



# **RENOUNCING MODERNITY THE ORIGINAL SINS OF THE WEST**

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To renounce Modernity ?

I. VOLTAIRE (1694-1778) or «the culture of satisfaction»

II. THE ENCYCLOPEDIA (1751-72) or «the dialectics of the Enlightenment»

III. THE FABLE OF THE BEES AND THE INVISIBLE HAND

IV. MONTESQUIEU (1689-1755) or «the contradictions of capitalism»

V. J. J. ROUSSEAU (1712-1778): or «the black sheep»

VI. «The End of History»

Conclusion

## TO RENOUNCE MODERNITY ?

The title of this Booklet is deliberately shocking and provocative. But it does no more than express a concern that Modernity has always harboured. A «Dialectic of the Enlightenment» has been mentioned time and again, together with the need to complete or correct it. And two modern examples of Enlightenment in recent times (Kant and Marx) cannot be overlooked.

But all these observations have led nowhere. As Marcuse already pointed out, the society which has emerged from Modernity *has an incredible capacity for digesting and neutralising any criticism*, even changing it into a new source for self-affirmation and profit. For this reason Marcuse launched a campaign of radical denial, without pretending by this to return to premodernity.

We can therefore say the title of this Booklet attempts something similar: to offer a critique that cannot be neutralised. But those who don't like the title should realise they are right and can replace it with «To rethink Modernity» - a more judicious version. But they should also realise that such a correction could become yet another sterile exercise.

I will use indiscriminately the words Enlightenment and Modernity. This presupposes a certain logical connection between the two. The Enlightenment raised *the banner of reason and criticism* against dogma or tradition. And these «lights» of reason are what *makes the world progress*, freeing it from past periods of backwardness up till modern times. Reason as the vehicle of human progress is what links Enlightenment and Modernity.

Such an automatic link between reason and liberty on the one hand and progress on the other is what this Booklet attempts to challenge. Such a challenge has already been made on other occasions. The classic work *Dialectics of the Enlightenment* asked how it is possible that an age born under the banners of reason and freedom has produced so much unfreedom and lack of reason. And if one answers this isn't true and that nazism was no more than an exception to the rule, more recent times would seem to show that such a reply is too facile. The reaction of the so-called «postmodernity» finds fault

with other aspects such as Modernity's promethian pride. Nietzsche, with his ambiguities and polysemy, was another opponent of the Enlightenment. It has also been said that the slogan of the French Revolution («freedom, equality and brotherhood») has been reduced to a freedom *against* equality and *against* brotherhood.

This Booklet will attempt to explain these claims, not by a subsequent process of confrontation (what J.B. Metz calls a bourgeois watering down of the Enlightenment), but by showing that the errors revealed *are contained in its very roots* and in the basic texts of the Enlightenment: in the Encyclopedia and all the authors who prepared the French Revolution. *The reason advocated is based on self-interest, its freedom merely individualistic, its human outreach confined to the bourgeoisie, and its progress restricted to technological advances with scarcely a concern for true human progress.* And it is because of this that today the reason and freedom discovered by Modernity cannot be used to criticise and rethink that same Modernity. Hence my provocative title.

I shall take the liberty of assessing some of the authors treated in the light of much later works than theirs, not just for irony's sake, but to show how the final outcome was present in the very beginnings

## **I. VOLTAIRE (1694-1778) or «the culture of satisfaction»**

Voltaire provides one of the clearest examples of this bourgeois watering-down of Modernity. With his attractiveness, his defense of reason and his skill in reasoning, his common sense, his support for freedom or for French Protestants against intolerance, he quickly wins the reader's sympathy.

But all these virtues vanish when we enter *the socio-economic realm*. If we seek in him anything to do with solidarity, susceptibility to human suffering, or with a passion for justice, we find it not only missing but trampled upon. Let us take a few examples.

### **1. Equality and Slavery**

Slavery is certainly repugnant to our author because man is the desire to be free. But it seems this way of thinking is only valid when it concerns one's own freedom. With regard to the freedom of others, Voltaire shows himself to be more «realistic» and confines himself to arguing in his Philosophical Dictionary: «*Slavery is as old as war, and war is as old as nature*» (29, 198)<sup>i</sup>. On the other hand he will never claim that lack of reason or absolute power are as old as nature, since this would imply that it is useless to struggle against them.

His utopia is valid at the level of individual desires but not at the level of social ideals. «*Equality - he writes - is at the same time the most natural and most fanciful thing*». But beware! The reason for being fanciful is that: «*if men didn't have needs, they would necessarily be equal*». But obviously, since we have needs and needs that are limitless (because «*nothing is so necessary as the superfluous*»), it follows that «*it is unavoidable in our miserable world that men who live in society be not divided into two classes: the rich who rule and the poor who serve*»... «*the human race could not survive unless there was an immense number of men who own nothing*», since then... nobody would work the land for us or make our shoes (29,7,8,10).

The careful choice of the adjective *fanciful* (*fantasy-based, illusory*) discredits

the other adjective (*natural*) that qualifies equality. And it guarantees the peace of conscience before something so “alien” to the very same nature that Voltaire tried to defend. When talking about equality, we are dealing not with real nature but with “fanciful” nature. And if what is so fanciful is nothing less than “an endless number” of dispossessed and not just a very small minority, Voltaire would regret this by saying that this is an unfortunate world. But he would not try to change it. And so, in his acute comments on the *Pensées* of Pascal, where there are things very worthy of being read, we find this unappealable statement of his that compares men with animals: “*the badly made man does not cede his bread to the other but the stronger man takes it away from the weaker one and, both among men as among animals, the big eat the small*” (37, 35).

## 2. The Nature of Progress

This means: in reason and technical progress, men should be different from animals, but in solidarity and defense of the weak, no. The author of the previous remark took umbrage in his Dictionary at the «detestable» idea of Rousseau that «it is natural for man to mate with a woman and then forget her, like the animals» (30, 242). So that, once again, only in the economic field should men be like animals.

Thus we meet up with what could be Voltaire’s great sophism. Sometimes there are things which are natural but fanciful (like equality). At other times there are things which should be, but which «are not natural». Thus with the word «woman» in his Philosophical Dictionary (and after recognising that there is «something divine» in a woman’s love), we find this pearl which will delight (!) many feminists: «*It is not strange that everywhere man has been the lord of the woman, given that almost everything in the world is based on strength. Furthermore, normally man is superior to woman both in body and spirit*» (29,354).

Note the weakness of the argument. The first phrase is an historical statement: men have always dominated women by pure physical strength, that is, through a principal of ill functioning in the world, the very thing that voltarian logic wishes to correct. But when it comes to drawing the consequences of what needs to be changed, the argument is reversed: it is not that history has gone wrong, but that nature is so: man is superior in body and *in spirit*...

And if we look for the reason behind this way of arguing, we have to abandon the famous french maxim («*cherchez la femme*») and replace it by another more apt to our theme: «*cherchez l’argent*». Let us consider this.

### 3. Personal enrichment

Clearly the desire for technical progress and freedom of thought is very understandable in a society dominated by absolute monarchies and aristocracies. The praise of commerce as a source of wealth (in his Dictionary) is also understandable in face of an aristocracy that does nothing and earns nothing. But in his enthusiasm for traders, Voltaire seems to suppose that trade is a source of wealth *in itself*. He cites as an example the case of a poor country like England which has become so rich through trade. He doesn't for one moment consider that trade can only increase wealth when either there is a productive structure of quality or there is exploitation of the other. Voltaire doesn't ask if those countries which traded with England have also profited to the same extent (which is what one should deduce if trade is held to be a source of wealth *in itself*). He looks only at England and, in this sense, foreshadows the arguments of the WTO which imposes the total abolition of tariffs on poor countries without obliging the wealthy to do the same.

To sum up: his philosophy is that of a rich bourgeois who, in addition, has made much of his fortune in the black slave trade from the colonies. Few words confirm this judgement better than the letter he wrote to Damilaville on the 1st. of April 1766<sup>ii</sup>: *«I believe it essential that there exist ignorant beggars... It is not the peasant who needs to be taught but the good bourgeois who lives in the towns... When the plebs begin to think, all is lost».*

### 4. Modernity as a bourgeois lack of solidarity

The ideal of this bourgeois lack of solidarity is well expressed in the famous poem «Le Mondain» (The man of the world). We should regret this poem led to Voltaire's exile because of a hypocritical accusation largely falsified against him, and this without attacking the real defect of the composition which is the sacrifice of solidarity to convenience. This only served to put the author in the right.

But granted this, we should now take up the poem. The man of the world (with whom Voltaire ironically but tacitly identifies himself) recognises that the secular times in which he lives are well suited to his habits, because *«every honest man has these feelings: it is very pleasant for my impure heart to see abundance around me... that the earth's gold and its inhabitants... everything promotes luxury and worldly pleasures»*, because *«the superfluous is very necessary»*. Here is the key of what we call progress: *«Our ancestors lived in ignorance and didn't know the difference between mine and yours. How could*

they know it if they didn't have anything?». This provides the proof that ownership with limits is the fruit of the struggle against ignorance and backwardness (which is exactly how the dominant right thinks today). «*How can you admire our grandparents unable to shine with either silk or gold?*» Good heavens! «*Without ownership, even the happiest love ceases to be love and becomes a shameful need*» etc. (14, 126foll.).

## 5. In conclusion

We can state our conclusions thus: the reason which Modernity worships overthrows absolute monarchs, the churches and the nobility, but it recognises no other progress than that of technology and the welfare of a few. Modern reasoning is diseased because in the moment of thinking it cannot overcome individualism, especially economic individualism. Obviously Voltaire would reply that what he defends in itself is defended for all, that he has nothing against all becoming like him. But this is a purely theoretical defense in an attempt to calm the conscience: because history shows clearly that no human being can fulfill all his personal «reasonable» desires except by ignoring others and at the cost of others. In fact, under the word «Frivolité» in his Dictionary (29, 532-35), there is a eulogy of frivolity as a means for putting up with the barbarities of life: «*Luckily men are so shallow, so frivolous, so concerned with the present and oblivious of the past that there will only be 2 or 3 among ten thousand who concern themselves with such thoughts*» [NB: the barbarities of history]. But clearly the result of such a therapy is to distance oneself from the barbarities, thus facilitating their repetition.

In this way, *progress, reason and the other myths of Modernity solve everything except the barbarities of history*. And history subsequent to Voltaire has shown this very clearly in the type of world to which it has given birth.

But Voltaire is before the Holocaust, and could have mistaken himself or not realise the consequences of his bourgeois optimism. We, after Auschwitz, can no longer continue to think in the same way. However much it may hurt, we have to ask ourselves if there is truth in T.Adorno's claim: that Auschwitz is not «a mere accident» but rather «a consequence» of our civilization.

## II. THE ENCYCLOPEDIA (1751-72) or «the dialectics of the Enlightenment»

«*L'Encyclopedie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*» is a bit like the birthplace of Modernity. An ambitious and impressive work, whose principal authors were D'Alambert, Diderot, Malesherbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Voltaire, it aimed at compiling all the knowledge of the age in a systematic manner. Leaving aside the vicissitudes and difficulties of its publication, and paying attention to the theme of this Booklet and the title given to this chapter, I shall limit myself to the topic of slavery, so terrible and so serious in the Eighteenth Century.

As in any work by several authors, one cannot apply to the whole the ideas and statements of a particular author. Nevertheless, it is a fairly general conclusion that the Encyclopedia subordinates politics to economics. Its freedom is essentially economic freedom, taking it for granted that political freedom will flow from this. And its idea of progress is limited to technical progress, again taking for granted that human progress will flow from this.

Not without reason, D'Alembert is scandalized in his «Preliminary Discourse» by the disparaging attitude of the age towards the mechanical arts and inventors. But today we should be more scandalized by the contempt that emerges in some of the Encyclopedia's pages towards anything that might hinder Europe's interest in self-enrichment.

In fact: if the readers scans the article on «Slavery» (signed by M. Le Chevalier de Jaucourt in volume 5) he will find, in addition to a history of slavery, a whole series of irreproachable ethical considerations: all men are born free, slavery destroys man's freedom, it is against natural and civil law (the author would accept it only as a substitute for the death penalty which he considers legitimate). «*Only barbarians treat slaves as a good they can dispose of according to their wishes.*» And «*slavery is humiliating not only for the person who suffers it but also for mankind that becomes degraded*».

Nothing objectionable so far: perhaps only that the author seems to forget what he has just said when, in the following article («Slaves»), he merely



comments on the actual situation of these in the European colonies without any ethical protest and limiting himself to the French law of 1685. All this becomes more astonishing when we read the article «Negroes» (signed by M. Le Romain) in volume XI. It is as if slavery were degrading when it affects *us* whites, but is not so to the extent it doesn't affect us or can be to our advantage. This double standard of judging, so often repeated, constitutes one of Modernity's original sins, as we shall see in the article mentioned above.

### **1. The first «Holocaust» of Modernity**

After a long description of how they are and the reasons for their blackness etc., the author continues: «For centuries Europeans have been trading in these negroes whom they capture from Guinea and other African coasts in order to support the colonies they have set up in various places in America and the Antilles. They try to justify a trade that is odious and contrary to natural law by saying that for the most part the slaves find health of soul in the loss of their liberty; that the Christian instruction given them, together with the absolute need that they cultivate sugar, tobacco, indigo, etc, softens what might seem inhuman in a trade where some men buy and sell others, as if they were beasts of burden to cultivate their land.»

One should note first the recognition that it is only Europeans who practice this trade. The possibility this trade is unjust, inhuman and against natural law is also accepted. But the author is satisfied with the justifications advanced for it: its need for our enrichment and the good of the negroes' souls. If the encyclopedists believed in this «good of souls», then we have a flagrant case of simony (=to sell spiritual goods for material prices). But if the encyclopedists no longer believed in this «good of souls», then we have a mercenary racket, and the church allowing itself to be used as a stooge in a situation of injustice.

The argument for «conversion by freedom» had already been refuted by Las Casas two centuries before in his dispute with Ginés de Sepúlveda<sup>iii</sup>. At any rate, this contradiction between material self-interest and the dictates of reason, decided always in favour of the former, is one of the basic contradictions of Modernity.

Our text continues: «This trade is carried out by all the nations who have possessions in the West Indies, especially the French, English, Portuguese, Dutch, Swedes and Danes. Although the Spaniards own the greater part of the lands in America, they don't have negroes first hand but obtain them from other nations who have made treaties with them to provide them...». And there

follows one of those laments, so typical of Modernity, that submits morality to one's own advantage: «A negro from the so-called 'area of the Indies' used to cost no more than 30 to 32 pounds in the market. But since the Europeans have been pushing up the prices, these barbarians have profited from their needs and it is now difficult to find good negroes for less than 60 pounds. The "Compagnie de l'Assiente" has even come to pay 100 libras per item».

The commercial viewpoint dominates the outlook of these paragraphs which anticipate the later argument that certain ethical or human considerations «are not economic reasons». Moral scruples vanish and the negroes become «items». On the other hand, the author becomes again a moralist when he laments the lack of solidarity among the Europeans which permits «these barbarians» to profit from market laws and increase the price of the «items».

The article goes on to describe how these slaves are obtained: some sell themselves through hunger or destitution; others are prisoners of war (and what wars except those of the Europeans invading countries in Africa?). It is also recognised that when European boats are in port, there are negroes who sell themselves to each other, including fathers to sons and son to fathers. And he goes on:

«When the deal is concluded, it is necessary to put to sea without losing time since experience shows that, while these unfortunates are still in sight of their homeland, they are overcome by sadness and despair; the first causes illnesses from which many die... and the other leads them to take their lives by refusing to eat or breathe... or throwing themselves into the water...

»On arriving at the islands, each head of negro is sold from between 300 to 500 libras according to its youth,... The negroes are the chief source of wealth for the inhabitants of the islands and, as in warm countries they multiply rapidly, their owners, if they treat them with some consideration, see the family in which slavery is hereditary grow imperceptibly».

Here one already finds this air of «scientific description» in which the narrator is in no way affected by such suffering, and which is similar to the analyses in many nazi studies of the jews in the concentration camps. We are really in the presence of the first Holocaust, a work of the whole of Europe, and for which Europe has never felt remorse or asked forgiveness, nor considered necessary any indemnity. But the negroes were just as much human beings as the jews and (if you wish to have recourse to the argument used by Hitler), much less «guilty» than them.

Our author goes on to speak of the negroes of the French colonies, describing them according to country, strength and beauty. He explains that *«humanity and personal interest advise that they should not be put to work on arrival but given a few days of rest»*. He also explains that, for the recent arrivals, *«their old fellow countrymen feel inclined to adopt them, look after them in their shacks and treat them as children»*, recognising implicitly what we already know in a thousand ways: there is more humanity in the victims than in their oppressors. And he continues: *«Then their bosses put them to work, punish them when they fail, and these fully grown men submit to their fellow men with great resignation. Owners who acquire new slaves are obliged to have them instructed in the catholic religion. This was the motive that decided Louis XIII to permit such a trade in human flesh»*.

This «great resignation» with which the negroes submit themselves is already proof of inhumanity. It takes up the hypocrisy, so denounced by Jesus of Nazareth, of «straining out the gnat» of catchetical instruction to «swallow the camel» of slavery. Hypocrisy of an Encyclopedia that no longer believes in catholicism, and stupidity of a Church established with absolute powers which blind it to the gospel it seeks to proclaim. After explaining different types of work, housing, punishments, etc..., he ends: *«When a negro commits a fault, the overseer can punish him on behalf of his owner with several lashes... If the fault is greater...»* (and here follows a whole casuistic argument in which the author recognises that, since men are unjust, many excesses are committed, and for that reason) *«officials of his Majesty have drawn up a 'Negro Code' to regulate them»*.

Another example of a scrupulous concern for justice, similar to that of the pharisees who, when they led the Innocent One to be condemned to death, didn't enter the house of the pagan Pilate «for fear of contaminating themselves».

It must be repeated in conclusion that the Holocaust of the negroes was the first and that it prepared the way for the later Holocaust of the jews. And this takes us back to the suspicion of Adorno with which we ended the previous chapter.

## **2. The idea of ownership or «economics without ethics»**

I would like to suggest, to end this chapter, that the reason for this hypocrisy or contradiction we have encountered, can be found in the concept of ownership

shared by the encyclopedists and by Modernity. Let us consider for a moment (in Volume XIII) the word «Owner»: *«It is he who has dominion over goods or landed property, physical or intangible, and who has the right to use them as he wishes, to the extent of degrading or destroying them, as long as the laws permit and on condition that no convention or disposition restricts this right».*

Note there is no natural restriction (based on the nature of things) on the rights of ownership. Any restriction admitted is of a contingent nature, derived from the interests of the owners themselves and expressed in «positive» laws or agreements. What the author does not mention is that these laws are drawn up by the owners themselves. And here once again is the stumbling block of Modernity: the rights of human beings can have natural limits (we have just seen this in the right to freedom). But the rights of owners have none.

And from owner let us move on to ownership which, in French spelling, comes after the previous word. It is an article drawn up by Diderot himself, almost the father of the *Encyclopedia*: *«Ownership: is the right each individual in civil society has over goods acquired legitimately. One of the principal objectives of men in forming civil societies has been to ensure the peaceful possession of the benefits they have gained or could gain. They have desired that no one should disturb them in the possession of their goods and, for this reason, each has agreed to sacrifice a part called 'tax' to preserve and upkeep the society as a whole... However great may be men's enthusiasm for sovereign rulers, those who submit never pretend to give them an absolute or unlimited power over all their possessions, never expect to see themselves obliged to work only for the sovereign. The praise of courtiers... sometimes convinces kings that they have an absolute right of the goods of their subjects; but only despots and tyrants adopt such irrational maxims... All power founded only on force will destroy itself in the same way. In nations which follow the dictates of reason, property owned by individuals is protected by law... Good kings have always respected the possessions of their subjects and have only considered the public monies entrusted to them as a deposit which should not be turned aside to satisfy frivolent desires, such as the greed of favourites or the rapacity of courtiers».*

It is intelligent to give scope to this very human desire for security which leads men to come together. But it is very one-sided not to define what is meant by «legitimate» acquisition. I shudder to read such a definition when, in the press during the days I am composing this chapter, we find these words of Mr Colin Powell, US Secretary of State: «the oil of Kazakstan is fundamental for the West»<sup>iv</sup>. What these words might imply, after the wars in Irak and Afghanistan, does not seem very reassuring for the planet.

The text finally makes it quite clear that his preoccupation in this matter is to reassure the bourgeoisie against the absolute pretensions of kings. There is no reassurance for the rest of the citizens against the absolute pretensions of the bourgeoisie.

And this sort of obsession which gives rise to the modern contradiction between human reason in general and economic interest in particular, we find it in other classic examples of the time.

### III. THE FABLE OF THE BEES AND THE INVISIBLE HAND

One can say of the small poem entitled «The Fable of the Bees», written in 1723 by a dutch doctor settled in England (B. Mandeville), the same that is often said of Joyce's Ulysses or the magnum opus of Proust: one has the impression that those who speak of it most have not in fact read it.

I say this because the fable of the bees has been the great text used by all neoliberal economists and Nobel prize winners to justify worship of the market. It pictures a beehive which functions very well as long as the bees are vicious and each one looks after himself. But when the bees become virtuous, austere or charitable, the beehive turns into a disaster.

This gives rise to the well known principal that, in economics, *private vices are public virtues*. Starting from this many neoliberals have written that the best way to practise charity is for each person to be concerned only with himself, and that solidarity ends up being a cruel lack of solidarity. As M. Friedman has said: all that is done to help the poor does more damage to the poor.

Yet Mandeville's Fable scarcely speaks of economics. It is true that the results of the bee's conversion are mainly (though not only) the results of economic ruin. But the vices of these bees, which constitute public prosperity, are not confined to the economic field, as we shall see. Mandeville does not know that independence of the economic, political and cultural spheres, governed by different laws, and according to which one can be unjust and cruel in the economic field yet show a magnanimous heart in the setting up of some Foundation or by giving money to the Church. In the same way so many nazis belonging to the SS were real monsters in the «labour camps» but then, in their own homes, were loving fathers of a family and devotees of classical music. It is what Hanna Arendt called «the banality of evil».

In Mandeville's beehive, these spheres are much more united. And at the beginning of his Fable he warns that, although speaking of bees, these «were in realitylike human beings».<sup>v</sup>

#### 1. The human beehive

Let us first look quickly at the poem.

«It was a beehive of huge crowds: millions who were trying to secure for themselves lewdness and vanity, while other millions were trying to cancel their work contracts... Some with much wealth and little labour were engaged in very lucrative businesses; and others wielded pick and spade in the hardest and heaviest jobs. They were crooked: but we should rub out that adjective since all the workers were equal; for every profession is in some way a racket and every calling a fraud».

But these swindlers were not exactly the businessmen, traders or bankers, but:

-«*The lawyers*... paid no attention to any clear case, with the aim of gaining higher fees. They were examining the laws in order to defend unjust causes, in the same way as thieves examine to see where they can enter into some room»

...

-«*The doctors*, putting fame and wealth above the patient's health, were only looking after themselves».

-«*The priests* of whom only a few were just and eloquent; thousands were cunning and ignorant». [And the fable tells us that these worshiped «Jupiter»].

-«*The soldiers* who risked fighting and lost here an arm and there a leg, until broken and forgotten they survived on half pay. While others who didn't go to war stayed at home with double pay.» And finally:

-*The citizens*: «many, slaves to their own wellbeing, were robbing the king without scruples. Salaries were low but they were living... When they did something unjust, they would say it was 'a bargain'... and when people saw the hypocrisy, they changed its name to 'remuneration', because they did not wish to be asses or gullible with regard to their own good».

To sum up: «*there was not a single bee who didn't squander what was not his, much more than he let be understood*»... Even «the shit in the streets that was sold as manure, buyers discovered it had been mixed with useless stones; but the swindled person couldn't complain since he was selling salt to others as if it were powdered milk»... And this is how things prospered: the balance sheet of this situation was that «all parts were full of vice but the whole was a paradise... Even the worst villain in that crowd contributed something to the common good... Many found work thanks to the noble sin of luxury [of others], and others through the hateful sin of pride».

It is clearly obvious that the quest for self-interest is valid not only in the

economic field but in all other spheres of society. The private vices which constitute public virtues are not only the greed of economists, but also the corruption of politicians, the lies of the liberal professions, the hypocrisy of priests and the cowardice of soldiers.

And so the beehive functioned excellently until moralizing voices began to be heard shouting «away with fraud!» (forgetting their own), or «clean hands» as in Italy. With this Jupiter became angry and decided «to free them».

All repented, and «went to confess their sins» and...«Lord, what consternation!... In less than an hour the pound sterling fell by a penny. Law courts went on strike because debtors were paying willingly even to the extent that they couldn't remember their creditors... This meant there was no place for lawyers in an honest beehive. The makers of window bars, iron doors, locks and other such had to leave the town... The quack doctors agreed they would only recommend skilled practitioners and not supply by giving consultations everywhere... The priests no longer imposed tithes and many charlatans were left without work... All the posts formerly occupied by three people who kept watch on each other (and also became partners in crime) were now occupied by only one, so that over a thousand were left over" ...

To sum up: not only those who wasted much before went away, «like the courtier who each year put on a feast for his lover in which three hours at the table cost the equivalent of a day in a regiment», but also «those who lived off them had to go as well». Taverns were shut... and «haughty Cloe who before made her husband rob the State so that she could live in luxury, now sold her furniture (for those she had plundered from India), cut back her shopping expenses and wore only one dress the year round».

In the end: «there were so few bees in the hive that they couldn't repel the attacks always carried out by enemies of those who win respect». Therefore all the bees ended up «by going to hide in the bole of a tree». And so the beehive disappeared.

From this the author draws the following moral with which he ends the Fable: «*Only fools want a very large beehive to be an honest beehive. To enjoy the pleasures of this world, it is a mental utopia to pretend to live in wellbeing without great vices... Fraud, luxury and pride have to exist while we know how to take advantage of them. Hunger is certainly a dreadful scourge. But without it, who could prosper?... Vice becomes gain if one controls it well, and for a state to be great, vice is as necessary as it is for a man to eat... Virtue alone*



cannot make nations thrive. And if one wants to set up a golden age, one has to be as far from honesty as the tree from an acorn».

## 2. Reflections

2.1. — We have already said the author is speaking not only, nor even mainly, about economics. In this sense, and according to the logic of the Fable, the non-intervention of the state should not be restricted only to the market (which all neoliberals advocate) but to *all* social fields.

2.2. — In accord with this, terrorism, which is almost the only sphere against which our modern society preaches crusades and has recourse to morality, should be seen rather as one of those private vices which, at world level, can end by producing public virtues. Bin Laden is just as much in the Fable as Milton Friedmann (or more). From the vice of terrorism there will also emerge a better world, while from the anti-terrorist crusades of Bush there can only emerge (according to the logic of the Fable) a poorer and non-functioning world.

2.3. — The Fable describes society's corruption very well (so well that it almost seems today). But it also canonizes it. And the only honesty which could counter such a corruption is a rigidity almost as great as that of the «taliban». This lack of a middle way is its greatest failing.

2.4. — Confined to the economic sphere, the Fable turns out to be pernicious. For what businessman having recourse to it would accept that his business should run in such a way, convinced that it might function as well as possible? The economic interpretation of the famous principle (private vices, public virtues) should be «individual vices, business virtues». What businessman could accept that ?

2.5. — Finally, although the Fable had claimed that many millions lived in the beehive, the plenitude it calls paradise is only *a plenitude for the wealthy*. For it recognises that, in this magnificent world, «hunger is a terrible scourge». We meet here once again a way of seeing things which is a dominant theme in this Booklet: already in its origins (and not in some later degeneration), Modernity proclaims that the progress, the comfort and the well-being we have built has, as its price, the hunger of many. A sad and regrettable price, yes. But a price Modernity is very willing to pay so as not to lose its comfortableness.

2.6. — Fifty years later, the moral of this Fable was taken up and moderated by Adam Smith with his famous phrase «the invisible hand»<sup>vi</sup> This «invisible

hand» is a profane substitute (but no less mythological) for what a certain religious tradition called «Divine Providence». Only now, this providence, being less divine, seems also dispensed from being universal: «*the earth's product is for all... the rich take from it only the part that is most valuable and agreeable. They consume only a little more than the poor... They are led by an Invisible Hand to carry out spontaneously that same distribution of goods... that perhaps might exist if the earth has been distributed in equal portions among all its inhabitants*».

The problem of this passage is that it presupposes the rich only take for themselves «*a little more than the poor*». Perhaps this was valid in the XVIII century when it is claimed the difference between rich and poor countries was 2 to 1. But it is no longer valid today when this difference has passed in 30 years from being 60 to 1 to almost 90 to 1, and where 335 individual millionaires possess more wealth than two thousand million human beings. And even so, it needs good (or bad) faith to pretend that this is «the distribution that would come about if the earth had been distributed among all its inhabitants in equal proportions».

And a second question arises: once again one cannot see why what is valid for the rich in acquiring property is not also valid for doctors who (seeking only their self-interest) carry out an unnecessary operation; or for those pharmaceutical firms which (seeking only their self-interest) try to oppose cheaper medicines. Or for politicians who (using their inside knowledge) buy up a decaying building in Raval for 6.000 \$ knowing that it will be converted into flats worth 240.000 \$. The principle of the Invisible Hand should be applied here as well since, in another instance, Adam Smith himself wrote: «*he intends only his own gain, in this as in many other cases, he is led by the Invisible Hand to promote an end [beneficent, it is understood] which was not part of his intention*»<sup>vii</sup>

It should also be added that the quotations given are the only two in which Adam Smith speaks of the Invisible Hand, and that (in contradiction to what he says in them), he recognises that the social conditions of his age always favour capital more than labour in conflict situations, a reality that needs to change. So the Invisible Hand would work only in *conditions of perfect social equality*; not in any conditions as those who have recourse to it presuppose. It works for example in the context of a «personal» meeting between two individuals (buyer and seller) and not in the impersonal and mass context which constitutes the market of today. In the context of the personal meeting what often happens is that, when each seeks his own interest, the result is often the best for both: but

this is not because there is an invisible hand which harmonises their egoisms, but simply because it is possible to dialogue and seek the best arrangement for both parties. As the shop-keeper knows the customer, he can end by feeling friendship towards him or not wishing to lose him as a client. And vice versa: the buyer can have complete confidence in this shop-keeper whom he knows personally. These basic details become impossible where buyers have ceased being persons and have turned into multinational corporations.

## 2.7. — Assessment.

We can conclude that the great fault in Nandeville's Fable is that there is no middle term between an absolute egoism that thinks only of itself and a love of neighbour so absolute that it doesn't think of self and which could be an ideal for some admirable saints but cannot serve as a principle for building society.

The problem of ethics is not to choose between self-love and love of neighbour but to find a true synthesis between the two. For, to begin, without a minimum of self-esteem (which is based chiefly on our dignity as human beings), it would be impossible to love others. Furthermore, our need in self-love is not that «we be ordered to it», given that human nature already provides us with it abundantly. The problem of self-love is rather that we learn how to control it and to balance it with a sincere love of others (which in turn can become a source of great satisfaction for oneself).

#### IV. MONTESQUIEU (1689-1755) or «the cultural contradictions of capitalism»

One can get an idea of the enormous importance for Modernity of Baron Montesquieu and his concept of democracy from the fact that, after general Franco's death, two eminent figures of Spanish political world during the period of transition (Tierno Galván and Solé-Tura) wrote a prologue to and edited his principal work in Spanish and Catalan. The scene of his deathbed is also noteworthy when Montesquieu confessed his sins to a Jesuit but, at the same time, defended his democratic ideas against his confessor. But once again we will come up against the original sin of these ideas.

##### 1. The original sin of Modernity

In this case we don't have to hunt for many texts. I shall concentrate mainly on one chapter in his *The Spirit of Laws* concerning slavery. After declaring that slavery runs against human nature and progress and that it cannot be justified for reason of war, debt or religion, Montesquieu comes up against European practice in the slavery of African negroes. And this is how he deals with it:

«If one had to defend the right we have had to enslave negroes, I would say the following:

The peoples of Europe, after wiping out those of America, had to enslave those of Africa to employ them in the ploughing of so many lands. Sugar would be too dear if slaves were not employed in the work needed to cultivate the plant that produces it.

These beings of whom we speak are negroes from head to foot and have in addition such a flattened nose that it is almost impossible to be sorry for them.

We cannot imagine how an infinitely wise God has given a soul, let alone a good soul, to an entirely black body.

It is so natural to think that the essence of Humanity is constituted by colour, that the peoples of Asia, when they make eunuchs, always pick on negroes...

A proof that negroes have no common sense is that they value a glass necklace more than a golden one, which is so highly considered in civilized nations.

It is impossible to suppose that such people are men because, if we believed them to be men, they would begin to believe that we are not christians.

Some misguided spirits exaggerate too much the injustice committed against africans because, if it was as they say, the princes of Europe would have had the idea of concluding a general agreement in favour of pity and compassion»<sup>viii</sup>.

It seems almost impossible that Montesquieu should have written these words. And he himself seems to feel what he is going to say is impossible since he begins using the conditional tense: «if one had to defend» (without saying one does defend). But when, at the end of the chapter, he criticizes the oponents of slavery as misguided spirits, he is speaking seriously and no longer in the conditional tense. His defense of the slavery of negroes claims to be based on the nature of things and not on a situation of structural sin that cannot be immediately eliminated. Let us comment on this passage.

## 2. Reflections

2.1.- The first two arguments are based on *strict economic reasoning without any human considerations*: first, we are led by ambition to conquer more than we need, and then we need slaves to be able to manage all that we have seized from others. The argument from the price of sugar is the same we still continue to hear when there is a call (euphemistically) for «moderation in wages» or a reduction in employment for reasons of economic progress. Between the enormous suffering of others in slavery and the inconvenience to the price of our sugar, Modernity choses the first.

In this type of argument, many of the mathematical formulas which modern economics revels in are already present: we are talking of equations and calculations which *presuppose* that «the negroes» (in our situation: the work force or Third World countries) «are not human beings» nor «have a good soul», but are mere economic factors, represented by an  $x$  or a  $y$ . On this basis, the calculations that follow are absolutely correct. But the conclusion doesn't hold: not because the calculations are invalid, but because the premise on which they are based is not valid. The wellk-known spanish saying is relevant here: «though the monkey clothes itself in silk [mathematics], it remains a monkey»..

2.2. — The other five arguments are deeply racist, even though it is *a racism based on economic interests*. Their ugliness, our idea of God (which is the idea of our superiority), certain historical practises and, above all, our need for a good conscience (because if not, «we would not be christians» given what we

are doing), lead us to affirm that negroes have no soul, are not human beings.

Montesquieu has forgotten what he himself wrote twenty years before in the Persian Letters: «We always judge things by the hidden repercussion they cause in us. Negroes paint the devil white and their Gods like negroes»<sup>ix</sup>. This is exactly what the Baron does here: he paints his God as a slave-driver. Nothing more, nothing less.

2.3. — So once again we encounter here the dominant theme of this Booklet: the paradise which modern reason seeks and promises is - from the very first moment - *a paradise exclusively for whites and Europeans*. For this reason, the power which the democratic Montesquieu is concerned to limit is political power, never economic power (which at the most can change hands, but not be limited). Therefore we cannot argue today that, if we live better and they wish to emigrate here, it is because we are better, since *our initial aim was to live better at their expense*.

2.4. — Finally, the reply to the arguments of the few voices raised against slavery which are the conscience of the age (that same left which always gives witness, insulted by the neoliberals) confirms tacitly that this father of Modernity was right wing: if the powerful of this world behave in such a way, it is a sign that it is good.

In this context, it seems unbelievable that those who are for «progress» in life and accuse much older religious texts (such as the Bible and the Koran) for their obvious social limitations, are unaware that they have as big limitations in their own foundational «bible». Such contempt is not the best atmosphere for dialogue.

## V. J.J. ROUSSEAU (1712-1778): “the black sheep”

With his debatable sensibility and without the practical sense of a Voltaire, Rousseau is nevertheless the most leftist representative of Modernity and the one who shows the greatest human qualities in its formulation. Concerned mainly with man («*the most useful and the least advanced of all the human sciences*») Rousseau doesn't fall for the simplistic clichés which speak of the noble savage and evil society. He doesn't claim that nature is good but that society is unjust. Nor does he try to «return to a primitive garden of Eden», but to return to the reconstruction of a society badly flawed.

### 1. Society: contract or ownership?

Rousseau recognises as a fact that man is made for society, needs it and is only happy within it. But, at the same time, it is within society that the human being is corrupted. This is an essential contradiction which affects other aspects of human history such as, for example, progress: «*the cruellest fact of all is that all the advances of the human species only serve to distance it continually from its primitive state; the more new knowledge we accumulate, the more we deprive ourselves of the means to obtain what is most important*»<sup>x</sup>. Note the similarity of this ambiguity with what Freud described centuries later when he spoke of «*the malaise in culture*». *This ambiguity in man is what the rest of Modernity with its ingenuous optimism was unable to perceive.*

For Rousseau, the reason for all these ambiguities is that in society man needs affection and recognition, and his search for these is so great that it even leads him to exceed his own limits. Therefore it is not true what the rest of the «enlightened» think that «*man is cruel by nature and needs civilization to tame him*». Civilization can also make man more cruel.

From this comes Rousseau's obsession with what he calls «*the social contract*», that is, a society born through democratic agreement and not through imposition: «*force cannot give birth to right and there is no obligation to obey other than legitimate authority*»<sup>xi</sup>. This phrase, which seems to be an anticipated criticism of the whole foreign policy of the United States, explains why man is corrupted by society: because it was born from an imposition derived from private property: «*the true founder of civil society was the first individual who, having enclosed a piece of land, had the idea of saying 'this is mine', and found people sufficiently naive to pay attention to him*»<sup>xii</sup>.

This statement certainly irritated Voltaire much<sup>xiii</sup> though Rousseau was merely trying to suggest that private property is a source of esteem and recognition among men and, because of this, gives birth to a flawed society where only a few receive such recognition.

And so society - necessary in itself - is that which makes a man greedy and deceitful in order to try and appease the desire for esteem and recognition the social bonding itself has awoken and nurtured. Primitive man lives «in himself», while man in society «*doesn't know how to live except only in the opinion of others*».

## 2. What liberty?

This is the reason why men enslave and subject their fellow men: and then deceive themselves by saying there is a natural tendency in man towards servitude. To argue in this way is to forget that «*the same happens with liberty as with innocence and virtue: we only relish them when we practice them, but when we abandon them we lose taste for them*». The truth is rather that human beings «detest freedom in others and desire it only for themselves»<sup>xiv</sup>. Such a liberty can only give rise to an inequality that makes society impossible and corrupts the individual.

In all this there is something of what Kant would call «the unsocial sociability of man». To counter this, «if you seek to give substance to the State, bring the extremes as near to each other as possible; don't allow people who are wealthy nor beggars. Since both... are equally disastrous for the common good: from one come the instigators to tyranny; from the other come the tyrants. Both are always trading in public freedom: those who buy it and those who sell it»<sup>xv</sup>.

I think J. Touchard is right when he writes: «freedom in Rousseau is very different from freedom in Locke. Locke associates freedom with ownership. Rousseau associates freedom with equality. For Locke freedom is in an individual's conscience: for Rousseau it is above all in solidarity. For Locke freedom is a good that has to be protected; for Rousseau it is a possibility to be achieved»<sup>xvi</sup>.

Hence the enormous importance Rousseau gives to education in order to build society (remember *Emile*). And education for Rousseau is not the same as teaching: it is not the mere transmission of knowledge but of values which guarantee the solidarity of the social body. This is something which, for Rousseau, would be impossible without religion, the only force that can promote equality.



### 3. Progress: a technique or wisdom?

It is not the job of this Booklet to follow our author in the drawing up nor in the successes and errors of this social contract «*for which all citizens are equal*» (III, 16), but rather only to note its differences with the type of society and authority based on private property. And we suggest this model of laying foundations implies a counterbalance to the cartesian simplicity of the other authors quoted. In this sense perhaps Rousseau introduces the first «dialectic of the Enlightenment». Two points:

— a. As opposed to progress derived solely from the sciences and technology, Rousseau gives greater weight to human suffering than the rest of the Enlightenment authors: «*man is born free yet everywhere he is captive. Believing himself master of others he doesn't cease to be more of a slave than them*». This observation in the first chapter of the «Social Contract» (which reminds one of the marxist theme of human alienation), seems to me essential for understanding Rousseau well.

— b. As opposed to progress seen as an escape from ignorance, Rousseau believes that «all evils befall men much more through error than ignorance and that what we don't know does us much less harm than what we know badly», as he wrote to Voltaire on September 10th 1755. Modernity's naive certainty with regard to the infallibility of a purely mechanical and material progress is questioned here by the search for a different progress which depends much more on the common will and radical democracy (the social contract) than on merely material growth.

In modern terms (which Rousseau didn't use), we can say Rousseau always envisaged a «participative» democracy, and not merely a «representative» one: «*sovereignty cannot be delegated nor taken away. It consists essentially in the general will*». *It follows that «deputies are not and cannot be representatives of the people. They are merely their commissioners and cannot take definitive decisions»* (C.S. III, 15).

It is not at all surprising therefore that Engels wrote in his *Anti-During* that «in Rousseau we meet a process of thought almost identical to what is developed in “The Capital” of Marx». Nevertheless, the difficulty of the proposal and the lesser authority of its “romantic” author as well as his turbulent affective life, meant that his differences with the rest of Modernity were not taken into account.

Rousseau was co-opted with all the others to become the ideologue of the

antifeudal bourgeoisie, and nothing more. The sadness which emerges in the «Meditations of a solitary walker», written at the end of his life and published against his will after his death, seems to echo the assessment we have offered here.

## VI. “THE END OF HISTORY”

French Modernity perhaps made the mistake of thinking about society without having sufficiently criticised the type of reasoning used. Kant undertook the critique of reason, not to think about society but to try and think of God.

Marx already prophesied that reason cannot be only an individual faculty, but social; not only does it critique tradition (the past), but also the present (of society). And that, on the contrary, for a purely Kantian reason, it can happen that human rights become the rights «of alienated man».

The honesty of Kant himself had already foreseen this criticism when, an older man, he wrote the following confession which I wonder if some of his disciples forget:

«There was a time when I considered that only the search for truth constituted the glory of humanity, and I looked down on the common man who knew nothing. Rousseau put me on the right path: I learnt to recognise true human nature; and I would consider myself more useless than the ordinary worker if I did not believe that my philosophy could help men to establish their rights»<sup>xvii</sup>.

This is already much but perhaps not enough. Unfortunately Hegel would take the bite out of Kant’s preoccupation to construct a philosophy concerned with men and human history, and also with traces of genius, but whose content ended by justifying as «progress» all the states and atrocities of history. Marx, who understood all this, remained a prisoner to another sin of Modernity: he deified the dialectic structure of matter and the capabilities of the working class as the only way of being able to count on a better future. The results we already know, in spite of its enormous merits and so many criticisms that it would be worth recuperating.

### **Other reactions**

1. — The Church hierarchy, in what we can call its second «iron age» (end of the XVIII to end of the XIX centuries) was roundly opposed to Modernity but for the wrong reasons. It reacted against critical reason because it saw in it no more than an act of human pride rather than an instrument given to man by God. It reacted against human rights with the argument they were contrary to God’s rights without recognising that -according to Biblical Sources- *it is precisely in the defense of human rights -especially those of the poor and*

*defenceless- that God's rights are defended.* Both criticisms reflected more the sensibility of the absolute powers of the age than the sensibility of the disciples of Jesus. To this extent the exercise of political power had distanced from the Lord the successors of the Apostles!

This false reaction is far from being overcome and today has bounced back with the regression that has characterised church authority at the end of the XX century. But here the attempt to come to terms with Modernity in the 2nd Vatican Council must also be noted. Yet it has to be said -as is so often the case in history when things are done too late- that this well-intentioned reaction uncritically over-valued Modernity without taking account what there is in the gospel values and the true teaching of Jesus that is radically opposed to many of the false modernistic ideas described in this Booklet: *the radical bid for the universality of the humane and* (within this bid and as a means for achieving it) *the radical option for all Modernity's victims and rejects.*

In this sense it seems undeniable that the latin american theology of liberation (as opposed to the post-conciliar «up-dating» in the First World churches) played a role similar to the «second enlightenment» of marxism in the Europe of the Enlightenment: *the recovery of the «rights of the oppressed» in a system that excluded them.* The European (and Roman) gut reactions to liberation theology were directed not so much against the deficiencies it could have had (and doubtless did have), but against the feeling of threat it represented to the world of the oppressor.

This rapid description seems to me to indicate sufficiently the tasks and lines of action in the third millenium for a christianity that wishes to be faithful to the world precisely from its faithfulness to the God of Jesus who «so loved the world that he gave his only Son, not to condemn the world but to save it». A critique of Modernity not made from pre-modernity positions (today resurrected), but from within the best of Modernity itself and which it betrayed by its undeniable «original sin».

2. — But the Church wasn't the only enemy of Modernity. In my opinion Modernity's greatest opponent has been F. Nietzsche. Here there is no room to explain the content and reason of Nietzsche's critique of Modernity. We will have to limit ourselves to pointing out that, precisely because it is so succinct and suggests such depths as a solution, Modernity has succeeded in «digesting» his critique instead of confronting it, neutralising its bite and even using it for its own ends.

In this sense Nietzsche's destiny is somewhat similar to that of Jesus: few human geniuses have had among their followers such distinguished representatives of the very pharisaism and hypocrisy they were attacking (though obviously in the case of Nietzsche and Jesus, both words - phariseism and hypocrisy - have very different meanings). It is simply a reply from fear.

3. — Rather than Nietzsche's reaction, we recall here the reaction of a non-western Nobel prize-winner in economics (the Indian Amartya Sen) to the modern economic reasoning descended from the errors noted in this Booklet. That is, against the mentality that considers all ethical considerations as being totally alien to economic reasoning.

For Sen, modern economics is at serious fault on two points: *in the belief that men always act rationally* (Modernity's optimism that Sen describes as «consistency in choice»), and *in the belief that this rationality is the same as the egoistic search for maximum economic profit* (sugar as the source of greater happiness than freedom for the negroes, to continue using Modernity's language). It is a myth to believe with G. Stiegler that «we live in a world of reasonably well informed people who behave in an intelligent manner to achieve their own interests». Comparing Sen's anthropology with some observations of St Augustine speaking about Grace, we would say that human beings a) don't always know what they want, b) nor when they know have strength for it, and c) when they receive this Light and Strength, sometimes chose what goes against their utilitarian and material interests.

Sen affirms emphatically that modern economics «describes human motivation in very limited terms»; forgetting that «for a long time economics was considered to be a branch of ethics», that is, concerned with the question «how to live» and not with the question how to become more wealthy. He reminds moderns that Aristotle deals with economics precisely in his *Nicomathean Ethics*.

From this standpoint, Sen launches two decisive criticisms against the unquestioned suppositions of modern economics: a) «Why should it be *uniquely* rational to pursue one's own interest excluding everything else». And b) «as a *reality* universal egoism can be false or not, but as a *requisite* for rationality, universal egoism is plainly absurd» (underlined in the original). Such a restriction can be seen «as one of the great deficiencies in contemporary economic theory»<sup>xviii</sup>.

Perhaps it is not by chance that such criticisms come from the East rather

than the West. Perhaps they also have an additional value because Sen is enormously receptive of all modern economics contributes with its precise analysis and believes that, in its turn, this type of analysis would be of great benefit to ethics, avoiding its escape to abstract realms. Perhaps also this Indian Nobel prize-winner can give flesh and blood to the critique I have been elaborating throughout this Booklet. It is time to conclude.

## CONCLUSION

In a magnificent Iranian film about Afghanistan, there are two remarks that can sum up all that this Booklet has tried to say. On the one hand: «*The West is so superior to this country in medical knowledge, that even someone who is not a doctor could help them in health matters*». On the other hand: «*The only modern thing in this country are its arms*».

Herein lies the greatness and the shame of Modernity. Two centuries later, this can no longer be denied. And it has to be recognised that the second factor seriously invalidates the first, that Modernity does not merely need to be corrected, it needs a change of direction. This is emphasised in the almost unending series of manifestations and protests from Seattle to Porto Alegre and Barcelona, and which those concerned immediately disown as if they were anti-globalization moves when their message is that *with this type of Modernity, we can only achieve a globalization that is false and deformed*.

In fact, Modernity cannot conceive universality or take into account suffering. For this reason it is of no use in an age of planetary globalization or in a century like the past 20th century which was (according to H. Arendt) «the cruellest in history».

Modernity can only recognise an abstract universality. And as for suffering, starting from the premise that *it cannot be*, it limits itself to getting rid of it by passing it on to others (when dealing with one's own suffering), or declaring that those who put up with it are blameworthy, as is affirmed in the concept of the omnipotent Market. And if not, it utilizes suffering for its own gain: as is evident from the records of medicines against AIDS, malaria, etc.

As a result of this, Modernity has built a world where one can stockpile weapons capable of destroying the planet several times, but not store food to avoid that each year 30 million people die of hunger. A world where the differences between rich and poor have passed from 2 to one, to 30 to one and 60 to one. A world where the ostentatious luxury of a few is ever more visible to the immense army of the dispossessed.

So cruel a world must provoke an equally cruel reaction in the form of terrorism, guerilla activities and other types of savagery. Such reactions cause fear among the well-off, a fear which accepts every type of authoritarianism and

disregard for human rights in the hope of ensuring their own security. Thus it is demonstrated that *human* rights are either rights for all or don't exist as such.

The postmodernity reaction which claims to reject Modernity's ideals but preserve its advantages, shows itself to be even less viable, though at the outset its apparent simplicity is attractive.

Postmodernity only knows how to avoid huge histories but make small offerings; without strong reasoning but with a strongbox; without global ideas but with particular interests; wanting to build not a world but a semi-detached house. Both daughter and enemy of Modernity, it only knows how to unite «the world of the ephemeral» with the «need for the superfluous». And this is an ideal mixture for a type of world fascism that rejects freedom, precisely in the name of freedom.

This is more or less where we are today. For this reason, a reaction against Modernity should not overlook the important ills it helped to alleviate; but it must also take into account the many others it helped to create. Modernity's impressive achievements should be clearly recognised and preserved, but they need to be corrected by eliminating its shameful shortcomings.

In this study I have not touched on the theme of God. It would be too easy to appeal to God as a solution though it is thought (and the author believes it too) that Modernity's denial of God has been disastrous for it. The authors we have been studying believed in God though it is debatable whether their God was the God of Christianity, and though Rousseau complained in his *Meditations* «of some ardent missionaries of atheism and dogmatic despots who don't accept without anger that someone doesn't think like them». Those wishing to challenge this statement should not forget the other from the Third Walk: «I became catholic, but always remaining a christian», which speaks for itself.

The problem lies in the fact that man's relationship with God does not depend on calling his name but on doing his will. From a christian and christological viewpoint, someone who claims not to believe in Him can carry out his Will, and someone can not carry it out even though they affirm and call on Him: «Not everyone who says *Lord, Lord* but he who does the will of my Father...» as Jesus taught. While one can have a «drama of humanistic atheism» (De Lubac), there is also - and this is much more serious - the drama of a christianity that disobeys God.

So I would like to end, very simply, with some words written in 1942 from a



concentration camp by a 28 year old Jewish girl, victim of some of the contradictions described here, and who probably became, in the midst of persecution, one of the greatest witnesses and best examples of human qualities produced by Modernity: *«I believe, perhaps naively but also with conviction, that if this world becomes a more liveable place it will only be through love; the love which the Jew Paul speaks about to the Corinthians in chapter 13 of his first letter»* (Etty Hillesum).

## NOTAS

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<sup>i</sup> If I don't indicate otherwise, the references given are to his complete works, edited by M. Beuclot (Paris 1834), giving only the volume and page. However I try to give in the text the title of the work.

<sup>ii</sup> Quoted by J. Touchard, *Historia de las ideas políticas*, Madrid 1961, p. 316.

<sup>iii</sup> Without this implying forgetting the sad mistake of Las Casas who accepted the possibility of a trade in negroes to avoid the slavery of indigenous amerindians.

<sup>iv</sup> *El País*, 10.12.01, p.6. Obviously when Powell is speaking of the West he is thinking of the USA.

<sup>5</sup> I quote the Catalan edition, "*La Faula de les abelles i altres assaigs*", with a prologue by E. Luch (Barcelona, 1988). You can find the original English poem at: <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/texts/hive.html>

<sup>vi</sup> Which probably gave rise to the hegelian expression "astute reason". Hegel would have read Smith's work around 1805.

<sup>vii</sup> the previous quotation is from the *Theory of Moral Feelings* (IV, I, 10). This second quotation is from *The Wealth of Nations* (IV, II, 9).

<sup>viii</sup> book XV, chapter 5. Madrid 1984, I, pp. 210-211.

<sup>ix</sup> letter 49 from Rica to Usbek, end.

<sup>x</sup> this quotation and the previous one are from the preface to *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Amongst Men*.

<sup>xi</sup> *the Social Contract* I, 3 end. And in chapter 6: "to find a form of association which protects and defends with all their joint strength the person and goods of each associate, and, for which each one, uniting himself to all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains just as free as before, this is basic problem that the Social Contract seeks to solve".

<sup>xii</sup> *I bid*, at the beginning of the second part.

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<sup>xiii</sup> In the word “man” in his *Philosophic Dictionary*, he replies that, in accord with this, the saviour of the human race must be a thief. And here Rousseau seems similar to the fox which “had no tail and wanted all his companions to cut off theirs”.

<sup>xiv</sup> meditations of a solitary walker. End of the sixth walk.

<sup>xv</sup> *social Contract*, II, 12, note.

<sup>xvi</sup> historia de las ideas políticas, Madrid 1964, p. 331.

<sup>xvii</sup> “considerations on the sense of the beautiful and the sublime”. In *Gesammelte Schriften*, XX, p. 44: the confession is all the more valuable since, by temperament and behaviour, Kant had little sympathy for Rousseau.

<sup>xviii</sup> see the first chapter of “*Sobre ética y economía*”, Madrid. Quotations on pages 20, 32, 33, 34, 45.

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