edge to party machinery. Only those votes count which have been *recruited*. Parliamentary governments, in fact, have nothing to do with classically understood representation. 'Modern parliaments are primarily representative bodies of those *ruled with* bureaucratic means.'<sup>565</sup> Obviously, this rule, as he adds, requires a 'minimum of consent on the part of the ruled', but this is precisely the purpose of the system of 'recruiting' votes.

Hence, we part with the laudable expectations raised by the Enlightenment: we have to move from the sphere of 'emancipation' to that of 'manipulation'. Does it still make sense to speak of the independence of reason? How should Kant's postulates be treated? In 1922 the famous study by Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* was published, dispelling all doubts in this matter and making clear that there is no chance for independence of any sort; in the sphere of opinion the imposed paradigms rule supreme. *Stereotypes* play the most important role. They would allow the human mind to emerge from the tangle of advancing messages and communiqués, whose numbers just keep growing. The

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562 D. Held, *The Models of Democracy* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2006), 135.

563 Weber, *Economy*, 1395-1410.

564 *Ibid.*, 1396.

565 *Ibid.*, 1407.



mind can free itself from the sphere of helplessness: this would indicate that all new information is seen just as an ‘episode, incident or eruption’.<sup>566</sup> Thus, certain paradigms come into being, these are models of uniformisation, never ‘innocent’ or natural. They are produced, manufactured. This is how public opinion originates – under the onslaught of propaganda. In 1927, Harold Lasswell published his work *Propaganda Technique in the World War* in which he indicated that the sphere of communication is perceived as a sphere of *coercion* which leaves absolutely no room for spontaneous thought; illusions are dispelled.<sup>567</sup> Once again *the idols*, those with which Francis Bacon once wrestled, have run rife.

Weber, Lippman and Lasswell speak with one voice. The conception of representation makes no sense since the object to which this notion could refer simply does not exist. Lippman’s book, as John Patrick Diggins suggests, is ‘a sort of analytic counterpart to Hemingway’s *Farewell to Arms*, where democratic ideals are also questioned as adolescent verbiage.’<sup>568</sup> To sum up, the rhetoric of ‘representation’ is naïve and false; there simply are no spontaneously developed conceptions of the world that could be included in the repertoire of political representation.

There is certainly no dearth of causes for wavering. Let us repeat the question again: What is the sense of representation? Is not the word which has now become an icon – an emblem of virtuous hopes – leading our interpretations of the world of politics astray? Looking for an appropriate label, should we rather not invoke Foucault’s conception of *resemblance*? Is not what we call a ‘representative system’ actually a system of resemblance? Representatives, as we have observed, are in fact recruiters. Their ‘marketing’ practices are more akin to a ‘combination of erudition and magic’ which, according to the author of *Words and Things* is a typical sign of Renaissance episteme. So perhaps *similarity* is once again becoming a fundamental principle of validation? Representatives-recruiters wish to be similar to their ‘electorate’ as identification should be mutual; politicians, likewise, feel the need to live in a world of analogy. Their astuteness turns towards the areas of ‘suitability’, they seek to ‘convene’ all the time, shorten the distance, show themselves as figures of analogy, signs of repetition. Be ‘heart and mind’ with the ‘sovereign people’, with the ‘electorate’. This is the purpose of the marketing masquerade – all the

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566 W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Macmillan, New York, 1960), 16.

567 A. Mattelart and M. Mattelart, *Theories of Communication. A Short Introduction* (SAGE Publications, London, 1998), 25-28.

568 J. P. Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism. Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill., 1994), 331.

efforts designed to give the impression of convergence, similarity and intimacy. This is the purpose of lunching with the men at ‘army barracks’, munching on hot dogs at street-stalls like everyone else; or the photographs showing the respectable candidates donning regional garb, or a fireman’s helmet. Photo opportunities with highlanders jumping over fire with their alpenstocks; visits full of concern to grief-stricken areas where the concern is likely to take on an appropriate ‘media’ tone. In a word, great care to provide the right ‘image’, one which suggests similarity. The purpose is to condense the language of signs making it possible to celebrate the tastes of the ‘electorate’. The art of the shamans and the art of magic are back in grace. Magic, let us keep in mind, consists in treating signs as codes and a politician’s ‘image’ becomes one such code: generated by magicians, specialists in the field of public relations; a magic formula designed to take over the minds and emotions of the ‘electorate’. A politician’s ‘image’ is, essentially, a magic spell which is to secure a politician’s rise to power – gaining the ‘electorate’s’ support. Politics is enthusiastically becoming irrational. In Kant’s words, shaman art is taking over ‘the public use of reason’. And we call this system ‘representation’.

The parties (which according to the text of the written constitution officially do not exist) do not face each other today discussing opinions, but as social or economic power groups calculating their mutual interests and opportunities for power, and they actually agree on compromises and coalitions on this basis. The masses are won over through a propaganda apparatus whose maximum effect relies on an appeal to immediate interests and passions. Argument in the real sense that is characteristic for genuine discussion ceases.<sup>569</sup>

To sum up, the concept of representation is a very good example of a situation which Richard Rorty defines as the ‘literalisation of metaphors’.<sup>570</sup> To a certain degree representation does make sense as it refers to the symbolism of mirrors. This sense, however, is somewhat hazy: we do not exactly know the nature of the ‘picture’ generated, nor how it comes about. The entire conception caused problems from the very beginning for being contentious and unclear. We are, though, getting used to the word which, initially, was treated with caution, and now we are fraternising with the metaphor. A peculiar vocabulary is coming into being, the instrument of our practices, with the metaphor at its centre. Finally, we become oblivious to the reference point, as reality on its own is becoming useless. Owing to their strong resonance, even words impose their dominance – and the metaphor turns into dogma.

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569 Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 6.

570 R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999).



## Chapter Four

### Lawmakers: the Manufacturing of Law

The ‘representatives of the sovereign people’ are charged with the obvious task of making law and free people have to live under the rule of the law they themselves develop. This is the sense of freedom. This is what Xerxes, the king of Persia, learned from his foe, the dethroned king Demaratos, expelled from Sparta to become a resentful exile and wanderer, finally finding refuge at the court of his enemy. Obeying the Persian king’s command, he explained the details of Hellenic life trying to ‘speak as truly as I could’ as he was bidden. Offering his characterization of the Lacedaemonians he said: ‘they are free, yet not entirely free; for they have a master, and that master is law, which they fear much more than your subjects fear you.’<sup>571</sup> This is the *dictum* of the free people who wish to live under the rule of law.

The Enlightenment luxuriated in the idea of the rule of law which was to supersede the disgraceful practices engaged in by despots. Unlike the Lacedaemonians, the people of the Enlightenment could not appeal to already existing laws but instead proclaimed their own with a view to destroying the bastions of despotism. In the beginning everything seemed obvious: since law is the voice of nature, proclamations would suffice. In 1788 Gaetano Filangieri published an important treatise on legislation, *La Scienza della Legislazione*. ‘With the *La Scienza della Legislazione*,’ reads Hazard’s argument, ‘law finally loses its historical and factual character, and becomes an ideology’.<sup>572</sup> The author recommends the use of rational and systematic science in order to unravel the chaos of facts and experiences and bring order and virtue into one’s life. Reason, thus, proclaims its laws: the art of legislation would become a skill, which would facilitate the coalescing of the dissipated grains of truth and build invincible foundations for the splendid edifice of laws.

Sadly, it would soon transpire that all was not that simple. Numerous doubts would appear and instead of unambiguous proclamations – feuds and discussions would ensue. Let us underline Hazard’s expression, the significance of which cannot be overestimated: law is becoming ‘ideology’! The Enlightenment found its calling in the *making* of law, a process which became the triumphant message of the Great Century. Judicious law is the new blessing

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571 Herodotus, *The Histories* (Penguin Books, London, 2003) 7.104.

572 Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 152.

which can heal the people harried by the absurdities of despotism, so people thought, therefore, lawmakers must get down to business as soon as possible. This exaggeration would be later mocked by the famous lawyer and philosopher as well as opponent of the Enlightenment, Friedrich Karl von Savigny. In his treatise *Of the Vocation of Our Age for Legislation and Jurisprudence* he would question the insane, in his view, idea of the Age of Reason to treat law-making as a privilege and responsibility of this epoch.

Is it creating, manufacturing or producing? Slightly altering the tone of the words we run the whole gamut of meaning. So, in fact, what is it that we are doing when we make law? Would ‘law-making’ not turn into an obsession with all the hallmarks of the almighty rule of ‘production’? The protagonist of this scene, let us recall, is *homo faber* – the tireless manufacturer who relishes the possibilities offered by *techné*. Filangieri speaks of ‘the science of legislation’, implying that law is to be manufactured as a product of specific skills leading to a situation whereby the legislature would in the end become a huge manufacturing centre. Nobody thinks anymore about proclaiming laws established by nature. Nowadays, laws are being ‘devised’ and invented manifesting the creative momentum. Lawmaking bodies tout statistics which testify to their vitality: the vigour which paves the way for ever-new laws, increasing their number, as well as changing and amending those already in existence. We are witnessing an impetus which has turned lawmaking bodies into gigantic law-manufacturing plants, operating in line with the requirements of the time and respecting the principles of productivity.

Hence, the *lawmaker*, as the delegate of the manufacturing plant, appears in the foreground delivering his products. This begs the question: is what the lawmakers produce indeed *law* and in what sense? Can *every* decision that wins the support of the majority become law? Is everything really that simple? Can we still unwaveringly speak of the ‘rule of law’? In his work *The Theory of Democracy* Giovanni Sartori asks the often-repeated key question: ‘is it the rule of law or the rule of legislators?’<sup>573</sup> The difference is very important, unlikely to be left unquestioned although it is very easily overlooked. How, then, should we protect ourselves against the light-hearted positivist assault which makes it possible to treat any decision reached by the legislature as law *ex definitione*? ‘This is obviously a formidable, strenuous, ever precarious undertaking. The problem has been tackled, within the constitutional state, by arranging the legislative procedure in such a way that the “form of law” also implies a control of its content. A large number of

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573 G. Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited* (Chatham House Publishers, Inc, Chatham, New Jersey, 1987) vol. 2.

constitutional devices are, in effect, intended to create the conditions of a lawmaking process in which *ius* will remain tied to *justum*, in which law will remain the right law.<sup>574</sup>

Practice, however, does not make for optimism. Arithmetic and calculations involving the structure of party interests are mighty rivals of the idea of justice; the fate of projects is being decided at parliamentary auctions. The ‘majority principle’ rules supreme together with the inexorable logic of numbers. Sartori believes that the ‘governments of lawmakers’ actually undermine the idea of law. ‘To begin with, what is law? In the Roman tradition *ius* (the Latin word for law) has become, over the centuries, inextricably connected with *iustum* (what is just); [...]. In short, *ius* is both “law” and “right”. That is to say, law has not been conceived as any general rule enforced by a sovereign (*iussum*, i.e., command) but as that rule which embodies and expresses the community’s sense of justice (*iustum*).’<sup>575</sup> This connection, however, does not arise on cue. Everything has become truly problematical.

Let us, then, return to the misgivings which, as we know, surfaced in the Age of Enlightenment and were voiced, by Montesquieu among others. In his, possibly, most famous statement we are able to read: ‘But constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry his authority as far as it will go.’<sup>576</sup> ‘Every man’ and of course, every form of power; one can abuse power in any form whatsoever. What is more, the sheer ‘use’ of power continuously generates the temptation to abuse it; in some sense usage signifies the wish to abuse. Let us remember ‘every man’ moves doggedly until he meets the limit. The abuse of power, therefore, is not an exception but rather, as one can say, comes to us naturally. One always has to be on one’s guard: ‘Is it not strange, though true, to say that virtue itself has need of limits?’ admits Montesquieu with alarm.<sup>577</sup>

Still another immensely important issue our authority draws attention to is the fact that political shrewdness is rather limited. Montesquieu reminds us that ‘as in republics the people have not so constant and so present a view of the causes of their misery, and as the magistrates seem to act only in conformity to the laws, hence liberty is generally said to reside in republics, and to be banished from monarchies.’<sup>578</sup> This is the way a dangerous illusion occurs: ‘as in democracies the people seem to act almost as they please, this sort of

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574 Ibid., vol. 2, 322-3.

575 Ibid., 84.

576 Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, 172.

577 Ibid.

578 Ibid., 171.

government has been deemed the most free, and the power of the people has been confounded with their liberty.’ Here is the conclusion!

Sartori, thus, follows Montesquieu. In this context one important question merits an answer: when, to what extent and in what sense, the lawmaking power of the ‘people’s representatives’ can be identified with freedom of the people? Any form of power can be abused – including that which deals with lawmaking! The fear of the despotism of the legislature had already made itself felt by the eighteenth century. Criticizing the projects which presumed the undivided power of the elected Assembly, Thomas Jefferson spoke of the threat of ‘an elective despotism’. He rightly concluded that ‘173 despots would surely be as oppressive as one’, even though constituted as an elected body and taking advantage of the veil of collegiality.<sup>579</sup>

Despots were to be held back by the principle of the separation of powers, but just how effectively was this being done...? Let us bring back Sartori’s question and, at the same time, a dilemma for us: are we dealing with the ‘the rule of law or the rule of legislators?’ It looks like the power of the people (the people’s ‘representatives’) can be ‘confused’ with, using Montesquieu’s words, the freedom of the people even under a system which embraces the separation of power. Here also, the despotism of the legislature seems to be a very real threat, indeed.

Let us, once again, invoke Montesquieu who explained that at the heart of every system there needs to be a ‘mainspring’, its ‘principle’, which puts everything in motion. In the republican system it is *virtue*. ‘When virtue is banished, ambition invades the minds of those who are disposed to receive it, and avarice possesses the whole community.’<sup>580</sup> Thus, the new mainspring of our times is linked to selfish passions. In the republican system, however, law is in jeopardy because everything depends on traditions; on bringing up children in such a way which instills in them the ability to make sacrifices. Republican virtue signifies ‘the love of the laws and of our country. As such love requires a constant preference of public to private interest, it is the source of all private virtues’.<sup>581</sup> When this love is no more – everything goes to ruin. ‘The objects of their desires are changed; what they were fond of before has become indifferent; they were free while under the restraint of laws, but they would fain now be free to act against law’.<sup>582</sup>

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579 T. Jefferson, ‘Notes on the State of Virginia’ in *The Complete Jefferson*, ed. by S.K. Padover (Freeport, New York, 1969).

580 Montesquieu, *op.cit.*, 38.

581 *Ibid.*, 51.

582 *Ibid.*, 38-9.

This is vital! Montesquieu points to a problem with which the whole of modernity has been grappling. The republican conception of virtue – demanding sacrifices – collapses, which is stating the obvious. ‘Law’ would find itself pressurized by selfish ambitions. Republics are condemned to make law; there is no other way out. They are not supported by the gods, they cannot count on the majesty of the heavens, they have to go forward unaided, wrestling with the onslaught of mundane ambitions intermingled with greed. A world which has rejected the concept of virtue puts a high premium on the will of parties and particularistic interests. An era which has deified trade and placed riches on a pedestal should forget selflessness – and where the latter does not exist it is hardly possible to speak of justice and laws. That which is given the name of ‘law’ is but its semblance: a testimony to the selfish ambitions which were given the rank of legal regulations. We are dealing in essence with a mystification: *ius* and *iustum* have very little in common.

Montesquieu, despite opinions prevalent in his century, is thus not an enthusiast of the republic. Is the republican system under the new conditions still conducive to freedom? Affectation growing out of selfish ambitions is a source of *lawlessness* of the most extreme kind. Arbitrariness is a mark of *despotism*. Freedom carries with it the exclusion of lawlessness. Therefore, law dictated by selfish interests becomes in effect an expression of new despotism; even the separation of powers does not make a big change. The despotism of the legislature can become a fact in spite of the barriers created by the mechanism of checks and balances, also when ‘law’ is the name given to principles dictated by the interests of parties, by selfish blindness which uses the alibi given by form – the procedure which determines the birth of ‘law’.

Thus, the Enlightenment does not accept the majority principle understood literally and law is not identified with the voice of the majority. Legal positivism would only later become successful. It is a different story in the eighteenth century when the idea of validity is still bound with the concept of *iustum*. The most convenient support is provided by the conception of natural law. It gives the means to treat proclaimed laws as a manifestation of the principles of nature, so, the law is, in fact, a *declaration* appealing to a higher order of things. As we know the idea of ‘a declaration’ would become a staggering success-story in the Age of Enlightenment. The metaphysical conception of natural order, however, did not gain universal recognition. ‘All justice comes from God’, Rousseau observes, ‘who is its sole source; but if we knew how to receive so high an inspiration, we should need neither government nor laws.’<sup>583</sup> Since we do not know how to receive this inspiration we are left to our own devices. ‘Doubtless,

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583 Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 27.



there is a universal justice emanating from reason alone'.<sup>584</sup> Rousseau stresses the autonomy of rational will. 'But what, after all, is a law? As long as we remain satisfied with attaching purely metaphysical ideas to the word, we shall go on arguing without arriving at an understanding'.<sup>585</sup> Clearly, therefore, law must forsake the heights of revealed truths.

Rational will should not be identified with arbitrariness; it should not be rooted in the 'I want to' formula. Justice must be 'mutual', says Rousseau. Law, by its nature, should rise above the sphere of subjective convictions and selfish preferences, and for this reason he introduces the concept of *general will*. 'There is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will; the latter considers only the common interest, while the former takes private interest into account, and is no more than a sum of particular wills'.<sup>586</sup> 'The will of all', the will of the majority would generate only a semblance of law, what is more, appealing to the will of the majority would in fact cause a great risk. 'Our will is always for our own good, but we do not always see what that is'.<sup>587</sup> The majority criterion could be very misleading which prompts the author of the *Social Contract* to present the issue mercilessly: 'How can a blind multitude, which often does not know what it wills, because it rarely knows what is good for it, carry out for itself so great and difficult an enterprise as a system of legislation?'.<sup>588</sup> It thus transpires that Rousseau is a great sceptic: the 'blind mass' cannot produce law, legal 'naturalism' is out of the question! Law should not depend on *opinion*. 'Political enlightenment' should lead to the 'unity of reason and will'. Rousseau does not, by any means, glorify the spontaneous wisdom of the 'people': 'The general will is always in the right, but the judgment which guides it is not always enlightened'.<sup>589</sup> Making law is certainly not an easy thing to do. The eighteenth century is by no means eager to identify law with the 'order of the sovereign', as the positivists would later on.

Introducing the idea of law, Immanuel Kant, as we know, would refer to the formula of the 'categorical imperative'. 'We have thus established at least this much', the author says, 'that if duty is a concept that is to contain significance and actual legislation for our actions it can be expressed only in categorical imperatives'.<sup>590</sup> Here is the famous formula: '*act only according to*

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584 Ibid.

585 Ibid.

586 Ibid., 20-21.

587 Ibid., 20.

588 Ibid., 29.

589 Ibid.

590 *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 79.

*that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.*<sup>591</sup> In the sphere of morality and law there is no place for party designs, in opposition to this, one should refer to principles which stand a chance of winning absolute and universal recognition. Any play of particularistic interests is ruled out, and so is bargaining and compromise. The concept of law should not have any ties with the concept of *majority*. Laws should be universal. The experience related to interests, hope and demands is absolutely of no avail here. The idea of law should not rest on the plinth of human desires or the law be the object of bargaining. Kant warns against engaging in ‘this slackness or even base way of thinking, in seeking to identify the principle from among empirical motives and laws.’<sup>592</sup> Disqualifying all ‘empirical motives’ he expresses himself firmly, even contemptuously; ‘human reason in its weariness gladly rests upon this cushion and in the dream of sweet pretences [...] foists on morality a bastard patched up from limbs of quite varied ancestry; which resembles whatever one wants to see in it, but not virtue’.<sup>593</sup> Without virtue justice is given no chance – the concept of law becomes void. Authentic legal principles, as Kant believes, are established *a priori* in human reason. This is a task for lawmakers; in this very area they should undertake their search. ‘[L]aws determine ends according to their universal validity’.<sup>594</sup> Whoever takes a different perspective, will forever ‘instead of Juno [...] embrace a cloud’.

Undoubtedly, the temptation is strong. The Kantian point of view excludes all wavering concerning the validity of norms it, however, demands that the self-sufficiency of reason be recognized as a foregone conclusion. The Kantian conception of autonomy indicates we are searching for principles that have been established *a priori* and must apply so widely that they hold ‘not merely for human beings but for all *rational beings as such*’.<sup>595</sup> We, thus, find ourselves soaring sky-high, relying on the wisdom which rises above the chaos of the world and make our way to the ‘kingdom of reason’ and we realize that the earth has become invisible. God, toppled from his heights, has become exclusively a ‘postulate of reason’. Thus, Kant asks: ‘Whence do we have the concept of God as the highest good? And replies: ‘solely from *the idea* that reason *a priori* devises of moral perfection, and connects inseparably with the concept of a free will’.<sup>596</sup>

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591 Ibid., 71.

592 Ibid., 81.

593 Ibid.

594 Ibid., 95.

595 Ibid., 45.

596 Ibid., 47.

However, not all have accepted Kant's *dictum*. The very idea of laws recognized by 'all rational beings' played a key part in giving shape to the message of the Enlightenment, irrespective of the fact that from the very beginning it sparked serious doubts. How many false prophets can parade in the clothes of 'reason'? What is the true value of the 'laws of reason'? Should the 'use made of reason' be indicative of the contempt for experience-based wisdom? Can 'reason' be juxtaposed with reality, forgetting all the bonds between 'empirical motives and laws' as Kant would wish?

The views voiced by the radicals, extolling the reign of reason and the rule of principles established a priori, were scathingly criticized by Edmund Burke who treated the position taken by the authors of the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* as a testimony to extreme arbitrariness. Questioning the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, Burke rejected the conception which allowed for combining the concept of 'law' with the dictate of the will of the 'sovereign'. He opposed the measures taken to, as he saw it, frantically deform the matter of law and subsequently raised serious arguments against the enthusiasts of 'human rights'. 'These metaphysic rights entering into common life, like rays of light which pierce into a dense medium, are, by the laws of nature, refracted from their straight line. Indeed, in the gross and complicated mass of human passions and concerns the primitive rights of men undergo such a variety of refractions and reflections that it becomes absurd to talk of them as if they continued in the simplicity of their original direction.'<sup>597</sup> The world cannot be subjugated to the control of regulations established a priori. 'The pretended rights of these theorists are all extremes; and in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false. The rights of men are in a sort of middle, incapable of definition, but not impossible to be discerned.'<sup>598</sup> This calls for prudence, a virtue that Burke holds most important, but instead he is faced with the extreme ambitions of the proponents of 'human rights' who wish to simplify everything believing the world can be forced into humility. Thus, they reject cautious thought, to which Burke replies, these are sophists through which the 'upstart insolence' speaks.<sup>599</sup> They boast about their botched ideas offered to the world as 'theories' to justify the great reform but fail to grasp the most important thing:

The science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every other experimental science, not to be taught a priori... real effects of moral causes are not always immediate; but that which in the first instance is

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597 E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Penguin Books, London, 2004), 152.

598 *Ibid.*,153.

599 *Ibid.*,121.

prejudicial may be excellent in its remoter operation, and its excellence may arise even from the ill effects it produces in the beginning. The reverse also happens: and very plausible schemes, with very pleasing commencements, have often shameful and lamentable conclusions.<sup>600</sup>

Laws are not the reflections of inviolable truths that theoreticians have in mind. Revolutionary ideas have always been burdened with a very serious flaw which from the start rules out their use. In their zeal, the enthusiasts of revolution see the world in a pleasing pose which makes it possible to tell easily right from wrong, so the new laws, they believe, should simply sanction this difference. Thus, law-making can appear to be a very simple exercise: just choose between good and evil. Burke cautions, however, that the opposite is true: ‘The rights of men in governments are their advantages; and these are often in balances between differences of good, in compromises sometimes between good and evil, and sometimes between evil and evil.’<sup>601</sup> Everything is much more complicated than it seems, this is why lawmakers should be on their guard: ‘By these theorists the right of the people is almost always sophistically confounded with their power.’<sup>602</sup> For all that, in the end, the highest ambitions yield positivism of the most meagre kind – as we are able to say today in agreement with Burke. Law is simply treated as the ‘sovereign’s command’ – and in practice, it is the voice of the majority.

This is, thus, a serious matter. It does not solely concern the eighteenth century and the French revolution, indeed, the dispute about law actually is all about the rationality of human action. The ambitions of the enthusiasts elated over the idea of the self-sufficiency of reason continue to raise the same doubts. Michael Oakeshott thinks that proponents of ‘rationalism in politics’ should be treated with extreme caution. ‘At bottom he stands (he always stands) for independence of mind on all occasions, for thought free from obligation to any authority save the authority of “reason”. His circumstances in the modern world have made him contentious: he is the enemy of authority, of prejudice, of the merely traditional, customary or habitual.’<sup>603</sup> When guided by his rash belligerency, the adherent of the idea of rationalism in politics causes a wide spectrum of dangers. He judges and questions everything. He is convinced that ‘reason’ has the undisputed ‘power of his reason (where properly applied) to determine the worth of a thing, the truth of an opinion or the propriety of an action.’<sup>604</sup> Whereas everything is extremely complex and problematic.

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600 Ibid.,152.

601 Ibid.,153.

602 Ibid.

603 M. Oakeshott, ‘Rationalism in Politics’ in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essay* (Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 1991), 5-6.

604 Ibid., 6.

Ever since the eighteenth century we have had presented to us a variety of forms of behaviour or projects of activity, each recommended on account of its “rationality”.[...] One famous protagonist of rational dress asserted that a shirt-collar which did not leave space for the insertion of a loaf of bread was irrationally restrictive of the flow of air to the body [...]. But the expression “rational dress” was applied, in particular, in Victorian times, to an extraordinary garment affected by girls on bicycles.<sup>605</sup>

It, thus, follows that ‘rationality’ is a dubious criterion since not all postulates of reason make sense. According to Oakeshott, rationality is, in fact, a certain ‘idiom of activity’.<sup>606</sup> Its meaning should not be made absolute, in particular, it should not be suggested that ‘the “rationality” of conduct does not lie in something that has taken place in advance of the conduct’.<sup>607</sup> All a priori formulas of rationality are of no use. We attribute considerable weight to them driven by the false conviction that people know everything about the goals and effects of their own actions even prior to undertaking those. This is how the concept of rationality and rational law, glorified in the modern era, is born. We assume that all activity ‘would be bent towards the performance of actions in pursuit of preconceived and formulated needs, actions determined wholly by the needs sought and from which fortuitous and unwanted consequences had, so far as possible, been excluded.’<sup>608</sup> This is how we make use of reason; in the belief that our actions become ‘rational’. This predominant conception of rationality is, as Oakeshott thinks, pathetic and dangerous. ‘If this is “rational” behavior, then it is not merely undesirable; it is in fact impossible. Men do not behave in this way, because they cannot.’<sup>609</sup> So, what is the value of ‘rational’ laws? Is not the concept of rational legislation merely a source of illusion?

The prospect of putting things in order is quite appealing. Thanks to ‘reasonable’ laws the world would become reasonable, too. For those who a priori oppose ‘rationality’, devised laws are only an overwhelming burden. Rational legislation is according to them a degeneration. Denouncing the principles of ‘constructivist rationalism’, Friedrich von Hayek<sup>610</sup> primarily turned against the most blatant abuses of ‘reason’: against the absurdities of collectivism and socialism. The ‘hubris of reason’ he speaks of does not pertain only to the most extreme examples. In his work *The Fatal Conceit: the Errors of*

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605 ‘Rational Conduct’ in *Rationalism in Politics and other Essays*, 100-01.

606 *Ibid.*, 121.

607 *Ibid.*

608 *Ibid.*, 108.

609 *Ibid.*

610 F. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, vol. 1, *Rules and Order* (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1973).

*Socialism* he does state that ‘This book, like some of my earlier studies, is directed against the traditional norms of reason that guide socialism’.<sup>611</sup> On the other hand, however, referring to David Hume’s strong argumentation that ‘the rules of morality are not the conclusions of our reason’, he gives this issue much wider overtones. Hume’s criticism of metaphysics and conceptions of rational acting related to it provide the means to see things more broadly, the socialists were not alone in committing sins. Taking Hume’s objections into account one wonders whether there is any sense at all in projecting rules of activity.

So what is the value of law which ‘reason’ juxtaposes with reality, imposing its own priorities? Looking at things through the eyes of Hume and Hayek one would have to question all practices which could violate the rules of spontaneity, all ‘structures’ which collide with wisdom based on experience. To a certain degree, the whole of modernity is under suspicion. It is a period which, succumbing to the impetus of bureaucratization, imposes the absolute power of the system excluding all tests of rationality which would not fit within the framework of that system. Modernity, and there is no doubt about this, has become the domain of ‘instrumental reason’, entitling us to treat the message of Hayek’s criticism more broadly. We encounter ‘constructivist rationalism’ in all those places where systems are created, where ‘reason’ enforces its requirements, appealing to abstract, a priori criteria of validity. We are able to ask a very fundamental question, what is the sense of creating law? Is not the intention itself abuse in the making: proof of the ‘conceit of reason’ that Hayek speaks of?

As early as the eighteenth century, Hayek recalls, ‘Jeremy Bentham had developed the most consistent foundations of what we now call legal and moral positivism: that is, the constructivist interpretation of systems of law and morals according to which their validity and meaning are supposed to depend wholly on the will and intention of their designers.’<sup>612</sup>

This conception would become a peculiar profession of faith of the rationalists; it would pave the way for the emergence of manufacturing plants of law – ‘legislative bodies’ of which democracy is so proud. The shape of the principles, let us repeat, is to depend solely on the ‘will and intentions of the makers’. This is the basis upon which the legislative mania would flourish. The untamed vitality of legislative bodies would become one of the typical traits of the age of rationalism. It would result in the continuous enthusiastic overproduction of law, dazing with its aroma. Modern constructivism has

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611 F. Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989), 8.

612 *Ibid.*, 52.

become a power that has yet to be balanced. The activity of lawmakers takes the form of alarming determination; they try to force everything into the framework of the system, moving unawares in the direction of the utopia of definitive regulation. In contrast to this, Hayek warns that the very idea of the system is highly suspicious, itself being, in his view, the clearest proof of blindness: ‘Mind is not a guide but a product of cultural evolution, and is based more on imitation than on insight or reason.’<sup>613</sup>

Indeed, we were always dealing with repetition, with the reproduction of certain schemes which today are imposed by bureaucratized systems concentrating the power of instrumental reason. Those have also sealed the fate of law, awarding the absolute priority to the formal criteria of legalization. The manufacturers of law – legislative bodies – are nothing but gigantic copying machines, or mechanisms for cultural reproduction. They duplicate intentions and convictions developed through practice which allows them to see the constant devising and ‘rewriting’ of law as a very important and useful activity. Lawmaking has become an imperative, a cultural model which enforces its power with ruthless resolve, transforming legislation into an obsession. This exactly is the result of ‘cultural evolution’ as Hayek would likely have said. Finally, everything has become very simple: a law is a principle sanctioned within the system; every rule which meets formal requirements can become a legal norm. This, precisely, is the sense of a bureaucratized legislative machine.

The modern state, Max Weber emphasized, is ‘rational’, and so, accordingly, all practices related to the exercise of power must meet the criteria of rationality. Rational validation, Weber explains, is based on ‘a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands’.<sup>614</sup> Everything is determined by procedure; that is the nature of ‘legal authority’. One of its important aspects is ‘rational and systematic legislation’.<sup>615</sup> Under the system of procedural rationality law bears ‘formal qualities’, as Weber defines them. A conviction is gaining ground that ‘legal orders are no more than “technical tools”’.<sup>616</sup> Doing justice to the genesis of the law as we have it, Weber explains in *The Economy and Society*, that the rational law of a modern western democracy in terms of its form is derived from Roman law, a product of the Roman city-state, which, as he says, has never seen the democracy typical of the Greek *polis*.

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613 Ibid., 21.

614 *Economy and Society*, 215.

615 Ibid., vol.2, 880.

616 Ibid., 888.

The content of law in the system of legal rule is not a factor which could play a self-contained and mobilizing role. The acceptance of legal norms does not depend on the assessments and convictions which could rival the principle of validation through procedure. Ideas about some other criteria of validity are not that significant. The ‘legitimacy’ of law is directly linked to the correctness of procedures. The content of law becomes the consequence of its form. Although Weber notes that the ‘development of the formal qualities of the law certainly shows some peculiarly antinomial traits’ but in so saying he means the issues involved with the application of law, primarily with the judiciary.<sup>617</sup> It is in this area that we can speak of a certain syncretism of form, excluding a purely ‘technical’ understanding of law which, as Weber says, blunts the ‘formal legal rationalism’.<sup>618</sup> In no way, however, does it pertain to enacting clauses for, in this case, we are dealing with total certainty, with the merciless power of procedures.

In the system of legal rule, unfettered positivism can become rampant. ‘Ultimately, formal rationalism consists in the autonomisation of the law. There is, in particular, a divergence between law and morality: no extra-legal norms intervene in the sphere of law. The law becomes “externalized”, becoming “pure form” while “morality” becomes “internalized” to become “pure content”’.<sup>619</sup> In this situation, as Habermas puts it, law could have become one of the ‘colonizing’ powers.

Severing the ties between law and morality can make the credibility of the former rather dubious. In a bureaucratized world it is easy to explain the birth of law – it is much more difficult to ascertain what constitutes its ‘rule’. Law continues to be ‘drawn into anti-formal tendencies’ in Weber’s words. It is under the pressure of various claims and objections. The ‘demand for substantive justice’ must be confronted with the idea of formal validation in the sphere of practice.<sup>620</sup>

We are thus dealing with a paradox. Admittedly, we have the merciless power of form, which is, at the same time, highly ineffective. In a system of ‘formal rationality’ we can easily ‘manufacture’ laws – but it is mighty difficult to give them an authentic meaning. Legislative machines make a lot of noise since the impetus of instrumental reason is not diminishing. In reality though, the idea of law itself is beginning to ‘drift’. The decisive role of procedure has the effect of making the content of law recede into the background. It is vital to

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617 Ibid., 894.

618 Ibid., 892.

619 Z. Krasnodębski, *M. Weber* (Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa, 1999), 83.

620 Ibid., 894.



put the voting machine into motion. Everything, therefore, depends on the political situation, on wavering preferences and changing interests. 'Law' becomes an arena for staging tournaments. Legislation has hardly anything to do with the appeal to fundamental arguments (apart from the appropriate procedure). Cicero's statement describing law as 'the highest reason implanted in nature' sounds like a voice from another world. What has really become important are opportunistic arguments. The content of law can be fluid as all decisions depend exclusively on party alliances and compromises, in fact, law has become a symbol of change as is borne out by the impressive productivity statistics quoted by 'legislative bodies'.

Hence, everything has been turned on its head. After all, the idea of law developed in opposition to the concept of coincidence and arbitrariness, and the conception of law as continuous change is a *contradiction in adiecto*. Laws (*nomoi*), by their very nature, were to be unchangeable. This is the direction that the concept of natural law tended to.

Nevertheless, the need to natural right is as evident today as it has been for centuries and even millennia. To reject natural right is tantamount to saying that all right is positive right [...]. Now it is obviously meaningful, and sometimes even necessary, to speak of 'unjust' laws or 'unjust' decisions. In passing such judgments we imply that there is a standard of right and wrong independent of positive right and higher than positive right.<sup>621</sup>

The idea of justice complicates somewhat the idyllic world of the positivists. Should law refer to fundamental values? Can the idea of law defy the modifications which have completely altered its sense? Surely 'rationalistic constructivism' and positivism can justify even the most shocking extravagance. In democratic systems change is beginning to be treated as a form of public entertainment. Politics deprived of strongly emphasized changes is no longer spectacular and ceases to matter. The announcement of changes has a mobilizing effect; it allows for soliciting people's support.<sup>622</sup>

This, of course, to the highest degree concerns changes in the legal system. At the same time, the idea of change makes it possible to maintain important pretences, for it suggests lawmakers take pains to keep the ties between *ius* and *iustum*. It strengthens the façade of reliability, moving the 'reforming' of law into the foreground. Small wonder that such missionary positivism can count on winning favour and support. Announcing changes in the law has become a salient form of political narration (one that ensures acclaim) and offers an invitation to participate in the show, the subject of which is justice, understood

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621 L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1965), 2.

622 Cf., R. Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (Macmillan, London, 1984).

in line with the interests of political parties and the rules of effective recruitment. Hence, in the end, everything becomes fluid.

Can the idea of law be separated from the concept of necessity; can laws be changeable by nature? Is it not perverse positivism that is responsible for the *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea of law, relegating it to areas of ‘contingency’? Let us, then, again repeat the fundamental question: what does the widely touted ‘rule of law’ have in common with the ‘rule of legislators’? As John Rawls argued in his fundamental reform project, law today lacks any profound content whatsoever as it has been torn away from the concept of justice. The legislative machine has a very modest powerbase. As for justification, we can mainly rely on utilitarianism and intuitionism.<sup>623</sup> Both positions lack the unquestionable strength of persuasion and precision, which renders them incapable of supporting any credible conception of justice. Speaking of justice, Rawls reminds us that it ‘is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought.’<sup>624</sup> Nevertheless, according to the intuitionists ‘the complexity of the moral facts requires a number of distinct principles there is no single standard that accounts for them or assigns them their weight.’ Intuitionist theories ‘include no explicit method, no priority rules, for weighing these principles against one another’.<sup>625</sup> Can this serve as the basis for grounding a conception of law...? Utilitarianism offers the hugely controversial criterion of ‘usefulness’ as well as faith in the effectiveness of self-regulatory practices. Indeed, there are no strong and credible justifications of the ideas of law; ideas corresponding to the message of the Enlightenment, generated under the auspices of reason, and excluding arbitrariness as well as all forms of validation exempted from rational criticism.

The idea of law is adrift, wandering somewhere between ‘intuitionism’ and ‘constructivism’. At first glance, these two conflicting tendencies seem irreconcilable by any means; yet, surprisingly they could be mutually conducive. Constructivism yields to the charms of intuitionism. Currently ‘constructs’ are not obliged to form a coherent whole since there is no need for the idea of a system (as was the case with the socialists). Constructing becomes an experiment which allows for the lightheartedness instilled by pragmatism. The latest form of positivism sanctions the total fluidity of normative standards. Anything can become the material to be processed by the legislative machine so as to acquire the form of ‘law’. Contrary to intention, the idea of formal validation is responsible for making legislative practices similar to solutions

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623 J. Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999).

624 *Ibid.*, 3.

625 *Ibid.*, 30.

which Richard Rorty recommends when he presents the radical project of 'liberal utopia'. Rorty calls for the repudiation of all formulas of validation furnished with a strong basis and shaped by religion or metaphysics. Appealing to the rejection of the superstitions and religion-related anachronisms of the Enlightenment he assures us that the question of credibility, hence, recognition can be solved by 'a general turn against theory and toward narrative.'<sup>626</sup> Ultimately, then, what is important, what is meaningful and worthy of recognition should be decided solely by means of a 'free and open encounter'. That which expresses 'whatever view wins in a free and open encounter' becomes *de rigueur*.<sup>627</sup>

Is not this the way the manufacturers of law behave in their manufacturing plants, where they incessantly engage in 'verbal skirmishes' designed to secure for them a majority in the dispute and recognition in the eyes of their own 'electorate'? At the same time making sure that the narrative concerning law is conducive to 'recruiting' votes. If the recruiting falters then the story of 'law' needs to be changed, sometimes even the law itself. In this lies the reason for the statistics which fill people with admiration in view of the inexhaustible energy of 'legislative bodies'. This is no small matter. Speaking about 'our legislative conception of law', Sartori perceptively states that 'the rule of legislators is resulting in a real mania for law-making, a fearful inflation of laws.'<sup>628</sup> That which we traditionally designate as law can easily transform itself into an instrument of despotic pressure. 'Law' deprived of all normative points of reference becomes a façade with the power of concealing intentions to annihilate the idea of the 'rule of law', hence, in essence, the conception of freedom. As Sartori points out, 'the transition from a rule of law to a rule by laws' represents 'albeit in disguise, a rule by men.'<sup>629</sup> Here, we have reached a territory where we have to be on our guard.

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626 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, xvi.

627 *Ibid.*, 67.

628 Sartori, *op.cit.*, 324.

629 *Ibid.*, 326.

## Chapter Five

### Power, Knowledge and Magic

In a 'disenchanted' world authority ceases to be sacred and does not call upon any higher, extraterrestrial powers. Rationalism encourages us to abandon the idea of God, so desires shaped by faith cease to be important. Is that really so? Rationalism does not, after all, preclude one from searching for final certainty but its source is supposed to be a self-sufficient mind whose glorification will become a fresh salute towards things final. The Enlightenment is not frightened of pathos and introduces new truths with reverence so they resemble the dogmas of a new faith. Will the authority that aspires to these heights really cease to be sacred? What, in fact, is the purpose of secularisation?

Traditionally understood attributes of holiness are replaced by the 'sanctity' of mind which uncovers the final truths and thus we are faced with the rhetoric of new revelations. The Great Declarations of the Age of Enlightenment will make the heads of the people bow again before unshakeable truths. The language of the epoch does not exclude characteristic reminiscences either, though their importance should not be overestimated. It is permissible to speak about 'the Creator' not forgetting, however, that, as Grotius said, 'even God cannot make two times two not make four'. Thus, reason is entirely self-sufficient.

The Age of Reason anointed 'the people' as the new ruler that, in the world of politics, has become the Highest Being, a sovereign. The newly anointed is supposed to rule wisely and justly, guided by the light of truth, putting things back on the right course. 'History had distorted Nature', and as we read in the Declaration's preamble (the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen), 'natural law had been ignored, forgotten and treated with contempt. History had caused conflict of man against man, and man against himself, and what was necessary to release humanity from this pitiful state was an act of political Will, for an effort to return to Nature.'<sup>630</sup>

So the aim is praiseworthy: new truths are to become a new blessing, a solid basis for renewal. 'The social order is a sacred right', writes Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'which serves as a basis for all other rights.'<sup>631</sup> Rousseau speaks also about the 'sacredness' of the civil contract whereby authority, toppled from heavenly heights but speaking with wisdom, does not, finally, relinquish all

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630 Baszkiewicz, *New Man, New Nation, New World*, 37.

631 J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Wordsworth Editions Ltd, Kent, 1998), 5.

attributes of sanctity and is to be unyielding and unmistakable. Reason would raise its own altars; the people would be led by a host of new apostles.

'The general will', let us recall Rousseau's famous statement, 'is always right and always tends to the public advantage; but it does not follow that the resolutions of the people have always the same rectitude. Men always desire their own good, but do not always discern it'.<sup>632</sup> Reason is self-sufficient but its arguments should be appropriately founded. Revolution spreads its wings through the power of rhetoric. The people have to be mobilised, encouraged, and kept in the belief of its mission so somebody has to speak on its behalf; somebody has to give an appropriate meaning to truth, just as it was once in Athens when *demagogues*, the helpers of the people and *sophists*, those who know, took front stage.

The revolution which would create the foundation for democracy in the eighteenth century by proclaiming *human rights* has also got its masters of ceremony who lead the people by exploiting the power of the new rhetoric, proclaiming new science. Democracy flourishes thanks to linguistic artfulness and assigns the main role to the advocates of new revelations who speak on behalf of the people.

'The representative' of the people is, therefore, guided by the light of truth and becomes a trustee of sacredness, a mandatory of a higher power, a servant of the truth, of the will of the people and of nature. He is the priest and the apostle of the new revelation which the official and the solemn message of the Enlightenment would like us to believe. We must, however, descend from the clouds and come down to earth.

Let us recall that according to Plato the people is 'an animal big and strong', angry, selfish and spoilt; for whom persuasion is not always sufficient and for whom the last word does not always belong to wisdom. A sophist should charm the crowd and so, in reaching the heights of his art, he also has to become a seducer. We know, after all, that it is very difficult to balance on the pomposity of 'truth'. The greatest mission of the mind gets stuck in arguments and quarrels originating in divided opinions which no abstractions can bind together. It is charisma, as Weber would explain, that would finally become the most successful form of harmonization.

In his picture of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke, with unmasking accuracy and great ridicule, depicted the split which enables us to perceive a political leader of 'the people' as a sophist and a shaman at the same time. The revolutionary mentors, he reminds us, decided to disenchant the world with the help of their syllogisms whereby they constantly speak of the 'rights of men'

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632 Ibid., 29.

while abolishing the existing canons. They pontificate and persuade but their efforts are not very effective and the revolution brings only chaos. As Burke says ‘a political preacher’ is really not interested in facts and despises experience but has his ‘rights of men’. Great mentors are only interested in their own arguments, ‘they submit to the despotism of fancy’<sup>633</sup> but reality resists. Schemas and formulas cannot become the source of real power and will, therefore, have to be translated into magical spells. According to Burke, revolutionary sophistry introduces magic and, while rejecting reality, it directs defiant wisdom towards magic.

This is inevitable and, as it were, natural, since reason is not at all self-sufficient. ‘We are afraid’, writes Burke, ‘to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock and reason’<sup>634</sup> but this is exactly what the ‘sophists’, as Burke frequently calls the supporters of the revolution and of ‘the rights of men’, were demanding. The author of *The Reflections* worries that faith rejected by reason was not to be replaced by ‘some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition’<sup>635</sup> as we are all ‘well aware that the mind will not endure a void.’ The mind of a sophist who is defeated when confronted with reality has to turn to spells and, thus, the sophist becomes a shaman. He strives for delusion to triumph which, Burke thinks, is the real meaning of the rhetoric of the miraculous change that calls upon ‘the rights of men’. ‘We are taught to look with horror on those children of their country, who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces, and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds, and wild incantations, they may regenerate the paternal constitution, and renovate their father’s life.’<sup>636</sup>

The pompous speech of speculating mentors reminds us, therefore, of ‘the magicians’ kettle’. ‘Sophists’ feed the people with ‘aphrodisiacs’ and because of the ‘corruption of medicine of the state into poison’ minds can happily exist in illusion.<sup>637</sup>

Burke’s doubts bring a very significant issue to the fore: rhetoric based on rules of rational self-definition helps create a facade. Deep down, however, everything looks different and, finally, the art of persuasion has very little in common with the knowledge that respects the authority of reason. This art draws its strength from other sources and uses mechanisms that have nothing to do with critical judgement or sensible explanation. Rhetoric becomes a practice of

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633 E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Penguin Classics, London, 2004), 271.

634 *Ibid.*, 183.

635 *Ibid.*, 188.

636 *Ibid.*, 194.

637 *Ibid.*, 126.

wooning since, in reality, the aim is to gain power over the minds of the people by inciting them to euphoric states with the help of spells that act as an 'opiate'. Practices associated with the idea of rational self-definition are not rational at all and knowledge, which does not serve to underpin the influence of reason, carries political authority. Group participation has more in common with magical trance than with the illumination that philosophers condemning superstition had in mind. 'Sophists' do not care about philosophical teaching as they are only interested in effective action, so spells and emphasis play a much more important role than sober argumentation. The authority of the sophists is, in reality, 'spellbound' and it gains in importance thanks to the hypnotic power of words which they introduce to the wonderland.

The relationship between authority and magic is primeval since magical knowledge has always been the source (one could say a natural one) of authority where the skills of the shaman make others ready to obey him. The figure of the shaman, the king-magician whom James Frazer writes about in *The Golden Bough*, is a model, an archetype whose silhouette in the old society is clearly visible while his role is literal, though it later changes. Everything begins to become complicated as systems of knowledge expand and the literality of 'spells' is questioned. At the same time, reason proclaims war on superstition and philosophy 'disenchants' the world. There is, therefore, no chance of repetition, of literally understood continuation. The shaman cannot wear a traditional costume and the king-magician does not sit on the throne. We know, however, that he does not disappear. Spells sound also very convincing in the mouth of a sophist who speaks in the name of a sovereign people. Thus, analogy begins to matter so there is no possibility of any direct connection.

Words enable the web of authority to be spun. Is there a clear boundary separating magic from discourse usurping the attributes of rationality? To what extent has it been possible to disenchant the language of politics? Why is it still necessary to have faith that is symbolized in democratic political systems by Weber's idea of *charisma*?

Let us look at everything through a magnifying glass and begin from examples which are certain. 'The foregoing evidence may satisfy us', writes Frazer, referring to the extensively used ethnographic material, 'that in many lands and many races magic has claimed to control the great forces of nature for the good of man. If that has been so, the practitioners of the art must necessarily be personages of importance and influence in any society which puts faith in their extravagant pretensions'.<sup>638</sup> The problem lies, of course, in the fact that we

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638 J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough, a History of Myth and Religion* (Chancellor Press, London, 1994), 83.

can judge claims to be 'extravagant' only when we observe from outside. As long as we believe and as long as a certain type of knowledge favours this belief, everything seems to be natural. A shaman, a magician, acts always within the limits of a certain culture which defines the criteria of credibility and which gives suitable status to magical knowledge. As long as we are stuck within the boundaries of an 'enchanted' world, we don't realise that it is enchanted.

Thus, we are faced with an important question: is it not too rash and hasty to juxtapose magic and rationalism? It is difficult, after all, to ignore the opinions of Burke and Weber. Has rationalism really expelled belief in miracles from the world of politics and thus excluded any influence of magical suggestion? Is 'putting a spell' on reality not, perhaps, the most significant characteristic of the wooing language of power? Magic, let us remember, is a certain system of knowledge and practices which has a clearly defined epistemological basis. These cannot, of course, match the criteria of credibility which reason imposes in the disenchanted world. Neither are they an example of a naive and carefree arbitrariness since magical suggestion has simply its own, separate logic. It can surface within various cultures and in different spheres of life and, because it is despised by reason, it lives its own life. Only the evolutionistic paradigms, which nowadays nobody pays too much attention to, allow us merrily to ignore it.

Frazer, being ill-disposed towards magic, sees in it 'a false science and abortive art', but admits that it has created its own 'basis of thought'.<sup>639</sup> Magic practices are always an expression of a certain way of understanding reality. Is it an adequate way, though? According to those who look from outside, definitely not, but any type of knowledge can be criticised. Moreover, in modern culture, the adequacy of a view of the world has long ceased to be considered an unquestionable attribute of truth. We must remember the great influence of pragmatism whose protagonists think that truthfulness should be equated with effectiveness. True, says William James, are ideas on which 'we can move forward' and pragmatism, as James assured us, is open to any type of experience: 'she has in fact no prejudice, no obstructive dogmas, no rigid canons of what shall count as proof'.<sup>640</sup> Can the world of politics that delights in pragmatism renounce magic? Are there any barriers strong enough to hold back the sophists who propagate their 'aphrodisiacs'?

How much influence magic has depends, obviously, on how effective it is, which can be proven by how strong the foundations of concrete beliefs are. Goals of magical practices have nothing in common with delusions because 'amongst the objects of public utility which magic may be employed to secure',

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639 Ibid., 11.

640 W. James, *Pragmatism* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1975), 43-44.



says Frazer, ‘the most essential is an adequate supply of food’.<sup>641</sup> It is necessary to believe that those in authority are able to achieve that goal always and everywhere. For example, ‘in Africa the king has often been developed out of the public magician and especially out of the rain maker’.<sup>642</sup> ‘Rainmaking’ can be performed in many ways as the language of enchantment is infinitely rich, so let us, therefore, treat this case as a general metaphor for a certain type of social experience. It typifies the most significant goal of any government’s action: the taming of elements and the assurance of blessings. In a disenchanted world everything is transposed into vocal parts and it is the collective that acts. Its power is symbolised by the concept of sovereign authority working on behalf of the people. It is its representatives that have to worry about ‘rain’ while in the past everything was taken care of by an omnipotent king-magician. ‘On the Grain Coast’, writes Frazer, ‘the high priest or fetish king, who bears the title of Bodio, is responsible for the health of the community, the fertility of the earth and abundance of fish in the sea and rivers; and if the country suffers in any of these respects the Bodio is deposed from his office.’<sup>643</sup> Thus, the ruler-magician is never unpunished and his ‘power’ is constantly tested. It is difficult to treat magic as a domain of fiction.

In his *General Theory of Magic* Marcel Mauss treats magic as a certain type of social practice and states that it ‘is a social phenomenon’.<sup>644</sup> He then adds that it:

has a taste for the concrete. Religion, on the other hand, tends to be abstract. Magic works in the same way as do our techniques, craft, medicine, chemistry, industry, etc. Magic is essentially the art of doing things, and magicians have always taken advantage of this know-how, their dexterity, their manual skill. Magic is the domain of pure production, *ex nihilo*. With words and gestures it does what techniques achieve by labour.<sup>645</sup>

A shaman’s ‘labour’ is, therefore, subordinate to measures of practical effectiveness and Mauss stresses very strongly that magic should not be associated with some sort of obscure variant of mysticism. The space in which magical practices emerge is created by society because ‘throughout its existence’, writes Mauss, ‘magic has never forgotten its social origins. Each of its elements, agents, rites and representations not only perpetuate the memory of this original collective state, but even help in their reproduction in an attenuated form.’<sup>646</sup> These ‘collective states’ are experiences that allow people to sample

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641 Ibid., 61.

642 Ibid., 86.

643 Ibid., 86.

644 M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic* (Routledge, London, 2001), 174.

645 Ibid., 175.

646 Ibid., 171.

the beneficial effects of 'the force'. Magic relies on the skill to make them permanent and to sustain the belief in the effectiveness of 'the force' even when the chain of miraculous events is broken and the expected effect does not occur. 'Every day', Mauss writes, 'society ordains new magicians, experiences rites and listens to fresh tales, which are always the same. In spite of the fact that there are constant interruptions, society's creation of magic is no less continuous.'<sup>647</sup> Magic is associated with a perpetual waiting for events that will fulfil the hopes and bring desirable effects. This waiting for a miraculous change, for a sudden turn of events, allows the shaman to put a spell on the world. 'These are attitudes', explains Mauss, 'which turn the abnormal into *mana*, that is, magic or things produced from magic. Moreover, everything magical is effective because the expectations engender and pursue hallucinatory reality'.<sup>648</sup> The reasons why magic is practised have, however, nothing in common with hallucinations as magical practices are supposed to enable people to conquer real difficulties. 'People's habits are continuously disturbed by things which trouble the calm ordering of life: drought, wealth, illness, death, war, meteors, stones with special shapes, abnormal individuals. At each shock, at each perception of the unusual, society hesitates, searches, waits.'<sup>649</sup> This is the social context of magic.

Magic itself, let us use Mauss's words again, is 'agents, rites and representations'. Thus we are dealing here with a certain system of knowledge, with an example of concrete skills and, finally, with beliefs that allow us to speak of the social effectiveness of magical practices. Everything is solid and is not at all 'irrational' in the sense that would suggest total separation from the world of reason. The shaman and his audience do not immerse themselves in some mysterious and obscure madness. Magic is subjected to severe rigours of form where rituals are important and, of course, a certain discipline of reasoning is imposed. This reasoning undoubtedly refers to a view of the world that is a definite enclosed whole and might be completely incomprehensible to those who have not been initiated in it since, for those surrounded by magical practices, everything might look different. Magic means crossing the borders of common experience and entering the enchanted world. 'Magic, by definition, is believed'<sup>650</sup>, says Mauss.

The most important aspect of magical practices is their seeming ability to predict events which makes the world 'enchanted' and, thus, creates separate

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647 Ibid.

648 Ibid.

649 Ibid.

650 Ibid., 113.

formulas of causality which, in turn, give meaning to the awaited miraculous change. The whole mechanism of enchantment is explained by the concept of ‘magical force’. According to Mauss:

the idea of magical force is, moreover, from this point of view, quite comparable to our notion of mechanical force. In the same way as we call force the cause of apparent movements so magical force is properly the cause of magical effects: illness and death, happiness and health, etc. This idea also included the notion of a milieu, where the powers in question exist. In this mysterious milieu, things no longer happen in the way they do in our world of the senses. Desires and images can be immediately realized. It is the spiritual world and the world of the spirits at the same time.<sup>651</sup>

This is the crux of the matter or the *mana*, to put it succinctly.

Magic, therefore, means glorification of mysterious powers and the picture of the world it creates radically simplifies any relation between cause and effect. This is clear when we look closer at the concept of *mana* that originates in the Melanesian language. Mauss points out, however, that ‘a similar notion exists in certain number of societies’.<sup>652</sup> ‘*Mana* is not simply a force or a being but it is also an action, a quality and a state. In other terms the word is a noun, an adjective and a verb. One says of an object that it is mana, in order to refer to this quality; [...]. People say that a being, a spirit, a man, a stone or a rite has *mana*, “the *mana* to do such and such a thing”’.<sup>653</sup> There is no need, therefore, for any scrupulous reasoning, or for any analyses of complicated relations as one word goes to the heart of the matter and directs us to the essence of the notion explaining everything. Magic *condenses* the notions of reality and gets rid of complicated relations of cause and effect, thus simplifying the image of the world. Everything is clear, obvious and completely comprehensible as one word *mana* is sufficient, plus, of course, the act of faith which identifies miraculous events!

This specific semantics of magical practices that signals preferential treatment for the most general meanings, while linking comprehension with the act of faith, enables us to ponder broadly captured analogies. The essence of things lies in the language since one can enchant not only with the help of the word *mana*. We are certainly susceptible to becoming enchanted where precision and fastidiousness are replaced with generalities and where words begin to play the role of an aphrodisiac. The language of power is always burdened with pathos and leans on strong and solemn words. It is usually the language of revelation that announces or predicts. It is meant to mobilise and to

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651 Ibid., 132.

652 Ibid., 133.

653 Ibid.

encourage, as well as to awake belief and hope. It is supposed to rise above the muddled world by sketching a clear vision of order and announcing laudable deeds. This language always simplifies by pushing complicated matters into chains of code words and slogans, thus *propagating* a certain vision of the world. It naturally, so to say, touches on the symbolism of *mana*, though the word itself is only an example and has broad affinities. In the Ojibway language we find the concept of *manitou*. 'The *manitou*', writes Mauss, 'refers, in fact, not to a spirit, but to a whole species of spirits, forces and qualities [...], a *manitou* is an individual who performs extraordinary feats. A shaman is a *manitou*. Plants have *manitous*. A sorcerer who uses the tooth of a rattlesnake will say that it is a *manitou*'.<sup>654</sup>

How distant is the world of magic depicted by ethnologists from the world of enthusiasts whose dancing around the 'magician's kettle' had irritated Edmund Burke so much? To what extent the language of politics associated with the practices of 'rational self-definition' is able to resemble the language of magical practices? How often do we generalise without taking account of the relationship between cause and effect? How often do we hold on to beliefs that are justified only by faith in the acts of hidden and charitable powers? We do, after all, support pompous slogans and we delight in the content of those that promise 'amendments', 'renewal' and 'reconstruction'. Political propaganda places us often in the world of metamorphosis, reincarnation and miraculous change. We believe that magical 'transfers' are possible and that they will land us in a different, corruption-free world without lies or hypocrisy and in the care of wise men, wishing to serve us with humility. Power-boasting idols will provide us with hope for a luminous future and ensure political regeneration.

So, we enter the world of magic where everything seems to be easy, where there are no complicated rules of causality. Politicians eagerly assist us in this task using the wooing language of promises and arousing exaltation. They threaten us with the 'tooth of a rattlesnake', as terror, in any system, is one of the most significant features of the spectacle of power regardless of its style.

Magic, therefore, is not a distant and forever abandoned archipelago and its influence, although perhaps masked, has not lost in importance. Mauss has already drawn our attention to the fact that modernity has not uprooted magic-related practices.

Magical beliefs', he remarks, 'which are active in certain corners of our society and which were quite general a century ago, are the most alive, the most real indications of a state of social unrest and social consciousness in which there floats a whole

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654 Ibid., 141.

crowd of vague ideas, hopes and vain fears, giving form to the remnants of the former category of *mana*. In society there is an inexhaustible source of diffuse magic which the magician uses to his own advantage.<sup>655</sup>

In summarising his argument let us draw attention to the fact that where ‘vague hopes and ideas’ run rampant, there a ‘magician’ can always appear. Years later, commenting on the opinions of the author of *A General Theory of Magic*, Claude Levi-Strauss wrote:

we know today that conceptions of the *mana* type are so frequent and so widespread that it is appropriate to wonder whether we are not dealing with a universal and permanent form of thought, which, far from characterising certain civilisations, or archaic, or semi-archaic so-called “stages” in the evolution of the human mind, might be a function of a certain way that the mind situates itself in the presence of things, which must therefore make an appearance wherever that mental situation is given.<sup>656</sup>

This is a generalised version of *mana*.

Today, many share Levi-Strauss’s opinion that the role of magical inspiration has not diminished in modern culture. In fact, in his book *Il Ritorno della Magia*, Massimo Introvigne claims that the reverse is the case and speaks of the revival of magic and the explosion of new religious practices, questioning the positivist view of history and the so-called ‘law of the three stages’ (the passage of human thought from being theological, then metaphysical and finally positivist).

A viewpoint that is not clouded by positivist anachronisms notices without any difficulty the various forms of ‘diffused magic’ which Mauss thought about. Thus, magic appears in literal forms openly rebelling against the priorities of the ‘disenchanted’ world. Interest in magical practices has become a prominent feature of the style of the New Age. It propagates itself in different variations and is accompanied by the raising influence of occultism and attention to ‘a different’ esoteric side of life. This undoubtedly has a significant impact on the general atmosphere of the epoch, creating a climate of tolerance and acceptance while increasing the carrying force of magical suggestion. It is most intriguing that magic exists also in a conspiratorial form, hiding behind the screen of the staffage of an epoch whereby we are faced with a much more complicated situation. The ‘disenchantment’ changes into a façade where seemingly rational acts become cryptic magical practices that have no names of their own. They are, therefore, not able to create a separate, homogenous view of the world and

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655 Ibid., 170.

656 C. Levi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1987), 53.

are always stuck in a context. This hidden magic is, of course, 'diffused' and intermingles with acts that have a different character and belong to the fully 'disenchanted' world. It seems, though, that despite the camouflage and diffusion, magic can be effectively unmasked in the end. The world of magic can also be easily separated from the sphere of religious experience. 'Mircea Eliade', reminds Introvigne, 'is very persuasive when he differentiates between a religious experience of God that reveals himself and is listened to selflessly (hierophany), and a magical experience which consists in the experience of power (cratophany) and the manipulation of the sacred'.<sup>657</sup> This manipulative aspect of magic is very important, especially if we concentrate on the relationship between magical practices and political acts.

Another important issue is the fairytale climate of feasting and easy success, an atmosphere of a miraculous escapade that has become one of the most characteristic features of a 'consumer society' and is constantly fuelled by the enormous deluding machine of advertising. Georg Ritzer speaks explicitly of *magic* when identifying areas of consumer paradise coupled with the ever speedier retreat from the stern sobriety that is the norm in the disenchanted world.<sup>658</sup> He believes that this world becomes 'enchanted' again, a view he confirms by giving his major piece of work the title *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*. We are usually not aware that the euphoric practices of consumption play a significant role in this transformation. The world of consumption is enchanted and its borders are forever being changed. Advertising tries to put forward a powerful magical suggestion, tempting with pictures of a miraculous change, creating illusions of easily accessible bliss. In advertisements everything has the features of *mana* whereas the empirical and the rational causality is not important. The world of advertising entices with magical charm and fuels the belief in the possibility of a magical 'change'. While forcing the whole society to dream, it teaches how to get rid of objections and inhibitions which, together with the idea of cause and effect, were imposed by epistemological perfectionists. Only magical relationships count in this world of consumption and secret paths lead straight to paradise.

Of course, these clients of illusion must also play their part as citizens, appealing to the rules of 'rational self-definition' as is required by constitutional rules. It is easy to see, though, that rational forms become the basis of magical practices. There is no other way. Influenced and moulded by advertisements the hero of the stage is a *homo magus* whose imagination is shaped by magical

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657 M. Introvigne, *Il Ritorno della Magia* (Ancora, Milano, 1995).

658 G. Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption* (Pine Forge Press, London, 1999).

suggestions and who lives in the world of fairytales. He enters the 'political scene' with this kind of potential and the scene is, of course, well prepared to receive him. The statement that the world of politics is closely associated with the world of advertising is today considered to be an utter commonplace and is not a shocking discovery. This relationship is very clear and strong and largely helps shift politics towards the sphere of magic.

In characterising the climate of infatuation which the modern epoch not only has not ousted but has also actually successfully encouraged, we should draw attention to the influence of 'therapeutic culture'. The relationship between psychotherapy and magic has been obvious to many observers for some time and it was Levi-Strauss who drew our attention to it. 'Ruth Benedict', he reminded us, 'taught both contemporary ethnologists and psychologists that the phenomena which they endeavour to describe can be expressed in a language common to both, borrowed from psychopathology.'<sup>659</sup> The actions of shamans and therapists, therefore, refer to the same sphere and pluck the same string. They take place in the same climate of a magical fascination for a miraculous change. A therapist works in the sphere of *mana*, doing what others are incapable of and which they usually do not understand. His knowledge exceeds any conventionally understood relations of cause and effect while his skills allow us to think about extraordinary effects, resembling the art of a shaman who can effectively face up to evil powers. We are dealing here with similar types of experiences.

The victorious march of psychotherapeutic culture means, therefore, that wooing is increasingly more successful and is conducive to magic which is imperceptible and veiled. It is magic masked by stage productions that follow the fashion of an epoch (which might be slightly disorientating), magic which finally imposes its own, separate causality. This magic enflames the ecstatic desire for 'power', looks for new roads and new tools and, finally, discovers new territories. Just as Freud (the great magician) once did when discovering the truth in the world of dreams, who advocated expertise that took advantage of the power of *libido* (or perhaps *mana*...?).

Expectations associated with therapy are unclear, far-fetched and are based on real fear, doubts and despair. Therapy, just like a shamanic practice, predicts a miraculous change through unblocking energies, regeneration, transformation and beneficial ecstasy. The expert eye of the therapist is the 'power' that watches over everything. Levi-Strauss pondered the relationship between psychoanalysis and magic very seriously. When analysing shamanic practices in his *Structural Anthropology* he concluded that the shaman's actions are always

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659 Levi-Strauss, op. cit., 10.

built on ‘psycho-physiological’ and ‘psychosocial mythology.’<sup>660</sup> Thus they are not limited exclusively to a trance that suggests obsession. A shaman is a man of knowledge, somebody who explains the world.

The shaman provides the sick woman’, so we read in a description of a real case, ‘with a language, by means of which unexpressed, and otherwise inexpressible, psychic states can be immediately expressed. And it is the transition to this verbal expression – at the same time making it possible to undergo in an ordered and intelligible form a real experience that would otherwise be chaotic and inexpressible – which induces the release of the physiological process, that is, the reorganization in a favourable direction.’<sup>661</sup>

This is the diagnosis of a shaman and the beginning of regeneration. This method of ‘healing’ surely cannot shock us as it is something typical in all variants of political cures. Even political ‘healing’ refers always to some kind of ‘psychosocial mythology’ and looks for a language that restores energy.

Let us, therefore, leave psychotherapists and turn our attention to the people in authority. They are also healers whose speciality is *diagnosis*, too. Even they try to cure by looking for a language that would identify evil, ‘unlock physiological processes’ and heal the political body ravaged by inadequacy. What role does magical suggestion play in all of this? We now know that it is significant.

Let us concentrate our attention on the figure of a ‘magician’ practising in the world of ‘diffused magic’. What tools does he use? In what way are such instruments effective? Does he heal with words?

We should obviously start from a model example, from ethnological literalness. So we reach once again for Mauss’s text.

Nobody can become a magician at will’, we read, ‘there are qualities which distinguish a magician from the layman. [...] It is claimed that a magician can be recognised by certain physical peculiarities, with which he is branded and by which his calling may be discovered should he attempt to conceal it. It is thought, for example, that the pupils of a magician’s eye have swallowed up the iris, or that his visual images are produced back to front. He is said to lack shadow. In the Middle Ages people looked for the devil’s mark on the witch’s body. Doubtless many witches were hysterical cases.’<sup>662</sup>

This is a classical picture, so to say, but we don’t have to look for examples exclusively in the world of magical drums and plumes. The concept of *mana* can easily be associated with that of charisma. There is no abyss between the worlds of Mauss and Weber and it is often difficult to define the border. Charisma

660 C. Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (Penguin Books, New York, 1963), 197.

661 *Ibid.*, 198.

662 *General Principles of the Theory of Magic*, 33.



allows one to speak about exceptional abilities and possibilities, about ways of acting which evoke admiration and hope while inclining to obedience and acceptance of the authority of the 'distinguished'. This otherness does not always have to be magical or exotic since 'a magician' might be a character appearing without a costume or without the insignias of extraordinariness. Here is yet another of Mauss's characteristics: 'they are all lumped together as magicians, along with nervous and jumpy individuals or subnormal people in those backward areas where magic still has a hold. Violent gestures, a shrill voice, oratorical or poetic gifts are often taken to be attributes of magicians.'<sup>663</sup>

Thus, 'the belief in magic' is most important as it is the mainspring for the whole mechanism of wooing. A shaman does not have to show at each and every step his power. If we follow Mauss's description, sorcery should be treated mainly as *a profession*. Levi-Strauss stresses also that skills are more important than style: 'we must remember that the shaman does not completely lack empirical knowledge and experimental techniques which may in part explain his success. Furthermore, disorders of the type currently termed psychosomatic, which constitute a large part of the illnesses prevalent in societies with a low degree of security probably often yield to psychotherapy.'<sup>664</sup>

Ecstatic practices are undoubtedly the crowning glory of the art of magic. The shaman must have the ability for 'ascent'. 'He falls into a state of ecstasy and has visions which are not purely imaginary even when the magician initiates them himself'. Rituals are very often 'accompanied by trances, hysterical crises, even cataleptic fits.' In the end 'these experiences deeply impress the magician, since he is prone to believe that his abnormal states are the manifestation of an unknown power which in turn makes his magic effective'.<sup>665</sup> This is how 'the belief in magic' spreads.

Of course, these 'ascents' can take various forms and, though it seems to be a paradox, in the 'disenchanted' world, no barriers have been created to stop magical 'transfers'. Ecstatic states have definitely changed character and have become more prosaic. However, according to their etymology, they signify a crossing over, a transfer to a different dimension. Even in modern society there is no lack of areas conducive to the 'belief in magic'. 'There is no doubt whatsoever', writes Mauss, 'that magic is also part and parcel of some professions. Doctors, barbers, blacksmiths, shepherds, gravediggers are magicians because their skills go hand in hand with magic.'<sup>666</sup>

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663 Ibid., 34.

664 *Structural Anthropology*, 180.

665 Mauss, op. cit., 34.

666 Ibid., 34-35.

Politics is definitely an area of trivialised ecstasy, a sphere of manipulation where wooing suggestiveness plays a huge role. It draws its strength mainly from words and an appropriately used word becomes a springboard for magical ‘ascents’ that awaken hopes and fuel expectations according to the ‘psychosocial mythology’ propagated by healers.

Magic is the discipline of enchantments where the word is the key: a shaman performs his miracles using the seductive language of ‘transfer’ in which he promises a trip to the world of miracles, a cure and a transformation. A politician who has to tread the same road as the ‘electorate’ always expects a miracle. ‘Democratic caesarism’, of which Weber speaks, favours visions of power and regeneration. In order to fulfil expectations, politics becomes an area of fairytale spectacles. The language of realistic observation is replaced by the rhetoric of power so that politics becomes increasingly the domain of pompous predictions and unfulfilled promises. Nevertheless the awaited ‘miracle’ gives a fresh chance to seductive protagonists.

‘Ascents’ which allow political practices to be moved to the sphere of magic become a fact and are permitted. Similarly, it is permissible to replace the rules of empirical causality with the language of enchantments which evokes the power and imposes the symbolism of *mana*. Finally, as Mauss says, this equates with ‘replacing reality with images’ which is ‘the art of magicians!’<sup>667</sup> This is what the ability to woo is: a practice that allows one’s own vision to become the first priority.

The omnipotent word decides everything and the magic hidden in words becomes suggestive. According to Levi-Strauss one of the most characteristic features of magic is its ‘symbolic suggestion’.<sup>668</sup> A shaman always refers to a myth or to a model-story that shows the truth in a symbolic abbreviation and uncovers the essence of things. Knowledge taken from such sources has the power to heal while enchantments evoke the power that is rooted in the truth which is the origin of the laws of nature. Words, therefore, are not ornaments and they do not form a framework for shamanistic practices but are their quintessence. A shaman casts spells, enacts enchantments with the help of words and the results he achieves are directly intertwined with inspiring the changes in ways of thinking and imposing new visions.

The shaman’, writes Levi-Strauss, ‘plays the same dual role as the psychoanalyst. A prerequisite role – that of a listener for the psychoanalyst and of orator for the shaman – establishes a direct relationship with the patient’s conscious and an indirect relationship with his unconscious. This is the function of the incantation

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667 Ibid., 175.

668 *Structural Anthropology*, 186-204.

proper. But the shaman does more than utter incantations, he is its hero, for it is he who, at the head of a supernatural battalion of spirits, penetrates the endangered organs and frees the captive soul.<sup>669</sup>

This is how the healing takes place, whereby enchantments help clean that which was contaminated. It could be said that *truth* heals as it is precisely enchantments which give power to truth.

The shaman's actions help correct a skewed picture and remove the defect that is the source of contamination. Thus, in a peculiar way, they lead to *straight* thinking. In the end, the symbolic operation in the mythical sphere consists in regeneration through the unblocking of life-giving energy which had been prevented from flowing by disease. The operation applied to a symbol is finally what happens within the world itself. The change is real and authentic and the patient is cured. Just as 'the patient suffering from neurosis', says Levi-Strauss, 'eliminates an individual myth by facing a "real" psychoanalyst'<sup>670</sup> and so returns to reality, getting rid of the ballast of untruth and removing imbalances.

Politicians as the doctors of the soul work in the same fashion. They are also successful because they destroy 'individual myths' and convert misguided thoughts by binding them with the 'psychosocial mythology' which they impose while popularising their own 'truths'. Their actions are chiefly aimed at creating an effective 'symbolic suggestion' in depicting the world which could take over the imagination of the 'electorate'. It is for this that the propagandist 'enchantments' are used: a continuous application of 'truth'. 'In shamanistic practices', writes Levi-Strauss, 'changing the details of a myth is supposed to awake an appropriate organic reaction'.<sup>671</sup> Moreover, 'the political body' is continuously exposed to the training in words aimed at releasing the potential for regeneration.

Is there a difference between a shaman and a doctor? Where do we place the stars of 'the political scene'? What type of healing do the promise-disseminating politicians practise today when like 'Caesar' and his guards they announce fairytale successes in the wonderland: renewal, regeneration, the new beginning, the taming of evil, the conquering of corruption and crime, the speeding up of miraculous transformation, certain growth and an increase in benefits? The lexicon of politics, if we take into account the most general message of propagandist slogans, is saturated with magic-tasting suggestions. In order to avoid a straightforward answer let us quote Levi-Strauss once again: 'myth and action form a pair always associated with the duality of patient and healer. In the

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669 Ibid., 198-99.

670 Ibid., 199.

671 Ibid., 201.

schizophrenic cure, the healer performs the actions and the patient produces his myth; in the shamanistic cure the healer supplies the myth and the patient performs the actions.<sup>672</sup>

A healer-magician has to enforce the language of power, outline the perspective of change and take hold of the imagination of the audience by replacing the naive, skewed image with a picture that will unveil the whole healing energy of truth. It is for this that the complete repertoire of enchantments is used. A shaman's trance has to become the plane for unification: joining that which is common with that which is miraculous. His story has to include the incantation which moves the machine of magic 'change'. 'This idea not only transforms magical judgements into analytical judgements but converts them from a *priori* to a *posteriori* arguments, since the idea dominates and conditions all experience. Thanks to the idea magical dreams not only become rational but they also become confused with reality'.<sup>673</sup>

There must, therefore, be a word which resembles a magic mirror, a word which is ambiguous and mysterious, enabling metamorphoses and referring to a different dimension. As said by Mauss, *mana* is just such a word. 'It is a remarkable fact', writes Mauss, 'that this obscure idea, which we have had such difficulty in separating from the vague nature of affective states, an idea which is almost untranslatable into abstract terms and which is inconceivable to us, should be precisely that idea which provides believers in magic with clear, rational, occasionally, scientific support.'<sup>674</sup> So a vague, general and ambiguous language facilitates 'enchantments' while obscure, puzzling and difficult to understand terms which excite, because of expected extraordinary effects, hold the greatest charm. Let us remember that it is myth which makes these words fertile and all magical actions have to revert to the truth of this myth as only then are they effective. 'Magical aphorisms', says Mauss, 'do not undergo criticism easily as they cannot be verified. Magical judgments always precede magical experiences. They are all canons of the ritual or the links in the chain of representations. Experience occurs only in order to confirm them and almost never succeeds in refuting them.'<sup>675</sup> Thus the circle is closed embodying the secret of magic and, as stated by Mauss, 'a picture replaces reality'.

It is fairly easy to rekindle the charms of *mana* in democracy. Tocqueville noticed that democracy has a particular passion for general terms. Such language is rich in words which are unclear, ambiguous and, at the same time, majestic

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672 Ibid.

673 Mauss, op. cit., 156.

674 Ibid., 155-56.

675 Ibid., 152.

and large, obscuring the horizon. These kinds of words are most surprisingly and impressively successful in lifting ‘spells’. They help to conjure images whose seductive power is directly associated with a lack of precision. The semantics of the acts of ‘rational self-definition’ has a lot in common with the charms of ‘magical aphorisms’. ‘The liking for general ideas’, writes Tocqueville, ‘expresses itself in the democratic language through a constant usage of general terms and abstract words and also the way in which they are used’.<sup>676</sup> The best example is the enormous success of the term ‘equality’ which has become a spell, an abstraction which popularizes fairy-tale images. This is because it has no concrete meaning and can be used in different ways having been given an extremely abstract and strange semantics. Moreover, as Tocqueville points out, it is keenly ‘personified’. For example, ‘Frenchmen in the reign of Louis XIV would never have spoken in that way; it would never have entered the head of any of them to use the word ‘equality’ without applying it to some particular thing, and they would have preferred not to use the word at all rather than turn it into a living being.’<sup>677</sup> But this is exactly how the language of a new myth is born: on the pedestal of abstraction. ‘This abundance of abstract terms in the language of democracy’, notes Tocqueville, ‘used the whole time without reference to any particular fact, both widens the scope of thought and clouds it.’<sup>678</sup> Practising propaganda is not difficult and the new ‘psychosocial mythology’ develops on fertile soil. Politicians can voice their ‘revealed truths’ without stumbling across an awkward barrier created by inquiring, ‘perfectionist’ minds which are sensitive to concrete ideas and details. ‘Magical aphorisms’ fall on fertile ground and the language of ‘healing’ readily achieves ‘symbolic effectiveness’. Political narratives are always seen through ‘rose-tinted glasses’ whereby, as a rule, they are meant to change the image of the world, correcting mistakes and falsehoods, and conquering illusion. These narratives become expansive thanks to the rules of substitution which enable magical judgements to be perceived as analytical. In other words, a thought encompassing the whole is always rooted in a symbol.<sup>679</sup> Political thought has not much in common with protocol, being visionary by nature and permeated with universal and cosmogonist symbols. Its carrying capacity has a lot to do with the lack of ambiguity, with being directed beyond literality. “‘A symbol makes one think.’” This charming sentence’, writes Paul Ricoeur, ‘says two things: a symbol gives meaning, so sense is not decided by me but is given by a

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676 *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, 74-75.

677 *Ibid.*

678 *Ibid.*

679 E. Cassirer, *Language and Myth* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1946), 44-62.

symbol, therefore what it gives “makes one think”<sup>680</sup>. Thus, a symbol initiates a play of the imagination and has real power which is able to enchant.

‘The language’ of a symbol always corresponds to the content of a myth, a model-story, in which symbols are rooted. The political symbolism of democracy originates in history and is influenced by paradigms generated by pop-culture. Today, the style of a political spectacle depends on the mythology of consumption. Advertising propagates the symbolism of fulfilment and promises miraculous transformation. Politicians have to move within this space and their stories must create the atmosphere of bliss, calm, joy and security. The idols of politics have to speak with the language of advertising and they do it with utmost eagerness. Political marketing has become the new canon of wisdom. Due to its spectacular success it is necessary to take the relationship between politics and magic very seriously.

Despite its rationalistic façade, political marketing enforces the criteria of effectiveness based on the rules of magic. It radically limits (or completely rejects) the influence of debate which is subjected to the rigour of reflection and suspends the rules of political discourse. It transfers political practices into the sphere of ‘charms’, enchantments and trifling enticements. It becomes most important to have a successful suggestion that manipulates and controls the behaviour of an audience, or use the rhetoric that awakens emotions, discredits the mind and limits the rational sense of a political act. It is most important to create an atmosphere where ‘magical judgments’ could resonate adequately and where the ‘jester’s bells’, which Kant wanted to silence, ring again with double force, while gestures count more than words and an image more than an argument. Slogans replace thought while acts of political marketing are directed towards seductive practices and so the art of seduction replaces the power of thought. A politician has to attract and should ‘sell’ himself well, a fact eagerly stressed by the openly cynical ‘image makers’. Ideas, if one can still speak of those, become a commodity and are also treated as profit-making products. They follow the rules of marketing efficiency, so political programmes should ‘sell’ themselves. This is exactly what ‘marketing’ specialists do: moving political practices into the field of magic, stubbornly questioning patterns of behaviour shaped by the traditions of the Enlightenment.

Marketing has been waging a big war on the priorities of the Enlightenment, the aim of which has been to silence the mind, to limit the role of persuasion which is associated with critical thought, independent judgement and inquisitiveness. Arguments are to be replaced with the evocation of power, the

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680 P. Ricoeur, ‘Existence and Hermeneutics’ in *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Continuum, London, 2004), 28.

creation of a hypnotic picture which would astound with symbolism of magic 'transfer'. Politics pressurised by 'marketing' is obviously coloured by *fetishism* where 'enticements', such as accessories, utensils and materials for performing 'enchantments' count most. The importance of detail in order to create an appropriate 'image' is the ideal. A tie, lipstick, face powder, hair dye, a well practised gesture all become powerful fetishes in the world of politics. They have the power to make things happen and are supposed to charm the auditorium so that people move in the right direction, following the sound of 'the jester's bells' of their idol. In this world of marketing hypnosis, the tie of a politician or a suitable colour scheme of a poster become expressions of *mana*. This is the sense of the 'message' which replaces debate.

The hero of the spectacle has to charm the audience. The contact between a politician and his 'electorate' is not aimed at persuading but at fomenting belief, arousing enthusiasm and hope, that is, at establishing the feeling of 'power' as only then will magical judgements fall on fertile ground. Marketing specialists are particularly interested in the spectrum of possibilities that determine the success of shamanic practices. A politician has to become 'a magician'. He does not dress in plumes because his job has to follow the fashion of the 'disenchanted' world. He acts as a presumptuous sophist but in fact he submits his linguistic dexterity to the general test of 'marketing' effectiveness. Language, therefore, is treated as a purely manipulative tool, as a domain of enchantments and how one speaks is more important than what one says. A hypnotic suggestion is more important than the relevance of an argument and good delivery counts most. Magic, as Mauss stresses, is to a large extent just a *technique*.<sup>681</sup> A magician has to know the tricks of his trade while his actions have to impress. So 'he speaks' as if with his whole being. 'From this point of view', writes Mauss, 'the mechanical rite is a translation of an unspoken incantation: a gesture is a sign and a speech. Words and actions become absolutely equivalent and that is why we find descriptions of the non-verbal rites presented to us as spells'.<sup>682</sup> That is why the 'image' specialists put emphasis on the language of gestures making 'body language' more important than the meaning of a rational argument. What the electorate 'buys' depends on the general impression made by the 'magician' and not on the relevance and the credibility of arguments. The message should have a magical sense and should promise an easy 'transition'. Nowadays, it is moulded to the dictates of advertisements and this is not because of the superficially perceived charms of the language of advertising. Let us not forget that the effectiveness of an

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681 Mauss, 67-75.

682 Ibid., 71.

enchantment is associated with a myth and in a consumer society advertising has become a new formula of *eschatology*: the image of things final. Therefore, the message of advertising forms the basis of a new myth and the whole drama of social hopes is played out within it. This means that politics has to acknowledge the superior rules of advertising not only because its images are technically effective but also because it has to search within it for the final 'truth', since only then will it find favour with the benefaction seeking 'electorate'.

Thus, the hopes associated with illumination and the Enlightenment-like brightness of reason are replaced by the glare of advertisements. A trickster instead of a philosopher comes to the fore organising a display of fireworks. Moreover, it is not only the change of scenery that is at stake here but the essence of things is changed, too. The fascination with fairytale beauty should not be treated with indulgent tolerance nor as an innocent weakness. The cult of appearances has a deeper meaning. Is there a better example of the 'revaluation of all values'? Former authority loses significance and the scruples of perfectionists who do not want to use 'the magic mirror' of advertising simply cease to interest anyone. 'Intellectuals' are put in the corner while the 'talking heads' have been asked to disappear behind the scene so as not to spoil the performance. Fiction rules unimpeded, becoming proud and majestic. 'Marketing' strategies aim to discount knowledge that is shaped by the main premises of the Enlightenment. Only charm counts while thinking is considered too boring to merit attention. Thought has been divested of any significance. Suggestion and the ability to evoke images replace criteria associated with the concept of truth. Only the 'truth' of the image matters.

Within the charm of advertising and marketing razzmatazz we find threads of Nietzsche's thought from his 'symptomatology of modernity', and so we go back to the subject of nihilism and the issue of the will to power. Of course, the 'revaluation of all values' produces feelings of emptiness and the will to power is a compensation. The 'liberated' mind which no longer recognises the authority of 'idols' can revel in the power of the act of creation and so it becomes creative. Thereafter, reality 'counts as the projection of a creative spirit', writes Habermas when talking about Nietzsche's view, 'who surrenders himself unhesitatingly to the diffuse enjoyment of the power and arbitrariness of his illusory appearances. The world appears as a network of distortions and interpretations for which no intention and no text provides a basis.'<sup>683</sup> A carefree delight in creating is 'the aesthetic pivot of the will to power' while fascination and charm become really significant. 'Creative' reason does not try to step beyond picture frames since another reality does not interest it. It is, then,

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683 Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 95.



necessary to assert that ‘this is at the same time *a will to illusion*, a will to simplification, to a mask, to the superficial; art counts as man’s genuine metaphysical activity, because life is based on illusion, deception, optics’.<sup>684</sup>

This is the crux of the matter: in the world of toppled idols ‘the will to illusion’ counts most. Modernity does not hanker after depth; instead, it loves truth that is pleasing to the eye. Aesthetic mannerism replaces the wand of a magician, setting the scene for unearthing attractions and condensing charms. This is how the world that expedites magical ‘transfers’ is made – where forces of enchantment rule. This world is helplessly unable to stand up to the seductive power of advertising and rejects wisdom that could destroy the idyllic beauty of images. Where the ‘will to illusion’ triumphs there is no need for knowledge based on critical thought. Authority does not have to rely on the power of truth that transcends the appealing stage production. Politics does not have to seek justification in a debate or in serious arguments about crucial issues. Effective ‘marketing’ tricks will suffice as well as care taken to assure that ‘the product’ (the idol and his programme) will gain applause. The idea of a self-sufficient mind is replaced by the concept of self-sufficient marketing practices. The shaman does not have to hide his accessories.

‘The symptomatology of modernity’ should not, of course, be associated exclusively with the aesthetic mannerism of a spectacle or the razzmatazz of stage production. Manifestations of the will to power are not restricted to the ability to impress with charm and ‘the will to illusion’ reaches much deeper, well beyond the world which is enchanted with advertising. *Technology* is the great field of seductive and authoritative illusion and its cult has become one of the most significant aspects of modernity. It has penetrated all spheres of social practices and is also part of the world of politics where it plays an important role in shaping its magical lexicon. Machinery has become a new symbol of the power of *mana*. Technology is closely related to magic and its rationality can be seriously doubted. The belief in the saving power of technology transfers the symbolism of a fairy-tale change into the field of modernity. We only need to remind ourselves of the ‘House of Solomon’, in Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, which depicts with prophetic enthusiasm the new epoch of miracles: the world ruled by thought which transforms *techne* into a sphere of unlimited possibilities.

Modernity believes in technology and boasts of its power. In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche drew our attention to the fact that this belief originated in *prejudice*: ‘In order to sustain the theory of a mechanistic world, therefore, we always have to stipulate to what extent we are employing two fictions: the

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684 Ibid.

concept of motion (taken from our sense language) and the concept of the atom (=unity, deriving from our psychical “experience”). The mechanistic theory presupposes *a sense prejudice and a psychological prejudice*.<sup>685</sup> The world of technology is therefore the world of fairy-tale anthropomorphisms, of miracles. It acquires shape thanks to the projections of the will to power but its ‘objectivity’ is an illusion. ‘Physicists’, says Nietzsche, ‘believe in a “true world” [...]. But they are in error. The atom they posit is inferred according to the logic of perspectivism of consciousness – and is therefore itself a subjective fiction’<sup>686</sup>. Thus, we are faced with a creation where knowledge that constitutes the foundation of technology is rooted in imagination. Technology is an abstract fantasy which naturally evokes and feeds the climate of magical ‘transition’.

In the world abandoned by gods it shows the way to the garden of plenitude. As part of fantasy and magic the cult of technology plays an enormously significant role in inspiring the art of political seduction. The ability to create magical suggestion associated with the symbolism of growth is the main point of the modern spectacle of power. Mechanically understood rationality becomes a tool of stage production which transforms the art of governing into the rites of *mana* where a politician, or ‘the wizard of rain’, promises to provide plenitude. The deification of technology turns into a specific rite of power. Exercising authority is directly associated with the magic of permanent ‘growth’, with the vision of perpetual multiplication of blessings.

The problem lies, however, in the fact that we don’t entirely understand technology and so we move within its realm as if in the dark. ‘The question concerning technology’, stressed Martin Heidegger, ‘is the question concerning the constellation in which revealing and concealing [...] come to pass’<sup>687</sup>. Technology, as he puts it, ‘challenges forth into the frenzied ness of ordering’<sup>688</sup>. It allows one to treat the world as an object of easy manipulation and a sphere where everything can be suitably ‘set’ or ‘ordered’. Rationality in the field of *techne* carries, therefore, signs of frenzy as it means feverishly struggling in the dark, whereas, the illumination provided by technology is only an illusion. The experience of technology is like magic and gives us an all-powerful belief in the saving power of appliances. Just like all manifestations of the will to power, ‘productional metaphysics’<sup>689</sup> establishes a certain perspective. Its truth makes

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685 F. Nietzsche, *The Will Power* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968), 338.

686 *Ibid.*, 339.

687 M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. by W. Lovitt (Harper and Row, New York, 1977), 33.

688 *Ibid.*

689 This expression is used by M. Zimmerman, *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics and Art* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington Ind., 1990), 150-91.

‘the will to illusion’ real but does not create a solid foundation. It has, however, indisputable charm, captivates with the majesty of ‘objectivity’ and imposes the language of peremptory certainty. At the same time it enters the realms of magic as it binds the rigours of precision with the symbolism of magical renewal. It also creates a vision of endless opportunities, inspires the mythology of departure, of crossing over to a different dimension where dilemmas of human condition cease to matter. Levi-Strauss claims that this is how ‘psychosocial mythology’ which determines the effectiveness of ruling practices, is created. Criticism is ineffective since it is difficult to undermine the roots of faith without proposing something else. The rival mythology negating the majesty of *techne* is still in its infancy. The adoration of technology has turned into a cult of benevolent power which offers salvation and politicians have become its priests.

To summarize the observations so far: the horizons of political activity are defined both by the mythology of the world of technology and the magic of marketing. The scope of the debate as a field of critical thought has been radically curtailed. Knowledge formed in the climate of the Enlightenment has gradually lost its significance. Reflection becomes useless while charming magical stories triumph. Priorities of the mind do not determine the legal validity or the success of political practices. Rationality has lost its political sex appeal. ‘The jester’s bells’ and the effectiveness of ‘enticements’ count most. The erosion of the systems of knowledge built by the Enlightenment has created a void in which spells replace persuasion.

Democratic practices veer ever more clearly away from the line demarcated by Kant who spoke of ‘the public usage made of the mind’. ‘Ideas’ which pave their way lack the serious foundations that stem from critical thought. Neither is there any higher ‘truth’ that reaches beyond a seasonal calendar and a sphere of particularistic rationale. Until recently, liberalism has tried to defend this truth, drawing on the inspiration of the philosophy of the Enlightenment. The liberal conception of politics, however, has been gradually losing its significance. Liberalism has got lost in the meanderings of the world which discredits the ‘fundamentalism’ of the Enlightenment. It has revealed its helplessness and has ceased to aspire to the rank of ‘truth’, becoming, as MacIntyre says, one of the ‘traditions’. ‘Liberalism, which began as an appeal to alleged principles of shared rationality against what was felt to be the tyranny of tradition, has itself been transformed into a tradition whose continuities are partly defined by the interminability of the debate over such principles’.<sup>690</sup> The abdication of liberalism means that there are no reasons for connecting democratic practices with the rigours of normatively understood rationality. These practices have lost

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690 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 335.

their status of an ideal which reflected the hopes of the Enlightenment and, ever since, their rationality has been equated with the concept of 'chance' or openly questioned. Democratic institutions have become a façade masking the game of various interests and justifying various aspirations, including those that threaten democracy. There is no chance of any consistent and common programme or of agreement as to the principles which would suit all 'rational creatures'. MacIntyre argues that the attempt to come up with a solution that would 'free the individual from chance and particulars to do with tradition has failed'<sup>691</sup>. Democracy, to use Tocqueville's words, cannot be 'taught manners'. No system of knowledge has been created that would permit one to base democratic practices on a permanent foundation. Improvisation has won. It would be difficult today to state whether we know in which direction we are being transported by 'the rapid flow of the river'.

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691 Ibid.

**Lex et Res Publica**  
**Polish Legal and Political Studies**

Edited by  
Anna Jarón

Vol. 1 Anna Jarón: Socio-Economic Constitutional Rights in Democratisation Processes. An Account of the Constitutional Dialogue Theory. 2012.

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