

Old and New Questions of Philosophy – Volume 2

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Presentation

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Presentation

Old and New Questions of Philosophy is a set of three booklets containing twenty essays on universal themes that have made and continue to make up the history of ideas, as well as some that concern our difficult times.

The first volume contains the following seven subjects: On the Idea of Truth - Time, Lord of All (Pantocrator) - Between Technophilia and Technoprudence - Matter and Spirit: Different, Opposite, Complementary? - A Few Words on Death - Equalities and Differences between Men - The Meaning of Life.

The second volume sets out ideas on the following seven questions: Are Laws Necessary? - When we talk about culture, what are we talking about? - Evil, from the beginning to the present day - Is a Just Society Possible? - Wokism: when good intentions go mad - What is Real? - Modernity and Post-Modernity.

The third volume deals with six other topics: Is freedom what we commonly think it is? - Is Democracy the best political regime? - The Death of Art and the Survival of Aesthetics - The False Quarrel of Cultures (On the subject of Race and History, by Lévi-Strauss) - The Age of the Masses and Excesses - The Many Faces and Dimensions of Love.

I. Are Laws Necessary?

The answer to this question is clearly yes if we are convinced that there is evil in human relationships, which seems more than likely to be evident ever since our species began to be conscious and to live in family groups and, later, in societies and states. From this simultaneously natural and cultural condition arose the famous question posed by Epicurus, quoted by Lactantius in *The Wrath of God*: "God, he says, either wills to remove evils and is unable; or is able and does not will; or neither wills nor can, or wills and can. If He wills and cannot, He is weak, which is not in keeping with God's character; if He can and will not, He is envious, which is equally at odds with God; if He wills and cannot, He is envious and weak, and therefore not God; if He wills and can, which is only fitting for God, then from what source are the evils? Or why doesn't he remove them?"¹

If we lived in an Edenic world, as the Bible tells us, if we lived in a utopian world like the social idealisations of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (*Hy Brazil, Cuccagna-Cocagne, The City of the Sun*),² there would be no evil, nobody would practice it and, consequently, nobody would have to react against it. The realisation that evil is a human reality, or a reality for human beings, even when apparently committed by nature, has led us to create and impose laws. In other words, rules for living together that establish rights and duties, that serve to avoid conflicts, repair damage already caused, settle disputes, punish offences or protect life and its conditions of possibility.³ Firstly, of course, to avoid threats from our fellow human beings, who are also the same people who harm us when

¹ Epicurus apud Lactantius, *The Wrath of God*, Chapter or Book 13, Of the Advantage and Use of the World and the Seasons, available at newadvent.org, no page indicated.

² The name of utopian countries created anonymously in the Middle Ages, endowed with every perfection. *The City of the Sun* is by Tommaso Campanella and dates from 1602.

³ Norm, from the Latin *norma*, square, an instrument for measuring angles and, figuratively, as a rule, established by authority, agreed in common or of customary origin, whose purpose is to guide the behaviour of individuals or the community; - Rule, from the Latin *regula* (derived from *regere* = to guide by law), which initially meant plank of wood, ruler, and by translation, rule, norm. - Law, from the Latin *lex*, *legis*, related to *legere*, as equivalent to the Greek *λέγω*, to say out loud. Any principle by which the order found in natural or human reality is enunciated, promulgated or recognised and which, socially, serves as a guide and value for human behaviour.

they are not adversaries or enemies. Secondly, to avoid revenge, which is a natural reaction to harm received or punishment meted out. Thirdly, to punish actions or events that are harmful or damaging to the physical, material and psychological integrity of individuals.

A society, whether animal or human, natural or artificial, is an organization of living beings that act through interdependence, complementarity, coordination, conflicts and hierarchy, whether the hierarchy is imposed by age, force, knowledge, experience or socio-political and cultural conventions. Consequently, the needs of the human world give rise, in a symbiotic way, to obligations or moral and legal rules for the functioning of the whole (disregarding the quality of this functioning). And the absence of rules can best be seen when they are transgressed in times of war, civil war or war between peoples and nations. In this case, the condition of belligerence demonstrates that the state of brutality is precisely that which disregards rights and duties (for example, the right to life, property, freedom and duties concerning the rules of coexistence), with only force and cunning, whether natural or technical, prevailing. Despite this clear and unavoidable demand for laws and, therefore, socio-political life, Karl Jaspers reminds us that "the history of politics frightens us, it shows men as demons. The instinct to dominate, tyrannize, kill, persecute and deceive has been present from the very beginning. Sometimes this instinct withdraws or appears to be dormant. But this is an illusion [...] And yet political orders, states governed by the rule of law and communities of citizens were created. For this to have been possible, powerful forces from another source must have been at work".⁴

In the world before the creation and practice of socially established laws, the will of the strongest or the ability of the fittest prevailed, of course. We could use the expression "natural law" here, but there is a conceptual difference between the "law of the strongest or fittest" and "natural law". The Greeks called the totality of legal obligations prior to public life the "inherently right or just" (*physei/physikon dikaion*), obligations that contrasted with positive, politically statuted law: *nomos dikaion*. For no other reason, Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, says that natural law is a universal tendency or impulse towards the very constitution of

⁴ K. Jaspers, *Introduction to Philosophical Thought*, chapter The Position of Man in Politics, pg. 66, Cultrix, São Paulo 1976.

laws, even if they are oral or customary.⁵ Let's also remember Antigone, who gives her brother Polynices a proper burial, despite King Creon's edict forbidding her to do so. Face to face with the king, Antigone retorts: "But Zeus wasn't the herald of them (laws) for me, / nor are these laws the ones dictated among men / by Justice, the dwelling companion / of the infernal gods; and I didn't think / that your determinations had the strength / to impose on mortals even the obligation / to transgress divine, unwritten, / unavoidable norms; they're not from today or yesterday, / they've been in force since the most remote times".⁶

Much more recently, Leo Strauss, in his lecture series *Natural Law and History*, reminds us at the outset that "Rejecting natural law is the same as saying that all law is positive law, and this mainly means that what is correct is defined exclusively by the legislators and courts of the most varied countries".⁷

But it is possible to imagine that, even in that initial situation of a savage horde, the strongest or fittest was not exempt from revenge, and that this revenge, if fulfilled, did not attract another in retaliation, and so on, as in today's criminal circles, or even in the political circles of certain Latin American or African republics. A vicious cycle of evils that does not exist in the immediacy of the animal world.

It is also possible to conceive of the existence of only oral or customary codes as early as the middle of the third millennium before our era. But the first confirmation we have of a written code that could be consulted and applied regularly is that of King Nammu of Ur in Sumer, which dates from between 2100 and 2050 BC, and in which the offenses of death and theft are punished equally by the death of the perpetrator. Three centuries later, the famous and very extensive Code of Hammurabi was written in Sumer.

Thomas Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologica*, states simply that the law is made to give rules or regulate human actions. Now, the most dependable and safe way to create rules is to rely on reason, through which one visualizes an end, a goal to be achieved, and the means to be undertaken. In his words: "The

⁵ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, The Thinkers Collection, Abril Cultural, São Paulo, 1973.

⁶ Sophocles, *Antigone*, *Theban Trilogy*, translated by Mário da Gama Kury, Jorge Zahar Editor, Rio de Janeiro, 2001, pg. 219.

⁷ L. Strauss, *Natural Law and History*, Six Lectures given at the Charles Walgreen Foundation, First Lecture, pg. 3, 1949, available at pressuchicago.edu.

law moves those who submit to it to act correctly. Now, to move to action, it belongs properly to the will... But, on the contrary, it belongs to the law, ordering and prohibiting. Now, ordering is an act of reason. Therefore, the law is something rational... Since every being is called to fulfil itself according to its own nature, this necessarily implies, in the case of man, the use of his own reason. This is why reason can be the rule and measure of human actions, and this is why the first propositions of the practical order are not just principles but precepts".⁸

Therefore, the law must be guided and formulated in such a way as to avoid the personal feelings and provisional passions that not only incite and involve us, but often lead us sinuously. At the same time, the law must observe the maximum possible common good in the relationship between its purpose and the means employed. It must not favour preferences, except in necessary circumstances (such as public calamities or circumstances of war, for example), but apply indiscriminately to all citizens, men and women, rich, middle class and poor, disregarding social status, political ideologies, religion, race or ethnicity. In other words, even if a law is not broad enough to cover an entire population, such as the law allowing freedom of expression, and is characterised by regulating a practice restricted to certain citizens, such as the domestic employment law, it must cover everyone in the same situation, and not just the individuals concerned.

However, some historical events and certain contradictions that we face in the daily life of the legal world show us that obeying laws is not always morally justifiable, even when it is impossible to avoid submission. For example, the overwhelming majority that enthusiastically consented to and approved Nazi laws, the laws of the communist dictatorship in Eastern European countries, apartheid in South Africa, the laws of exception in Latin American dictatorships, as well as the real tax extortion that we are subjected to daily in Brazil, without the funds collected being duly returned to society, and certain rules in our legal processes that, contradictorily, lead to impunity for various types of crime. So while respect for the law can be a means of preventing human violence in all its guises, which is what happens most of the time, it can also be a pretext for

⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Questions 90 and 91, Pars Prima Secundae, On the Essence of the Law.

collaborating with a form of social barbarism or economic exploitation. Or a refusal to comply. If this refusal is made individually, we have the case of conscientious objection, which consists of shirking an obligation imposed by law. For example, the refusal of compulsory military service if the person is convinced that they are opposed to pacifism, war or the use of weapons; the refusal of a doctor to carry out an abortion, or that of a scientific researcher to use animals in their experiments. If the refusal is carried out collectively, we have the case of civil disobedience, which occurs when several people consciously decide to violate the law they consider manifestly unjust, acting through public demonstrations.

This ambiguity was, among other things, the content of a letter that Martin Luther King sent to the pastors of a Protestant community when he was imprisoned in Birmingham on 16 April 1963. It reads: "You express great anxiety about our willingness to break the laws. This is a legitimate concern. Since we diligently induced people to obey the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public schools, at first glance this may seem rather paradoxical to us, i.e. consciously breaking laws. One might ask: how does one advocate breaking some laws and obeying others? The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws - just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate just laws, because we have not only a legal but also a moral responsibility to obey them. Conversely, we have a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St Augustine that an unjust law is not a law at all. Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a human code that conforms to God's moral law. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in St. Thomas' terms: every law that elevates the human personality is just. Every law that degrades the personality is unjust [...] In no way do I recommend breaking or defying the law [...] That would lead to anarchy. Anyone who breaks an unjust law must act openly, with love [...] and voluntarily accept the punishment they incur. I maintain that anyone who breaks a law because his conscience considers it unjust, and

then accepts a prison sentence to arouse social conscience against this injustice, actually displays a superior respect for the law".⁹

Returning to Epicurus, the philosopher had already pointed out in his "Capital Maxims" that "The just, according to nature, is an agreement of the convenient so that some do not harm others nor suffer them"; "Of the laws established, only that which is confirmed as convenient for the uses of community dealings has the character of the just; if a law is established that does not work according to the benefit of the community relationship, it no longer has the nature of the just".¹⁰

These considerations help us to realise both the need for and distrust of laws. A good law is indispensable to the healthy coexistence of men; a bad law is detrimental to the same relationships. Sometimes it's easy to distinguish between good and bad laws. For example: all labour is free and presupposes remuneration. In other circumstances, the choice becomes more difficult. Is the death penalty appropriate for heinous crimes, such as cruel, multiple, and genocidal ones? In the face of repeated crime or offence, a fact that shows contempt for the person harmed, for society as a whole, and its institutions, would it be appropriate for the criminal to lose all civil rights, including the right to appeal a punishment imposed?

On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of people don't ask themselves about respecting the law. It has to be said that our daily obedience to rules and regulations, when we stop at red lights, pay our debts and respect contracts and agreements, is not the result of reflection, but of automatism, introjected behaviour, a habit that has fear and the usefulness of a certain order as its motives. It could also be called a spirit of gregariousness and social convenience, but that's not why obedience is legitimate, good, or morally recommendable. In other words, the law does not necessarily express an ethical principle or a moral action.

The first states did not arise out of a generous impulse of fraternity. Most likely, some private owners gradually organised themselves to combat and reduce the permanent fear of theft, loss of property, and violent death. Even those who had

⁹ Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter From Birmingham Jail*, The Atlantic Monthly, published as "The Negro Is Your Brother", Massachusetts, v. 212, n. 2, Apr. 16, 1963, p. 78-88.

¹⁰ Epicurus, Capital Maxims, 31 to 40, pgs. 149 and 150, Clásicos de Grecia y Roma, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2008 [1981]

nothing in the way of material possessions were perhaps frightened by the common practice of theft and threats of aggression. Generalised insecurity made the freedom of the strongest and gangs unbearable. Hence the need to refer everyone, or at least the majority of a community, to a higher authority to restrict certain aggressive actions. Thomas Hobbes endeavoured to show why men in various parts of the world established this supposed first social contract. The Leviathan, a figure of a sea monster borrowed from the Book of Job, was chosen to represent this superman to whom all others surrender their freedom and weapons in exchange for relative physical security (a very fragile shield in Brazil, the world champion in annual violent deaths - around sixty thousand in the first two decades of the 21st century - without there being a war). It's the replacement of natural freedom, which depends on personal, subjective forces, by the social protection of the state or even a fiefdom, like the medieval one. By gaining security, society can devote itself to technology, science, art, and, as Hobbes put it, "the sweets of life".¹¹

Evidently, in all the places where a state has been constituted, men have not, on a certain day or at nightfall, gathered round a campfire or organised a barbecue to decide to abandon the state of nature, adopt the civil state and institute politics. So what does this fiction of the social contract tell us? That we don't need to have signed this agreement to be responsible for it. From the moment we live in a pacified political community, we are already committed to it, just as we are already committed to life simply by being born. As we take advantage of the physical security that comes from police power and, modernly, social security, guaranteed by social security, labour and public health promotion laws, we must, in return, respect the laws. Obviously, it's much easier to respect this pact or convention in civilised countries, those where responsibilities are balanced and taken seriously. I can pay the taxes demanded because I fear the penalties, or I can pay them because I realise that they are being applied for the benefit of society, avoiding undesirable inequalities. I can comply with the laws knowing that this reduces my freedom, but aware that all citizens gain security, which is the primary purpose of the state.

¹¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, The Thinkers Collection, Abril Cultural, 1997.

So we're back to an idea we've already stated: respect for the law is not basically of an ethical-moral nature but derives from a social interest and intelligence. For Epicurus,¹² as we have already seen, what is just is what does not harm and, at the same time, is useful for social behaviour within the polis. But if this socio-political community was founded not on the support of the law, which contains historical and cultural aspects, but on ethics, it would have to make use of behaviour that was simultaneously universal, timeless, and a subjective decision, because it was resulting from goodwill and personal duty. These *categorical imperatives*, as Kant calls them in the *Metaphysics of Customs*, in other words, obligations that are valid in themselves, regardless of our inclinations or desires, are: firstly, "act as if the maxim of your action should be erected, by your will, into a universal law of nature"; therefore, if you lie, you want lying to be commonplace; if you steal, you want theft to be widespread; if you kill, you want murder to be the common way of resolving conflicts; secondly, "act in such a way that you always treat humanity as an end, not simply as a means".¹³ In the realm of ethics, therefore, goodwill and the feeling of acting universally are given as laws. We act morally well when we oblige ourselves to do so, not by an external command, nor out of personal interest or advantage, but out of a duty to obey a rationally conceived principle situated above or beyond ourselves and which results in a good. One historical case in which the dilemma of legal law and moral law clashed was that of Socrates. Sentenced to death by the Athenian judges for disturbing order and corrupting youth, Socrates could have fled the night before his execution with the help of his friends and disciples. However, he refused exile, saying that his condemnation was unjust, but that it was also necessary to respect it. He was convinced that if he refused to obey the law of the city, he would set a bad example to his fellow citizens and give reason to the judges. Throughout his life, he had been protected and had benefited from the existing laws, one of which, at that moment, was leading him to his death. To

¹² Opus cit.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Customs*, pg. 30, Editora Vozes, Petrópolis and Editora Universitária São Francisco, Bragança Paulista, 2013: "The principle that makes certain actions a duty is a practical law. The rule that the agent chooses as a principle for himself on subjective grounds is called his maxim... The categorical imperative, which in general only states what is an obligation, is: act in accordance with a maxim that can at the same time be valid as a universal law".

summarise, a law may be imperfect, or its application unjust, but our disobedience can also cause harm when it sets an example for others.

Finally, it should be realised that the law is necessary, but it is not good in itself, and can be just or unjust, as mentioned above. Laws should be obeyed, even if they are imperfect, and it is up to the society that created them to perfect them, even if over time. Respecting laws means, first and foremost, respecting the idea that the best laws are still the most appropriate social instrument for living together. Furthermore, it must be realised that if laws are imperfect and unjust, and can therefore be improved or even disobeyed, the opposite can also happen, and we go from a state of individual and collective guarantees to a dictatorship or tyranny; but that if we were to subjectively give ourselves the moral law or the law of reason (*Vernunftrecht*, as expressed by the German Enlightenment), it would be much easier to live together and create objective legal laws, which above all serve immediate or historically delimited interests.

II. When you talk about culture, what are you talking about?

In everyday life, the word culture (a noun) has been used with so many meanings and in so many different contexts that an adjective or attribute is often added to make its meaning relatively more precise. For example, popular culture, sports culture, business culture, political culture, oriental culture, cereal culture, cell culture, and many others. However, there are at least two fundamental understandings, historically formulated and distinct, which, precisely because of these circumstances, do not have the same meaning.

Let's start with the most recent, which is also the oldest.¹⁴ It dates back to the 19th century and corresponds to all the collective and socially arbitrary or artificial ways in which people react to their natural needs. This means that, in this sense, the word culture encompasses the social relations and material and symbolic ways of life of a society, including language, economic characteristics and values, techniques and created objects, political structures, ethical and moral behaviour, beliefs, educational forms, and artistic creations. When Burnett Tylor defined it primarily in his work *Primitive Culture* in 1871, he emphasised the character of "acquired habits", as opposed to "instinctive, natural habits".¹⁵

It can therefore be seen that this anthropological understanding has two noteworthy peculiarities: 1. culture is a human response to the needs imposed by nature, which can be characterised by being more or less artificial, depending on the conceptions, knowledge, and practices that develop in society; 2. at the same time, it designates a particular world or system of multifaceted elements and relationships within a social structure and over a historical period. This is why we can talk about Western culture, Jewish culture, Hellenistic culture, Tibetan culture, and the culture of the Nhambiquara.

¹⁴ Just as we perceive old age temporally by its progressive distance from our birth, so the generations furthest from the emergence of humanity are also the oldest. This astute perception is due to Francis Bacon.

¹⁵ "Culture or Civilisation, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, Chapter I, John Murray, London, 1920, sixth edition, available at gutenberg.org/cache/epub.

Whether we like it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, man has always manifested himself - from the point of view of ethnology - as a cultural being, thus differentiating himself from all other living beings. It should also be realised that this concept remains neutral, i.e., it does not stipulate a positive or negative scale of values concerning a society's way of life. Rather, it is about the collective and also anonymous characteristics of a people or social group, created and passed down from generation to generation. If, however, we link this concept of culture to that of evolution or development, then we can broadly suggest the existence of three types of culture: a first type that has not proposed or incorporated the idea of development itself, such as Brazilian indigenous cultures. In this case, we are dealing with a static or stationary culture. A second type would be that which, although it has changed in some respects, for example in terms of materials, still retains symbolic and/or behavioural traces of past times, of ancestral traditions, as can be seen in Islamic, Indian, and African tribal cultures, among others. Here we find cultures that we could call semi-static. Finally, that culture, has become a kind of arrow of time, emphasising permanent conquests and transformations, has marked Western Europe since, above all, the Renaissance and the overseas conquests. In a way, the phenomenon of globalisation corresponds to a worldwide extension of these principles, objectives, and values, guided since then by the capitalist mode of production.

A second understanding - and the oldest of the word culture - has to do with its semantic origins, Greek and Latin, and the meaning it carries is more precise and delimited. It refers to the action of caring for and cultivating, no longer the land, the field, but the spirit, the intellect, the knowledge, the artistic sensibility or the memory of an important event whose deed has been recognised as epic or extraordinary. That's why Francis Bacon considered it the "georgic of the spirit", remembering that *georgia* is the Greek term for cultivated land.¹⁶

The same meaning applies to the term *cultus* (cult). On the one hand, as a participle of the verb *colere*, it indicates diligence, care, concern for language and even for the body and health. For example: *quid tam dignum cultu?* - what things are so worthy of our care? On the other hand, as a noun, it applies both to someone who cultivates all knowledge (*cultura animi philosophia est, haec*

¹⁶ Francis Bacon, *De dignitatis et augmentis scientiarum*, book VII.

extrahit vitia radicitus: est profecto animi medicina medetur animis - philosophy is the culture of the soul, and extracts vice by the roots: it is undoubtedly the medicine by which souls are healed),¹⁷ as well as those rituals that preserve the memory of ancestors, of a relevant historical event or of a narrative of a supernatural and religious nature (*erudire ad cultum deorum* - teaching to honour the gods). In this case, culture alludes, that is, it relates to the symbolic and social universes, in other words, to the truth of knowledge, the good of moral action, and the beauty of an artistic representation. For no other reason, Ortega y Gasset wrote: "The idea is a check really... What I'm saying is that there is no culture where there are no norms to which our neighbours can appeal. There is no culture where there are no principles of civil legality to appeal to. There is no culture where there is no acceptance of certain ultimate intellectual positions to refer to in a dispute... There is no culture where aesthetic polemics do not recognise the need to justify works of art... The scarcity of Spanish intellectual culture, that is, the cultivation or disciplined exercise of the intellect, is manifested not in what we know, more or less, but in the habitual lack of caution and care to adjust to the truth that those who speak and write usually demonstrate".¹⁸

Unlike the notion of anthropology, this idea of culture indicates attributes or qualities that individuals or society can have to a greater or lesser degree, more or less perfected, more or less effective. In Greek, it would correspond to the continuous endeavour of *paideia*, a term that combines the integral formation of a person with a common life project, and which we can find in the funeral oration of Pericles, a version by Thucydides: "In a word, I say that the whole city is the school (*paideusis*) of Greece, and if we consider ourselves individually, it seems to me that each of us shows ourselves self-sufficient for all the tasks of social life, with the utmost grace and versatility, in the most varied circumstances."¹⁹

If the pre-6th century Greek understood the human condition as inferior to that of divinity, since man is ephemeral (*brotos*), while the gods are immortal

¹⁷ See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, book II, 13.5 apud John Leland, *The Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation*, v. II, Philadelphia: Anthony Finley, 1818, p. 72.

¹⁸ O. y Gasset, *A Rebelião das Massas*, Capítulo VIII, pgs. 144-145, Vide Editorial, São Paulo, 2016.

¹⁹ Tucídides, *História da Guerra do Peloponeso*, book II, p. 111, Coleção Clássicos IPRI, Editora UnB/Funag/Imesp, Brasília, 2001.

(*athanatoi*), the influence of philosophy and sophistry introduced the opposition "Greek, educated" versus "Asiatic, barbarian" and, from there, the idea of human superiority coming from education, political and contemplative (intellectual) lives, the arts and philanthropy. Isocrates, quoted here by Bruno Snell, reaffirms the difference between man and animal through the use of words and the possibility of persuasion, with which laws, arts and crafts were developed, "for you, above the others, are distinguished in that faculty by which man is distinguished from the animal and the Greek from the barbarian; in that, more than the others, you are educated in reasoning and in the art of speaking".²⁰ In the Latin world, this concept leads us to *excolere animum* (cultivation of the soul) and *humanitas* (humanistic formation), in other words, the education of man, which includes both self-mastery (self-knowledge), an understanding of nature, moral exercise and participation in public life. This is why we understand Aristippus' saying, collected by Diogenes Laertius: "It is better to be a beggar than ignorant; the former lacks money, the latter humanity (*anthropopismós*)".²¹

Imagining this perfect and much more complex cultural condition, T.S. Eliot wrote: "We may be thinking of refinement of manners - or urbanity or civility... We may be thinking of learning and a close acquaintance with the accumulated wisdom of the past... We may be thinking of philosophy in the widest sense — an interest in, and some ability to manipulate, abstract ideas... Or we may be thinking of the arts... If we look at the several activities of culture listed in the preceding paragraph, we must conclude that no perfection in any one of them, to the exclusion of the others, can confer culture on anybody. We know that good manners, without education, intellect or sensibility to the arts, tends towards mere automatism; that learning without good manners or sensibility is pedantry; that intellectual ability without the more human attributes is admirable only in the same way as- the brilliance of a child chess prodigy; and that the arts without intellectual context are vanity".²²

Eliot develops here what Kant had already suggested in *Ideas on a Universal History, from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*: that "we are cultivated to a high level

²⁰ B. Snell, *A Cultura Grega e as Origens do Pensamento Europeu*, São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2001.

²¹ ²¹ D. Laércio, *Vidas e Doutrinas dos Filósofos Ilustres*, book II, [70], p. 65, Editora UnB, Brasília, 2008.

²² T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definiton of Culture*, London: Faber and Faber, 1988

by the arts and sciences; we are civilised to exercise all kinds of decorum and social conveniences".²³ In this statement we find the German authors' use of the terms culture and civilisation. The spiritual development or improvement that underpins the humanist ideal is also what best translates the German term *Kultur*, adopted at the end of the 18th century by the country's bourgeois intellectual elite to contrast the predominance of civilisation française among the German nobility. In Norbert Elias' analysis, this concept, in German, "alludes basically to intellectual, artistic and religious facts, and tends to draw a clear dividing line between facts of this kind on the one hand, and political, economic and social facts on the other [...] The specifically German meaning of the concept of *Kultur* finds its clearest expression in its derivative, the adjective *kulturell*, which describes the character and value of certain human products, rather than the intrinsic value of the person [...] [...] And like the word 'civilised', *kultiviert* refers primarily to the form of conduct or behaviour [...] It describes the social quality of people, their dwellings, their manners, their speech, their clothes, unlike *kulturell*".²⁴

Comparing the two definitions, it is clear that every human being is a cultural being, when viewed through an anthropological lens. It is a "natural" scenario to be born and live in a state of culture, whatever it may be. It is therefore a passive condition. But having culture or being cultivated presupposes a humanist understanding, in other words, a situation that depends on individual will and endeavour and, therefore, personal merit, as well as objective social opportunities created by society.

There are also authors who give the understanding of culture a sense of evolution and improvement, as opposed to an original situation of barbarism (Hobbes, Leibniz, the Enlightenment, Herder, Ortega y Gasset, for example); and others who see it as sublimation, loss of naturalness or an original idyllic state: Jean de Léry (*Histoire d'un Voyage faict en la Terre du Brésil*), Montaigne (*Sur les Cannibales*), Rousseau (*Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité*

²³ I. Kant: "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht", pg. 10 [a 404]: Wir sind im hohen Grade durch Kunst und Wissenschaft kultiviert; wir sind zivilisiert, um zu allen Arten von Anstand und sozialen Zweckmäßigkeiten anwenden", available at philosophie.uni-wuppertal.de.

²⁴ N. Elias, *O Processo Civilizador*, Introduction p. 24, Jorge Zahar, Rio de Janeiro, 1990.

parmi les hommes), Nietzsche (*Die Geburt der Tragödie*) or Freud (*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*).

Johann Herder, for example, writes: "Human beings are, in the noblest sense, predisposed to culture and language. Close to the ground, all of man's senses had only a small range and the inferior ones stood out against the more refined ones, as the example of wild man shows us. Smell and taste were, as in animals, his guides. Erect, however, on the earth and vegetation, smell no longer predominates, but sight does; with it, a wider realm unfolds around him; and it improves itself already in childhood with a geometry of finer lines and colours [...] With the formation of his upright gait, man acquired free and artistic hands, tools for elaborate manipulation and a permanent touch to develop new and clear ideas. In this sense, Helvetius is right: man's hand was offered to him as a great aid to Reason".²⁵

On the contrary, Nietzsche opines: "The metaphysical consolation that life, at the bottom of things, despite all the changes in phenomenal appearances, is indestructibly powerful and full of joy; and this consolation appears clearly in the satirical chorus, as a chorus of natural beings who live indestructibly behind all civilisation [...] with what fearless claw the Greek would take up his natural man [...] Nature, in which no knowledge was yet at work, in which the bolts of culture were still inviolate - this is what the Greek saw in the satyr [...] He was the proto-image of man, the expression of his highest emotions [...] Here the illusion of culture had been erased from the proto-image of man [...] Before him, civilised man was reduced to a lying caricature".²⁶

From another point of view, it would be impossible to refer to the idea of culture without the foundation of language, with its dialectal or prosodic variants, by the most obvious social behaviours or daily habits of its speakers and by those popular artistic or craft creations that have become the hallmarks of a group, a community, a people or even populations living in different political states.

²⁵ J. Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Book IV, digital version textlog.de. Herder's argument, which dates from the end of the 18th century, could be endorsed by any palaeoanthropologist of the following centuries.

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *O Nascimento da Tragédia*, ps. 55-57 (translation Jacó Guinsburg), Companhia das Letras, São Paulo, 2001.

These linguistic, ethnic and behavioural characteristics have been converted more recently, that is, after the supremacy of economic and political neoliberalism and the end of the dichotomy between capitalism and communism, into the somewhat controversial subject of cultural rights or multiculturalism. So-called cultural rights do not concern a political claim, that is universal in nature, such as the right to vote and to come and go, for example, but rather the right to be different because of ethnic origin, mother tongue, gender, or subjective sexual preferences. But that's another debate, still dragged down by the unbalanced fervour of passions. And they tend to drive away the best care of reason.

III. Evil, from the beginning to the present day

Philosophy easily triumphs over past and future evils; present evils, however, always defeat them. La Rochefoucauld, Maxims.²⁷

Would it be possible to maintain, as Socrates and Plato did, that evil is not done voluntarily? Or that it comes from something outside the person who does it, like a supernatural, demonic force? Having seen it, felt it, or provoked it, what is evil really? Is it simply the absence of good, as St Augustine thought? Why was it revealed in heaven, with the revolt of the fallen angels, in paradise, with Adamic disobedience, and a little later, in the envious crime of Cain? How can we explain it if we often feel as helpless as Job, and if even Christ suffered extreme physical pain and spiritual dereliction on the cross? Is it something radical, as Kant analyses it? Or simply banal, as Hanna Arendt criticises it? Is it absolute for those who suffer it, and relative for those who commit it?

We know that what is understood as evil can take the most diverse forms and all kinds of vices: from the intimate suffering of a love disappointment to ethnic genocide; from material misery to the monstrosity of torture; from personal illness to collective catastrophe; from robbery to war between peoples; from endemic corruption to extortionate policies. And it is also possible to say that where good is not found, that is, in its absence, its opposite, precisely evil, flourishes. Evil, therefore, is both physical or sensitive when it causes pain, and spiritual or moral when it manifests itself against the good, against justice and all the other virtues, giving rise to fear, consternation, and anguish.

For the sufferer, however, compassion doesn't seem to be enough. As Paul Ricoeur reminds us, "Evil, once again, is what we fight against; in this sense, we have no other relationship with evil than this relationship of 'against'. Evil is that which should not be, but of which we cannot say why it is".²⁸ In his analysis of the symbolism of evil, Ricoeur suggests that it has three characteristics: its

²⁷ François de La Rochefoucauld, *Reflexions ou Sentences et Maximes Morales*, number 22: *La philosophie triomphe aisément des maux passés et des maux à venir. Mais les maux présents triomphent d'elle.*

²⁸ P. Ricoeur, *Le scandale du mal*, *Revue Esprit*, july/august, 1988, p. 62.

positivity, that is, the fact that it is something and not just an absence or lack; its exteriority, indicating that it comes from outside, from something objective; and its capacity for infection, that is, its capacity to seduce and attract human nature.²⁹ Since a hypothetical golden age has been lost, we feel that "evil is unspectacular, but always human. It shares our bed and eats at our table".³⁰ From the earliest age, we have realised that what we call evil we find in existence; would it be unreasonable to say that it is inherent in existence itself?³¹ Couldn't "original sin" be interpreted as an infused inclination towards evil?

Precisely for this reason, let's start with an authoritative opinion on the subject, and that is Kant's in *Religion at the Limits of Simple Reason*: "That the world is in evil is a complaint as old as history, and even as old as poetic art, even older, yes, just as old as the oldest of all poetry, priestly religion. However, everyone wants the world to begin with the good: the Golden Age, life in paradise, or an even more fortunate life in a community with celestial beings. But they soon let this bliss fade away like a dream, and then they rush down the slope of evil (moral evil, with which physical evil has always gone hand in hand) towards misfortune... could man, in his species, be neither good nor evil, or both, partly good and partly evil"?³²

And he doesn't fail to quote a verse from Horace's Odes: "The time of our fathers, worse than that of our grandfathers, has led to us, more perverse, and we will soon raise an even more vicious progeny."³³

If we go back to the earliest texts of Western culture that refer to the existence of evil in the world, we can already find this concern and astonishment in two very ancient works: the Torah or Pentateuch (written around the 9th century BC) and Hesiod's *Works and Days* (from the end of the 8th century).

The Book of Genesis says: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, You must not eat from any tree in the garden'? The woman said to the serpent,

²⁹ See *Finitude et Culpabilité II, La symbolique du mal*, Aubier/Montaigne, Paris, 1960.

³⁰ W. Auden, poem Herman Melville.

³¹ As stated by Prince Segismundo in Calderón de la Barca's *Life is Dream*: the greatest crime of man is to have been born.

³² I. Kant, *A Religião nos Limites da Simples Razão*, ps. 22 e 23, LusoSofia, Coleção Clássicos de Filosofia, Covilhã, Portugal, 2008.

³³ Odes, III, 6.

‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die’. ‘You will not certainly die, the serpent said to the woman. For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’.”³⁴

Still in the Book of Job, we read: “So the satan went forth from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with severe boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. He took a potsherd to scrape himself, as he sat among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, ‘Are you still holding to your innocence? Curse God and die!’. But he said to her, ‘You speak as foolish women do. We accept good things from God; should we not accept evil’? Through all this, Job did not sin in what he said”.³⁵

From the possible interpretations that the text suggests, we can infer that: 1. because he was "a man of integrity and uprightness, one who feared God and kept himself from evil",³⁶ he was able to prosper; 2. that even in the suffering of the evil he received, he didn't react by doing evil, remaining good.

The Hesiodic myth tells us that after Prometheus stole the sacred fire from the gods to offer it to men, Zeus took care to punish them all: Prometheus, who remained chained to a rock while vultures ate his liver, which was always redone, and men. For the latter, he asked Hephaestus to make a beautiful virgin and asked each god to deposit a type of evil in a vase. And he sent Pandora (which means "all the gifts") to Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother. So says the poet: “Before, the tribes of men lived on earth free from the sad sufferings of hard labour and the cruel illnesses that lead to old age, because men who suffer all this grow old quickly. Pandora, holding a large vase in her hands, lifted the lid and the terrible evils spread far and wide. Only hope remained. Held on the edge of the vase, it didn't go away, and Pandora then put the lid back on the vase, by order of Zeus, who holds the aegis and gathers the clouds. After that day, a thousand calamities surrounded men everywhere; the earth and the sea were full of them,

³⁴ Chapter III.

³⁵ Chapter II.

³⁶ Idem.

diseases tormented mortals day and night and brought them all their pain in silence, for the prudent Zeus had deprived them of a voice".³⁷

The Persian religion of Zoroaster, or Zarathustra, whose existence dates back to the seventh and sixth centuries before Christ, also categorically states that good consists in imitating the goodness of Aura-Masda, and evil in imitating the spirit of Angra Mainyu, one of Aura-Masda's children or creatures. In one of the gathas, or poems written directly by the prophet, Spenta Mainyu, or the Beneficent Spirit, brother of Angra, says: "Neither our thoughts, nor our doctrines, nor our mental forces; neither our choices, deeds or words, nor our consciences and souls are in agreement".³⁸

In all these texts we come across a similar idea about evil: it is the consequence of a punishment or a castigation of man for having committed disobedience or sacrilege against divine precepts, or he is, by free choice, responsible for the evils that afflict him. Among the oldest references, Homer's verses in the *Odyssey*, spoken by Zeus, still fit the bill: "Ah, mortals impute to us / Their evils, which to fate and their own carelessness / they owe alone". Or in the French version: "How mortals now accuse the gods! / For mortals say that evils come from us; but they, / by their foolish presumptions, give themselves evils beyond fate".³⁹

The Greek myth also tells us that evil arrives or is introduced silently, unexpectedly and even in the guise of its opposite, the good. What often seems like joy and well-being can bring with it more intense suffering than the previous pleasure. And we should note that the only gift that remained with Pandora's vase was hope. Does this mean that, despite the promises, hope is also evil? Wouldn't despair, i.e. expecting nothing from chance, be a good thing for man, since it would encourage him not to deceive himself and to act on his own?

In various dialogues, Plato, through Socrates, argues that no one does evil voluntarily, because it comes from our ignorance, from completely wrong opinions about something we want. In *The Menon*, we read:

"Socrates: Don't you think, dearest, that everyone desires good things?"

³⁷ Hesiod, *The Works and the Days*, verses 60 to 105.

³⁸ Mircea Eliade, *História das Crenças e das Ideias Religiosas*, tomo I, vol. II, pg. 148, Zahar Editores, Rio de Janeiro, 1976.

³⁹ Homer, *Odyssey*, Livro I, 26-28, trad. Manuel Odorico Mendes, Edusp, São Paulo, 2000 [1992].

Menon: No, I don't think so.

Socrates: But then some desire evil?

Menon: Yes.

Socrates: Do they believe that evil things are good, or, even though they know they are evil, do they still desire them?

Menon: Perfectly.

Socrates - What do you mean, "wishing for bad things"? That you want them to happen to you.

Menon: Yes, let them happen.

Socrates - Do they believe that evil things benefit those to whom they happen, or do they know that evil things harm those to whom they happen?

Menon: Some believe that evil things bring profit, and some know that they bring harm.

Socrates: Do you think they know that evil things are evil when they consider them to be beneficial?

Menon: I don't think so.

Socrates: Then it is clear that those who are ignorant of evil things do not desire them, but those who believe them to be good, even though they are evil. So if they ignore evil and take it for good, it's clear that they desire good things.⁴⁰

Although the Platonic opinion may seem a little naïve, it is nonetheless true that ignorance, already an evil in itself, can cause others that are much more serious. A good example of this is the absolute ignorance of medieval people about the causes and sanitary conditions of plagues, which considerably increased, for example, the lethality of the black plague, which appeared in China and was brought to Europe by the Mongols. At the same time, the Platonic view is that the choice of a particular object or action is projected onto a lesser and immediate good, while perfect knowledge of the whole situation would entirely modify the first choice. A person who is free of passions and prejudices (pre-judgments) and whose conduct is regulated by reason and moral values tends to act more beneficially; otherwise, the chances of acting badly, due to ignorance or disregard for those same values and virtues, are enormous. I believe that this ignorance is the best meaning given to the Socratic-Platonic statement.

⁴⁰ Plato, Menon, 77a and following.

At the beginning of the seventh book of the *Attic Nights*, the Roman author Aulo Gellius comments on the thought of Chrysippus, a Greek stoic philosopher from the third century BC, as he had written in his book *On Providence*: "Nothing is more foolish than those who think that there could have been goods if there had not been evils at the same time. For although goods are contrary to evils, it is necessary for one and the other to exist, opposed to each other and, as it were, sustained by mutual and adverse endeavour; neither contrary exists without the other. For how could the sense of justice exist if there were no injuries? Likewise, how could courage be understood without being compared to cowardice? How could continence be understood if it wasn't compared to incontinence? [...] And indeed, likewise, there are goods and evils, happiness and misfortune, pain and pleasure"⁴¹.

A similar conception of the inevitable coexistence of goods and evils was expressed by Lactantius, a fourth-century Christian apologist who was an adherent of God's providential. This means that, despite the evils, God has given men a powerful remedy, reason, and with it, wisdom. Says the apologist in *Wrath of God*: "See, then, that we need wisdom, especially because of the evils. If they were not proposed to us, we would not be rational animals [...] And yet [God] has placed before him [man] both good things and bad things, for he has given him wisdom, whose nature is employed in the discernment of bad and good things: for no one can choose better things and know what is good, unless he knows at the same time to reject and avoid bad things. Both are mutually connected, so if one is taken away, the other must also be taken away. Therefore, when good and bad things are presented to it, wisdom ends up fulfilling its office and desires the good for usefulness, but rejects the bad for security. Therefore, just as countless goods were given to wisdom, of which it can take advantage, so also evils were given against which it can guard itself. For if there is no harm, no danger - nothing, in short, that can hurt man - all the material of wisdom is taken away, and it will be unnecessary to man".⁴²

The idea of human self-responsibility for evil, which mythical-religious thought had previously formulated, was modified partly by St Paul and entirely by the

⁴¹ A. Gellius, *Noites Áticas*, p. 273, Eduei, Londrina, 2010.

⁴² Lactantius, *A Ira de Deus (The Wrath of God)*, Chapter 13, no page reference, available at newadvent.org.

Babylonian mystic Mani in the third century of our era, whose influence spread throughout much of the Middle East, and it was in Antioch, Syria, that Augustine became a Manichaeen before converting to Christianity. Paul, in his *Epistle to the Romans*, says: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.^[c] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it".⁴³

According to the Babylonian prophet Mani, self-proclaimed *sent from the God of Truth*, "before the advent of Heaven and Earth and all that is in them, there are two natures (*kyanin*): one good, another bad. The good nature inhabits the land of light. Mani calls it the Father of Greatness. Around it live five houses: consciousness, reflection, thought, intelligence, and science. Mani calls the evil nature the King of Darkness (*mlek heshuka*). He dwells in the dark earth in five worlds: smoke, fire, wind, water, and darkness".⁴⁴

The man was born out of this eternal conflict, his spirit being the result of the luminous nature and his body the result of the kingdom of darkness.

Contradicting this version, Augustine will say: "I was trying to understand (the question), which I had heard stated, about the free will being the cause of our doing evil, and your right judgment the reason for our suffering it... when I wanted or did not want something, I was absolutely certain that it was none other than myself who wanted or did not want it, experiencing that therein lay the cause of my sin... corruption is harmful, and if it did not diminish the good, it would not be harmful. Therefore, either corruption harms nothing, which is not acceptable, or all things that are corrupted are deprived of some good. But if they were deprived of all good, they would cease to exist entirely... Therefore, all things that exist are good, and that evil which I sought is not a substance, for if it were, it would be a

⁴³ Epistle to Romans, 7, 15-20.

⁴⁴ Theodoro Bar Konai, *Livre des Scolies*, Mimrā XI-59, pg. 234, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, E. Peeters, 1982. Lovanii.

good."⁴⁵ For the bishop of Hippo Regius, evil is the fruit of pride, understood as the love of oneself above all things. Evil, therefore, is not an extrinsic force acting from the outside on men, but a failure of human will, a non-being or absence of good. The bishop here takes up the opinion of his master Plotinus, when he affirms that evil is defined as being *steresi*, that is, a deprivation. In his book *The Free Will*, Augustine reaffirms: "It is by the will that we deserve and lead a life of praise and happiness; and by the same will that we lead a life of shame and unhappiness [...] merit is in the will. Thus, the reward or punishment will be either beatitude or misfortune".⁴⁶

Gottfried Leibniz understands that "One can take the metaphysical evil, physically and morally. Metaphysical evil consists in mere imperfection, physical evil in suffering, and moral evil in sin."⁴⁷ Thus, when speaking of metaphysical evil, Leibniz refers to a deficiency, a failure, or an imperfection that may exist before or after an all-natural experience, without considering a particular fact or experience. The philosopher continues: "It cannot be denied that there is physical evil in the world, i.e. suffering, and moral evil, i.e. crimes; furthermore, that physical evil does not seem to be distributed on earth in proportion to moral evil, as justice demands. So the question of natural theology remains: how did a single, entirely good, entirely wise, and absolutely powerful principle (God) allow sin and how could it often make the bad happy and the good unhappy"?⁴⁸

So here we have three kinds of evil: physical evil, which indicates pain, illness, death, and suffering; moral evil, which is lying, the swindle, the physical or psychological violence that is committed or practiced; and metaphysical evil indicates the imperfections of natural things and the human constitution. But how to respond to the chain of ideas that Leibniz himself assumes, namely: God is almighty; he is absolutely good and wise; evil, however, exists. The answer may begin with a question: is there another world, another known universe? No. Therefore, this is the best possible world for God, among those infinitely imagined. Within this maximum possibility (of this *optimum*), evil had its share

⁴⁵ Augustine of Hippo (Saint Augustine), *Confissões*, Coleção Os Pensadores, Book VII, Chapters 3 and 12, Abril Cultural, São Paulo, 1973.

⁴⁶ Idem, *O Livre Arbítrio*, chapters 13 e 14, ps. 60 a 62, Paulus Editora, São Paulo, 1995.

⁴⁷ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Ensaio de Teodiceia*, Part One, paragraph 43, Editora Perspectiva, São Paulo, in press.

⁴⁸ Idem, *ibidem*.

and lot. If you want to imagine a world even better, utopian because there is no evil, you must be satisfied with pure fantasy and its practical impossibility. For the philosopher, and also theologian, as long as one thinks about evil, it is necessary to consider all evils and the whole of the universe, and never a particular and isolated evil. In this totality, in which myriad factors interfere, the good is much greater.

In a way, his contemporary Spinoza also clearly separates the realms of nature and society. He says so in the appendix to the first part of the *Ethics*: "All the [prejudices] that I have proposed to point out here depend on just one, and it consists of the fact that people commonly assume that all things in nature act, like themselves, with an end in mind, and they come to take it for granted that God himself directs everything with an end in mind. They say, in effect, that God made everything for man and that he made man to worship him. It is just this prejudice that I will consider first, looking for the reason why most people hold it and why everyone is inclined to embrace it. Secondly, I will show its falsity and, finally, I will show how the prejudices concerning good and evil, merit and sin, praise and vituperation, order and confusion, beauty and ugliness, and other objects of the same kind came from it".⁴⁹

And in his *Political Treaty*, he reaffirms: "All that, therefore, which in nature seems ridiculous, absurd, or evil, has no such appearance except because we know things only in part, and ignore them, for the most part, the order of the whole nature and the connections that exist between things, so that we wish everything to be directed in a way according to our reason and, however, what reason claims to be bad is not bad at all if we consider the order and laws of the universe, but only if we have in view the exclusive laws of our nature".⁵⁰

For Spinoza, it is not possible to speak of evil in what occurs naturally, without human interference. Precisely because there are no preexisting reasons or future intentions in the action of nature, by him also called God. In society, men create or choose different models of behaviour and perspectives of life in common, such

⁴⁹ Baruch Spinoza, *Obra Completa, Ética*, First Part, p. 124, Coleção Textos, Editora Perspectiva, São Paulo, 2014.

⁵⁰ Idem, *Obra Completa I, Tratado Político*, Chapter II, parágrafo 8, ps. 377-378, Perspectiva, São Paulo, 2014.

as the saint, the hero or the wise. The good is in acting by approaching these values that, without doubt, contribute to the coexistence and improvement of society, while the evil is found in actions contrary, that lead men away from their own formulated ideals.

In his correspondence with Pastor Blyenbergh, Spinoza states: "As for me, I cannot agree that evil and sin are something positive, and even less that whatever may be or happen against the will of God [or nature, let us always remember]. Not only do I say that sin is not positive; I affirm that it is inappropriate and entirely human when we say that we sin against God or that men may offend God [...] It is certainly true that the wicked men express in their own way the will of God; but they are not therefore comparable with the good: the more a thing has perfection, the more it participates effectively in divinity and expresses the perfection of God. Then, because the good have incomparably more perfection than the bad ones, their virtue cannot be compared with that of the bad ones, for the bad ones do not have the love of God which comes from their knowledge, and only by which, according to our human understanding, we are called servants of God. What's more, since they don't know God, they are only an instrument in the hands of a divine worker, and an instrument that serves unwisely and destroys itself by serving, whereas the good men serve knowingly and become more perfect by serving [...] Since I don't introduce the idea of God as a judge into my idea of God, I estimate works according to their quality, not according to the power of the agent who produces them, and for me, the reward that follows the work is a consequence that follows from it as necessarily as it follows from the nature of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles".⁵¹

In Kant's work *Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone*, we can read the following: "in order to call a man evil, it would have to be possible to infer from some consciously evil actions, and even from a single one, a priori an underlying evil maxim, and from this a foundation universally present in the subject, of all particular morally evil maxims, a foundation which, in turn, is also a maxim [...] this subjective foundation must, in turn, always be an *actus* of freedom (for otherwise the use or abuse of man's agency concerning the moral law could not

⁵¹ Idem, *Obra Completa II, Correspondência*, letter 19, from 5/01/1665, Perspectiva, São Paulo, 2014.

be imputed to him, and good or evil be called moral in him). Therefore, the foundation of evil cannot lie in any object that determines the will through an inclination, in any natural impulse, but only in a rule that the will itself institutes for itself for the use of its freedom [...] The disposition towards animality in man can be put under the general heading of a physical and simply mechanical love of self, i.e., a love of self for which reason is not required. The proposition "man is evil", according to the foregoing, can mean nothing more than: he is aware of the moral law and yet has welcomed in his maxim the occasional deflection in its regard. "Man is evil by nature" means as much: this applies to him considered in his species [...] we can then call this propensity a natural inclination towards evil, and, since it must, however, always be self-responsible, we can call it an innate radical evil (but no less contracted by ourselves) in human nature. The formal proof that such a corrupt propensity must be rooted in man, however, we can spare given the multitude of glaring examples that experience puts before us in human actions... Three different degrees of this propensity can be distinguished. Firstly, the weakness of the human heart (to accept the moral law) or its fragility; secondly, the inclination to mix immoral motives with moral ones; thirdly, the inclination to follow maxims, that is, the malignity of human nature or heart... (*vitiositas, pravitas*), or, if you prefer, the state of corruption of the human heart".⁵²

It can be seen that for Kant, as for St. Augustine, man's innate radical evil is a moral choice and therefore something that comes from freedom or free will. And the philosopher reaffirms this in the same text: "The freedom of the will has the entirely peculiar quality that it cannot be determined to an action by any motive except only insofar as man has admitted it into his maxim (has transformed it for himself into a universal rule according to which he wants to behave); only in this way can a motive, whatever it may be, subsist together with the absolute spontaneity of the will (freedom)".⁵³

And perhaps that's why La Rochefoucauld wrote in his *Maxims and Reflections*: "Self-love is the greatest of all flatterers".⁵⁴

⁵² I. Kant, *A Religião nos Limites Simples da Razão*, p. 29 to 33, LusoSofia Press, Coleção Textos Clássicos de Filosofia, Covilhã, 2008.

⁵³ Idem.

⁵⁴ Opus cit.

Schopenhauer, an admirer of Kant and, in certain respects, his disciple, returns to Augustine's question, *unde malum?*, where evil comes from, and, being an atheist, he doesn't imagine approaching it from theological texts and sees evil neither as an absence of the dominant good nor as having a sinful origin.

Evil must be linked to the world itself and, therefore, to the Will (der Wille), that is, to that blind force which is the essential constituent of everything that exists and which, incorruptible, wants to remain in existence. Evil consists, in the human world, of a metaphysical act (that is, above any particular or temporal experience) of the Will, which, incarnating itself in life and consciousness, inflicts the conflicts of existence on individuals, because the form of a subjective will can perfectly well oppose any other of its kind.

Based on Kant's expression of radical evil, Hannah Arendt coined the terms *absolute evil and banality of evil* after following the Eichmann trial process in 1961, as well as reflecting on the most genocidal century in human history. As early as 1945, the philosopher wrote in the essay *Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility* that the problem of evil would be the basic question of post-war intellectual life.

Later, in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, the writer utters the following thought: "So far, the totalitarian belief that everything is possible seems to have proved only that everything can be destroyed. In their eagerness to prove that everything is possible, totalitarian regimes have discovered, without knowing it, that there are crimes that men can neither punish nor forgive. By becoming possible, the impossible became absolute, unpunishable, and unforgivable evil, which could no longer be understood or explained by the evil motives of selfishness, greed, covetousness, resentment, the desire for power, and cowardice; and which, therefore, anger could not avenge, love could not endure, friendship could not forgive".⁵⁵

In a letter to Gershom Scholem, dated 1963, she wrote: "It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never 'radical', that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface".⁵⁶

⁵⁵ H. Arendt, *Origens do Totalitarismo*, ps. 608-609, Part III, Companhia de Bolso, São Paulo, 2023.

⁵⁶ *The Jewish Writings*, p. 461, Schocken Books, New York, 2007,

What did Hannah Arendt discover through the character of Eichmann? That man, responsible for the deportation of Jews throughout Europe, like countless officials of all totalitarian regimes, had nothing demonic or hateful about him, given the monstrosity of his actions. He was an official dedicated to carrying out the orders received from the higher echelons and who, according to his statements to the court, would have had a bad conscience if he hadn't carried out the orders. Eichmann presented himself as an idealistic man, a believer in the benefits of the regime, having overcome inclinations that could make him sympathetic to the victims. In short, Eichmann was an average, normal person, neither weak-minded nor cynical. Adhering to the regime's logic and proposals, as all dictatorial governments do, he became incapable of putting himself in other people's shoes. Eichmann, here representing all officials of all discretionary organizations, that is, of a political nature or organized crime: "The longer we listened to him, the clearer it became that his inability to speak was closely linked to an inability to think, namely to think from someone else's point of view. There was no communication possible with him, not because he was lying, but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all protections against the words and presence of others, and therefore against reality as such... It was as if, in those last few minutes, he was summing up the lesson that this long course of human evil had taught us - the lesson of the banality of evil, which defies words and thought... He wasn't stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness - something that is in no way identical to stupidity - that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of his time. And if this is 'banal' and even funny, if with the best will in the world no diabolical or demonic depth can be extracted from Eichmann, this is far from being called a commonplace".⁵⁷

From an ethical point of view, this normality is more terrible than all the atrocities put together; it commits crimes in such circumstances that it becomes impossible to know or feel that evil has been committed. This is what makes it terrible, ineffable, unthinkable, *the banality of evil*. "I meant that evil is not radical, going to the roots [*radix*], that it has no depth, and for this very reason, it is so terribly difficult to think about, since thinking, by definition, wants to reach the roots. Evil is a surface phenomenon, and instead of being radical, it is merely

⁵⁷ *Eichmann in Jerusalem, a Report on the Banality of Evil*, ps. 27, 118 e 133, The Viking Press, New York, 1964.

extreme. We resist evil by not being swept away by the surface of things, by stopping ourselves and beginning to think — that is, by reaching another dimension than the horizon of everyday life. In other words, the more superficial someone is, the more likely he will be to yield to evil. An indication of such superficiality is the use of clichés”.⁵⁸

By admitting that evil is not found in nature and does not come from a supernatural, divine or demonic intention, one of the problems raised by the phenomenon is resolved: that of its eminently human origin. As Paul Ricoeur observed about Augustine's understanding of the subject, "If the question *unde malum* (where does evil come from?) loses all its ontological meaning, the question that replaces it, *unde faciamus malum* (where does it come from that we do evil?) swings the whole problem into the sphere of the act, of the will, of free will... And a purely moral view of evil brings with it, in turn, a penal view of history: no soul is not unjustly precipitated into unhappiness”.⁵⁹

But that doesn't end the questions. Why can I be an agent or a patient of evil, or both, sequentially? Does its appearance respond to a logical chain, or is it arbitrary? Does it derive from a social, collective system, or is it the result of sparse subjective actions? Can we trust that historical development or the march of civilization will reduce the world's ills? Or is it independent of history, only changing its figure?

Thinkers of the so-called Enlightenment of the 18th century, believing in the victory of reason and progress, bet that, since man is a perfectible being, he would be able, over time, to overcome socioeconomic and cultural evils. The most enthusiastic of them, Condorcet, said: “How much this picture of the human species, free from all chains, removed from the empire of chance, as well as from the enemies of its progress, and walking with a firm and sure step on the route of truth, virtue, and happiness, presents to the philosopher a spectacle that consoles him for the mistakes, the crimes, the injustices with which the Earth is still soiled, and of which he is often the victim”.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt / *Karls Jaspers Correspondence*, p. 409, Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, New York, 1992.

⁵⁹ P. Ricoeur, *Le Mal, un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie*, ps. 35 and 36, Labor et Fides, Geneva, 2004.

⁶⁰ Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, p. 219, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1970.

If Condorcet could have survived the 19th and 20th centuries, he would certainly have renounced his aspirations: the monstrous wars, genocides, labour and extermination camps, purges, organized famines, bombings of civilian populations, criminal or political torture, exploitation of labour, forced immigration, the worldwide spread of drugs and their psychotic effects, terrorism and political-economic corruption have confirmed the fact that, contrary to expectations, civilization can create barbarism on a global scale and at a very high technological level.

Before continuing, however, let's take a brief break from the Western way of looking at the problem, to bring up two short ancient Eastern texts that also refer to it.

The founder of Taoism, Lao Zi (or still Lao Tse, who lived between the 6th and 4th centuries BC), in the book *Dao De Jing* (or *Tao Te Ching*), Book of the Way and Virtue, without referring directly to a concept of evil, says: "For those who wish to possess the world and act to do so / I see [that] they will not succeed. / The world is a spiritual container / That cannot be manipulated / Whoever manipulates it, destroys it / Whoever retains it, loses it / For things / Are rigid or flexible / Bind or break / Therefore, the Holy Man Eliminates excess / Eliminates opulence / Eliminates complacency".⁶¹

For Taoism, evil consists of "acting". The wise man, who wants to keep this evil at bay, is not the one who remains in inaction (otherwise stones, which don't act, would be holy). Non-action, or Taoist inaction, means acting without wanting to take possession; evil is rooted in the act that is based on a particular will and wants to impose that particularity on the world. The natural movement of the path (Tao) is for each thing to take place and follow in close connection with the whole. Those who seek to act of their own free will seek to replace the Tao, thus committing an offence against the natural order of the world, forgetting that they are neither the beginning nor the end of things, just a humble participant in the cosmos. "The Sacred Man does the work through non-action / And practises the teaching through non-word / The ten thousand beings do, but not in order to accomplish / They initiate realisation, but do not possess it / They complete the

⁶¹ Lao Tse, *Tao Te Ching*, trad. Wu Jyn Cherng, São Paulo: Sociedade Taoísta do Brasil, [s.d.], p. 32.

work without attachment / And precisely because they accomplish without attachment / They do not pass away".⁶²

Another text from around two hundred years before Christ, the *Book or Ceremonial of Rites* (Li Ji or Li Ki), which is part of the Confucian canon, states: "The rites must be in harmony with the seasons and related to the products of the earth, to satisfy the pleasure of the spirits and the gods, to be under the feelings of men and to treat all things according to their particular nature; for each season has its productions, each locality has things that suit it (to the detriment of others), just as each magistrate has his attributions, and each object its use... All the beings scattered between the sky above and the earth below have a different way of existing: hence the institution of rites (which establish distinctions between men). In their revolution, heaven and earth do not stop, and their joint action gives rise to all things: hence the creation of music. In spring everything sprouts, in summer everything grows (without distinguishing between good and bad plants; it is the image of humanity (which makes us love everyone indiscriminately). In autumn we harvest, in winter we keep (all the produce of the earth, good and bad); this is the image of justice (which punishes or rewards with equal impartiality). Humanity has to do with music; justice has to do with rituals".⁶³

When rites, or ceremonious acts, when politeness and respect are lacking or fail, in other words, when they are neglected or abandoned, this gives rise to what can be evil. At the time of Confucius, "rite" was not limited to ceremonial behaviour, but to determining forms and limits. The loss of meaning and the need for forms is assimilated to the loss of humanity, which Confucius defines as the willingness to communicate all the planes of existence, giving form or measure to things. When this human mediation (the regulated act) breaks down, nothing else can be communicated, and all that remains is pain, which only connects to itself.

Returning to Western understandings, let's now look at the "nine possibilities of evil", according to a recent classification by Julian Baggini, an English professor of philosophy, author of philosophical popularisation books, and editor

⁶² Ibidem, p. 5.

⁶³ *Li Ki, Le Mémorial des Rites*, ps. 98 e 143, trad. Joseph-Marie Callery, Imprimerie Royale, Turim, 1853, disponível em chineancienne.fr/king/li-ki.

of *The Philosopher's Magazine*. It should be borne in mind that in this classification, the possibilities are actually mixed, i.e. they only didactically separate what can be multiple or concomitant.

Natural Evil - If what harms or causes damage is not linked to intentionality or awareness of intent, it can be said that it is a natural evil: natural disasters, unexpected illnesses, accidents that are not directly and consciously humanly responsible.

Systemic Evil - This is a continuous, generalised, cultural practice. Slavery, vaginal mutilation or infibulation, the binding of women's feet, the mistreatment of animals through fighting or bullfighting, the exploitation of labour, sexist prohibitions ordered by religious doctrines, or the regular use of illegal or immoral resources are or have been considered normal cultural practices and even recommended in various societies. There are also ritualised human sacrifices, such as those regularly practised by the Aztecs.

Complicit Evil - Where systemic evil is behaviour that is seen as socially commonplace over a long period of time, complicit evil is the evil of individuals in brief or prolonged situations of conflict. The worst examples of this accommodation can be seen in violent political and social protests, in prisons, when torture procedures are adopted, and in circumstances of war.

Indifferent Evil - Some people behave indifferently or with absolute disregard for the evil they may do to others. They don't feel any compassion or regret for their actions. Not infrequently they neglect the physical or moral damage they may cause, disregarding its consequences, being driven only by narcissistic desires or personal tendencies, which override any other rational criteria. An extreme and recent case of this was Germanwings Flight 9525 in March 2015, when the co-pilot knowingly and intentionally crashed the plane into a mountain in the Alps, killing 149 other people on board.

The Inherited Evil - In addition to those people who, due to neurological problems, are predisposed to psychopathies and sociopathies, disorders of extreme self-centredness, and antisocial attitudes, some have lived with situations of misery and daily violence from an early age, and who respond to or reproduce this sociocultural inheritance in the same way and with the same intensity, usually from adolescence onwards, without being able to adopt a moral compass that guides them in the opposite direction.

The Evil of Self-Preservation - This is the case of consciously accepting and participating in contradictory situations, such as serving dictatorial or corrupt governments, buying counterfeit products or products made by exploited labour from underdeveloped countries, in the name of one's socio-economic survival, personal comfort or justifications such as the lesser evil, i.e. that employees should receive a miserable salary than nothing at all.

The Utilitarian Evil - The logic of the lesser evil is closely linked to that of the greatest future good. If what is morally or ideologically good is what makes possible the greatest happiness of the greatest possible number, then sacrificing millions of people in the name of future happiness would not only be morally acceptable, but morally obligatory. All dictatorial regimes, left-wing or right-wing, have had utilitarian evil for the sake of general happiness as their present norm and future perspective, causing mass exodus, arrests, and murders. But people in charge of primary groups, such as the family, or secondary groups, such as those at work, can also sacrifice the present good of a family member or employee for the sake of future gain, generating situations or sensations of unease, anxiety, conflict, or revolt.

Virtuous Evil - While utilitarianism justifies its harm by the realisation of a greater good in the future, others do evil in the delusional belief that the action undertaken is virtuous. This is the case with violence in the name of a god, the state, an ideology, or immediate, passionate personal reactions, such as an act of revenge. This kind of evil is what Paul Ricoeur has already called Political Evil. The French philosopher says: "There is a specific problem with power. Not that power is evil. But power is a human greatness eminently subject to evil; it is perhaps, in history, the greatest occasion and the greatest demonstration of evil".⁶⁴

Sadistic Evil - Finally, there is what is known as sadistic evil, where the perpetrator is not only perfectly aware of the act but is also happy to do it, like certain rapists, paedophiles, and serial killers.⁶⁵

Having mentioned Paul Ricoeur, it is worth remembering that in the mid-20th century, he attempted to investigate the origins of evil in his work *Finitude and*

⁶⁴ P. Ricoeur, *Encyclopédie de la Philosophie*, La Pochothèque, Librairie Générale Française, Paris, 2002, pg. 269.

⁶⁵ See *Philosophie Magazine*, n° 37, Hors-Série, Paris. Spring of 2018.

Guilt, divided into two volumes: Fallible Man and The Symbolic of Evil. For him, man acts or reacts in the world made up of three faculties that intertwine and permanently influence each other: understanding or reason (*der Verstand*), will (*der Wille*), temperament, character, or emotional disposition (*das Gemüt*).

At the same time, man is a fallible creature, that is, subject to errors and mistakes. Of the three components that make up his psychic framework, the one that is most prone to error, failure, and deception is the emotional, sensitive or sensible one. This is because it internalises the worries, the fears that are always being felt. This 'affective fragility' is also a sign of the self's disagreement with itself, of a 'disproportion', because while the components of will and reason aim for infinity or eternity, and thus happiness, the emotional only achieve pleasure in isolated acts, in particular experiences, thus demonstrating the finitude or ephemerality of being.

Evil will then enter the human world precisely through the emotional door, through the passions, and the incessant search for pleasure. The emotional component, that of feelings and passions, contains an intentionality and intimacy that attributes or transfers quality to the things felt, in other words, feelings always express love, repulsion, indifference, and disregard. There will be a passion or dependence on individual possession, which extends to the economic level (*die Habsucht*); a passion for dominance in the group or in the political sphere of power (*Herrschaftsucht*) and, finally, a passion or greed for ostentation or personal honour (*Ehrensucht*).

Hence there is no evil that is a thing, a being, or a substance, but a way in which an emotional intention arising from human fallibility is freely expressed. Things and other beings in the universe, devoid of freedom, are also devoid of faults. But evil can only be understood based on human freedom, which, in all cases, will be the author and accomplice of the harm caused to other men and beings.

Turning now to Freud's analysis of evil, let's take as an example his penultimate writing, *Malaise in Civilisation*. To the fundamental question - what do men ask of life and what do they want to achieve in it - there is only one answer: happiness. "This endeavour has two aspects: a positive goal and a negative goal. On the one hand, it aims for an absence of suffering and

displeasure; on the other, for the experience of intense feelings of pleasure”.⁶⁶ This dual pursuit is nothing other than the pleasure principle. And yet, for man to relate to others, this principle is curtailed by the reality of civilisation, which is characterised by order, repression, and the transfer of psychic energy, mainly to work and social institutions. Somewhat pessimistically, Freud concludes: “We are inclined to say that the intention that man should be “happy” is not included in the plans of Creation”.⁶⁷

Suffering derives from three factors: from the body itself, which is doomed to destruction; from the external world (nature), which constantly turns against man and, finally, from our relationships in society. This last suffering is a kind of gratuitous addition, but no less fateful. Although sublimation in work can compensate for it, “the vast majority of people only work under the pressure of need, and this natural human aversion to work gives rise to extremely difficult social problems”.⁶⁸

The curious thing about this analysis of suffering is that Freud accepts the first two as inevitable processes - those that come from the body and nature. But not the one generated by civilisation: “We do not accept it at all; we cannot understand why the regulations established by ourselves do not, on the contrary, represent protection and benefit for each one of us”.⁶⁹ Throughout these pages, Freud investigates the cultural and economic causes of civilisation, but the question keeps reappearing: “It is not easy to understand how it can be possible to deprive an instinct of satisfaction. It is not done with impunity [...] It is difficult to understand how this civilisation can act on its participants in any other way than to make them happy”.⁷⁰

The answer, unfortunately, is not satisfactory. It leads us to a dead end. Because along with libido (Eros), Freud discovers the destructive and equally instinctive force of aggression and death (Thanatos). The unity of man is welded together by a polarisation between love and violence.

⁶⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Obras Psicológicas Completas, ESB, volume XXI: O Futuro de Uma Ilusão, O Mal-Estar na Civilização e Outros Trabalhos (1927-1931)*, p. 94, Imago, Rio de Janeiro, 1996.

⁶⁷ Idem, p. 95.

⁶⁸ Idem, p. 99.

⁶⁹ Idem, p. 105.

⁷⁰ Idem, ps. 118 and 121.

Also in this text, Freud looks at the Christian commandment 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself'. He does so to affirm that this precept contradicts the deep nature of the human being, endowed with aggressive instincts and inhabited by the death instinct.

Says the psychoanalyst: "The portion of reality, often denied, that lies behind all this is that the human being is not cordial, in need of love and being capable, at most, of defending himself if attacked; but he can boast of having among his instinctive gifts a large part of aggressiveness. Consequently, his neighbour is not just an occasional aid or sexual object for him, but also a temptation for him to satisfy his aggression, exploit his labour power without compensation, use him sexually without his consent, take possession of his property, humiliate him, cause him suffering, martyr him and kill him. Homo homini lupus; who, after all that life and history have taught us, would have the courage to dispute this phrase? This cruel aggression usually responds to a provocation, or is put at the service of a purpose whose goal could be achieved by gentler means. In favourable circumstances, when the opposing psychic energies that usually restrain it fail, it manifests itself spontaneously, revealing the human being as a savage beast, ignoring the concern to spare his own species... Despite the punishments, civilisation's efforts have not been very successful.

Each of us ends up abandoning as illusions the hopes we had in our youth for our fellow human beings, and each of us can see how difficult and painful life has become because of its malignity".⁷¹

Contrary to the entire ethical tradition in philosophy, Nietzsche rejected the notion of evil as understood by his predecessors, including the one who greatly influenced him, Schopenhauer. In his *Genealogy of Morals*, the philosopher states: "Out of my own scruples, which I grudgingly admit, my curiosity, as well as my suspicion, had to say 'halt!' to the question: what exactly is the origin of our good and bad? [...] Fortunately, I learnt in time to separate the theological prejudice from the moral one and I no longer looked for the origin of evil behind the world. A bit of historical and philological schooling, including an innate selective sense [...] soon changed my problem into this other one: under what conditions did man invent these value judgements, good and bad? And what

⁷¹ Idem, os. 133 and 134.

value do they have? Have they obstructed or favoured the prosperity of humanity so far? [...] the 'good' judgement does not come from those who have been shown to be 'good'! Rather, it was the 'good' themselves, that is, the noble, the powerful, the most highly placed and of high sentiment, who felt and judged themselves and their own doing as good, that is, of the first order, as opposed to everything that is inferior, of lower sentiment, common and plebeian".⁷²

Nietzsche bases himself here on the Greek etymology of *aristos* (what is very good, excellent, superlative of *agathos*, good), which led to the political formation of the aristocracy, the party of nobles, descendants of the mythical heroes and warriors of Greece. The philosopher continues: "The *pathos* of nobility and distance, as has been said, the lasting and dominant global and fundamental feeling of a superior species of lords, put in proportion with an inferior species, with a 'below' - this is the origin of the opposition good and bad [...] (one can also conclude the opposition good and evil). It is due to this origin that the word 'good' is not attached to non-selfish actions, as is the superstition of those genealogists of morality [...] The masters were abolished and the morality of the common man won. At the same time, this victory can be seen as a poisoning of the blood; undoubtedly, this intoxication was successful".⁷³

Most likely influenced by Nietzsche, there are certain English-speaking authors (British or American) who have also questioned the relevance of the concept of evil. They are sceptical about the concept and believe that we should abandon it. By doing so, they say, one can 'more accurately and less perniciously' understand and morally describe despicable actions, their characteristics and events using commonplace concepts such as badness and wrongdoing.

These sceptics believe that the concept of evil is particularly problematic and should be abandoned, while other moral concepts, such as right, wrong, good and bad, deserve to be maintained. They offer three reasons for abandoning the concept of evil. The concept involves unjustified metaphysical commitments to evil spirits, the supernatural or the devil. The concept of evil is useless because

⁷² F.W. Nietzsche, *Genealogia da Moral*, Preface, ps. 297 e 298, Nietzsche (Os Pensadores), Abril Cultural, São Paulo, 1983.

⁷³ Ibidem, ps. 299 and 300.

it lacks explanatory power. Finally, the concept can be harmful or dangerous when used in moral, political or legal contexts, revealing prejudices.

The concept of evil would have explanatory power or would be useful for understanding if it were capable of clarifying why certain actions are carried out by certain agents and not by others. According to Inga Clendinnen, the concept of evil cannot explain the performance of actions because it is an essentially dismissive classification, which immediately demeans or despises.⁷⁴

To say that a person or action 'reveals evil' is simply to say that the person or action defies explanation or is even incomprehensible. Similarly, Phillip Cole believes that the concept of evil is often used when we lack a complete explanation of why an action was committed.⁷⁵ For example, we might wonder why two ten-year-old boys, Robert Thompson, and John Venerables, tortured and killed a two-year-old boy, James Bulger, while other ten-year-old children, with the same genetic characteristics and upbringing, cause less offence or harm.

Other authors, such as Clara Card, point out that harm can come from different motives, including good ones. Hence the assertion that "Institutions are evil when it is reasonably foreseeable, by those with power to change or abolish them, that their normal or correct operation will lead to or facilitate intolerably harmful injustices. Abolitionists object to capital punishment on this ground. The intent is to execute only those guilty of capital offenses. Yet, the argument goes, the ordinary, normal, or correct observance of the practice foreseeably results in the execution of innocents who cannot afford the legal talent to counteract routinely tolerated police and prosecutor incompetence and corruption".⁷⁶

A simple response to the supposed inexplicable nature of the concept of evil is to argue that evil is no less useful, from an explanatory point of view, than other concepts, such as good, bad, just, unjust, beneficial, or harmful. Therefore, if we had to abandon the concept of evil, we would also have to do so with all notions of ethics and moral practices. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, we should then shut up about this issue and many others.

⁷⁴ See I. Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

⁷⁵ See P.A. Cole, *The Myth of Evil: Demonizing the Enemy*, Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

⁷⁶ Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*, pg. 140, Oxford University Press, 2002.

Finally, let's remember two phrases that once became famous but have long since been forgotten by the younger generations. The first was collected by Erasmus of Rotterdam in his magnificent book on the Adages: "Evil brings men together (*conciliant homines mala*) - A proverbial expression that shows how it often happens, or sometimes even happens, that enemies become friends because of an evil that strikes them both. Aristotle, in the first book of *Rhetoric* (1362b) says: 'Nothing prevents the same thing from sometimes being useful to two opposing people. Hence it is said that evil unites men when both suffer harm in the same way'. Elsewhere we talk about syncretism (adage 11). But the proverb can also be used to say that the ignorant support the ignorant, and the child helps the child. In fact, not only does the communion of positive experiences cement the relationship of friendship, but affection is also often born from common ills. Those who have been shipwrecked together, those who have fought together, those who have been captured by the enemy together, and even those who suffer from the same ailments of body and soul are well-liked".⁷⁷

The second and last one also appears in the same *Adagiorum* by Erasmus: "An Iliad of evils (*Ilias malorum*) - It is said of a very great and at the same time numerous misfortune since there is no kind of evil that has not been recorded in the Homeric Iliad". And, therefore, in the world of men.

⁷⁷ E. de Roterdã, *Adagiorum*, n.º 1.071

IV. Is a Just Society Possible?

In a broad sense, a society can be defined as a set or grouping of beings that maintains a series of mutual and constant relationships, including those of cooperation, dependence, exchange, division of functions, and competition, with a view to survival and reproduction and the satisfaction of the ever-renewable needs of its members. Hence the talk of animal societies, bees, or ants. But what interests us here is human society and the collective frameworks to which the individual belongs or is implicated, above all the state and political organisation, and which derive from a supposed or fictitious "social contract" of origin, from a previous reciprocal engagement.

Every society, no matter how primitive, has a certain rationality, given that its members act as a result of individual needs and interests and, consequently, these mutual relationships require a calculation of gains and losses, advantages and sacrifices, rewards and sanctions. Unable to satisfy all their needs and passions personally, individuals naturally associate, from the formation of a primary group, such as the family, to more complex and hierarchical organisms, including supranational ones.

Just to remind us of the simultaneity and complementarity of life in common, Socrates and Plato already affirmed this in *The Republic*: "One man brings with him another man for a certain job, and yet another for another job or function, and the multiplicity of needs brings together in the same residence a large number of associates and auxiliaries, and to this common establishment we have given the name of city (*polis*)... Very well, then. Let's establish the foundations of a city by thought; these foundations will be our needs".⁷⁸

In order, therefore, to ensure a minimum of order and organisation in these exchanges and relationships of interdependence and differentiated functions, the figure of the state was historically imposed, at least in most of the world and its collectivities. In the state of nature, and I believe Hobbes is more right here than Rousseau, "To this war of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice,

⁷⁸ Plato, Oeuvre Complète, *La République*, livro II, 369 c, Librairie Garnier, Paris, 1936.

have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues. Justice and injustice are none of the faculties neither of the body nor mind. If they were, they might be in a man that were alone in the world, as well as his senses and passions. They are qualities that relate to men in society, not in solitude".⁷⁹

This Leviathan, as Hobbes called it, is responsible, through a principle of subsidiarity (interdictions, protection, aid, command), for exercising certain functions that citizens themselves should not and cannot appropriate - sovereignty, justice, public security, issuing and controlling currency, among others - with a view to the general interest or, in Aristotle's words, the common good, which is the purpose of politics.

It is also because of social cooperation and competition that the problem or concern with social justice arises, because if there were no common life, i.e. a permanent exchange of actions, services, products, and values in society, each individual would be absolutely autonomous and, in the absence of comparisons and more lasting contacts, the idea of social justice would not apply. We could even say that the expression *social justice* is a pleonasm, because it can only be claimed in society.

To investigate the possibility of a just society, we need to start by understanding this attribute, in other words, what is just. Allow me to begin this journey with Epicurus, although he is a little later than Aristotle, whose work on the subject is undoubtedly much more extensive and important.

Epicurus writes in his *Capital Maxims*, number 5: "It is not possible to live pleasurably without living sensibly, honestly and justly (*dikaíos*), nor to live sensibly, honestly and justly without living pleasurably".⁸⁰ In number 33: "Justice (*diké, dikaiosiné*) is not something in itself; it is only, in the association of men, whatever its size and place, a pact (or contract) that aims not to harm and not to be harmed".⁸¹ And in 38: "When new things do not come into being and it turns out that what has been established as just does not conform to the previous notion, then those things are not just. But when there are new things and the

⁷⁹ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning their Felicity and Misery, pg. 79, Andrew Cook, Londres, 1651.

⁸⁰ Epicuro, *Máximas Capitais*, Clásicos de Grecia y Roma, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2008.

⁸¹ Idem.

things already established are still useful, then they are just for the common life of the citizens".⁸²

In principle, therefore, any action that is useful and combined for life in common and that does not cause harm to the parties is just. Thus, justice is something convenient because it establishes a more pleasant and peaceful way of life. First of all, it's worth noting that, for the philosopher, convenient (not harming and not being harmed) doesn't just mean something pragmatic in the composition of personal interests, but is inspired by an invitation to know about natural and human things, because without knowing what things are and how fickle and often foolish human behaviour is, it's impossible to define what is convenient before the pact.

Secondly, we realise that justice, before being a legal system or a bureaucratic structure, is a principle of life, a good, a *virtue* of a moral nature, based on knowledge, in other words, on experience and reason.

Aristotle makes it clear to us about the just and justice: "The lawless man, as well as the greedy and the ungodly, are considered unjust, so that both the law-abiding and the honest man are evidently just. The just, therefore, is the law-abiding and upright, and the unjust, the lawless and ungodly [...] Since we have seen that the lawless man is unjust, and the law-abiding man is just, evidently all lawful acts are, in a certain sense, just acts, because the acts prescribed by the lawgiver are lawful [...]. ...] so that we call just those acts that tend to produce and preserve, for political society, happiness and the elements that make it up [...] well-crafted law does these things rightly, while laws made in haste do them less well [...]. For this very reason it is said that only justice, among all the virtues, is the "good of another", since it relates to our neighbour by doing what is advantageous to another, whether a ruler or an associate [...] Justice, in this sense, is not a part of virtue, but the whole of virtue; nor is injustice, its opposite, a part of vice, but the whole of vice [...] We have shown that both the unjust man and the unjust act are ungodly or unrighteous. Now it becomes clear that there is also an intermediate point between the two iniquities understood in each case. And that point is equity, because in every kind of action in which there is the more and the less, there is also equality. Therefore, if the unjust is iniquitous, the just

⁸² Idem.

is equitable [...] And this equality will be observed between the persons and things involved [...] If they are not equal, they will not receive equal things; but this is the origin of complaints and disputes, or when they are equal, they have and receive unequal things. This, moreover, is evident from the fact that distributions must be made according to merit, since everyone admits that fair distribution must agree with merit in some sense [...] democrats identify it with the condition of the free man, supporters of oligarchy with wealth or nobility of birth, and supporters of aristocracy with excellence. The just, then, is a kind of proportional term [...] In fact, proportion is an equality of reasons [...] That, then, is what is just: what is proportional; and what is unjust is what violates proportion”.⁸³

We see that the philosopher defines just and justice both by the legal (within the law), the equal (being a member of the same political community) and the proportional (merits and personal or private goods). And just as truth is the supreme value of knowledge, justice is the supreme value of the social or political sphere (of life together in the *polis*).

Roman law, in its republican period, had as its *ius* the individual right of the citizen, or the right of men, as opposed, therefore, to *fas*, the scope of the right of the gods or the norm established by them. Hence *iustus*, *iusta*, is that which is an accordance with the law; as for the just person, he is the one who behaves in such a way as to observe the law and the individual right it protects. And *iustitia*, finally, would be the general state of human relations, in which *ius* is respected and arbitrary behaviour is avoided. That's why Cicero wrote in *De Officiis* that *iniustitia* is the rupture of *ius*, that which guarantees *libertas*.

Since Aristotle, then, three types of justice have been distinguished: distributive, commutative, and corrective.

The distributive is that of sharing or distribution, as the name itself suggests. It is justified by the basic ideas of equality and proportionality. As for equality, it's about offering the same thing to everyone, at a certain level of living conditions or exercise of rights. For example, the right to vote for every citizen, a salary for everyone who works, punishment for anyone guilty of a crime. As for proportionality, it derives from the idea of merit or its opposite, demerit or dishonour, as well as from the importance of the contribution to society, and it

⁸³ Aristotle, *Ética*, book V, 1, 2, 3

would be fair for more knowledge, greater responsibility or greater efficiency in work or in the production of goods to be rewarded with greater private incomes; the more hideous or infamous a crime, the greater the penalties to be assigned to it.

Commutative justice requires the equal exchange (*commutatio*) of obligations and duties or the substitution of something for another of the same arithmetical or monetary value, and applies above all to the economic world (the exchange of goods, barter or the price considered fair). But it is still ethical in nature. If parents take good care of their children (out of instinct or moral obligation), in return the children must obey their parents for the same reasons (protection and moral obligation). If the employee fulfils his obligations, it is only fair that the employer pays him in a way that is both dignified and legal.

Corrective justice is the type that repairs damage or harm, albeit in a substitutive way. This refers to the most common cases in civil and criminal law today, such as theft, fraud, murder, corruption, embezzlement, breach of social and economic contracts, etc.

When considering these types of justice and the Western symbol of the scales, it should be borne in mind that political equality has for centuries required equal chances (education, health, for example), provided by a system of incentives and social protection; but the demands of merit must take precedence over dogmatic standardisation. The greater the responsibility, knowledge, skill or efficiency required for a job, the more competence, ability, effort, and merit must justify the choice or decision. Thus, it's necessary to consider that equalising what is (or proves to be) unequal is also a form of injustice.

It's important to note here that Aristotle and Epicurus speak of justice as a particular virtue, or between particulars. For both ancient authors, the notion and pursuit of the good precedes the notion and practice of justice. Also in the Institutes (*Instituciones*), a work designed to teach law from the emperor Justinian onwards, justice (in the positive sense of law) is defined as "what is always equitable and good" (*quod semper aequum ac bonum est*). This conception differs from that offered by Hobbes, when he states: "In order for the words just and unjust may have any place, some kind of coercive power is necessary, capable of obliging men equally to fulfil their pacts, through the terror of some punishment that is greater than the benefit they expect to derive from breaking

the pact, and capable of strengthening that property that men acquire by mutual contract, as a reward for the universal right they have renounced. And there can be no such power before a commonwealth is established [...] So the nature of justice consists in the fulfilment of valid pacts, but the validity of pacts only begins with the institution of a civil power sufficient to oblige men to fulfil them, and it is also only then that property begins to exist".⁸⁴

Would it be possible to transfer the concept of antiquity (the good precedes and founds the just) to a modern social and constitutional order, that is, from the states created after the Renaissance, in which the just is the legal condition of the good? Yes, as long as we understand the social and constitutional order as a system of rules that encourages and, at the same time, constraints subjects or citizens to practise virtues, that is, good social behaviour, avoiding or sanctioning vices and evils. Since no one is born entirely virtuous or vicious, but only with a certain inclination towards this or that kind of action, virtue must be learnt from the experience of one's elders (if, of course, they have learnt it), through the exercise of reason and with the spirit (intention) of the laws.

However, the diversity of times and cultures is an undeniable reality, which makes understanding what is fair and justice much more complicated, or even uncertain, if we only consider cultural values, which are obviously not universal, but rather particular. In other words, it's impossible to formulate ideas and analyze only so-called "cultural" actions and customs as just. As Descartes reminds us in *Discourse on the Method*: "Having learnt from school that nothing could be imagined so strange and so unbelievable that one of the philosophers had not already said; and then, when travelling, having recognised that all those who have sentiments very contrary to ours are not barbarians or savages for that reason, but that many use reason as much or more than we do; and having considered how much the same man, with the same spirit, being brought up from childhood among Frenchmen or Germans, becomes different from what he would be if he always lived among Chinese or cannibals; and how, even in the fashions of our clothes, the same thing that pleased us ten years ago, and which perhaps will please us even before another ten years have passed, now seems extravagant

⁸⁴ T. Hobbes, opus cit., Of the First and Second Laws and of Contracts, ps. 88 and 89.

and ridiculous to us, so that it is much more custom and example that persuade us than any certain knowledge, and that, nevertheless, the plurality of voices is not proof that is worth anything for truths that are a little difficult to discover, since it is much more likely that a single man has found them than a whole people".⁸⁵

After the discovery of the New World, 17th-century thought already recognised and was on guard against the following fact: that "humanity was, in some way, decentralised; it was no longer possible for it to organise all human affairs from a single point of view (that of Roman Catholicism, for example), to make man's destinies depend on an 'eternal council' that had linked them in a single universal order".⁸⁶

This perception of the variability and instability of human institutions in the field of law was already present in the works of Roman compilers such as Ulpian and Gaius, who included in the *ius civile* (civil law) what is proper or characteristic of each city, people or nation, and those laws that are found in all peoples by force of natural reason (*ius gentium, quo gentes humanae utuntur*). This is also the understanding found in Montesquieu's magnum opus, *The Spirit of the Laws*. There the philosopher says: "The intelligible world must be as well governed as the physical world. Although the former also has laws, it doesn't follow them consistently in the same way that the physical world does with its own. The reason is those particular intelligent beings are limited by their own nature and are therefore subject to error; and, on the other hand, it is their nature to act on their own [...] and even those [laws] that they give themselves are not always followed."⁸⁷

Despite this, there is a force common to human communities, beyond brute and natural force, by which the strongest, the most agile or the most cunning prevail (*ius naturale*), which seeks to coordinate efforts and regulate common life in society. This force is that of "law in general, since it governs all the peoples of the earth".⁸⁸ This principle of order and internal stability is not absolute and the rules it establishes are not fixed forever. "When you look at the monuments of

⁸⁵ René Descartes, *Discurso do Método*, Second Part, p. 79, Editora Perspectiva, São Paulo, 2010.

⁸⁶ Bernard Groethuysen, *Philosophie de la révolution française: Précédé de Montesquieu*, p. 19, Paris, Gallimard, 1992.

⁸⁷ Montesquieu, *L'Esprit des Lois*, Primeira Parte, Capítulo I, p. 22, Gallimard, 1995.

⁸⁸ Ibidem, Capítulo III, p. 24

our history and our laws, it seems that everything is sea and that even the coastlines are missing from that sea".⁸⁹ Despite everything, people end up establishing laws, because necessity forces them to do so. Therefore, they are not driven by fantasies alone and the order they establish is not purely factitious. It is necessary, says Montesquieu, "that the laws should be linked to the nature and principle of the government established or to be established, either when they form it, as political laws do, or when they maintain it, as civil laws do. They must relate to the physical physiognomy of the country, the climate, the quality of the land, its situation, its size, to the way of life of the people [...] they must relate to the degree of freedom that the constitution allows, to the religion of its inhabitants, their inclinations, their wealth, their number, their trade, their customs and manners".⁹⁰

Every law, therefore, is part of a social organism and the logic of a form of government (republican, monarchical, despotic or dictatorial, or even democratic, aristocratic) brings with it a set of laws and their characteristics. And in addition to its conservation, each state has a particular object: "Greatness was the object of Rome, war that of Lacedonia, religion that of the Jewish laws, commerce that of Marseilles, public tranquillity that of the Chinese laws, navigation that of Rhodes."⁹¹ And one could add: the political and economic freedoms, of England.

Aware of these differences and having as a principle the impossibility of, basing itself on particular customs, establishes a universal idea of fairness and justice for every man, Voltaire wrote to Empress Catherine II of Russia: "Laws are made after the fact, just as we caulk ships after water infiltration; they are numerous, because they are made for ever-resurgent needs; they are contradictory, since needs are always changing; they are almost always poorly written because they are almost always written by pedants for barbaric governments. They resemble our cities, built irregularly, at random, mixing palaces and hovels in narrow, winding streets".⁹²

Despite of the wide-ranging differences in customs, interests at stake and laws, there is a common ground, a kind of law that we can recognise in ourselves,

⁸⁹ Ibidem, Livro XXX, Capítulo XI, p. 395.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, p. 24

⁹¹ Ibidem, Livro XI, Chapter V, p. 112.

⁹² Voltaire – Catherine II, Correspondance 1763-1778, Letter of June 20, 1770, Editeur Non-Lieu, Paris, 2006.

according to Voltaire, which is the moral law (or ethical principle, if you like) because we intimately know when we are doing right and when we are doing wrong. That's why the French philosopher and novelist wrote to Prince Frederick of Prussia: "I always submit my metaphysics to morality as far as I can."

In this respect, Kant argues: "They [the teachings of morality] command each one without regard to his inclinations; only because, and insofar as, he is free and has practical reason. The learning of their laws is not drawn from observation of oneself and the animality present in oneself, nor from the perception of the course of the world, of what happens or of how one acts (although the German word custom means, like the Latin *mores*, only manners and forms of life), but reason commands how one should act, even if no example of it were to be found, and also does not take into account the advantage that could result to us from it and that only experience could teach".⁹³

For reasons such as these, applied to our judgments and actions, Kant divides ethics into two branches: the doctrine of right, which includes moral laws and legal laws, and the doctrine of virtue, which concerns ethical laws. While legal legislation applies to external relations between men (work, commerce, property regime, exchanges, etc.), ethical legislation governs the interiority of the moral subject. It guides not only the form of action, but its purpose.

Thus, considering that all men are equal, regardless of their conditions, time and place of life, moral principles must be applied to all rational beings, in opposition to or differently from the particularities of cultures and individual personalities (inclinations, tendencies, capacities). And actions will be moral only if they are taken rationally out of respect for morality itself, without ulterior motives, that is, in response to a personal or group desire. Therefore, we must act in such a way that the principle of our motivation has universal value and, thus, becomes necessary, that is, always required in all circumstances of life.

Although it is difficult to find purely moral actions, since we can always relate them to a personal or group interest, we must remember that the intention and good of the moral law is to transform everyday life and common experience; its fundamental purpose is to perfect reality and the human condition, and not to

⁹³ I. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Part One, II, On the Necessity and Ideas of a Metaphysics of Morals, Editora Vozes, Petrópolis and Ed. Universitária São Francisco, 2013, digital edition, without page indication.

submit to the impulses that dominate us and to the passions and vices that naturally and powerfully seduce us.

From this “categorical imperative” (to think and act without other particular conditions) it follows: treat others as ends in themselves (*Zweck an sich*) and never as means, primarily avoiding utilitarianism and immediacy. Even an apparently universal proposition such as “do not do to others what you would not have them do to you” can hide a fallacy arising from personal utility, since a defendant can invoke it before a judge so that the judge takes the defendant’s place; or a child who has committed a bad act can invoke it so as not to be punished by his parents. It is, preferably, a question of acting according to principles that could constitute the “kingdom of ends”, that is, a legal community in which we are, simultaneously, decision-makers and subjects of the law.

From this, we can conclude another principle that is little considered and seldom perceived in society: moral law is the true realm of freedom, because we ourselves, individually, can impose just and universal behaviour on ourselves, without the need for legal law, especially when we live under illegitimate or unenforced laws. To put it another way: if by some miracle we were all ethical, there would be no need for legal law and its grandiose bureaucratic structures, because we would mutually avoid evil and vices, even in the absence of legal coercion. This is why Xenocrates replied when asked what he taught his students: “To do spontaneously what the laws would force them to do”.⁹⁴

In the 18th and 19th centuries, with the growing industrialization and after the political revolutions in Europe and the Americas, there was a gradual shift from the “freedom of the ancients” (restricted by the traditions and values of agrarian societies that hindered changes in living conditions and social advancement) to the “freedom of the moderns,” which means that each individual increases his or her capacity for free choice, including his or her own conception of good and justice; that is, with the progressive autonomy of the individual, a characteristic of modernity according to Hegel, no notion imposes itself with great force. Societies became more complex, socioeconomic interests diversified, and the newer social classes gained flexibility, density, and importance (such as the proletariat and the

⁹⁴ M.T. Cicero, *La République*, First Book, II, ps. 3 and 4, Didier et Cie. Editeurs, Paris, 1858.

petite bourgeoisie), which gave rise to a polyphonic moral discourse, that is, containing opposing and even antagonistic values.

The Declarations of Rights, both at the founding of the United States (Virginia Declaration of Rights, 1776) and at the establishment of the French republic, forged a concept of citizenship that remains theoretically consistent and that has spread to much of the world, except under dictatorial governments. It should be noted, however, that the American document took care to restrict its purposes to the people of Virginia, by stating: "a declaration of rights made by the good people of Virginia, assembled in full and free convention, whose rights belong to them and their posterity, as the basis and foundation of government."⁹⁵ The French document, on the other hand, expresses itself in the name of man, and therefore universally, and not in the name of the French citizen in particular.

According to both Declarations, there are two basic concepts for a just society: equality before the law and freedom of thought and action. Thus, we can read in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, approved by the French National Assembly in 1789: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights; the purpose of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man; these rights are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression; freedom consists in being able to do whatever does not injure others; thus, the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits, except those which assure to the other members of society the enjoyment of the same rights; these limits can be assured only by law; no man may be accused, arrested or detained except in the cases determined by law; those who seek, issue or execute arbitrary orders must be punished; no one should be harassed for his opinions, even religious ones, so long as their expression does not disturb the public order prescribed by law; the free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man; every citizen may thus speak, write and print freely, but be held liable for abuses of this freedom in the terms determined by law; Since property is a sacred and inviolable right, no one can be deprived of

⁹⁵ The Virginia Declaration of Rights, Washington: The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 1776, disponível em: <<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/virginia-declaration-of-right>.

it, except when public necessity, legally established, requires it, and under the condition of fair and prior compensation”.⁹⁶

Quite different from these principles are those propounded in the Manifesto of the Communist Party by Marx and Engels, published in 1848, a libel and political programme that served as a guide for the thinking of part of the left in the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as for the so-called real communist regimes after the Russian Revolution: The communists can summarize their theory in a single expression: the abolition [*Aufhebung*] of private property [...] The first step in the workers' revolution is the elevation of the proletariat to the ruling class, the conquest of democracy by struggle. The proletariat will use its political domination to gradually wrest all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class, and to multiply as rapidly as possible the mass of the forces of production. Naturally, this can only happen initially through despotic interventions in the property right and in the bourgeois relations of production, through measures that seem economically insufficient and unsustainable, but which in the course of the movement go beyond themselves and are inevitable as means of revolutionizing the entire mode of production. These measures will naturally vary from country to country. For the more advanced countries, however, the following can be applied in a fairly general way: 1. Expropriation of landed property and use of land rents for state expenses; 2. Heavy, progressive, and gradual taxation; 3. Abolition of the right of inheritance; 4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels; 5. Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, through a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly; 6. Centralization of the transportation system in the hands of the state; 7. Increase in the number of national factories, instruments of production, clearing (deforestation), and improvement of land according to a community plan; 8. Compulsory work for all, the establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture; 9. Combination of agricultural exploitation and industrial manufacture; gradual elimination of the difference between town and country through a more equitable distribution of the population throughout the country; 10. Free public education for all children.

⁹⁶ Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, 1789.

Abolition of child labor in factories in its present form. Unification of education with industrial production, etc".⁹⁷

From this perspective, a just society is characterised first and foremost by the extinction of private ownership of the means of production; and given the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat, only one political representation is allowed, that of the communist party. The idea of justice therefore emerges from a fundamentally political-economic and collective vision of society, since individual, civil, and political freedoms were considered bourgeois and, consequently, unjust because they were exploitative.

Starting from the primordial idea of citizenship, i.e. the possession of rights and the need for basic duties, its scope expanded throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. In other words, "alongside properly civil claims (personal freedoms and economic action) and political claims (the right to vote, representation and association), i.e. those known as formal citizenship rights, other additional claims were formulated, including those of a symbolic or cultural nature, which gave rise to the later model of social or substantial citizenship. Here, the concept of freedom no longer predominates, but rather that of equality or social balance, which means the redistribution of wealth generated and the expansion of knowledge, benefits or practical conveniences generated by a progressively advanced society – from a scientific and technological point of view –, highly productive and socially complex. Substantial citizenship is therefore based not on the idea of a previous natural state (typical of formal citizenship), but on a social disposition to be constructed and preserved, guided or stimulated by the action of the State. As Hannah Arendt rightly observes, nothing establishes equality, except political citizenship (apart from death, a natural and irrevocable fact). In other words, one does not start from equality to establish citizenship, but rather from equality to citizenship".⁹⁸

An example of this expansion of the concept of citizenship can be found in the Report on Education, delivered to the French Legislative Assembly in 1792, prepared by the Marquis de Condorcet, in which it was warned and

⁹⁷ Karl Marx; Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party, II - Proletarians and Communists*, digital version, no page numbers, Edições Avante, Lisboa, 1997.

⁹⁸ Newton Cunha, *Cultura e Ação Cultural*, Edições SESC, São Paulo, 2010, pg. 33.

recommended: “Education must be universal, that is, it must be extended to all citizens. It must be distributed with all the equality that the necessary limits of expenditure, of the distribution of men over the territory and of the time that children can devote to it allow. It must encompass, in its various degrees, the complete system of human knowledge and guarantee to men, at all ages of life, the facility to preserve their knowledge or to acquire new ones [...] It must offer to all individuals of the human species the means to provide for their needs, to ensure their well-being, to know their rights, to understand and fulfill the possibility of perfecting their abilities, to become capable of exercising social functions to which they have the right to be called, to develop the talents received from nature and, by such means, to establish a de facto equality, to make real the political equality recognized by law”.⁹⁹

The idea that liberalism will use to define social relations will be the formal or ideal recognition of the different members of society as equals, without taking into account their real, concrete differences. Considering society as an association in which each person participates in search of the realization of their personal interests, then everyone has the same weight and should be seen and judged as equals. If the endorsement given by each person to a different lifestyle has the same weight as the others, then it makes no sense to judge conflicts by prioritizing someone as unequal. Hence, in liberal societies, justice is characterized, above all, by the implementation of a formal homogeneity of individuals, through a legal-judicial system. For liberalism, therefore, the possible self-determination of citizens (except those with serious physical or mental illnesses) enables them to find for themselves the basis of their ways of life. More than that, freedom gives individuals the power to judge what they consider beneficial in their lives, since “no one can be in a better position than I to know my own good”.¹⁰⁰ The conception of the good is too diverse to be realized in a single lifestyle, so that none of them can fully contain all the legally possible values. Human beings can live under a great variety of conceptions of the “good

⁹⁹ Condorcet, *Vers les temps nouveaux par l'éducation integrale*, apud N. Cunha, *Cultura e Ação Cultural*, pg. 38, Edições Sesc, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Will Kymlicka, *Filosofia Política Contemporânea*, Martins Fontes, São Paulo, 2006.

life" (eubios, in the ancient Greek conception), so that the pluralism of values is the most just of sociopolitical demands.

In 1971, John Rawls, a US liberal philosopher, published *A Theory of Justice*, a book that served to bring the issue of social justice back into debate, provoking reactions both favorable and contrary to his ideas. In short, the author argues: "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, just as truth is that of systems of thought [...] For this reason, in a just society, freedoms and equality of citizenship are already established; and rights, assured by justice, are not subject to political bargaining or calculations of social interests. Such propositions seem to express our intuitive convictions about the primacy of justice (over the idea of Good). To do so, it is necessary to establish a theory of justice in the light of which these assertions can be evaluated [...] Let us say then that a society is well ordered when it is not only designed to favor the goods of its members, but when it is effectively regulated by a public conception of justice [...] But men differ on what principles should define the basic terms of their association. Despite this disagreement, we can say that each of them has a conception of justice, that is, they understand the need for a set of principles, and these principles allow them to attribute basic rights and duties and what they consider to be the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation. Many different things are called just or unjust; not only laws, institutions, or social systems, but also particular actions, including decisions, judgments, and assertions. But let us deal with social justice. For us, the first object of justice is the basic structure of society, or, more precisely, the way in which the most important social institutions distribute social rights and duties and determine the distribution of the advantages derived from social cooperation. By the most important institutions I mean the political constitution and the main socioeconomic structures. Thus, the protection of freedom of thought, the existence of competitive markets, private ownership of the means of production, and the monogamous family are examples. My purpose is to present a conception of justice which generalizes and raises to the highest degree of abstraction the well-known theory of the social contract, as found in Locke, Rousseau, and Kant. The guiding idea is that the principles valid for the basic structure of society are the object of the original agreement. They are the very principles which free and rational persons, desirous of advancing their own interests and placed in an initial position of equality, would accept in defining the

essential terms of their association. I will call this way of considering the principles of justice “justice as fairness” [...] In this theory, the original position of equality corresponds to the natural state of the older theory of the social contract [...] The choice that rational men would make in this hypothetical situation of equal freedom determines the principles of justice, assuming at this point that the problem posed by the choice itself is a solution. Among the essential aspects of this situation is the fact that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, just as no one knows the lot that is reserved for him in the distribution of natural gifts and abilities, his intelligence, strength, etc. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance. This guarantees that no one is at an advantage or disadvantage in the choices of principles as a result of natural chance or social contingencies [...] Given the circumstances of the original position, that is, the symmetry of the relations between the partners, this initial situation is equitable with respect to the moral subjects [...] We can assume that, having chosen a conception of justice, it will then be necessary to choose a constitution and a legislative body that enacts laws in accordance with the principles of justice originally decided [...] One of the features of the theory of justice as equity is to conceive of the partners placed in the initial situation as rational beings who are mutually disinterested [...] Improving the theory of justice as equity, it is clear that an essential task is to determine which principles would be chosen for the initial position [...] This is why it seems that the principle of utility is incompatible with a conception of social cooperation between equal people, with a view to mutual advantage. Such a principle contradicts the idea of reciprocity, implicit in the concept of a well-ordered society [...] I will therefore argue that the people placed in the initial situation would choose two quite different principles. The first requires equality in the attribution of rights and duties; the second establishes that socioeconomic inequalities, and let us take for example inequalities of wealth and authority, are just only if they produce, in compensation, advantages for each and, in particular, for the least favored members of society [...] It may be expedient, in certain cases, for some to possess less so that others may prosper, but this is not just. But there is no injustice in the

greater benefits gained by a few, provided that this is for the betterment of the least favored".¹⁰¹

What are the contemporary criticisms of Rawls' thinking?

One of the most obvious is that his foundation and the consequences that follow from it reject, in principle, the existence of natural differences and socio-economic circumstances, thus avoiding the idea of proportion that also constitutes the understanding of fairness.

Robert Nozick, another American philosopher who was Rawls' colleague at Harvard University, answers this question in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, having recourse to Friedrich Hayek: "Our objection is to all attempts to impose on society a deliberately chosen pattern of distribution, whether it be an order of equality or inequality [...] Formulating more precisely this standardized element of a free capitalist society, we have: "to each according as he benefits others who have the means to benefit those who benefit them" [...] Suppose that Wilt Chamberlain, a great box office attraction, is the object of the demands of the basketball teams. He signs the following contract with one of them: for each game won, he will receive 25 cents of the price of each ticket [...] Let us suppose that, during the championship, a million people attended the games in which he took part and Wilt ends the competition with 250 thousand dollars, a sum much greater than the average income and even greater than that earned by any person. Is he entitled to this income? Is this new distribution unfair? [...] Each of these people decided to give 25 cents of their money to Chamberlain. They could have spent it on a movie, a candy bar, or a copy of *Dissent* or *Monthly Review*. But they all agreed to give it to Wilt Chamberlain in exchange for watching him play basketball. [...] Could anyone complain about [this transfer of income] on the grounds of justice? [...] How could this transfer between people give rise to a legitimate claim of distributive justice by a third party who had no claim to any property of the others before the transfer"?¹⁰²

Further, Nozick argues in the chapter entitled *Redistribution and Property Rights*: "A man who chooses to work longer hours to earn more than enough income to meet his basic needs prefers some extra goods or services to the

¹⁰¹ J. Rawls [1971], *A Theory of Justice*, pgs. 3 e 4, 10 e 11, Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1999.

¹⁰² R. Nozick, *Anarquia, Estado e Utopia*, ps. 178 to 181, Jorge Zahar Editor, Rio de Janeiro, 1991.

leisure and activities he could do during his free time, whereas a man who chooses not to do overtime prefers leisure activities to the extra goods and services he could acquire by working longer. Given this situation, if it were illegitimate for the tax system to confiscate part of a man's leisure (forced labor) to serve the needy, how could it be legitimate for the tax system to expropriate a man's assets for the same purpose"?¹⁰³

Amartya Sen, in *The Idea of Justice*, defends the notion that "two fundamental and divergent logics were produced in the Enlightenment era, and still persist today".¹⁰⁴ The first of these two logics "aims to define fair institutional arrangements for the whole of society".¹⁰⁵ Sen describes it as "transcendental institutionalism", taking advantage of the notion given by Kant. The objective of the theory that is developed then is to define what a fair social order is, and what principles should guide the basic social structure, without trying to know whether the members of society rationally adjust to the norms thus proposed.

The second consists of the "comparison of real situations", with the concern of "eliminating certain manifest injustices" in the real world that result from both individual behavior and socioeconomic institutions. "Its aim is to clarify how we can proceed to address questions of enhancing justice and removing injustice, rather than to offer resolutions of questions about the nature of perfect justice. In this there are clear differences with the pre-eminent theories of justice in contemporary moral and political philosophy".¹⁰⁶

This second approach, to which Sen subscribes and which he calls "realization-focused comparison", is based on the principle that it is impossible to build perfect political institutions and focuses on establishing criteria capable of guiding choices so that there is less injustice among the possible alternatives. For the author, there is, in reality, no absolute rational foundation capable of defining a single criterion of justice, but only the work of developing parameters that allow us to choose or orient ourselves among multiple and ever-emerging

¹⁰³ Ibidem, p. 189.

¹⁰⁴ A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009, Preface, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Idem.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, Preface, IX.

values of society. But the democratic regime is indispensable to the development of ideas of justice.

In the preface, therefore, the author states: “In this paper, democracy is assessed in terms of the public exercise of reason, which leads to an understanding of democracy as “government by discussion,” an idea that John Stuart Mill did much to advance. But democracy should also be seen more generally in terms of its capacity to enrich rational engagement through increased information availability and the feasibility of interactive discussion. Democracy should be judged not only by the institutions that formally exist, but by the extent to which different voices, from different sections of the population, can actually be heard [...] If democracy is seen not simply in terms of the creation of some specific institutions (such as democratic government or general elections) but in terms of the possibility and scope of the public exercise of reason, the task of advancing—rather than perfecting—the two global levels of democracy and justice can be seen as an eminently comprehensible idea, capable of plausibly inspiring and influencing practical action across borders”.¹⁰⁷

And, unlike Kant or Rawls, for whom justice and the good contained in ethics derive from an impersonal rationality, from a deduction that begins in the universal and returns to it, Sen defends a kind of induction, based on what would be rational for the individual. He says: “Rationality is primarily a matter of our choices and the reasoning that we can reflectively support them, and it requires that our choices, as well as our actions and goals, values and priorities, can survive our own serious and critical scrutiny. It has also been discussed why there is no specific ground for imagining that any motivation other than the pursuit of self-interest should somehow be guillotined by such critical scrutiny [...] While there is nothing strange or irrational in someone being moved by concern for others, it would be harder to argue that there is any need or obligation to have such concern for reasons of pure rationality”.¹⁰⁸

The economist goes on to argue: “Indeed, the nature of the life that people can lead has been the object of attention of social analysts throughout the ages. Although many economic criteria of advancement are used, reflected in a large

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, Preface, XII-XIII.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem, chapter Plurality of Impartial Reasons, ps. 194-195.

number of readily produced statistics, they tend to focus specifically on the improvement of inanimate objects of convenience (e.g., on gross national product, GNP, and domestic product, GDP, which have been the focus of a multitude of economic studies of progress). This concentration could only be justified, in the final analysis, by what such objects produce in human life, and by what they can influence it directly or indirectly. The case for using direct indicators of the quality of life, of the well-being and freedoms that human life can bring, has been increasingly recognized. Even the creators of the estimate of national income, which receives so much attention or support, have tried to explain that their ultimate interest was in the richness of human life, even though their measures, and not their motivational justifications, have received wide attention [...] For example, in the United States, urban African-Americans often have no greater (indeed, often substantially less) chance of reaching old age than people born in many poorer regions, such as Costa Rica, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, or large parts of China and India. The absence of premature mortality is, of course, aided by having a higher income, but it also depends on many other features, particularly social organization, including public health, the provision of medical care, the nature of schooling and education, social cohesion or harmony, and so on. This makes a difference if we look only at the means of living, rather than directly at the lives that people can lead [...] [William Petty, the seventeenth-century economist] went on to explain the various determinants of people's condition, including 'the common safety' and 'each man's particular happiness'. This motivating connection has often been ignored in economic analysis, which focuses on the means of living as the endpoint of the inquiry. There are excellent reasons not to confuse means with ends and not to see income and affluence as important in themselves, but rather to value them conditionally for what they help people achieve, including good and dignified lives".¹⁰⁹

Hence, Amartya Sen does not only take into account immediately measurable aspects, such as income, wealth, and resources, but above all freedom of choice and the capacity for personal fulfillment, since with such criteria one perceives the quality of life or the greatest extent of the *good life*. "Since the

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem, Chapter Lives, Freedoms and Capabilities. p. 226.

idea of capability is linked to substantive freedom, this fact assigns a central role to the real capacity of a person to do different things that he or she values. The capability approach focuses on human life, and not only on the resources that people have [...] Income and wealth are often considered the main criteria of human success. By proposing a fundamental shift in the focus given to attention from the means of living to the real opportunities that a person has, the capability approach aims at a radical change in the evaluative standard widely used in economic and social studies”.¹¹⁰

In short, Sen believes that the criteria of social justice are varied and changeable, and that only public debate can establish them. But, in general, they should create personal freedoms, allow the development of capabilities and guarantee civil equality so that people can decide autonomously about their own lives, in the absence of a single calculation or criterion.

For Alasdair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue*,¹¹¹ modernity would need to reactivate the ethics of virtues, as presented since its beginnings by Aristotle, in order to build a more just society. For him, the Enlightenment attempt to rationally justify morality failed, because it was shattered into sociocultural fragments inherited from different traditions: Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, French Enlightenment, political-economic liberalism, socialism, etc. Such fragments of religious, political and economic views produced insoluble dilemmas in their mixture. It is precisely in the midst of this state of disorder, in which countless moral theories compete for our acceptance in the public sphere, that MacIntyre outlines the main characteristics of contemporary morality. The first of these is the “conceptual incommensurability of opposing arguments”, that is, there is no single or prevalent way of deciding between opposing statements, since “the opposing premises are such that we have no rational means of weighing the statements against each other, since each premise employs a normative or evaluative concept quite different from the others”.¹¹²

Practical rationality in the public sphere exists only as part of or indebted to one of these traditions, and there are no neutral rational standards free from such contexts. Modern society is characterized not only by division and conflict, but by

¹¹⁰ Ibidem, Chapter Capabilities and Resources, p. 253.

¹¹¹ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2007 [1981].

¹¹² Ibidem, Chapter 2, p. 8.

the inability or even disinterest in reaching consensus: "The most striking feature of contemporary moral language is that it is largely used to express disagreements; and the most evident feature of the debates that express such disagreements is their interminable nature [...] There seems to be no rational way to secure moral agreement in our culture [...] politics today seems to be a civil war conducted by other means".¹¹³

Arguments about the justice or legitimacy of actions are merely professional skills in certain areas, such as law or economics, which, through them, dominate those who lack fluency or dialectical articulation. In other words, because liberalism accepts all points of view, this neutralizes a real challenge to its ideological hegemony. Having forgotten the ethics of virtues, today's societies have developed the idea that the individual depends solely on himself to affirm, determine and develop his own existence. Therefore, it is up to the individual feeling, the subjective emotion, to indicate the criterion of personal fulfillment, which MacIntyre calls emotivism. It has become the determining criterion of moral judgment. However, such feeling is neither true nor false, and agreement in such a domain cannot be obtained by a rational method, since none exists. But what allows emotivism to guide or determine a life choice in this or that direction? Above all, chance, and luck, amidst countless sociopolitical factors. Emotivism encourages the individual to experience maximum pleasure and minimize personal pain and setbacks. A view like this, which is dominant in today's society, would be extremely poor. It is not the perspective of building or achieving something better, of excellence, socially speaking, but simply feeling a certain emotional state. Ethics, or rather, the predominant ethos, is this permanent desire to find some pleasure, and the industrial and mercantile society, in which everything is governed by renewable consumption, is responsible for satisfying this aspiration.

For the author, this means that we have lost something important as rational and social beings. We forget that it is through practice, *praxis*, or action, that we fulfill ourselves and become human beings. No one is born ready, and fulfilled. We do have potentialities that can be realized throughout life, but this progressive achievement only occurs with others, among others, socially. The goods we

¹¹³ Ibidem, Chapter 2, p. 6.

pursue and desire are the actions and things through which a human being can have the feeling of becoming someone. Among these things are material or spiritual recognition, social advancement, money, and power. These are external goods, that is, what counts is not what one does, but the result of what one does.

But ethics would consist in the discovery of other goods, that of internal goods, that is, goods inherent and adherent to the individual's actions in a social environment, such as joy and self-fulfillment in what one does. The construction of the common good and a just society depend fundamentally on the *practice of virtues*. This practice is defined by MacIntyre as follows: "By practice, I mean every coherent and complex form of cooperative human activity, socially established, by which the goods internal to that practice are realized by trying to obey the appropriate standards of excellence, which causes a systematic extension of the human capacity for excellence and for the conception of the ends and goods implied therein".¹¹⁴ What unites the various human practices (family, political, work, leisure) is the possibility of the one who acts to be motivated by love for the practice itself, and not by extrinsic considerations, allowing the improvement of oneself and one's action.

When we say that our moral judgments are teleological (aimed at a purpose beyond the act itself), we are also affirming that they must not only be fair, but also that they seek to create a certain state of the human being, more developed and complete. In short, ethical judgment and moral practice concern human purposes at their highest and most desirable level, when we can then demonstrate a perfected nature, both from a particular and universal point of view.

To do so, it is necessary to go beyond immediate individuality, this concept so valued in our personalist and globalized culture. Why? Because the individual does not exist outside of communities (family, neighborhood, political, work, etc.). Because we must always bear in mind that the individual appears in an already existing world and will disappear, leaving an existing world. The individual is not an empire within an empire, and this is why MacIntyre argues: "The story of my life is always embedded in the history of these communities, from which I draw

¹¹⁴ Ibidem, Chapter 14, The Nature of Virtues, p. 187.

my identity. I was born with a past, and to want to break with it, in an individualistic way, is to distort my present relationships. The possession of a historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide. The 'own being' must find its moral identity in and through communities [...] but this does not imply accepting the limitations and moral distortions of the particularity of these communities. To distance oneself from this particularity is to seek the good, the universal".¹¹⁵

For MacIntyre, there is no individual morality that is disconnected or isolated from the public world and social life. There is no ethics, strictly speaking, if it is not constructed within a community, based on a previous tradition, as a narrative of virtue for oneself, with a view to the common good. Hence, the good life for the man (the *eubios* of his guide Aristotle) is a life spent in the pursuit of good.

If a just society, or the most just possible, requires laws that stipulate rights, obligations and compensations, it is necessary to examine the characteristics of a nation's judicial system and its relations with the most important ethical principles and the most recommendable moral actions because they are most beneficial to society as a whole.

If we take our country as an example, it seems clear that it is not a model of social justice, despite being established on the foundations of a formally liberal and democratic republic. Some characteristics help to explain the common obstacles that we ourselves create. In the book *Corruption, Justice and Public Morality*, José Eduardo Faria shows us how the widespread activism of the various judicial bodies in the control of constitutionality is incongruent and even irrational in our country. According to the author, "this phenomenon has been exacerbated by several factors. One is normative inflation. The number of laws in the country jumped from 66.2 thousand in 1978 to 141.7 thousand in 2006, reaching approximately 180 thousand today".¹¹⁶

It is perfectly expected that in this thicket of laws many of them are contradictory and that it is extremely difficult to establish a clear, distinct, and indisputable doctrine or jurisprudence. The author continues: "This factor is compounded by two others: on the one hand, the high number of constitutional norms with indeterminate concepts; on the other, the fact that the Brazilian justice

¹¹⁵ Ibidem, Chapter Unity of Life and Concept of a Tradition, p. 221.

¹¹⁶ J.E. Faria, *Corrupção, Justiça e Moralidade Pública*, São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2019.

system does not give value to precedents. This overloads the diffuse system of constitutional review (the author refers to the prerogatives held by judges in the various instances), making it potentially a source of legal uncertainty. Among other reasons, this is because the different instances of the justice system have more than seventeen thousand judges with different degrees of specialization and theoretical training. All of them may fail to apply the law sub judice, based on their perception of justice, doctrinal convictions and worldview, which increases the risk of discrepant decisions on the same topic".¹¹⁷

From a macroeconomic point of view, let us take the Gini coefficient as a criterion, a statistical data that aims to measure, among other things, the degree of equality or inequality in the distribution of income in a country or region. It is a number between 0 (complete equality, with everyone receiving the same income) and 1 (maximum inequality, as if a single individual had all the income). Therefore, the closer to 0, the greater the equality and the better the distribution of income; the closer to 1, the greater the inequality and the worse the distribution of income (it is worth remembering that the data provided by countries are not always reliable or even equivalent).

In Brazil, currently (first two decades of the 21st century), although this coefficient seems to be declining, that is, reducing historical disparities, its values are still very high, which reveals a great and persistent inequality, whether between social strata or classes, or between geographic regions. In this respect, the southern region is the least unequal and the northeast region, the most unequal.

The global data published in 2011 are from the World Bank and the World Fact Book, respectively, and refer to years between 2000 and 2009. Brazil, 54.7 and 51.9. Some other countries: Argentina, 44.5 and 45.8; South Africa, 63 and 65; Canada, 32.6 and 32.1; United States, 40.8 and 45; France, 32.7 and 32.7; Germany, 28 and 27; Nigeria, 48.8 and 48.8; Czech Republic, 25.8 and 31; Portugal, 38.5 and 38.5; China, 42.5 and 48; Sweden, 27.2 and 24.9. With such coefficients, we are only better off than South Africa, which only reveals a terrible social situation.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 60.

Submission to the gods of the markets and to new information technologies, with their effects of shrinking spaces (productive and mercantile globalization) and accelerating time (instant communication and its immediate effects), plays a decisive role in the uncertainty about the future of political action, in the distrust in democratic values and in the capacity of a country to govern itself, taken in isolation, due to interdependent economic flows. The supremacy of financial capital, capable of being everywhere simultaneously, as well as of volatilizing instantly, does not develop roots in local society, unlike industrial or agricultural capital, which is more dependent on immobile physical structures, resources and local labor.

Therefore, apoliticalism (disbelief in party politics and in the actions of the powers that be, which are considered powerless to manage structures and improve social aspects) and nihilism regarding the possibility of a society shaped by principles and fair actions are on the rise. On the contrary, people are beginning to think that politics only consolidates socioeconomic injustices. Hence, a reaction to this phenomenon of feelings of weakness, disbelief and fear has led to the emergence of what is now called political indignation, demonstrated by spontaneous, anarchic social movements formed by the new computerized social networks. Such is the case, for example, of the black blocs, the gilets jaunes and the extinction rebellion.

But if this feeling has grown in our days, uncertainties about the establishment of social justice date back to the beginnings of philosophy. For would we be able to demand and reward each person according to their merits or abilities, that is, in accordance with their contributions to society? Should we distribute to each person the same share, or according to their personal needs and preferences?

Although it is known that without recourse to politics there is no possibility of a just society, that is, one that guarantees equality, freedom and resources for social protection, it is necessary to consider the truth of a historical and, at the same time, cultural and anthropological fact, already well observed by Xenophon at the beginning of his *Cyropaedia*: "We once began to consider how many democracies have been overthrown by the supporters of a political regime other than democracy, and how many monarchies and oligarchies, in turn, have been destroyed by the people, how many individuals have sought to exercise tyranny

[...] In the course of our reflections on this subject, we realized that there is no living creature that is as difficult to govern as man".¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Xenofonte, *Ciropedia*, Book I, 1, 3, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2019.

V. Wokism: When Good Intentions Go Crazy

The sociopolitical movement of wokeism emerged in the mid-1900s in the United States and quickly gained popularity in some parts of the Western world. Its name comes from the English word woke, meaning "awake or awake," and refers to the fact of being aware of the problems of social injustice, inequality, and racism in our societies. People who identify with wokeism therefore consider themselves woke, awake, or vigilant. And according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "To be politically 'woke' in the black community means that someone is informed, educated, and aware of social injustice and racial inequality."¹¹⁹

The movement was influenced by the civil rights demands of the 1960s, and argues that forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism and homophobia, form an intersectionality, that is, they are interconnected and must therefore be combated together. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a black professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), chose and uses the term to indicate that discrimination tends to be cumulative, as well as to build a certain pyramid of marginalizations. In other words, a poor black woman can suffer three simultaneous discriminations: for being a woman, for being black and for being poor. Meanwhile, a rich black man will be discriminated against, at most, for being black, but privileged for being a man and rich.

The origin of the expression, however, is older. In the 1930s, the song "Scottsboro Boys" by Lead Belly, an American blues singer, called for people to stay awake regarding racism and police brutality, referring to black teenagers accused of raping two women. In 1965, it was Martin Luther King's turn to call on young Americans to stay awake and be engaged citizens. At the time, the term wokeism was used only to denounce social injustices against black Americans. Later, both reggae and rap used the expression as a simultaneous cry of warning and defiance, following the purposes and ideals of the Rastafarian movement.

¹¹⁹ Merriam-Webster, Entry "woke", available at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/>>, accessed: Nov. 2023.

Today, Wokism¹²⁰ claims to be a broader movement and way of thinking by denouncing other behaviors considered socially unjust, such as those that affect women, the LGBTQIA+ community, poorer and illiterate communities, and immigrants. Over the last two decades of the 21st century, its popularity grew, driven by social media and the work of academics and university students, especially in the humanities (such as Literature, Psychology, and Sociology), encouraging followers, especially teenagers, to promote demonstrations of various kinds. And this influence has penetrated governments and public administrations on both sides of the Atlantic. In January 2024, for example, on the premises of Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, US President Joe Biden, already campaigning for his reelection, stated that “white supremacy” is a historical poison in the United States (“It is a poison, throughout our history, that’s ripped this nation apart. This has no place in America. Not today, tomorrow or ever”).

Its particularity was, initially, to condemn the so-called discreet injustices that exist in our society, those that manifest themselves through intolerance or rejection on a small scale and may involve acts such as those of some company recruiters who, faced with equal profiles of competitors, give preference to men over women, to natives over immigrants, to heterosexuals over homosexuals. Such behavior, although not always intentional, presupposes a more subtle or less explicit form of discrimination than that of an avowed racist or sexist activist. For the follower of wokism, therefore, the prejudices of whites (or even of other Asian races or ethnicities) are deeply internalized, making them act “spontaneously and unconsciously”, since they suffer less prejudice than any other group or community.

The expression wokism, however, has also been used habitually and equally as a derogatory term, in view of the irrationalism that is not only scandalous, but also limitless, to which it has reached over the years.

The first criticism of this recent ideology, which seeks to reduce the complexity of the world to a simplistic view based on a voluntarist belief, and thus to shape a self-imprisoned reality and truth (and even a “religion”, since it presents itself

¹²⁰ The term Social Justice Warriors is sometimes found linked to Wokism, although the term, according to Katherine Martin, director of US dictionaries at Oxford University Press, gained an extremely pejorative connotation in American social media as early as 2011, due to the radicalism of its members.

as an “epiphany” that requires the separation between the pure and the impure, in the understanding of Jean-François Braunstein), is that the movement vigorously reaffirms cultural identities, opposing differences as an expression of pride, be they racial, class or gender. By insisting on past historical facts, and analyzing them in an incomplete and thus partially true way, in compensatory demands, in specific rights or in the sometimes hysterical spectacularization of sexual preferences that have long been liberated, a political situation is created that reinforces group hostilities, which is well suited to the concept of “political” formulated by Carl Schmitt. Instead of reaffirming the universalism of the human condition and general republican laws, the cult of particularity and the division of society into *polemioson* (πολέμιοςον), adversaries or political enemies, are propagated. In other words, sociocultural life is becoming more radical today, as extremist ideologies of the right and left have always done.

A clear example of this distorted view is the slavery of black Africans. While there are traces of slavery in the Neolithic period and it had already served as a mode of economic production in ancient Europe, it also existed in pre-colonial America and Africa, and this cultural habit contributed to the expansion of slavery in the Muslim world from the seventh century AD onwards (the so-called Eastern slave trade). For more than a millennium, slave labor was obtained by the Arabs both on the African continent (buying it from tribal chiefs who captured enemies or through armed raids along rivers),¹²¹ and in the Caucasus, the Indian subcontinent and Eastern Europe (hence the medieval Latin names *sclavus*, *slavus* and the Byzantine Greek names *sklabos*, *sklabenos*, referring to Slavic prisoners). The Arab historian, geographer and politician Ibn Caldune, or Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), wrote that “Black nations are, as a rule, docile to slavery because they have attributes close to animals... It is estimated that between 1 and 2.5 million people were kidnapped from Western Europe between the 16th and 18th centuries (by pirates), during the reigns of Francis I, Louis XIV and Louis XV. These slaves, mostly men, were exploited in the worst possible way on plantations, quarries, galleys and on construction sites in North Africa. Christian

¹²¹ The American historian Ralph Austen estimates that around 17 million people were transported between 650 B.C. and the end of the 19th century. *African Economic History*, James Currey edition, 1987, pg. 275. The regions where slaves were exported to the Arab world were: West Africa, Chad, Ethiopia, Somalia, Nubia, Tanzania and Mozambique.

organizations worked hard to redeem these unfortunate people, among them figures such as Miguel de Cervantes and Saint Vincent de Paul. In Eastern Europe and the Balkans, during the same period, the Ottomans took about three million slaves".¹²²

In Brazil, it is worth remembering that the two largest and richest black slave traders were the mulatto Francisco Félix de Souza (?-1849), born in Bahia and settled in Benin, and his son-in-law José Francisco dos Santos, known as Zé Alfaiate, a former African slave from Dahomey who was freed in Brazil. In the Americas, the Western abolitionist movement grew from the 19th century onwards, unlike in the Arab world, and achieved success after national independence. However, according to the Walk Free Foundation, in 2014 there were still around 46 million people in the world in conditions of slavery, through forced labor or marriage, almost half of them in China, India, Pakistan and Uzbekistan, and almost the other half in African countries, from north to south of the sub-Saharan zone (Global Slavery Index).

The second criticism, clearly derived from the first, is that Wokism "discovered" the origin of all historical and current evils (our biblical original sin) not in man or in the individual, but in Western civilization, which has always (or until now) been led by white men, mostly (it is believed) heterosexual, more educated, from a formal point of view, and belonging to a higher or wealthier economic class, thus creating their own system of powers and privileges that would be unacceptable, because they are criminal. This means that white and European civilization, which, since Antiquity, has historically imposed itself in the Western world (and since the Renaissance in practically the entire globe), is the result of a logic of domination that is both social and economic and cultural.

But unlike original sin, which brought about the advent of Christ and his promise of redemption, the sin of white culture does not deserve forgiveness and, precisely for this reason, must be abolished or canceled from the face of the Earth (*cancel culture*), since its creations and its immutable behavior are oppressive and inherently oppressive. Cancel culture occurs mainly through social media, due to the fact that it persecutes people, groups and companies considered

¹²² Alban Dignat, *622 au XXème siècle – L’esclavage en terre d’islam*, Revista Herodote.net, 02/07/2024, electronic edition.

“politically incorrect” or critical of wokism, which, in practice, let’s face it, shows racism, explicit censorship, intolerance and heterophobia in reverse. But it can also constitute a deliberate corporate policy, as is the case with Disney organizations.

It happens that the conceptions woke, as well as those of the so-called subaltern studies, believe that the cultures called autochthonous or non-western would constitute edenic societies, free from vices or objectionable behaviors, characterizing themselves as models of good-heartedness, of morality and irenicism. And if crimes were committed in the past by the West, must present generations take responsibility for them, as if the descendants were solidary and conniving with the delituous and infamous actions of their ancestors, in a kind of legal bond Adamic, indissoluble. Thus they avoid a historical and investigative deepening on the cultures that claim to have been subjugated, as, for example, the theocratic societies of Mesoamerica: the Aztecs sacrificed every year thousands of individuals of other ethnicities in the pyramid Tenochtitlan, ripping their hearts and distributing their meat among the local nobility for the preparation of Tlacatlaolli, delicacy cooked with corn and garlic.¹²³ Here is a strong indication of the motivations that led eight peoples of the region (under the leadership of the Tlaxcaltecas), to make a pact with the small group of Hernán Cortez (300 men) and having constituted an army of 200,000 warriors, stormed the capital Tenochtitlan, ending the power of the Mexicas. The Incas sacrificed children of neighboring peoples submitted to the celebrations of new temples or for the death of the emperor, throwing them into volcanoes or burying them alive. It is known that when the remodeling works of the Temple of the Sun were finished, the emperor Pachacútec of Cusco ordered that dozens of children be buried alive as an offering to the god Sun, and when he died, another thousand were buried with him.¹²⁴ Among the rituals of infanticide was that of leading children to the volcano Llullaillaco, at 6,700 meters. There they tied them and left them to die of cold. In 1999, three perfectly preserved bodies of these victims were transferred to the Museo de Arqueología de Alta Montaña in the city of Salta.¹²⁵ Currently, it is

¹²³ Carlos Javier González, Xipe Tótec. *Guerra y regeneración del maíz en la religión mexicana*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México D. F., 2011.

¹²⁴ Marcelo Gullo, *Madre patria*. Desmontando la leyenda negra desde Bartolomé de las Casas hasta el separatismo catalán, Espasa, Barcelona, 2021.

¹²⁵ María Constanza Ceruti, *Cumbres sagradas del noroeste argentino*, Eudeba, Buenos Aires, 1999.

known for sure that the conquests in Aztec and Inca lands were carried out mainly by indigenous armies, opponents of those conquering peoples. It is also known, according to the Mexican historian Juan Miguel Zunzunegui,¹²⁶ that at the date of independence from Mexico, in 1821, the indigenous population was made up of about 60% of society, while today it does not exceed 8%. To what and to whom is due such a decrease?

In December 1829, Lord William Bentinck, the first governor-general of India under the British empire, issued a decree prohibiting sati, horrified by the ancient Hindu custom of forcing a widow to immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre. His law also condemned to the maximum penalty those who had aided or instigated the execution of the ritual. Although the prejudices and inequalities derived from the existence of castes or varnas - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras and the Untouchables, self-styled Dalits (in charge of the simplest services, such as removing carcasses from dead animals or cleaning sewers, for example) - have been reduced in the twentieth century by the implementation of laws similar to Western, at least in urban areas, the enormous differences of income and economic opportunities remain outstanding in India, having been a socio-political issue of great importance in the government of Gandhi, for whom the abolition of the system would depend on the goodwill of the Brahmins.

If the Balkans were examples of carnage in Europe, with the dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia, we cannot close our eyes and prevent reflection on the fact that, soon after its decolonization (1960-1970), conflicts between states or African civil wars, ethnic, political, economic or religious (among others Angola, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone), including genocides (for example Rwanda and South Sudan) have spread throughout Africa, making violence reach the simplest and everyday spheres of domestic life (crime rates in South Africa) and ally itself with corruption (international financial aid) and systematic neglect, as well as recurrent episodes of epidemics, of drought and hunger. In the words of Achille Mbembe, a political scientist from Cameroon, "the post-colonial regime is characterized by the arbitrariness of power and the state, which monopolizes illegitimate violence" and "the post-colonial dictatorships staged a dithyramic ritual of power, similar to that

¹²⁶ Interview with Deutsche Welle in Spanish, 05/10/2024.

of the former communist regimes". Furthermore, "the mechanics of power is repeated with the systematic ordination of a personality cult. The postcolonial potentate recovers colonial violence to claim the right to command".¹²⁷

Here it would be worth asking whether, by denouncing and combating, in a multiracial society, the preponderance, authoritarianism or domination of the white population, as well as many of the achievements, structures and values created by it, such as, for example, in the fields of ethics, science and technology, universities, citizenship, love of neighbor (*Christiana caritas*), civil and political liberties, or even Mediterranean or French cuisine, would not Wokism be rejecting the democratic principle of the numerical majority and the best rational propositions, and putting in its place that of minorities, simply because they are minorities? Would it not be replacing the idea of the common good, generic and comprehensive (that of the citizen, contemplated by the revolution of Human Rights since the end of the 18th century), with a communitarian conception, much more restricted and full of resentment? This conception highlights a youthful Manichaeism (which the Hollywood film industry has always encouraged and today popularly amplifies due to the influence of Wokism) based on the belief that only the underprivileged, the persecuted and the oppressed of the world are possessors of virtues (of Good, Justice, Truth) and human beauty, both physical and moral.

A third criticism concerns the absolute denial of polarities or natural differences, the main one being that which exists between the male and female sexes (new gender theory), between male and female (the existence, role and influence of the X and Y chromosomes mean nothing in the constitution of bodies and sexes, as much as the existence of ovaries or testicles, progesterone or testosterone, since perhaps nature itself is retrograde and homophobic), since what should prevail is the "fluidity of genders". A coloring book intended for primary schools in the United States tells children that everyone has the right to choose their own gender, following their heart, to choose to be a boy or a girl, or both, or neither. Hence also the refusal to use masculine and feminine pronouns

¹²⁷ Achille Mbembe, *De la postcolonie. Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine*, Paris, La Découverte, 2020, páginas 118, 124, 158, 214; first edition Karthala, 2005.

when referring to people, opting for neutral grammatical categories, which, in many languages, are non-existent. In Portuguese, for example, the word “todes” was invented, in an aberrant and hideous way, instead of *todos* and *todas*, as if to say that the language itself, by discriminating real things, becomes discriminatory. In short, men cannot and should not be exclusively men; and women cannot and should not be exclusively women, but should fluctuate daily between antipodal conditions for their greater pleasure.

An additional criticism (last but not least) can be formulated precisely for radicalized university environments. There, a "point of view epistemology" was proposed and fully accepted, that is, a study of "scientific" knowledge (of its methods and scope) that maintains that all knowledge is "particularly situated" and that, therefore, there is no objective science or universal knowledge, everything depends on a certain position or desire of whoever observes any object or phenomenon. Thus, the wokes' intention is to "deconstruct" the entire cultural and scientific heritage of a West accused of being "systematically" sexist, racist and colonialist.

Well, if universities, established as centers for the creation, preservation, and transmission of knowledge that date back to the cathedral and monastic schools of the medieval period¹²⁸ and the secular faculties of Italy between the 12th and 13th centuries, are exclusive products of white civilization, why do wokes work in them and want to subject them to their principles? Why do they accept and intend to remain as teaching and student bodies in a structure that was contaminated at its birth and throughout its millennial history by racism, authoritarianism, homophobia, sexism, coercion, discrimination, errors, and lies that made them expand throughout the world? It is imperative to reject, and this has been intended and demanded in practice, the biological, medical, physical, chemical, and mathematical sciences, as well as the humanities and classical studies, because their principles, methods, objectives, and exponents throughout history are predominantly white and male (hence the existence of a toxic white masculinity).

¹²⁸ For the first time in the history of cultures, after the Council of Vaison in 529, there was concern about teaching nobles and peasants in the same establishments.

Has there even been consideration of completely replacing medicine with the healing practices of indigenous or native peoples in a colonized territory? This is a completely paradoxical claim. Therefore, it would be more logical or coherent (if the term logical is acceptable among wokes) for the movement to create its own community centers that are completely distinct from traditional schools and universities, and in which there would be no predefined principles, methods, hierarchy or objectives of action, in order to avoid the classic and undesirable processes of domination and authoritarianism. All that would remain would be the inconvenience of continuing a “new school”¹²⁹ of complete educational freedom, something that has already been formulated and tested in practice by equally white and European pedagogues, without convincing results, since the beginning of the 20th century.

¹²⁹ Also known in English as “progressive education”. A movement that became popular in Western countries in the 1960s, when Alexander S. Neill published the influential *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, a classic work of alternative pedagogy in which the Scottish writer and educator set out the radical ideas developed at the Summerhill School, founded in England in 1921.

VI. What is Real?

Man is the only being capable of generating or creating unrealities, such as dreams, explanations and imaginary stories, which serve as fantasy or comfort, as well as evasion and subterfuge. And this ability in itself is an undeniably real fact.

Initially, and almost naively, one can say that the real is that which, factually or naturally, exists, externally or independently of us; or that which constitutes a being as it is “in itself” (if that is possible)¹³⁰ or manifests itself – physical objects and phenomena, such as the states of matter and energies. Or even, whose existence is established, and is therefore evident; that which is capable of being observed and scientifically investigated, distinguishing itself from something merely illusory, from a false appearance, from a fiction or a simulacrum. For example, the real movement of the Earth in relation to the Sun, as opposed to the apparent movement of the star around the Earth, or the reduced size of something when observed from afar, with the naked eye. Hence also that which opposes resistance to apprehension or sensitive contact, that which is perceived by the senses, by repeated experience or captured by suitable human instruments (microscopes, telescopes or electromagnetic wave sensors, for example) and, consequently, manifests itself undoubtedly to reason or consciousness (a body, a luminous emission, a chemical transformation, even if its functioning is not understood).

The assertion about the existence of singular and real things had already been assumed, for example, by Duns Scotus in the High Middle Ages, through the concept of *haecceitas* (“haec res” = this individually constituted thing). Individuation would not depend on matter, which is in itself indistinct and therefore incapable of producing distinction and diversity, nor on form, which, as substance, is prior to any individuality, but there would be a process leading to the structuring of the “ultimate reality of being” operated by matter, which, acting on common nature, comes to determine it as realized individuality, that is, as a set of matter

¹³⁰ What could a “cow in itself” be, beyond or differently from what ancient herding and livestock farming, as well as the sciences – biology, zoology, veterinary medicine and animal science – have described and defined?

and form, of which individuality represents the final point, the full and realized reality of the substance. In his words, “This entity is therefore not matter or form or the composite, since each of them is ‘nature’, but it is the ultimate reality of the entity, which is matter, or which is form, or which is the composite”.¹³¹

But although it can be said that reality is what exists independently of us (of a consciousness), the idea or representation and knowledge of this same real entity or of a set of entities that constitute reality depend on the interaction between the being (and its manifestation) and an act of perception, thought or reflection. Therefore, reality is also constituted by the *pragmatic*¹³² experience of the spirit, that is, by a mental and subjective experience of the world, as it happens to an individual based on his or her cognitive possibilities.

Thus, the fact that something needs to be perceived (*esse est percipi*, as Berkeley stated),¹³³ and can only be perceived by means of the mind or a spirit that perceives, affirms, or denies its existence, as the Irish philosopher demands, does not exclude the “being there” independent of natural entities or phenomena.¹³⁴ Even if we admit, like Berkeley, that sensory qualities belong only to ideas (an idea only resembles another idea – its likeness principle – and is not the cause of the internal cognitive process), and that the adherent of materialism cannot affirm that objects and occurrences are like ideas, the consequence would be the impossibility of knowing objective entities “in themselves”, that is, their *noumenon* (*noumenon*, *noumena* – the thing in itself, in Kant’s terminology), but not their suppression or nonexistence, as Berkeley claims. He does not admit, for

¹³¹ From Italian: “Questa entità non è perciò materia oppure forma oppure il composto, in quanto ognuno di questo è ‘natura’, ma è l’ultima realtà dell’ente, che è materia, oppure che è forma, oppure che è il composto.” Martín Carbajo Núñez (a cura di), *Giovanni Duns Scoto: studi e ricerche nel VII centenario della sua morte*, Rome: Antonianum, 2008.

¹³² Πραγμα, pragma, in ancient Greek, encompasses the idea of what is done, of what exists or is real, which in Latin was translated as *actus*, *actualis* – that which is in action, active, practical. *Actualis*, in turn, was translated by Meister Eckhart into German as *Wirklichkeit*, reality.

¹³³ “I say that the table where I write exists – that is, I see it, I feel it; and if it is outside my office, I say that it exists [...] That is all I can understand by this and other expressions. What has been said of the absolute existence of unthinkable things, without some relation to their being-perceived, seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse est percipi*.” George Berkeley; David Hume, *Treatise on the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley, Hume (The Thinkers), pg. 13, Nova Cultural, São Paulo, 1989.

¹³⁴ Berkeley himself admits that we perceive external, material things indirectly (mediately), but before that we directly (immediately) perceive ideas, which are mind-dependent items. Ideas represent external material objects and, therefore, it is only through them that we perceive and can know them.

example, that space is something real, objective, perceptible by movement or sight, but rather that there are two subjective spaces, one provided by touch, the other by vision. In the same way, neither sound nor color nor extension or strength or resistance are real in themselves, but depend on the spirit, on a state of consciousness. The spectacle of nature and human creations do not spring directly from a matter that would be, in essence, inaccessible, but from a communication from God. In the words of Philonous (the friend of the spirit), a character in the *Three Dialogues*: “I see this cherry; I feel it by touch, I taste it, and I am certain that nothingness can never be seen, nor touched, nor tasted; the cherry, therefore, is real. Now suppress the sensations of softness, of moisture, of redness, and of sourness; you will suppress the cherry. Since it is not a being distinct from sensations, a cherry is only a collection of sensible impressions, or of ideas perceived by the various senses, ideas that are united into a single thing by our mind”.¹³⁵

Later: “When I deny that sensible things exist outside of intelligence, I do not consider my intelligence in particular, but all intelligences. Now, it is clear that they have an existence outside of mine in particular [...] there is therefore another intelligence in which they exist during the intervals that separate the moments in which I do not perceive [...] and since this is true of all other finite created spirits, it follows necessarily that there is another external Intelligence present in everything, which knows and understands all things and which presents itself to us in a manner and according to the rules that it has established and which we call the laws of nature”.¹³⁶

From this understanding, as well as from the growing individualism typical of modernity (according to Hegel), emerges the idea that there is no absolute reality, in the sense of a specific, detached and generic reality, but only subjective and therefore contradictory conceptions or images of “reality” (whatever that may be). Thus, what would be called reality would constitute a personal interpretation, a particular way of observing and explaining the world, constructed through communication and experience. Therefore, reality would not be what is discovered, known and experienced in common, socially and historically

¹³⁵ D. Hume, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, Third Dialogue, p. 54, available at earlymoderntexts/assets/pdfs/berkeley.

¹³⁶ Idem, *ibidem*.

(between generations), but, invariably, a personal construction. A view defended, for example, by constructivist psychology. Thus, in the collective work *Invented Reality*, directed by Paul Watzlawick, Ernst von Glasersfeld writes: "Today, when behaviorists try to attribute all responsibility to the environment, and sociobiologists are happy to attribute much of it to genes, a theory that maintains that the world in which we seem to live is our own responsibility provokes little sympathy. Ultimately, this is what constructivism wants to affirm [...] A metaphysical realist, therefore, is someone who defends that it is only valid to call truth that which corresponds to an independent and objective reality [...] The radical difference lies in the relationship between knowledge and reality. While the traditional conception of the theory of knowledge, as well as of cognitive psychology, considers this relationship always as an agreement or graphic-iconic correspondence, radical constructivism understands this same relationship as an adaptation or adjustment, in the functional sense [...] Constructivism is radical, therefore, because it breaks with conventions and develops a theory of knowledge in which knowledge no longer refers to an ontological, objective reality, but exclusively to the ordering and organization of a world constituted by our experiences [...] all animals, all things that I have ever seen or imagined to myself resemble each other because, by means of well-defined perceptive operations, I have isolated all of these as limited objects, enclosed in themselves, in the total field of my experience. In these cases, as in any others, it is evident that the criteria by which their similarity or difference is determined are created and selected by the judging subject, and can never be attributed to a world independent of the experimenter".¹³⁷

Given this constructivist reductionism, which appears, on the one hand, naively childish and, on the other, foolishly arrogant, it is worth asking whether certain thinkers have not realized the old Copernican gesture that moved away from knowledge based exclusively on the senses, on the common sense of Aristotelian physics, to project itself into an intuition based on the objects themselves investigated, that is, the sun and its companions. This is what is called the subordination of knowledge to the object of study or investigation.

¹³⁷ Paul Watzlawick (Org.), *The Invented Reality*, Ernst von Glasersfeld, Article Introduction to Radical Constructivism, pp. 25 to 41. Editorial Psy, Campinas, 1994.

Could it be that in the constructivist conception each human being would see “a particular sun”, and not the star of our system, if each citizen would live “particularly and in his own way” with a general law of the country in which he lives, or if someone could avoid, by his own will and thought, not growing, maturing, aging and dying? Would it be possible to agree with the idea that Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant, would correspond only to a personally constructed belief, without taking into account its history, its dogmas, its theology, its churches and temples, its priests and pastors, its cults, its faithful, its bureaucratic organizations, its dissensions and what it has inspired, such as painting, sculpture and sacred music?

However, Paul Watzlawick ends up accepting what he calls “reality I”. The Austrian psychologist says: “What validity do scientific statements have? As far as the interests of everyday life are concerned, it can be fully accepted that such statements are universally valid. The observation of the free fall of a body in a vacuum and at sea level [...] results in the same values [...] Elsewhere, I have already tried to distinguish two fundamentally different aspects of our conception of reality and designated them as elements of reality of order I those that could be obtained by observation and experiment. Consequently, this reality would be the universe of all facts that fit into a given framework (precisely the framework of observation and experiment, which, in turn, are constructions of the theories that lie behind them)”.¹³⁸

But then he resorts to another argument that was not within the “same framework of the discussion”, to use his own terms: “What this portentous simplification neglects is that the facts of first-order reality provide no basis for attributing meaning to human existence [...] The meaning of death and life does not emerge from this”.¹³⁹ Questions about the meanings of life, of man and even of the Universe cleverly deviate from our specific purpose, given the impossibility of denying previously given physical and cultural realities.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibidem, p. 227.

¹³⁹ Ibidem, pg. 228.

¹⁴⁰ We can admit, as Schopenhauer does, for example, that the Universe simply is, and does not contain any meaning ulterior to its existence (nor that it will exist eternally, if it had a beginning). We can believe, religiously, that everything is the work of God, of an immeasurably conscious power, and that the human being is its most beautiful and complex creation. Or we can recognize that the meaning of human life, although in a meaningless Universe, is an

The question that Joël Gaubert raised in his speech at the Philosophical Days of Le Mans is relevant here: “Doesn’t this claim of reason to constitute the absolute subject of the effective real or of the world (natural and cultural) reveal itself as an illusion, at the very least ineffective, insofar as the categories and rules that reason projects onto and for reality (taking its reasons as being reality) would be incommensurable with it and, therefore, would not allow it any control over this same reality (as skepticism claims), an illusion that is very dangerous, since it would subject the world and men themselves to the violent empire of a reason that does what it wants, according to the insane logic of its Idea (or ideology), as modern “constructivism” reveals, thus feeding the nihilism that reason, however, intends to combat? Furthermore, isn’t the real that precedes and regulates a reason that is merely its emanation or accidental, particular, and contingent expression, a real that would exceed reason, and that should make it return to a greater lucidity and humility regarding its own capacities and limits”?¹⁴¹

Unlike this idealist conception, realism asserts that being (what manifests itself) is independent of the current, present knowledge that conscious subjects may have or develop of it. And Kant, in an attempt to reconcile both positions, accepts the existence of a dualism in this regard. He uses the word *Realität* for reality or even for the “thingness” (*Sachheit*) of things, thus admitting that “the simple consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) of my own presence (*existentia*, *Dasein*) proves the presence of objects external to me” (Refutation of Idealism). According to André Lalande’s *Philosophical Vocabulary*, “transcendental realism is the designation given by Kant [...] according to which time, space and perceived phenomena are things in themselves [...] On the other hand, this same expression of transcendental realism is used by (Nicolai) Hartmann to mean that representation is inseparable from the idea of a cause, independently of the

objective to be forged privately and/or communally, and in this case, existence would precede several possible essences. I believe that Watzlawick himself was aware of this subterfuge when he quoted Wittgenstein: “We feel that, even if all possible scientific questions were answered, our existential problems would still remain insoluble. Surely, there is no longer any other question left to ask, and that is precisely the answer.” L.J.J. Wittgenstein apud E. von Glasersfeld; P. Watzlawick; H. von Foerster, *opus cit.*, p. 228.

¹⁴¹ J. Gaubert, Contribution à la table ronde des journées philosophiques du Mans, *La Raison et le réel*, 8, 9 dezembro, 2003, available at cairn.info/revue.

subject's will".¹⁴² Having been cited, it is worth remembering that, for Hartmann, according to his exposition in "Principles of a Metaphysics of Knowledge" (*Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*), human knowledge is oriented towards the real, being is not based on knowing, but rather this on that; knowledge is a progressive encounter with something distinct and autonomous and only at the end of a long discursive process can one hope to say what being is, since it reveals itself only gradually.

If reality is related to truth, as admitted by the ancient medieval definition (*adequatio rei et intellectus* – adequacy or correspondence between thing and intellect) and Kant likewise (with analytical additions), there must be a judgment of conformity between the object or event to which we refer and the intellectual act. Hence the German philosopher states: "Reason must go to nature having, in one hand, the principles according to which phenomena that agree with each other can be valid as laws, and, in the other, the experiment that it has imagined according to its principles, of course in order to be instructed by nature, not however as a student who allows himself to be dictated whatever the teacher wants, but as an appointed judge who forces the witnesses to answer the questions he proposes to them".¹⁴³

In another place and situation, the philosopher states: "When the phenomenon is given to us, we are still entirely free to judge the thing as we wish from it. The phenomenon is based on the senses, but the judgment depends on the understanding, and the only question is whether or not there is truth in the determination of the object. But the difference between truth and dream does not arise from the nature of the representations, which refer to the objects, since they are identical in both, but from their connection according to the rules that determine the connection of representations in the concept of an object, and insofar as they may or may not coexist in an experience".¹⁴⁴

And in other passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we can read: "Instead of seeking in the understanding and in the senses two different sources of

¹⁴² A. Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, Paris: PUF, 2010.

¹⁴³ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the Second Edition, p. 11, Os Pensadores Collection, Abril Cultural, São Paulo, 1980.

¹⁴⁴ Idem, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, paragraph 13, Observation 3, Edições 70, Lisboa, 2008.

representations, which, however, could only be judged objectively about things in connection with each other, each of these great men [Kant here refers to Locke and Leibniz] stuck to only one of the two sources, which, in his opinion, referred to things in themselves, while the other did nothing but confuse or order the representations of the first".¹⁴⁵

As also: "Indeed, truth or illusion are not in the object as it is intuited, but in the judgment about it, as it is thought. Therefore, it can be rightly said that the senses do not err, not because they judge correctly, but because they do not judge at all. Consequently, both truth and error, and therefore also illusion, as it leads to the latter, can be found only in the judgment, that is, in the relation of the object to our understanding".¹⁴⁶

And, finally, "The agreement of our concept with the object" (Die Übereinstimmung unserer Begriffe mit dem Objekte), "The agreement of knowledge with its object" (Die Übereinstimmung der Erkenntnis mit ihrem Gegenstand) or even "It is in accordance with the laws of the spirit that the formal element of all truth exists" (In Übereinstimmung mit den Gesetzen des Geistes besteht das formale Element jeder Wahrheit).

Hilary Putnam, an American philosopher, with the aim of discussing how it is possible to make reference and give meaning to things and actions, begins in his work *Reason, Truth and History* by proposing purely imaginary situations (as if a brain had been removed from the body and placed in a vat of nutrients and connected to a supercomputer, or an ant had a portrait of Winston Churchill drawn in the sand by pure chance).¹⁴⁷ From there, he defends the opinion that, for those he calls metaphysical realists or exteriorists, "the world consists of a permanent totality of objects independent of the mind [...] and truth involves a kind of relationship of correspondence between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things".¹⁴⁸ Putnam does not fully accept this conception, and calls himself an interiorist. In his words, "Interiorism does not

¹⁴⁵ Critique of Pure Reason. Appendix – On the Amphibology of the Concepts of Reflection, p. 167, opus cit.

¹⁴⁶ Idem, ibidem.

¹⁴⁷ It is somewhat surprising that philosophers often resort to "imaginary and unreal situations", if everyday life gives us innumerable examples of situations that could serve as examples and grounds for argument. See H. Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 1992.

¹⁴⁸ Ibidem, Chapter 3, Duas Perspectivas Filosóficas, pg. 77.

deny that there are inputs of experience in knowledge, but it does deny that there are any inputs that are not themselves, to some extent, shaped by our concepts, by the vocabulary we use to report and describe them”.¹⁴⁹ In other words, by language, by the use of reason and its concepts. In other words, with a different and modernized argument, Putnam repeats what Kant had already explained to us about the relations between sensibility (sensible experience), intuition, and the categories of knowledge: that all our knowledge begins with experience (of something, with something), but not everything arises from experience by force of a priori knowledge, pure or not.

When addressing the problem of reality, “presence” (translation used for *Dasein*, man’s way of being), and “worldliness”, Heidegger asserts in *Being and Time*: “The proof of the presence of ‘things outside of me’ is based on the fact that transformation and permanence belong in an equally original way to the essence of time. My simply given being, that is, the simply given being in the inner sense of a multiplicity of representations, is a simply given transformation. However, temporal determination presupposes something permanent, simply given. This, however, cannot be (be) ‘in us’ because my presence (existence) in time can only be determined by something permanent [...] presence (*Dasein*) always arrives ‘too late’ because, from the moment it realizes this presupposition (of a simply given being) in its being, and otherwise this presupposition would not be possible, presence (*Dasein*), as being, always is and is in a world. ‘Before’ every presupposition and attitude characterized by presence (*Dasein*), the a priori of the constitution of offering itself in the mode of being of healing (*Sorge*)”.¹⁵⁰

The interaction between the material and concrete real (things and phenomena external to us) and the ideal and intellectually elaborated real (ideas, the action of the spirit, of understanding) makes us realize that, just as the material real is unthinkable without the real of ideas, without mind or thought, the ideal and abstract real is unrepresentable in the absence of the former. Being is more than perception and understanding, and if thinking is “knowing that I exist”, it is equally true, as Descartes himself points out, that *to think it is first necessary*

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem, Chapter 3, section “Interiorismo e Relativismo”, pg. 83.

¹⁵⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Ser e Tempo*, ps. 204 a 206, Editora Vozes, Petrópolis e Universitária São Francisco, Bragança Paulista, 2018.

to be (in a human or even divine form). That which is external to us, which shows itself as an “in-itself”, does not impede, but, on the contrary, makes possible the phenomenal given, the reference we need to know reality.

The possibility of speaking and encountering reality encompasses various forms, beyond the immediacy of the senses (which can obviously deceive us), without projecting abusive rational demands as if “the thing in itself” were very different from what is shown in the “thing”, or thinking that the ways of apprehending objects and phenomena are the only realities of this cognitive relationship: “These forms of access can be considered in many different ways: structures of consciousness, transcendental, neurocognitive or linguistic structures, concepts, symbolic forms, historical epistemes, institutions, and social constructions. What they have in common is the fact that they define a reality for us. A realist position in metaphysics is therefore minimally distinguished by the fact that it postulates that, in one way or another, this reality for us does not exhaust the meaning of reality itself”.¹⁵¹

Hence, it cannot be denied that real and reality are natural or cultural phenomena or occurrences that affect or interfere, in some way, in our lives (and in the lives of other living beings), such as the fauna and flora of the fields, forests, and seas, as well as rain, drought, illness, pollution, or a threatening noise to which we react. If the so-called “hypothetical entities,” such as numbers, linguistic signs, or philosophical and scientific concepts, are certainly not physical entities, but rather immaterial or intelligible, they nevertheless maintain a close link of usefulness (means or tools) for the knowledge of the material world and for everyday human actions. This is why language, and more specifically the language spoken, the laws, codes, and institutions of a community, are capable of forming a second reality, linked to natural or primary realities, which we call cultural.

Precisely for this reason, due to their undeniable structures and influences, the very thoughts, reflections, or descriptions about the existence and events of the world constitute realities, those that can be transmitted socially or collectively, through coexistence, writing, lessons, images, or a certain code, as well as

¹⁵¹ Emmanuel Aloa, Élie During, *Soyez realistes, demandez l'impossible*, ps. 7 to 23, in *Choses en soi: Métaphysique du réalisme*, PUF, Paris, 2018.

affections, feelings and personal memories, whose lived experiences can only be communicated entirely to others very imperfectly. Even in the case of subjective hearings and visions of a schizophrenic (lack of control of neuronal information), such experiences are “real” to him (otherwise there would be no manifestation and admission of the disorder), although unreal from an external point of view, that is, independent of the patient himself, and thus can be socially corroborated. In such cases, consequently, the visions and hearings produced mentally in the patient are accepted as “real”, while the external world is denied or considered “unreal”. In other words, all artificial human creations, which are generically called cultural (whether in the exclusively anthropological sense or in the humanistic sense) constitute realities because they participate and interfere, directly or indirectly, with greater or lesser intensity, in personal life and social relations, in addition to producing evident, relevant, perceptible and, precisely for this reason, real consequences. That's why Watzlawick's conclusion is incomprehensible: “[Human] relationships are not aspects of first-order [natural] reality, whose “true” nature can be scientifically investigated. Human relationships are pure constructions of the members of the relationship and, as such, escape any scientific verification. As a result, the naive faith placed in scientific knowledge, based on reason, as the highest authority, diminishes”.¹⁵²

Therefore, psychology itself, of which he was a researcher and professor, as well as history and other humanities would be useless for the investigation, understanding, knowledge and truth of the facts.

But how can we understand the difference between the objects of classical physics (bodies) and those of quantum physics (subatomic particles and waves)? Could there be two distinct realities or manifestations of matter, that is, deterministic properties and behaviors of the former and a probabilistic, undetermined or random one of the quantum ones? The astonishment at the subatomic world led Einstein himself, together with physicists Podolsky and Rosen, to formulate the “EPR paradox” (an abbreviation of the authors’ names), questioning the ability of quantum mechanics to prove itself as a complete theory. In the exposition of the three proponents of the paradox, every element of physical reality must correspond to a defined quantity, whether it is measured or

¹⁵² P. Watzlawick (org.), article *Components of Ideological Realities*, pg. 229, opus cit.

not. The problem is that, as Niels Bohr responded, it becomes impossible to separate the behavior of particles from their observation and measurement by the devices that produce and define their condition of existence. Every quantum observation, which can only be performed by instruments, interferes, distorts or itself generates what is measured. In other words, the measurement forces the particle to assume this or that state vector, that is, a specific or defined position (particle or wave). Thus, the position or speed of an object (electron, photon) is a property shared between the device and the particle. Another phenomenon of these specific objects, outside of common sense and even relativistic physics, is what is called quantum entanglement or superposition, that is, a fact that occurs when two or more particles become interdependent, in such a way that the measurement of the property of one particle instantly affects the property of another, regardless of the distance that separates them. This phenomenon arises from the property of superposition, that is, from the existence of two simultaneous states, which does not occur in the world of physical bodies. But if the link that is established is “instantaneous”, how can it be faster than the speed of light, the maximum limit predicted by relativistic physics? Therefore, there are correlations between the physical properties observed in these distinct particles, but they remain as unresolved investigations in epistemological discussions of quantum physics. Therefore, either we have distinct manifestations of reality, dependent on the level of structure of matter (supra-atomic level, subatomic level) or science has not yet been able to unify them.

In any case, it is curious not to take into account crystal clear evidence, at least since Leibniz's *Protogaea* (which already suggested to us the reality of geological modifications on Earth that is evident today) and the subsequent diffusion of the life sciences. For before we came into the world as creatures capable of perception, consciousness and understanding, there already existed a previous world in which and from which we would emerge, as one of the innumerable modes (to use Spinoza's vocabulary) of this unique substance (God or nature). The natural sciences have revealed to us “a landscape in a ‘wild state’: scenes of the existence of things and their obscure commerce, pictures of a world without men, before or even after man, full of events hitherto unsuspected”.¹⁵³ Or

¹⁵³ E. Aloa; É. During (éds.), opus cit.

what Bimbenet calls “external realism”, explained as follows: it is because human beings, through language and social life, “come out of themselves”, realise and become convinced that the world is not ontologically dependent on them. “I, dead, or the human species extinct, the real will still and definitively be what it is”.¹⁵⁴

Otherwise, we would have to admit, *ab absurdo*, that before humans, no reality existed and that we, the children of a long evolution, would be the demiurges of all bodies and phenomena, including those from which we come, since they would reside only in our “perceiving” and cognitive organ. If a pharmacomedicinal treatment or therapy is efficient in combating a disease, this fact occurs through the sensitive or experimental apprehension and the compatible intellectual discernment of the phenomenon – its material and/or biological causes and effects, as well as the treatment that has been consolidated. And this same therapy serves not just one individual, but all or the vast majority of those who suffer from the same syndrome or illness, and can be transposed and applied to other species (mammals, for example), with the obvious and necessary adaptations of time and dosage. If the world did not *exist in reality and independently*, and if its descriptions and analyses could not be shared by men, through additions, rectifications, or revolutions in knowledge, no traditional or scientific knowledge would be possible and no practical application in technology would have been created in such profusion throughout human history.

Finally, it is possible to make a distinction between real and reality. If the real is what it is and affects us in our experience, with or without our perception, reality can be understood as the representation of a set of objects, facts, events or correlated real phenomena (*the totality of facts*, according to Wittgenstein), such as environmental complexity, socioeconomic structures, and whose understanding or comprehension can vary in extent and plausibility.

¹⁵⁴ Étienne Bimbenet, *L’Invention du réalisme*, Cerf, Paris, 2015, p. 76.

VII. Modernity and Postmodernity

The concept of modernity is quite old, if we consider the time span that separates the High Middle Ages from the present day. Derived from the Latin adverb *modo*, which in ancient times meant “now”, “a little while ago” or “presently”, as in *modo hoc malum republicam invasit* (this evil now invades the republic – Cicero), the word only emerged, in its current meaning, in the 4th century.

In this regard, Ernst Curtius says: “Só no século IV aparece o feliz neologismo *modernus*, e então Cassiodoro (historiador, teólogo e gramático latino) poderá celebrar em rimas contínuas um autor como *antiquorum diligentissimus imitator*, *modernorum nobilissimus institutor* (que imita com muito zelo os antigos e forma com muito cuidado ou empenho os modernos) (Variae, IV, 51). A palavra *moderno* [que nada tem a ver com moda] foi um dos últimos legados da fase final da língua latina ao mundo moderno. A época de transição de Carlos Magno pôde, então, ser chamada, no século XII, *seculum modernum*”.¹⁵⁵

The great dictionary of that time, the “Thesaurus Linguae Latinae”, records the meaning of *modernus* as follows: *Qui nunc, nostro tempore est, novellus, praesentaneus* (which is now proper to our time, new, present or current).¹⁵⁶ And since the 10th century, the derived words *modernitas* (modern times) and *moderni* (men of today) have been used with relative frequency. It is clear that the meanings of modern and modernity have been affirmed as the idea of a continuous, progressive time, different from the eternal return of antiquity, takes hold in the Middle Ages, preparing the cultural revolution of the Renaissance.

The first philosophical or aesthetic clashes between the opposing conceptions of modernity and antiquity occurred in the 12th century, between poets who, even writing in Latin, either preferred the ancient poetics or proposed a new one, based on dialectical oppositions, believing themselves to be superior to the older ones. This dispute includes the famous statement by Bernard of Chartres, presented

¹⁵⁵ Curtius, E., *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Harper and Row, 1963, ps. 251 to 254.

¹⁵⁶ Teubner, Leipzig, 1966, volume VIII, pg. 1211.

by John of Salisbury and dated 1159, in which the values of both times and their contributions are balanced or complemented: “We often know more not because we are advanced by our natural ability, but because we are supported by the mental strength of others and possess riches that we have inherited from our ancestors. Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He said that we see more and further not because we have sharper eyesight or greater height, but because we have risen and been born upon their gigantic stature”.¹⁵⁷

The dispute was reignited in the 17th century and we see Francis Bacon, for example, dreaming of the reform of knowledge, and with it human dominion over nature, writing in a curious and insightful way: “The opinion which men cherish of antiquity is altogether idle, and scarcely accords with the term. For the old age and increasing years of the world should in reality be considered as antiquity, and this is rather the character of our own times than of the less advanced age of the world in those of the ancients; for the latter, with respect to ourselves, are ancient and elder, with respect to the world modern and younger. And as we expect a greater knowledge of human affairs, and more mature judgment from an old man than from a youth, on account of his experience, and the variety and number of things he has seen, heard, and meditated upon, so we have reason to expect much greater things of our own age (if it knew but its strength and would essay and exert it) than from antiquity, since the world has grown older, and its stock has been increased and accumulated with an infinite number of experiments and observations”.¹⁵⁸

In short, the superiority of the current men (contradictorily modern) rested on the accumulated wisdom of their own historical old age, while their ancestors (apparently ancient) found their fragility in the youth of the world. Thus, the ideas of progress, advancement, and overcoming were incorporated into those of modern and modernity.

Reasoning in similar terms, Descartes wrote that “There is no reason to bow down to the Ancients because of their antiquity; it is we, on the contrary, who

¹⁵⁷ John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon*, Gloucester, Massachussets, Peter Smith, 1971, p. 167.

¹⁵⁸ *Novum Organum*, Aphorisms, book I, LXXXIV, The Online Library of Liberty.

should be called the Ancients. The world is now older than in the past and we have greater experience of things”.¹⁵⁹

The author of the *Discourse on the Method*, which had such an influence on science and philosophy, and the application of algebra to geometry, attributed greater value to what moderns investigated about nature and its laws. And it is undeniable that during the 17th century Galileo perfected the telescope and revolutionized the foundations of astronomy; Newton formulated the laws of gravitation, Leibniz created infinitesimal calculus and binary mathematics; Pascal invented the calculating machine, Denis Papin designed the first design for a steam engine, which operated through the reciprocating movement of a piston in a cylinder; Huygens developed optics, probability theory and invented the pendulum clock, and Antoni Van Leeuwenhoek, the microscope. In medicine, Harvey discovered blood circulation and formulated the first truly effective herbal medicine for combating fevers, *cinchona officinalis*. Jean-Baptiste de La Quintinie worked wonders in French gardens and orchards, managing to produce out-of-season fruits and vegetables; the Marly machine, designed by Arnold de Ville and R. Suallem to extract water from the Seine and irrigate the gardens of Versailles, was another technical feat that contemporaries compared to other extraordinary feats of that then-modern world. Thus, the entire period of the European Renaissance forged critical and rational arguments against the medieval past, dubbed “*età oscura*” by Petrarch, discrediting it in certain aspects (theological, philosophical and scientific), or preserving them, but in a clearly more refined or improved manner (in the arts, under the aegis of a new rational poetics, and in various technologies for practical use).

Partly based on the aforementioned authors, the famous Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns took place in France in that same century, and spread to England under the name of The Battle of the Books (the title of a work by Swift). Authors such as Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin (*Clovis, or Christian France*, 1657) and Louis Le Laboureur (in the preface to his epic *Charlemagne*, 1664) had already been advocating the supremacy of Christian values (and their heroic characters) when compared to ancient polytheism and sensualism. From them

¹⁵⁹ Quoted by 17th century biographer Adrien Baillet in his *La Vie de M. Descartes*, II, Ed. Des Malassis, Paris, 2012, p. 531.

came the circle of the moderns, led by the writer Charles Perrault, who considered it appropriate to apply the evidence of scientific advances already achieved to concepts of an aesthetic nature, especially plastic and literary ones.

As a result, the moderns argued in favor of the supremacy of their contemporary arts over those of antiquity, given a stricter verisimilitude between art and nature, derived from scientific achievements. Perrault, in his writings entitled “Parallels between the Ancients and the Moderns in the Arts and Sciences” (from 1688 to 1692) defended this artistic superiority based on the quantity and complexity of the poetic rules already formulated. Thus, for example, the writer asserted, through the voice of the character Abbot: ““When I have explained that Homer and Virgil committed countless errors which moderns no longer commit, I believe I have proved that the ancients did not possess all our rules, and that the natural effect of rules is to prevent the commission of errors. So that if heaven were willing to provide us with a man who had the genius of Virgil, it is certain that he would write a poem more beautiful than the Aeneid, for he would have, in my opinion, as much genius as Virgil, and at the same time a greater number of precepts by which he would conduct himself”.”¹⁶⁰

In addition to this rational aspect or greater plausibility in the description of facts, defenders of modernity emphasized the refinement of the expressions of the time, more decorous or subtle (present in the necessary “jeux d’esprit” of the courts), unlike several Greco-Roman texts, considered rude or coarse (too “agrarian”) and licentious. And finally, the most elegant beauty of Renaissance modernity also came from the spirituality and truth revealed by Christianity, to whose elevation the ancients did not have access.

On the opposite side, defending the greatness of the “pagan” arts, were, for example, in France, Boileau (*Arte Poétique*) – himself a more flexible preceptor than Perrault’s group –, Molière, Jean de la Fontaine and, later, the erudite Madame Dacier, whose translation of the two Homeric poems preserved a philological rigor not taken into consideration by another poet and translator, sympathizer of the moderns, Houdar de La Motte. In England, Swift, a supporter of the classical spirit of poets such as William Temple (of whom he was secretary)

¹⁶⁰ *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* (1692), volume III, paragraph 155, available at humanum.fr/integral, without page number.

and William Wotton, supported the cause of the ancients. Describing the “war”, the author narrates: “Immediately the two main bodies withdrew, under their several ensigns, to the farther parts of the library, and there entered into cabals and consults upon the present emergency. The Moderns were in very warm debates upon the choice of their leaders; and nothing less than the fear impending from their enemies could have kept them from mutinies upon this occasion. The difference was greatest among the horse, where every private trooper pretended to the chief command, from Tasso and Milton to Dryden and Wither. The light-horse were commanded by Cowley and Despreaux...The army of the Ancients was much fewer in number; Homer led the horse, and Pindar the light-horse; Euclid was chief engineer; Plato and Aristotle commanded the bowmen; Herodotus and Livy the foot; Hippocrates, the dragoons; the allies, led by Vossius and Temple, brought up the rear”.

In addition to the criticism contained in *The Battle of the Books*, Samuel Johnson (*Dictionary of the English Language*) uses a letter from Swift to his friend Pope as an endorsement of the term “modern”: “I hope you will discipline the corruption of English made by those little Writers who send us their rubbish in Prose and Verse, with abominable Abbreviations and queer Modernisms”.

With Romanticism, however, the aspects of modernity were revealed more emphatically, being the result of the principle of dominant or permanently required *subjectivity*, as presented by Hegel. A principle that consists, at the same time, in the freedom and reflexive character of consciousness, as a need to recreate, from itself, a new insertion in the world, distinct from the past. In other words, the Romantic era gradually became the turning point in which three great historical projects were combined: the Reformation (freedom to interpret the sacred), the Enlightenment (claim for the sovereignty of the subject) and the French Revolution (political free will, expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man). Thus, in the artistic sphere, says Hegel, “the true content of romantic art is constituted by an absolute intrinsic character, and the corresponding form by the spiritual subjectivity conscious of its autonomy and its freedom... a simple agreement with itself that ignores all separation and all the processes of nature, the succession of birth, disappearance and reappearance, all limitation of spiritual life... it is the individual, real subject, animated by interior life, which acquires an

infinite value, as the only center where the eternal moments of that absolute truth that is only realized as spirit are elaborated and from which radiate”.¹⁶¹

It is true that Romanticism, as a confessional and subjective world, a search for ineffable sensations, had, among its characteristics, the revaluation of the medieval, the recovery of maternal heroes, the religious spirit of ancestors, as well as a critical evasion in the face of the advance of industrial and financial civilization, or in the face of the philistine attitudes of the various bourgeois strata. Even so, the classic, the ideal of a universalist and abstract beauty, ceased to make sense to many of its intellectuals. The Romantic conceptions of genius and Christianity, but also that of the death of God (theodontology) – thought and sensibility that block the claims of transcendence – definitively broke with classical metaphysics and classicism, becoming, in relation to them, antinomic. According to Hans Jauss, modernity is still defined by opposition to antiquity, but in a new sense, now referring expressly to the experience of a national and Christian past, rediscovered by it (*Literary Tradition and Current Consciousness of Modernity*). We find this mentality in a herald of those new times, such as Chateaubriand, for whom – in the face of the naivety of polytheism – the feeling of moral superiority of the New Testament and the lives of its martyrs, as well as the beauty of revealed religion, would be enough to reaffirm the “Genius of Christianity”.

Theodontology, on the other hand, owed its first sentence not to Nietzsche, but to Hegel, for whom the feeling underlying religion in the Modern Era is that God is dead, both as a result of the predominance of subjectivity (which begins to have an absolute value) and the growth of atheism and the progressive separation between faith (focused on the infinite) and knowledge (which is directed towards what is finite), phenomena characteristic of the “new times”.

Later, Nietzsche would insist on the anti-historicist stance, on the need for modern men to free themselves from past values. Since life is an organic manifestation, moving forward must overcome what has already happened. Therefore, we read in the *Untimely Meditations*: “In the smallest, as in the greatest, happinesses, it is always the same thing that makes happiness

¹⁶¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Curso de Estética* (Course in Aesthetics), The Beautiful in Art, Ed. Martins Fontes, São Paulo, pp. 571 to 573.

happiness: the power to forget or, to put it more eruditely, the faculty of feeling *unhistorically*. Whoever does not settle on the threshold of the instant, forgetting all the past, whoever is not capable of standing on one point like a goddess of victory, without vertigo and fear, will never know what happiness is, and even worse, will never do anything that makes others happy... Every action requires forgetting: just as the life of everything organic requires not only light, but also darkness. A man who always wanted to feel only historically would be like one who forced himself to abstain from sleep... Therefore, it is possible to live almost without memory, and even to live happily, but it is entirely impossible, without forgetting, to simply live... We moderns have nothing; It is only by filling and cramming ourselves with alien times, customs, arts, philosophies, and religions that we become something worthy of attention... The historical sense, when it reigns *unrestrained* and brings all its consequences, eradicates the future, because it destroys illusions and deprives things of their atmosphere, in which alone they can live".¹⁶²

For reasons such as these, already present in the spirit of the times, Stendhal came to the conclusion that "Romanticism is the art of presenting people with literary works that, given the current state of their customs and beliefs, give them the greatest possible pleasure. Classicism, on the contrary, presents them with the literature that gave the greatest possible pleasure to their great-great-grandparents. Sophocles and Euripides were eminently romantic; they gave the Greeks gathered in the theater of Athens tragedies that, according to the moral habits of that people, their religion and their prejudices about the dignity of man, should give them the greatest possible pleasure. To imitate Sophocles and Euripides today, and to pretend that these imitations do not make the Frenchman of the nineteenth century yawn, is to be a classicist".¹⁶³

Thus, the current situation and the aspects of taste, fashion and social relations experienced at the time were the striking aspects that should be present in literature.

¹⁶² *Nietzsche, Considerações Extemporâneas*, II, On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life, Coleção Os Pensadores, Ed. Victor Civita, São Paulo, 1983, pg. 58.

¹⁶³ *Racine et Shakspeare*, Librairie Hatier, Paris, 1825, pg. 23.

And it is from this notion of “singular time” that Baudelaire will develop his ideas of modernity. Already in the comments of the Salon of 1846, he admits that the romantic spirit is the most current: “Each century, each people, has had its own expression of beauty and morality - if by romanticism we mean the most recent and most modern expression of beauty -; the great artist will therefore be, for the reasonable and passionate critic, the one who combines the above-mentioned condition, naivety, with the maximum possible romanticism... For me, romanticism is the most recent and most contemporary expression of beauty... Whoever says romanticism, says modern art, that is, intimacy, spirituality, color, aspiration to the infinite, expressed by all the means that the arts possess”.¹⁶⁴

And later (1863), in a text about Constantin Guys, he defines it as follows: “Modernity is the transitory, the fleeting, the contingent, half of art, the other half being the eternal and the immutable... As for this transitory, fleeting element, whose metamorphoses are so frequent, you have no right to underestimate or ignore it. By suppressing it, you inevitably fall into the void of an abstract and indefinable beauty, similar to that of the only woman faced with the first sin... In a word, for all modernity to be worthy of becoming antiquity, it is necessary that the mysterious beauty that human life involuntarily deposits there be extracted... Woe to the one who studies in the ancient only pure art, logic, and general method! By immersing himself in it so much, he loses the memory of the present; he abdicates the value and privileges granted by circumstance, for almost all our originality comes from the seal that time imprints on our sensations”.¹⁶⁵

Consequently, the perception and understanding of the present time – of what is ephemeral and circumstantial – constitutes the prevailing factor of modernity, something that the artist cannot learn from the past. This is useful and necessary as a general method, but the contemporary is, in fact, realized in the “beauty of the present”, as long as beauty is considered as the criterion and objective to be achieved. Eternal beauty (the general and common principles of art) is complemented by modern beauty, by the values of the present, by the imaginative capacity of living artists. And from this deficiency arises the “drama of modernity”, which is the difficulty and the risk of expressing the beauty of the

¹⁶⁴ *Salon de 1846*, Collections Litteratura.com, pgs 7 e 8.

¹⁶⁵ *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Collections Litteratura.com, pg. 11.

present, rejecting history and accumulated memory. In other words, the drama experienced by the modernity of the late 19th century, which influenced that of the 20th century, is that of not only opposing innovation to repetition, but of comparing and replacing the past with an absolutely new present, which is not a guarantee, in itself, of the quality of the artistic work. Such antitheses are found in Baudelaire's work and in his idiosyncrasies in the face of the modern world – industrial, mass, excessively materialistic and utilitarian – to which he felt attracted, not without confessed aversion.

In the opposite sense to that given by Swift, the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, as a critic, attributed to the term modernism the idea of renewal and literary self-affirmation (nationalist), developed by Latin American writers, although under the influence of French symbolism. In addition to Darío himself, the qualification referred to authors such as Ricardo Contreras, José Martí, Manuel Nájera, Leopoldo Lugones and Guillermo Valencia. This denomination, together with that of symbolism, extended to several Spanish-speaking authors, began to be adopted even voluntarily, as by Ramón de Valle-Inclán, who called himself a modernist because he fought for a personal, non-imitative style, because “if there is something in literature that can be called modernism, it is certainly a strong desire for personality” (quoted by Max Ureña – *Brief History of Modernism*).

But this Hispanic character of modernism did not prevent it from being perceived more broadly. Although the Spanish Generation of 98 proposed itself as modernist (with reservations on the part of Unamuno), Isaac Goldberg's opinion (*Studies on Hispanic-American Literature*), as early as 1920, was that it was not a phenomenon restricted to Castilian and Ibero-American writers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but an aspect of the spirit that spread throughout the West.

At the same time that the notion of modernity was spreading in Hispanic literature, French, Germanic and Scandinavian literature was being analyzed from the same perspective. Thus, for example, the authors of the naturalist and realist trends were treated by the eminent Danish critic Georg Brandes, referring to Bjornson, Zola, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Strindberg, Büchner, Knut Hamsun, as well as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (a set of texts that made up, in six volumes, *The Main Currents of European Literature of the Nineteenth Century – 1872-1890*). This was followed by the Austrian Hermann Bahr in the series *For the Criticism*

of the Modern (1890-1891). At the same time, however (as already mentioned), symbolism also gained this name, although, on the contrary, it had its preferences for the most subjective manifestations of the unconscious, for the hidden vibrations of the soul, or the hermeticism of images. As modernists, besides Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Rilke, Stefan George or the Russian Sologub were seen. This fact led Edmund Wilson to admit the symbolist lineage of literary modernism (*Axel's Castle*). This “high modernism” extended, for most observers, from the end of the 19th century until the mid-1930s, with more intense ruptures in the first two decades of the last century.

The confirmation or affirmative and incessant search for new truths and radically different beauties (or at least for unusual images and aesthetic objects) are at the heart of the ideas of modernity and modernism (the words can be interchangeable, since “modernism is essentially, as those who gave it its name perceived, the search for modernity” – Federico de Onís, *Martí and Modernism*). And these include sociopolitical and economic denunciation, social revolution, the decadence that comes with the rise of the masses (an environment in which even a racehorse can be called “genius”, as Robert Musil discovered in *The Man Without Qualities*, formal experimentalism, and invention (or even aesthetic deformation), narratives of facts or events that follow one another without any apparent links between them, the anodyne but the highly illusory character of hopes, represented in a tragicomic way, or even uncertainty about the possibility of human communication, whether ordinary or artistic.

In the opinion of Octavio Paz, persistent criticism and self-denial would still be indispensable to understanding modernity or modernism. The poet and critic reminds us that “the modern is not only characterized by its novelty, but also by its heterogeneity. The ancient tradition was always the same, the modern (tradition) is always distinct... The modern is not the continuity of the past in the present, nor is today the child of yesterday; they are rupture and negation. The modern is self-sufficient; each time it appears, it founds its own tradition... The art and poetry of our time live on modernity and die in it... The novelty of the 17th century was not critical nor did it bring the negation of the traditional. On the contrary, it affirmed its continuity... To find this strange alliance between the aesthetics of surprise and that of negation, one has to go back to the end of the 18th century, to the beginning of the Modern Age. Since its birth, modernity has

been a critical passion and is thus a double negation, as criticism and as passion, of both classical geometries and baroque labyrinths. Dizzying passion, because it culminates in the denial of itself: modernity is a kind of creative self-destruction... controversial estrangement and active opposition... the denial of all principles is its principle".¹⁶⁶

Sufficient reasons for us to have, for example in Pirandello, the fluidity of personal identity, of the boundaries between reality and fiction, between truth and illusion. Contradictions that remain blurred in the game of "così è se vi pare" (so it seems). That Gide assumed hedonism, the "gratuitous act", immoralism, or the rejection of traditional education as foundations of contemporary freedom. Let us remember Joyce and his multilingual exploration, in permanent metamorphosis, the accommodation of facts and objects to the interiority of consciousness, leading to the decomposition of the epic adventure (Ulysses), that is, its reduction to the private, depoliticized, and disenchanted experience of the world. Or Proust pouring himself into intricate labyrinths of memory and physical sensitivity, with autobiographical features, in search of a meaning for his personal life.

T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is often regarded as one of the landmarks of modernist writing, leading William Carlos Williams to later describe the work (from 1922) as "an atomic bomb" dropped on the English-language poetry scene. The poem contains many of the techniques associated with the movement, such as the use of collage and disjunction, free verse, an impersonality averse to effusive sentiment, and constant references, in his personal case, to high culture.

This permanent dilemma of the spirit, which took hold in the way of life, mentality and social relations, permeated artistic work and aesthetic creation, making it a more individually realized impulse than ever before. The "period style" disappeared, which also meant that the absence of a common environment and poetic conception became the characteristic of the period. Consequently, aesthetic modernity manifested itself, preferably, in the pluralism of individualities, amidst immediate antagonisms, in an uninterrupted flow of works complete in themselves and without reference to models or rules, to a memory to which it wanted to refer, except in the cases of irony and parody.

¹⁶⁶ *Los Hijos del Limo*, Ed. Seix Barral, Barcelona, 1990, pgs. 18 a 22.

Post – a prefix with multiple uses

The words postmodernity or postmodernism began to be used by historian Arnold Toynbee (in the eighth volume of *A Study of History*, 1954) and by post-war American critics and poets – such as Randall Jarell's comments on Robert Lowell and his then-recent work, *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946) – and by the American poet Charles Olson.

For Toynbee, postmodernity indicated a split with the most cherished values or perspectives inaugurated by Renaissance humanism and expanded by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment: the predominance of reason, the overcoming of states of belligerence, political freedom, scientific and technological progress, and social development and equality. The new period established a mentality and political-economic relations through which nature and social life began to be seen as manifestations of chance, irrationality, relativism, or indeterminacy. And to this contributed a society and mass culture that were paradoxically individualistic, intoxicated by communications and materialistic appeals, which embedded permanent functional disorders. A time of troubles, laden with symptoms of destruction or disintegration of the hopes that Western civilization had created, at the cost of conflicts and cyclical overcoming. Toynbee, although he did not follow the same path as Spengler, pointed, in the end, to the same gloomy perspectives of decadence.

In an opposite, or rather enthusiastic, manner, Olson, in a letter to his friend Robert Creely (08/09/1951) states that “I am led to this notion: the postmodern world was designed by two earlier facts, the voyages of discovery of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which made the whole Earth a known quantity, and the development of the machine in the nineteenth century”. Further on, in an essay entitled *Additional Prose*, he states that: “The writing acts which I find bear upon the present job are (I) from Homer back, not forward; and (II) from Melville on, particularly himself, Dostoievsky, Rimbaud and Lawrence. These are the modern men who projected what we are in, who broke the spell... They put the men

forward into the post-modern, the post-humanist, the post historic, the going live present, the Beautiful Thing".¹⁶⁷

Olson's argument is more than debatable, as it reveals a narrow idiosyncrasy in the selection of authors and little historical depth. It serves only to indicate, chronologically, the use of this notion that is being discussed here.

Wright Mills (*The Sociological Imagination*, 1959) also used the term in a pejorative sense, comparing the sociopolitical trends of his time with the "Dark Ages", the successor to the clearly ancient one. In his opinion, both socialism and liberalism developed the need for a union between freedom and reason.

But the dissemination of the term and the attempt to give it a more consistent theoretical framework, which might or not admit an original character, came from the architectural field during the 1970s. Figures such as Charles Jencks (*The Language of Postmodern Architecture, Current Architecture*), Robert Venturi (*Learning from Las Vegas, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*) or Paolo Portoghesi (*After Modern Architecture*) launched their criticisms of certain aspects of the constructive aesthetics of the first half of the century, listing, among them, the following: the denial of the city's past, that is, of its architectural memory and particular symbols; the excess of planning and functionalism or the preference for solely rationalist conceptions, which imposed additional barriers to spontaneous coexistence and the complexity of everyday social life; the unrealized utopia of cities without hierarchies; the adoption of different visions and forms that once again took into account aesthetic and cultural aspects.

In the opinion of these authors, architects such as Sullivan, Wright, Gropius, Corbusier and Niemeyer designed spaces that were clearly different from the existing urban fabric, considering it outdated, degenerate or degraded. But in doing so, they imposed the pure logic of excessively artificial and rationalist configurations. In Portoghesi's opinion, for example, the most sensible attitude would perhaps be to face the fact that modern architecture, as a style of an era, as an expression of a rising technological civilization, had run its course and that a civilization that truly wanted to repair the disruption of ecological balances and put an end to the impoverishment of material resources, could not afford to

¹⁶⁷ C. Olson, Ed. George Butterick, 1974, pg. 40.

continue building according to those methods and ideas. According to the architect, a modern building, after thirty or forty years, is already decrepit, unlike older buildings, made of stone or masonry. So much so that Charles Jencks dates the beginning of the postmodern movement in architecture to July 15, 1972, the day on which the Pruitt-Igoe residential neighborhood in St. Louis, Missouri, designed by Minoru Yamasaki according to the dictates of the modernist movement in the 1950s, was demolished. The neighborhood was then considered "uninhabitable", precisely due to the rigidity of its guiding principles, the incredible density of housing and the depersonalized or alienating condition of the architectural features used.

Although the postmodernists did not reject the formal contributions of the modernists, the past began to be used with the aim of revitalizing or reusing old buildings, warehouses and abandoned factories in a functional way. In addition to the financial issues involved (working in undervalued and cheaper areas), the postmodernists then imposed a duplication of architectural codes, meaning that it was no longer possible to speak of a well-defined or constituted style, but rather of a plurality of facets or conceptions: "the postmodern condition was a magical moment, in which apparently discordant phenomena (were) endowed with a common core"¹⁶⁸ – that is, the rejection of modern standards.

For example, for Robert Venturi, who used Las Vegas as a paradigm, architecture could no longer be based on the purity of geometric form, as advocated by modernism, but on the contamination with history and the popular and consumer world. And history could be used as a free quote, out of context, extolling eclecticism, decoration, kitsch and pop art, the current and immediate realities of urban life, such as shopping malls, business centers, fast food chains, leisure areas, automobile use and junk spaces (accumulated waste, as called by another architect of a later generation, Rem Koolhaas).

Precisely eclecticism, freedom and uncompromising attitudes are, for Jencks, attributes that are not only innovative, but also desirable: "It is an age in which no orthodoxy can be adopted without embarrassment and irony, for all traditions apparently have validity. This fact is partly a consequence of what is called the

¹⁶⁸ Pisani, M., *Architettura e politica*, "Dialogo con Paolo Portoghesi per comprendere l'architettura", Officina Edizione, Roma, 1989, pg. 277.

information explosion, the advent of organized knowledge, worldwide communications, and cybernetics... Pluralism, the 'ism' of our age, is the great problem and the great opportunity: when Every Man becomes a cosmopolitan and Every Woman a Liberated Individual, confusion and anxiety become the dominant moods, and Ersatz¹⁶⁹ a common form of mass culture... the postmodernist sails on, often losing his way and regretting it, but occasionally fulfilling the great promise of a pluralistic culture".¹⁷⁰

In *The Postmodern Turn*,¹⁷¹ Ihab Hassan asks himself whether it is possible to perceive a cultural phenomenon - starting from the artistic world and extending it to other social and cultural instances - that needs to be differentiated, in Western society, from what has been conventionally called modernism (in this case, and broadly speaking, the last third of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century), and how this trend relates to previous and already established modes. At first, it is clear that the word postmodernism evokes that which one wishes to overcome, which did not occur with the previous names of artistic styles (gothic, classical, baroque, neoclassical, romantic, modern) and would connote a certain qualitative decadence. Comparing certain characteristics in artistic creation, in the way of life and in the worldview of both eras, Hassan suggests the following differences and even oppositions: in modernism, the conjunctive and closed form, the finished work; in postmodernism, the anti-form or disjunctive form, the unfinished; totalization X performance and process; finalism and rationality X play and chance; domination X anarchy; depth X superficiality; grand narratives X small stories and anti-narratives; determination X indetermination; transcendence X immanence, construction X deconstruction. Although these dichotomies may vary in degree and according to the scope to which they refer, the tendency towards indeterminacy would be the most evident. And indeterminacy would encompass: ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, deformation, and decomposition. In addition,

¹⁶⁹ That which replaces or compensates.

¹⁷⁰ *What's Post-Modernism?*, Academy Editions, Londres, 1996, pgs. 7 e 8.

¹⁷¹ *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, Ohio State University Press, 1987.

irony and rupture. All these signs have penetrated and imposed themselves on the discourses of contemporary Western society, in its various areas or domains.

The choice of the play of codes, of the ambiguity and simultaneity of forms and intentions, has unleashed an aesthetic, a spiritual category that is both generalized and elusive, that is, capable of coexisting and intertwining the differences between high culture and mass culture (kitsch, popular television or cinema), spiritual creation and the financial profitability that comes from populism, reinterpreting the past in various ways: in the qualities of a skeptical and ironically nostalgic attitude, oblique remembrance, source of opportunistic recreation or simply comic parody. Since the past and traditions have already been entirely rejected by the modern avant-gardes, postmodernism constitutes the moment in which, according to Umberto Eco, “one cannot go any further, since it has already produced a metalanguage that speaks of its impossible texts (conceptual art). The postmodern response to the modern consists in recognizing that, since the past cannot be destroyed – its destruction leads to silence –, what remains to be done is to revisit it; with irony, without naivety”.¹⁷²

This comment by Eco is part of the explanations he added to the elaboration of the novel *The Name of the Rose*, a text itself based on various “quotations”, such as Aristotle, the Christian rigorism of Bernard of Clairvaux, passages copied from Voltaire’s *Zadig*, Borges’ library or incursions into modern semiotics, treated from the perspective of a detective plot. Thus, the means most commonly employed by postmodern art are transposed or distorted allusions, the recasting of temporally diverse materials and themes, the playful coexistence of past forms and styles or, in short, the transparency of a hybrid character, including in its levels of meaning.

Unlike other periods, in which the respective poetics (artistic creations) were postulated as relatively homogeneous, distinct and purposeful orders or sensibilities, postmodernism moves in a fluid manner. Hence the “impurity”, seen as the essence of postmodern aesthetics, in the opinion of essayist Guy Scarpetta, which includes the skepticism or anti-utopianism of figures such as Samuel Beckett and Milan Kundera. Unlike the first modernists of the century,

¹⁷² Umberto Eco, *Postille a “Il Nome de la Rosa”*, Il post-moderno, l’ironia, il piacevole, 1984, available at docenti.unimc.it/giovanni.giri, p. 611.

whose common banner would be the “death of art”, but so that it would be born confidently ex-novo, postmodernists free themselves from illusions and, when they create, they do so from the “death of art”. They prefer to denounce modern cruelty, discouragement or mockery. In a parallel way, Clement Greenberg contrasts the modern with the postmodern in the following way: in painting, high modernism would have expressed itself as a continuous effort to confront the decline of aesthetic standards threatened by the democratization (popularization) of culture and industrialization (*The Notion of Postmodern*). Postmodernism, on the other hand, would represent bad commercial taste, disguised as progress and sophistication, which destroys, almost imperceptibly, the spiritual integrity of art.

The beatnik “counterculture” and the post-war existentialist generation, pop art, happening demonstrations, the cultivation of a “vital” or hedonistic sensibility (sex, drugs and rock’n’roll) practiced by young people, the challenge to all hierarchical or elitist institutional forms (Student Revolt of 1968) proclaimed, together, a permanent rebellion of subjectivity, the erasure of the boundaries between art and life, disregarding attitudes of aesthetic contemplation and intellectual discipline in favor of a narcissistic mass culture. As a result of technology, instantaneousness, speed, increasing and immediate production and consumption ended up predominating, the resulting excess of waste, the superabundance of information and experiences that were more virtual than real.

Also in the 1970s, the notion of postmodernity penetrated the fields of philosophy and cultural hermeneutics through some authors, including Jean-François Lyotard, in France, and Gianni Vattimo, in Italy.

In the texts *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) and *Postmodernity Explained to Children* (1986), Lyotard distinguishes two types of knowledge, one formulated by scientific discourse, necessarily denotative and subject to criteria of experimentation and verification, and the others, elaborated and disseminated by narratives (récits) or metanarrations (métarécits) – ideologies, philosophies, myths, literary texts, propaganda, knowledge of customs and traditions, etc., whose function is to provide theoretical support for moral, social and political practices. Such narratives, however, are not internally legitimized with the aim of affirming and validating the truth they propose, that is, they are those that are not subject to verification by evidence. But both constitute, above all, language

games. And the cultural project of modernity and its metanarrations was entirely based on the assumption of a redemptive purpose for humanity throughout its history: from Catholicism (renewal of life in a spiritual state), through the Enlightenment (overcoming intellectual minority and continuous progress), Hegelianism (emancipation from the alienation of the Spirit), Marxism (extinction of social classes, emancipation from the State and Labor), capitalism (overcoming poverty through market forces). All of them lost not only strength or consistency of legitimacy, but even validity over time. It is as if no discourse, even scientific, could justify its foundations.

In the words of the author, ““First of all, it (science) can no longer legitimize itself as speculation supposed. In this dissemination of language games, it is the social subject itself that seems to dissolve. The social bond is language, but it is not made up of a single fiber. It is a fabric in which at least two types, in reality, an indeterminate number of language games, intersect... The very nostalgia for the lost story has disappeared for most people. It in no way follows from this that they are destined for barbarism. What prevents them from doing so is that they know that legitimization can only come from their practice of language and their communicative interaction. Faced with every other belief, the science that ironizes (*sourit dans sa barbe*) has taught them the harsh sobriety of realism”.¹⁷³

Therefore, disputes or conflicts of interest between social actors, the *différents*, can no longer rely on criteria recognized as unique and universal, in the absence of criteria applicable simultaneously to both arguments, and in this case, only a specific agreement between the parties is necessary. Finally, the storage, processing and incidence of information, subordinated to computer science and currently carried out by machines and communication systems, significantly and irreversibly changes the conditions in which knowledge arises and the way in which it is propagated. Thus, the old principle that linked the acquisition of knowledge to education (*Bildung*), that is, to a progressive education of the spirit, will cease to be important and will probably fall into disuse. Everything will depend on the way in which producers of information technology and consumers (who use it in an immediate, practical, daily manner) maintain their relationships, which are still predominantly economic.

¹⁷³ Brazilian version, O Pós-Moderno, José Olympio Editora, Rio de Janeiro, 1988, pp. 73 and 74.

Vattimo, in turn, argues that there are two thoughts, one called “strong”, characteristic of the modern Western tradition, rationalist, universalist, homogeneous and imposing (empiricism, idealism, enlightenment, Marxism, etc.), that is, endowed with “regent concepts [...] such as the idea of a totality of the world, of a unitary sense of history, of a self-centered subject”¹⁷⁴ and another precisely opposite, called “weak” (*pensiero debole*), which is opposed to it based on the figures of Nietzsche and Heidegger. From the latter we can recall that the idea of Man (Dasein) is above all that of a substance projected into wandering and drifting. No longer conceiving of man and being as stable structures or with regular characteristics, but as weak, fluid, transitory entities in constant becoming, we would all be dependent on interpretations and occasional or temporal exchanges of a linguistic order. Consequently, truth also finds itself undermined in its claims to validity and stability, as do ethical principles and their metaphysical understanding, which is situated above cultures and epochs. In other words, according to the Italian philosopher, truth “is not metaphysical, nor logical, nor normative, but above all rhetorical”,¹⁷⁵ dialogical, constructed through hermeneutics. Now, if one accepts the idea that there are no facts or moral precepts, but only interpretations, everything can be justified or claimed by this same relativism and by a persuasive narrative or account, capable of ad hoc persuasion. Such substantial equivalence prevents any criterion by which one can distinguish the true from the false, the just from the unjust, the moral from the immoral, or even beauty from ugliness. A true short circuit between ethics, intellection (knowledge) and thought (conception), since the postmodern vision is made by renouncing intellectual systems tending towards a coherent and integral certainty, already considered as products of a metaphysics in decline. Adopting only the relativism of subjective and group interpretations (on social networks) is to allow a myriad of values, opinions and messages of the most diverse possible, of an economic, advertising, political-ideological or religious nature, to crystallize, without any of them having the right to an authority considered solid and incontestable, even if they are thoughtlessly followed and accepted in social life.

¹⁷⁴ Gianni Vattimo, *Dialettica, differenza, pensiero debole*, in *Il Pensiero debole*, Feltrinelli, Roma, 1983, p. 18.

¹⁷⁵ Idem, p. 25.

The initial analysis of the term culture by another thinker, Zigmunt Baumann, in his essay “Culture in the Liquid Modern World” (based on Pierre Bourdieu) is riddled with populist prejudices against high culture and an inexplicable historical reductionism. Even so, the author does not fail to mention an important characteristic that extends Marx and Engels’ observation about the transformation of everything into a commodity in the capitalist environment (“All that is solid and majestic evaporates into the air, all that is sacred is profaned”)¹⁷⁶, especially when we find ourselves in such an advanced stage of computerized industrialization and immediate circulation of capital: “I use here the expression ‘liquid modernity’ to designate the current form of the modern condition, described by other authors as ‘postmodernity’, ‘late modernity’, ‘second modernity’ or ‘hypermodernity’. What makes modernity ‘liquid’, and thus justifies the choice of the name, is its compulsive and obsessive ‘modernization’, capable of propelling and intensifying itself, as a result of which, as with liquids, none of the consecutive forms of social life can maintain its appearance for long. ‘Dissolving all that is solid’ has been the innate and defining characteristic of the modern form of life from the beginning; but today, unlike yesterday, the dissolved forms should not be replaced (and are not) by other solid forms – considered ‘perfected’, in the sense of being even more solid and ‘permanent’ than the previous ones and, therefore, even more resistant to liquefaction. In place of melted and therefore inconstant forms, others emerge, no less – if not more – susceptible to melting and therefore also inconstant... Liquid modernity is the arena of a constant and deadly battle waged against every type of paradigm – and, in fact, against all homeostatic devices that serve conformism and routine, that is, that impose monotony and maintain predictability”.¹⁷⁷

Without there being a direct relation to the topic discussed here, one must, however, take into account a warning that seems quite clear and sensible to me from Leo Strauss, contained in his essay *Natural Law and History*: ““When we realize that our basic principles have no support other than our blind choice, we can no longer, as rational beings, believe in them. We can no longer act against them. We can no longer live as rational beings. In order to live, it becomes

¹⁷⁶ *Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft, alles Heilige wird entweiht*, Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei.

¹⁷⁷ Zahar Editora, 2013, available at LeLivros.site, ps. 11 e 12.

necessary to silence the easily silenced voice of reason, the one that tells us that our basic principles have no support other than our blind preference or choice, and therefore are as good or as bad as any other principle. The more we cultivate nihilism, the less we are capable of being members of any integrated 'culture'. The inevitable practical consequence of nihilism is fanatical obscurantism".¹⁷⁸

Amidst this unfolding of postmodern views or thought, it is also necessary to mention the analysis that Foucault proposes in *Les Mots et les Choses* regarding the need for philosophy to move away from the anthropological bias, in search of a pure ontology. This departure or uprooting of anthropology would have been announced by Nietzsche through philology, thus indicating that it is fundamental to study discursive practices, the forms and intentions of language. They are, in fact, the permanent constituents of man, and he is a product of this previous and comprehensive structure, and not the cause of knowledge or understanding: "To all those who still want to talk about man, his kingdom or his liberation, to all those who still ask questions about what man is in his essence, to all those who want to start from him in order to access the truth, to all those who, on the other hand, lead all knowledge back to the truths of man himself, to all those who do not want to formalize without anthropologizing, who do not want to mythologize without demystifying, who do not want to think without immediately thinking that it is man who thinks, to all these clumsy and distorted forms of reflection, one can only oppose a philosophical laugh — that is, in a certain way, a silent one".¹⁷⁹

As for the German sociologist Robert Kurz, he examines postmodernity as a failure of social criticism, as a disarmament of the capacity to theorize about the inevitable conflicts of collective life. In an article entitled "Philosophy as Farce," the author says: "After the concept of development has long since lost its allure, it is now the critical theory of society itself that is seen as obsolete, not only the Marxist theory, but theory in general... Postmodernity has enveloped everything that in the history of modernization has hitherto been considered theory with the suspicion of a 'totalitarian purpose' of the so-called grand narratives or grand

¹⁷⁸ Series of lectures delivered at the University of Chicago in 1949, available at press.uchicago.edu, no page number.

¹⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, *As Palavras e as Coisas: uma arqueologia das ciências humanas*, chapter IX, O Homem e seus Duplos, Martins Fontes Editora, p. 473.

theories. People no longer want to consider society as a whole and, therefore, 'grand concepts' are repudiated in exchange for the comfort of theoretical 'indeterminacy'. Critical theory is replaced by the disinterested intellectual game... Right at the moment when the totalitarianism of money dominates reality as never before, social theory itself is denounced as totalitarian in its projects... In its terminal status, the modern system thus becomes the first completely unreflective society in history... Postmodern generations no longer understand the concepts of reflection, which in just a few years have come to sound as foreign to them as the cult of the dead in ancient Egypt".¹⁸⁰

There are those who insist, however, on the idea that postmodernism, as a heterogeneous form of thought and heterogeneous action, would have as its defining features the rejection of hierarchical differences and dichotomies, since prescriptive values could not be universalized nor imposed by stratified or uneven structures. In this way, there would have been a reduction in authorities (family, education, employers) and, consequently, an increase in individual autonomy, responsibility and moral choice, as well as the abandonment of the great narratives of collective legitimacy and salvation. At the same time, a permanent suspicion would have been established regarding the claims of Reason, Truth or regarding ideas such as the Absolute or Transcendence. Therefore, the postmodern would contain a more tolerant, or even permissive, more relativist and skeptical worldview than in past eras. In Hottois' words, "Rational consensus with a universal objective, presented as a necessity and an obligation founded on Reason or the essence of language, is an illusion that belongs to the Myth of Modernity".¹⁸¹

This also means that the end of grand narratives reveals a growing disenchantment with politics (apoliticism), and even with the possibilities of the democratic regime to satisfactorily resolve the contradictions between production and ecological balance, between globalization and local interests, between universal rights and specific or cultural rights.

¹⁸⁰ Caderno Mais, Newspaper Folha de São Paulo, 09/07/2000.

¹⁸¹ See Gilbert Hottois, *De la Renaissance à la postmodernité*, disponível em Cairn.info, chapter 21, ps. 463 a 484.

As for the criticisms already formulated, they would be typical of postmodernity: 1) a lack of identity and consistency, both intellectual and moral, that is, both the disdain for historical experiences and thoughts already formulated – which we could qualify as cultural erosion – and the inability to judge and prescribe on ethical (and therefore universal) grounds; 2) the dominance of irrational and fluctuating preferences, supported merely by “taste” and individual desires, but strongly influenced and guided, contradictorily, by the interests of oligopolistic markets and the advertising that accompanies them; 3) pure aestheticism and hedonism, characteristic of a neoconservative world, satisfied with the benefits of developed societies; 4) lack of creativity and originality in the art world, aware that the cultural weight of the past cannot be equaled or surpassed, except by new technologies for domestic use and private comfort; 5) uniformity and artificiality in the way of life, based on the American way of life, a tendency taken to extremes of irrationality by the gigantism of large metropolises, by the exploitation and abusive commodification of nature, by mass tourism, generators of climate disorder, of various pollutions and ruin of biodiversity; 6) it also constitutes a mass civilization that has become culturally uniform, both in behavior, interests and life perspectives, as well as in the urban landscape itself (the physical aspects of airports, shopping centers, food chains and globalized stores, the same products consumed and the same gadgets used in the four corners of the world; 7) what predominates in everyday life is the relationship between a screen (of any device) and a network, the “ecstasy of communication”, as Baudrillard called this narcissistic and changeable era of connections, telematic contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface. With this, the perspective of an autonomous and sovereign individual, suggested by Hellenism or the Enlightenment, disappeared in the diffuse and omnipresent tangle of communications, making it a tiny cog in the global machine whose contents may be partially or entirely false or simulated, partially or entirely true, more futile than necessary, more indecent than morally recommendable, more rudimentary and crude than eminent and enlightening. In his words, ““This is the time of miniaturization, of remote control and microprocessing of time, bodies and pleasures. There is no longer any ideal principle for these things at a higher level, on a human scale... with communication and information, with the immanent promiscuity of all these networks, with their continuous connections, we are now

in a new form of schizophrenia. Without hysteria, without projective paranoia, strictly speaking, but in that state of terror typical of the schizophrenic: a proximity to everything, the impure promiscuity of everything that touches, invests and penetrates without resistance, without a halo of protection".¹⁸²

Also in common, national but equally globalized societies have progressively developed, since the 19th century, what Ágnes Heller called "dissatisfied societies", that is, incapable of restraining or moderating the creation of needs, measures and products that satisfy them (the satisfiers), generating a permanent greed, which feeds back into the movement of this same ascending cycle. In such social bodies, needs refer to material, corporeal and immediate desires and to spiritual desires, dematerialized as they are on the world wide web of the internet and mediated, such as self-determination. Finally, and according to the author, "The dissatisfied society is characterized by the expansion of both needs and desires... In modern times, such motivating forces appear as demands, both in the social and political spheres... By proclaiming such demands, people translate their personal dissatisfactions into public language, into the language of justice and equality... so that the gap between aspirations and experiences ceases to be insurmountable... It is false consciousness that makes people believe that if they can achieve more and more things, and fame and power, this would be the true path to self-determination... It is Weber's profound observation that, unlike our ancestors, we cannot die 'satisfied with life'. We cannot be satisfied with the state of the world, we cannot know everything we would like to know, we cannot see everything we would like to see, we cannot do everything we would like to do".¹⁸³

If we are never satisfied, we are intemperate and foolish. And so, everything indicates that this contemporary and post-modern society lacks virtues, despite its old age in the world.

¹⁸² Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, 1987, available at ereserve.library, ps. 129 e 132.

¹⁸³ Á. Heller e Ferenc Fehér, *Políticas de la postmodernidad*, chapter "Sentirse satisfecho en una sociedade insatisfecha", Ediciones Península, Barcelona, 1989, ps. 162, 173, 178.