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# MODERNITY

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ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH COLLABORATORY (ARC) AIMS TO DEVELOP NEW TECHNIQUES OF COLLABORATION, MODES OF COMMUNICATION AND TOOLS OF INQUIRY FOR THE HUMAN SCIENCES. AT ARC'S CORE ARE COLLABORATIONS ON SHARED PROBLEMS AND CONCEPTS, INITIALLY FOCUSING ON SECURITY, BIOPOLITICS, AND THE LIFE SCIENCES, AND THE NEW FORMS OF INQUIRY.

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# Modernity

## Anthony Stavrianakis, Field Statement, Berkeley, March 2009

### *Summary*

The field statement begins by asking how can anthropology inquire into modernity? Whilst the field statement on the contemporary offers one way of taking up the problem of 'today' without making modernity into an epoch, this field statement is an exercise in trying to sort out the multiple genealogies for the multiple claims about this thing called 'modernity'. The rationale for laying out a number of genealogies is taken from the insight that *anthropos* is that animal with too many *logoi* about itself (Rabinow, 2003). This has the effect that the multiple claims about *anthropos* in its modernity have no means of arbitration between them. The anthropology of the contemporary is one means of arbitrating between these multiple claims, however, this field statement could be considered a review preliminary to any such statement about the 'contemporary'. It is an overview of a selective and selected set of claims regarding modernity; these claims are taken up first in terms of modernity as a mode of reason, second in terms of thinking of modernity as a way of taking up history and third as a problem of individualism.

I start with Louis Dupre on the grounds that if one is interested in genealogies of modernity it is important not to start with the Enlightenment but to see how what would become called Enlightenment reason was made possible. As such I find his claim compelling that to think about modernity one has to look at the late medieval rise of nominalism and the rise of Renaissance humanism. In part it is compelling as it points to a change in the status of a domain called nature. I follow Dupre with John Milbank's 'meta-critique' of modern reason, which is a critique of so-called secular reason, itself a product of the 'onto-theological' split which Dupre claims produced the domain of nature. I am interested in his work in part because of the recent fashion in anthropology to critique 'liberal secular reason' and to show that such a critique is predicated on a fairly monolithic reading of the history of reason and of Christianity. However, I am also interested in Milbank's critique because of the genetic link of Milbank's work with

a line of Catholic thinkers, such as Henri De Lubac who are connected with Henri Bergson. Bergson is a figure I am interested in as a way to think about the anthropology of reason and nature. I try and balance the Catholic lineage of thought from Bergson with the philosophical. The Catholic line of thought is interesting as it is part of a general resourcing that takes place in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century of primitive Christian thought of the early Church Father's on the question of what 'nature' is in relation to the Divine. As opposed to what would become after the Reformation a two sphere settlement, the primitive Church, embodied today still in the Eastern Orthodox Church among other traditions, takes up the world within the divine economy predicated on no a priori split between nature and grace. The point I wanted to show is that the anthropological significance of what has been called modernity cannot only be a question of the significance of social science. I have tried to show the relation of such theological anthropological questions to the discipline of anthropology as a social science.

I take up the historical transformation as a move from the late medieval period to the Enlightenment (Koselleck, Blumenberg, Foucault) and then back to the Renaissance (Cassirer). The move back to Cassirer then has a double function of trying to show some of the prior elements necessary for an understanding of Enlightenment reason and then signposting a later 'move' within anthropology to diagnose modernity as a problem of 'individualism' (Dumont). I try and do justice to Dumont's diagnosis in its own terms but am unconvinced because it is a teleological account taking Luther's Reformation as the point in relation to which this history is read. This is of course both interesting and important, but relative to what I have tried to show in the previous sections of the statement, the Reformation account of the individual's relation to God and the world need not be the only way of finding a metric for the judgment of what 'modernity' is and what "we moderns" have become.

If it is not an epoch and if it cannot be reduced to a teleological account of the history of the western Church, modernity nonetheless retains some distinctive features. I take Blumenberg's account, echoed in other accounts, of the centrality of the emergence of method. But, given my reluctance to reduce modernity to the self-assured individual in the domain of nature it prompts me to pose the question of how else to approach that which has been read as an ontological split of the 'natural' world away from *anthropos* and *theos*. Following Bergson's problem based philosophy, I am inclined to see modernity as a problem of synthesis, although not in the manner suggested by Dupre, that is to say, a totalizing re-synthesis of the *kosmos*, *anthropos* and *physis*. Following Bergson

and the Catholic thinkers he inspired we can see in many traditions resources for thinking recombination of the old and the new, which never takes the ‘whole’ as total, but as a virtual space and time of change.

*“We are in the age of Faust. The modern scientist tries to carve out an intellectual realms for reflection between himself and the object – a realm located between magical practice and cosmological mathematics”*

*(Warburg quoted in Cassirer, 1964; 169)*

### *Introduction*

The Renaissance and Giordano Bruno? The nominalist destruction of an “original” ontological-cosmological synthesis? A new and dangerous Gnosticism born of the enlightenment? An analytic of finitude? How can anthropology inquire into modernity? Multiple genealogies for multiple claims and no means for arbitrating between them - an outcome itself of, to borrow a phrase, the history of truth in its modern moment. There is not even a stable object; a historical epoch? A structure of thought? A generalized organizational structure? A disposition to human relations?<sup>1</sup>

‘Modernity’ should not only be characterized as a condition of loss. However, the pathos of a disintegrated “cosmos” or “polis” and the ethos of its double, self-assertion, are what unify the multiple genealogies and diagnoses of modernity that will be presented in this field statement. This pathos is also what made the anthropological form of knowledge both necessary and possible. Socrates died rather than flee the polis, but now under today’s conditions of knowledge production and consumption, anthropology wanders through the fragments of these fractured polities and what may have been a kosmos. If it is true that ‘anthropos today’ is that figure which has too many logoi about itself, then the ordering of those truths and the arbitration between those truths is what conditions the pathos and ethos of the modernity of *anthropos*.

However, anthropology is missing something if it does not take up the theological as well as the anthropological aspects to the problem of modernity. Some people make this claim by suggesting that modernity is nothing if not the secularization of a theological idea (Koselleck 1959, Loewith 1957), the transformation of

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<sup>1</sup> Attentive readers will see homage to Faubion’s 1988 “Possible Modernities” Cultural Anthropology Vol 3, no 4 1988

eschatology into progress. A response to this line of reasoning is that modernity is not a secularization of eschatology but a novel expression of the self-assertion of man (Blumenberg, 1966) – the Renaissance resourcing of a past imagination of man’s capacities with novel insights in what can be gained for knowledge through ‘method’. I think even if we accept the general response of someone like Blumenberg, there is still room to ask about the kind of transformations that occurred such that this self-assertion could emerge. Whilst undoubtedly not reducible to theological artifacts, the transformations in theology at the time of the Reformation in parallel with what was happening within Renaissance humanism were crucial for what could later be characterized as modern reason and a modern experience of history.

Whilst ‘method’ emerges from transformations in the relation of philosophy, theology and new scientific capacities, I would like to keep open the question of whether this transformation ushers in a new epoch. If on the one hand modernity is characterized by the dominance of the form of reflexivity<sup>2</sup> known as ‘method’, modernity is not reducible to such a form of reflexivity. With this in mind I would like to suggest that we can follow someone like Foucault (Foucault, 1970) in his diagnosis of a novel ‘*episteme*’<sup>3</sup>, but we must hesitate in taking it on as a total or complete diagnosis of “our” modernity. There are limits to a purely discursive archaeological account of the logoi of modernity. For this reason I begin not with the Nineteenth Century or the Enlightenment but rather with a diagnosis of modernity which returns to the theological debates around nominalism and the emergence of humanist creativity in the Renaissance. By doing this, I want to pose the question of both the necessity and potential insufficiency of the analytic of finitude for characterizing the mode in which we take up modern thought as a historical artifact. It is necessary inasmuch as philosophically this analytic is the historical outcome of the events in thought I am tracing, but its sufficiency for posing the problem of modernity can only be asserted if one forgets how it came to be the case<sup>4</sup>.

In this statement, I array the responses of others to the question of how we have become these forms of reason named modern; Some are hermeneutic, some are structural and some theological. It is an attempt to find a pathway through which to present the responses. To this end, I have structured the books read through the terms of modernity as a mode of reason, modernity as a question of history and finally I finish with modernity as characterized by the so-called problem of “individualism”. In each case the problems of reason, history and individual are addressed in relation to both anthropological thought and a set of theological intellectual moves which can act as a resource for anthropological thinking about the problems of modernity.

### *The hermeneutic problem of modernity: creativity and nature*

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<sup>2</sup> exercises of thought in which the act of thinking is itself made an object of thought.

<sup>3</sup> The boundaries within which knowledge is possible, of which discourse is an expression

<sup>4</sup> This may sound like a genealogical strategy akin to what has been called ‘history of the present’, but in fact I think this paper has been written in a contemporary mode.

Louis Dupre's starting point in his text *Passage to Modernity* (Dupre, 1993) is that the originality of the Enlightenment as the origin of the "modern" has been overstated and that the correct starting point for thinking about the modern is the breakup of what he calls the onto-theological<sup>5</sup> synthesis in the late medieval period. Dupre suggests early humanist 'creativity' and the negative conclusions of nominalist theology are what defined the "passage to modernity". I find this starting point compelling as human creativity and the question of the independent existence or non-existence of that to which language refers are perhaps two of the most fundamental questions of anthropology. In his own words, the birth of humanist creativity and nominalism "shattered the organic unity of the western view of the real" and this western view of the real was formerly a "harmonious and all inclusive whole" (Ibid; 3).

For Dupre, the problem of modernity is the emergence of a sphere of nature separate from both the divine and from man. This is a hermeneutical problem because nominalism's relegation of the divine to a supernatural sphere separate from nature effected the possibility of having "meaning", or the demand of the search for a not evident meaning. Before the breakup of the 'onto-theological' synthesis, meaning was established in the act of Creation. The human mind and the person become the locus of meaning, in Dupre's narrative, due to the emergence of a sphere of 'the natural' separate from man and from 'the divine' (a point we will revisit in Cassirer's work *The Individual and the Cosmos in the Renaissance* and also Dumont's work in modern ideology).

However, Dupre suggests that, unlike Nietzsche, he does not look back to Socrates for the origin of the absolute priority of the Logos and the corresponding problematic features of modern thought. He suggests instead, "its seeds lie buried not in the sands of ancient or early medieval rationalism but in a set of assumptions newly formulated at the *closing of the middle ages*." (Ibid; 6). For Dupre the problem of modernity is the problem of the emergence of 'nature' as a distinct domain of human action. This is a problem inasmuch as it demands a hermeneutic response. It demands such a response because "meaning" has been made not self-evident and thus requires the labour of meaning making lest we fall into nihilism. He advocates the search for a new *kind* of synthesis in response to the breakdown of evident meaning;

"If the argument advanced concerning the fragmentation of being, thinking and acting is at all valid, then no all-comprehensive, timeless metaphysical reflection in the classical style can come to grips with our present existence. The disintegration of what once used to be integral components of a single reality deprives such a reflection of its object....a genuinely new synthesis, if ever to come, will have to rest on newly established principles" (Ibid; 6-7).

Dupre suggests that whilst a synthesis eludes us, this does not justify abandoning the search. A prior question is, what was 'lost' in the break-up of the supposedly original synthesis, and why one would want to try and reconstitute it? I think there are strands of thinking in Catholic theology which can be read relative to the Eastern Orthodox

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<sup>5</sup> By ontotheology I think Dupre is referring to a kind of theology characterized although not invented by Kant in which the relation between creator and created can be known outside of experience, that is, transcendentally. It is the theological question of what "Being is" taken up not through revelation and not through empiricism.

Christian tradition which challenge both his reading of the consequences of nominalism and help us open up the question of what the 'whole' which he considers needs to be reconstructed actually is.

If one approaches the problem anthropologically, one has to ask the question of the significance for "life" by the so-called 'break' and how a reconfiguration of those elements introduced by this break, synthetic or otherwise has stakes for thought, being and action today?

There can be ontological novelty and I take Dupre's starting point that "unless we assume that the 'cultural revolution' of the modern age was an event of ontological significance" (Ibid: 7) then there would be no point in taking up modernity as a problem. Whether or not this needs to be a problem of metaphysics – and hence cosmological synthesis - is a question I am struggling with .

My suggestion will be that ontological novelty can but need not necessarily be taken up as a problem of metaphysics. It can rather be taken as a problem of the significance of the problem of thought and action for living. It is in this register that the question of things human and things divine can be taken up in a common conceptual apparatus, challenging a reading of modernity in which one has to assume a prior metaphysical split between anthropology and theology.

Dupre contrasts his hermeneutic approach from the approach of the history of ideas; "My question is the hermeneutic one; how is the shift that occurred at the dawn of the modern age to be seen in the light of our thinking, feeling, and valuing today? ...Precisely by its hermeneutic approach our project differs from that of the history of ideas on which it so heavily relies. The historian of ideas considers ideas under their formal aspect – as expressions of the mental life of a particular epoch... Yet once they cease to capture attention, they appear as ideologies destined to take their place in the museum of past beliefs. Nothing leaves a more discouraging impression of the futility of human convictions than a mere history of their succession." (Ibid; 9)

I disagree with him when he suggests that "A reflection on past thought that is not a search for *permanent meaning* leaves us defenseless against cultural nihilism" (Ibid). It is possible to find resources against cultural nihilism which are indebted to the possibility of change and human capacity for creation which do not read change as just different manifestations of the same or as lamentations for a past loss. The texts that follow in different ways – anthropological, historical, theological – attempt to address this question of change.

*Modernity as secular reason: John Milbank*

Is there a particular manner of reasoning, or a kind of reason distinct to modernity? I would like to begin with a genealogy of this form of reason offered by John Milbank, a British systematic theologian, in his controversial work *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. It is controversial because he is proposing that sociology is a pagan parody of true meta-historical reflection on social life, which is the status he grants to

theology. It is as a genealogy that I find it interesting, even if some of his fundamental assumptions should be challenged, both from within and without the theological tradition he is writing from.

Milbank has a three stage movement in his critique of modernity which I will schematically present. Whilst Milbank conflates ‘secular’, ‘modern’ and ‘liberal reason, I think his analysis is worthwhile thinking about because of his reading of the Reformation as an event to which contemporary thought still needs to respond to.

He begins his critique of secular reason with the claim that secular reason is the product of a set of moves in liberal theological thought. First of all, why is liberal reason a problem for Milbank? Liberal reason is a problem because the ‘formal’ openness of liberalism, which is designed to mitigate conflict, is ‘overwhelmed’ by the arbitrariness of its content. This is presumably a reference to Hobbes’s contract theory as the answer to the wars of religion following the onset of the Protestant Reformation. Secondly, for Milbank, dialectic is seen as a variant of liberalism understood in terms of a Christian Gnosticism. Negation and re-doubled negation is the work of a self-grounded freedom which unleashes the ‘anarchically positive’. Thirdly, he suggests that Nietzsche’s response to self-grounded freedom was to destroy the reason at the heart of socialism and dialectic. Nietzsche’s philosophy of difference is grounded in an ontology of violence. This is Milbank’s sweeping characterization of what happens to theorizing about political life when a secular domain of authority is parsed out from a theological domain; it ends in an ontology of violence.

It is in response to this triad that Milbank wishes to constitute a defense of a catholic ontology of peace in relation to what has become understood as “modern secular” reason<sup>6</sup>. He claims to write a genealogy of this form of reason and to constitute a defense of Christian truth against it. The subtitle of the book is “*beyond*”, not “*against*” secular reason, precisely because nihilism is taken as “a parody of the Christian view that we are created from nothing and that therefore all that is finite is indeterminate”(Milbank, 2006; xv). He is proposing a catholic ontology against liberalism and positivism, but accepts that the development of each of them produced elements which need to be reoccupied and reconciled with a renewed catholic ontology - catholic meaning universal and not per se pertaining to the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome.

In his ‘ontological’ schema all positive differences “must analogically concur in a fashion exceeding the liberal agreement to disagree” (Ibid; xvi). A counter-genealogy to Nietzsche, which Milbank finds in Vico and Augustine, resists the narration of will to power as the sole narrative device of reason as power’s ruse. How to choose between genealogical strategies? Agon or Peace? If there are no a priori or ahistorical grounds to choose, then there is a meta-discourse of non-reason beyond Milbank’s mode of reason, or else it is “Hegelian” in the sense of Geist unfolding in time. He cannot take the latter option, if I can use a clumsy schematic, because it relies on the positive emerging from conflict. However, he says the “choice” for peaceful analogy over agon is not really an ungrounded decision, but a “seeing” by a “truly desiring reason”, a reason founded on faith. Milbank must

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<sup>6</sup> See Scott and Hirschkind : See especially Jose Casanova, “A reply to Talal Asad”: and “the anthropological category of religion” in *Genealogies of Religion*

distinguish this “seeing by a truly desiring reason” from a gnosis, but how? “Reason” is “saved” in Milbank’s catholic ontology because it is consistent with the infinite, “full rationalism is rendered irenic through the biblical mythos” (ibid) which requires faith.

His treatise on liberalism is the prolegomena to the rest of the book because it is in discourses of liberalism, scientific politics and political economy, that the secular is first constructed. Sociology insists on this ‘negative’ image of the secular as the stripping of the sacred and an unleashing of human autonomous freedom. However, Milbank’s point is that sociology does not see the secular in its positivity - that is as the outcome of set of theological arguments. Milbank makes the ‘positive’ move, that an anthropology of the ‘private self’, secured legitimacy through a specifically theological move. This move is a specific late-medieval and post-Reformation legitimization of ‘dominions’; the acceptance of spheres of creation and the distinct legitimate authority in each sphere. It is, theologically speaking, in relation to this Reformation settlement that Kantian critical philosophy was an epistemological response.

#### *Theology contra sociology*

The idea of the social whole emerged as an ‘irreducible fact’ in 19<sup>th</sup> Century France (Cf. Rabinow, 1989). Unlike the political and the economic, the social did not have to be deduced (known initially by revelation and later by positivism). New sciences of society were not trying to explain phenomena, as liberalism had, instead the social is described as a positive ‘datum’ and used to explain other human phenomena in relation to it. The relation of the individual to the collective was ‘positive’ in the sense that from the social order the individual gains goals and values. Milbank makes the point that prior to sociology was a social theology. In post-Revolutionary France, some Catholic thinkers denied the possibility of a secular politics on the grounds that politics had its basis in a social order revealed or created by God. For this theology, the ‘individual’ is already situated in a collective, making this collective neither ‘artificial’ nor an unintended outcome governed by providential design – the two liberal responses to explain political economy – but instead as an aspect of the original divine creation. It is after this theological sociology that a secular sociology becomes possible in the guise of Comte and Durkheim. Milbank wants to show the continuity of social theology and sociology. We can read Levy-Bruhl as a later response to this question of the individual and the question of participation in a collective life and the contrast with Durkheim. Durkheim makes “religion” a function of social life and shows the social origins of a priori categories.

Durkheim and Comte take from Kant a critique of metaphysics which makes finite knowledge possible through ahistorical means. Against this position Milbank cites Hamman’s metacritique, foreshadowing his argument on dialectic, that if the categories of knowledge are linguistically and historically determined, then the grounds for a distinction between a ‘necessary finite’ knowledge and a ‘superfluous transcendental knowledge’ are undermined. i.e. Milbank is citing Hamann’s *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason* against the Kantian underpinning in Durkheim and Comte. However, for Milbank it is not dialectic which can reconstitute a sociology free from Kantian

assumptions, but rather a theology based on metacritique and a Trinitarian ontology of peace, which ultimately makes sociology redundant (unlike Gillian Rose's *Hegel Contra Sociology*).

The reductive element in Durkheim's sociology of religion consists in the notion that all "religion", when clear about itself, would turn out to be the Comtean-Kantian religion of 'humanity'. For conservative French Catholic thinkers (De Bonald and De Maistre), unfounded difference, in revelation, produces a social whole. By contrast it is the philosophers of difference (Foucault and Deleuze are cited as exemplary), taking their cue from Nietzsche, who retake this position against the Comtean-Kantians who, these philosophers of difference claim, make the reductive move of difference as manifestation of the same. We will note later the relation to anthropology on this point. It will be Milbank's *piece de resistance* to challenge the ontology of violence that is the basis for such a difference. In preparing us for this set of moves, Milbank writes regarding the ahistorical assumptions of positivist sociology;

"One never sees the social, except in the instances of its manifestation in 'individual' action and one can never read the intention of this action except in terms of its objectively 'historical' situation within a more general process which it assumes and modifies. The relation society/individual is not that of scheme to content, nor of whole to atomic parts. This antinomy can only be mediated by narration; an adequate 'transcendental' reflection on the conditions of possibility for social action discovers the inevitability of historiography, but finds no room whatsoever for 'social science'" (Milbank, 2006; 74).

Which narrative? Agon or Peace? Milbank as theologian cannot take up narrative in the Geertzian interpretive sense, as this would be just another violent reduction of difference to the same which he characterized as arbitrary and violent - and hence without justification. Which genealogy will we write? Oriented to what vision or claims regarding the true, the good or the beautiful?

*Bergson and Henri De Lubac: an orientation to theosis?*

Henri Bergson, in The *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* denies the social a priori origins of the categorical imperative and makes social norms a question of evolutionary, psychological and social necessity – what he calls 'habit' or a "vital tendency" (the late 19<sup>th</sup> century nexus of biology, psychology and sociology) whilst making change (including normative change) the product of singular will, genius or mystical revelation.

The '*Nouvelle Theologie*' movement of the Roman Catholic Church, influenced by Henri Bergson – specifically de Lubac and Gilson – wished to give a new form to the Reformation problem of the spheres of creation, specifically by "resourcing" the early Church Fathers of what would become normative for the Eastern Church. The Church Fathers posited no separation of a sphere of nature from a sphere of grace and as such posited the doctrine of

deification (*theosis*). It is an immanent understanding of the relation of things human (*anthropos*) and things divine (*theos*).

Milbank is highly influenced by Henri de Lubac whose influences were in turn Bergson as well as Maurice Blondel. This line of theology from Maurice Blondel to John Milbank attempts to 'go back' to the Church Fathers to resource older Christian elements as a way of confronting a range of problems which these theologians think stem from a liberal-secular settlement that the Latin Church had made within the post-Reformation period. This is a political settlement which agreed on the separation of things human from things divine. That is to say, these thinkers urge us to take up the Reformation question of how power should be exercised in light of the question of how to specify an anthropology, a theology towards an understanding of salvation?

Relative to the post-Reformation political settlement and the development of Enlightenment rationality, it is interesting to look at the elements of Patristic theology that were being resourced. As a tradition of thought and practice it perhaps poses a difference to a totalizing view of "modernity". I will follow Milbank's interest in Henri De Lubac as a mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic thinker who wanted to rethink the Catholic Church's reading of Aquinas and the effect this reading had on the domain of a realm of nature (both as an object of thought and an object of political governance).

De Lubac's thesis was that the original and authentic Latin patristic understanding of the operation of grace (especially that of Augustine) was not essentially different from the Greek patristic notion of deification (*theosis*)<sup>7</sup>.

What is *theosis*? Robert Sephanopoulos writes that "What God is by nature and in his essence man can never become. *Theosis* speaks only of what man can become by faith and grace, that is a participant in the divine life." As Gaymon Bennett has suggested at a recent conference on the place of *theosis* in theology today – "Theosis is the relation between the *logos* of *theos* and the *logos* of *anthropos* as a question of how we might live our lives today in light of *theosis* as our highest potential and highest good, and all of this taken up as a challenge for thought and practice today". If as Bennett suggests the Reformation question regarding man's relation to nature and God, leads us to return to the problem of *theosis*. I will suggest that it returns us also to the Renaissance question of creation, namely, what are the human thing's capacities to create and what status do they have relative to his finitude and that which exceeds it?

At this moment I want to do two things; mark *theosis* as a term which has the capacity to transform the anthropological question of 'modern life' as an outcome of a Reformation political settlement and to see if *theosis* helps recalibrate an understanding of the '*elan*' of the Renaissance not as the start of modern reason but as a continuation of the question of the relation of knowledge and life. Some will say that the 16<sup>th</sup> century (a marker of both the Renaissance and the Reformation) was the point which began the separation of an "original" synthesis of

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<sup>7</sup> This is not an uncontroversial point of view, Christos Yannaras for instance would dispute such a claim; described Augustine as "the fount of every distortion and alteration in the Church's truth in the West" (*The Freedom of Morality*, p. 151n.).

*anthropos* and *theos* (e.g. Dupre). For those who claim the possibility of participatory ontology (as a broad philosophical characterization of *theosis*) was abandoned with the birth of modernity, the claim is that the goods that orient us now are justified by instrumental intervention into a sphere of the natural world. The question then is what is it about modern reason that forecloses this possibility?

It seems as though this possibility is foreclosed by accepting the Reformation reading of the Augustinian conception of the Fall. If we reject the Reformation conclusion that the Fall sealed *anthropos* off from *theos* the focus is not on the “Creation” of *anthropos* but the Renaissance question of the creations of *anthropos*, i.e. the creative capacity. This would lead me to the position that we can both on the one hand accept Blumenberg’s interpretation of modernity as a distinct ethos not reducible to the ‘secularization’ thesis and that this ethos can be a resource for a theology and anthropology that asks of the possible relation between things human and divine today. This position is predicated on not taking the Reformation position on the fallenness of man and the ontological split between spheres of creation for granted.

Historically and historiographically the influences on Milbank’s critique of the secular are the *nouvelle theologie* scholars, Maurice Blondel, Etienne Gilson and Henri de Lubac, among others, all of whom were influenced by Henri Bergson. As is clear from Bergson’s relation to a one time disciple turned critic Jacques Maritain, Bergson’s attack on reason was incompatible with ‘orthodox’ Catholic Thomism . Many of these scholars were drawn to ‘bergsonism’ as the ‘antithesis’ of scientism, yet many like Maritain found themselves unable to accept its critique of reason as such. As Pilkington writes, “While Maritain admired Bergson’s critique of the intellectualism of the determinists, his own view was that this type of intellectualism sprang from the misuse of a faculty through which alone truth is accessible. The implication of Bergson’s more thoroughgoing critique of reason would be that the doctrines of the church are not eternal truths but merely the provincial expression of ‘un certain sentiment religieux en evolution’” (Pilkington 1976; 173).

Bergson’s disagreement with Durkheim that religious life could be reduced to social life is important as a way of anthropology taking up “religion” as something other than a functional explanation of beliefs. The influence on a future generation of Catholic scholars is clear where Bergson posited an account of motion towards the “supra-intellectual” between the open and the closed forms of morality –instinctual habit and mystical revelation.

### *Bergson*

If we were to locate Bergson within a French philosophical tradition there are a number of positions he could take. I have located him in his relation to a lineage of French Catholic Theologians, however it is also possible and indeed necessary to locate him within the French philosophical and more specifically epistemological tradition. Within this tradition Bergson should be characterized as ‘anti-positivist’ but with a complicated relation to ‘rationalism’. Some authors see a cleavage in French thought between philosophy of experience and philosophy of

rationality deriving from two readings of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* (Sartre on the one hand, Cavaille on the other- I take this point from Eli During). However, for others the bifurcation of 'reason' and 'experience' as kinds of philosophical inquiry can be traced to a knot within Bergson's 'philosophy of life', a philosophy which poses the problematic relation between intellect and intuition as a scientific question with philosophical stakes. Bergson's philosophy, to paraphrase Deleuze, is a duality-unity which bifurcates later French thought into experience/concept. He is often also placed alongside Nietzsche and characterized as an 'irrationalist'. What is important to note is that Bergson is less anti-rationalist and more a critic of the self-sufficiency of reason which whilst not denigrating 'reason' poses reason as a problem within an empirical evolutionary frame. His position is anti-intellectual in the sense that his philosophy of time (not history I note) is not self-grounding in the vein of Hegel's self-grounding freedom and is not teleological. Bergson put man back into nature, whilst not reducing man to matter.

Bergson's anti-positivism is a reaction against the unproblematic take up of concepts and their linear development rather than against the empirical verification of statements. Bergson's thought is deeply empirical, but it overturns a positivist metaphysics because he predicates his work on the assumption that philosophy is not the attempt to know the 'really real', to know the status of an independent reality common to traditional metaphysics. Instead his anti-positivist metaphysics is based on the claim that thought attends to its own problems as immanent functions. Thought inherits problems, rather than unveiling reality.

To state his philosophy in its most general terms we can say that Bergson is interested in the question of creation, contra the uncovering of a priori forms. He addresses five interconnected but distinguishable problems in his oeuvre; rethinking science and philosophy in relation to Kant's fundamental categories of thought, the human condition which is a condition of the accrual of evolutionary habits of thought to be exceeded, duration, intuition and the rationalist tradition of moral philosophy. Bergson's work as a whole was committed to a critique of Kantian critique in the sense that critique understood as showing the limits of what one can know is only one side of a duality unity in which the other side is the 'leap' or creation which has its source in the intuition Bergson is a metaphysician in the sense that he claims the 'absolute' as the proper object of philosophical inquiry. However, Bergson is non-Hegelian in the sense that his 'philosophy of life' is not indebted to the reified status of the intellect or concept and does not work through the labour of contradiction or negation. In this sense alone he is 'positivist'. Bergson places man within evolutionary time and asks from this evolutionary perspective how the problems of philosophy such as free will or the problem of duty can be posed from this position.

Let me state a brief overview of his oeuvre ; *Time and Free Will (1889)* is a novel account of free will showing that intention or will cannot be treated as an extensive magnitude, because the experience of duration is different in kind from the spatial representation of magnitudes. In *Matter and Memory (1896)* he argues against both reductionist materialism and subjectivist idealism to posit an intermediate position in the philosophical problem of perception and to then distinguish matter-perception in kind from what he called pure memory. *Creative Evolution (1907)* is his most well-known text which took up the biological advances of his day with utter seriousness in order to demonstrate the need for a philosophy adequate to the advances in knowledge about 'life'. His final book *The*

*Two Sources of Morality and Religion*(1932) is a critique of the rationalist approach that posits a transcendental subject as the a priori source of morality. I will offer some thoughts on duration taken from *Time and Free Will* and the sociological and theological questions implicit in his critique of Kantian rationalist approaches to moral philosophy in the *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.

### *Duration*

Kant considered three possibilities for a theory of knowledge; mind determined by external things, things determined by mind; or finally, between things and mind there is a curious pre-established harmony. In contrast to all these possibilities, Bergson wanted to show the temporal genesis of both material existence and consciousness. A common form between matter and consciousness has evolved through time (especially *Creative Evolution*) If the common form is produced in time then there is no a priori means of predicting the form in advance. You cannot slot reality into the concept of all concepts, such as Geist.

Bergson's evolutionism takes as its object an always incomplete whole, meaning that the whole of existence can never be a totality – actuality has within it an unspecified form which is virtual. To see the whole as a totality, that is to have a meaningful whole which is representable through symbols, is to conflate duration with spatial representation. As Bergson writes in *Time and Free Will* “consciousness spatializes time through symbols” (Bergson, 1889;124) , but this does not mean our symbols are adequate representations of the whole, it just means we perceive reality through the symbol – “... the self thus refracted, and thereby broken into pieces, is much better adapted to the requirements of social life in general and language in particular, consciousness prefers it, and gradually loses sight of the fundamental self” (Ibid; 128)

However, if time is a medium in which conscious states are series then time is assimilatable as a category of intuition to space. Bergson challenges the convention that time can be treated as such a homogenous medium. Writing of the Eleatic paradox Bergson says that, “...each of Achilles' steps is a simple indivisible act ... after a given number of these acts Achilles will have passed the tortoise. The mistake of the Eleatics arises from their identification of the series of acts, each of which is of a different kind and indivisible, with the homogeneous space which underlies them.” (Ibid 113) While space traversed is a quantity that is divisible, movement is an intensive act and a quality.

In essence, I think Bergson is suggesting that *relation*, the fundamental relation that Kant reflected on, between subject and object, presumes a *representational* relation, that is a relation in homogenous reality, in which extensity is an element of the sensible. Space as the condition for representation, makes representation a problem in so far as representation makes experience extensive rather than intensive in Bergson's terms. In this way, we confuse things, with processes. To inhabit a process is to experience duration. “Pure duration is the form which the

succession of our conscious state assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former state” (Ibid; 100).

The problem of free will is a false problem because it confuses the duration we represent to ourselves through the symbols we take from the external world with the internal experience of duration. We have two selves, one is the social representation of the other. As Bergson writes quite beautifully;

“the greater part of the time we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost, a colourless shadow which pure duration projects into homogenous space. Hence our life unfolds in space rather than time we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we are acted rather than act ourselves. To act freely is to recover possession of yourself and to get back into your duration” (Ibid; 231 )

Freedom is incomprehensible if time is reduced to the medium of space. If the will is divisible, capable of analysis, and by that he means capably of being divided up and subjected to scrutiny through the juxtaposition of psychic states. With this juxtaposition of states of consciousness, freedom has to be elevated to a transcendental realm rather than understood through the method intuition. Whilst in Bergson’s method the ‘free’ self lies outside space, for Kant this self, the transcendental subject, lies outside of time and out of the reach of our faculty of knowledge. The indivisibility of the act, or in other words concrete duration, is what shows the problem of free will to be a false problem. The question then becomes what of the relation between freedom and collective life? In Bergson’s thought collective life predicated on representation is the condition of the misrecognition of ‘our’ freedom. We will return to this question in relation to Levy-Bruhl anthropological philosophy of modes of reason.

### *The two sources of morality*

The anthropology of the ancients asked only, what I am and what things are –culminating in the physics of change and the metaphysics of that which does not change. Their anthropology, which was their philosophy, might be exemplified by Parmenides, a thinker of the multiplicity of existing things, their changing forms and motion, which are but an appearance of a single eternal reality (“Being”), the univocal principle that “all is one”, accessible by reason alone.

Why is this important? Bergson’s *The two sources of morality and religion* is a book which invites us to think about the social life of man and the question of (good) life with the fact of change. Read against a Kantian inquiry into the question of how we can know, Bergson’s text is a challenge. Kant represents the counter to Descartes’ answer to the question of the knowledge of the self, insofar as he argues that that the thing that I am is not what I know. The knowing subject becomes a problem answered by the subject’s capacity to know. The form of knowing is the limit of what I can know. Bergson has an interesting response to this, that the static form of knowing

and acting is that of actual social relations. But the Kantian 'knowing I' tells us nothing about the capacity for creation and change – of living human relations - because, as we have seen, Kant conflates space and time in the forms of intuition that structure the categories of the understanding.

In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson outlines two kinds of obligation; natural (social) and 'perfect' (human) morality. The source of natural obligation is a social one. Social life is immanent, an impetus at once instinctual and intelligent. The essence of obligation is different to a requirement of reason. The way the book begins is as though it were in the vein of a Durkheimian biological analogy. There is talk of 'force' and a parallelism of habit being to society what necessity is to nature. Social life is understood by Bergson as a habit which responds to communal needs, which is the source of obligation. Just as one can say Durkheim put Kant's imperative back into Rousseau's 'state of nature', so too, in his understanding of 'social' life, Bergson puts man into evolutionary time which produces an accrual of habit responding to the needs of communal life. Bergson reflects on the analogy with the necessity of nature and specifically the image of cell interaction, which only began to be developed as a field of knowledge in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He wonders why the analogy persists? Perhaps in an indirect reflection on Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* he stresses that whilst "society" is present within each of its members, this *image* is predicated on an enduring analogy, which has 'merely some analogy to the inflexible order of the phenomena of life' (Bergson, 1932; 11). Society is an image. One cannot only point to an anthropological universal such as the incest taboo to claim the existence of necessity in social life. what is more important, he suggest, that even when there are infractions of the rules governing behavior "even in those cases where moral precepts implied in judgments are not observed, we contrive that they should appear so" (Ibid). Communal existence is predicated on the representation of man to himself. So far so Durkheimian. However, he asks, why does the analogy of necessity persist? Because we cover with this analogy the weakness we recognize in ourselves. Social life is grounded in the illusion that others are not as morally weak as we are. Bergson suggests that this 'happy illusion' is so strong it blurs the boundary between norm and natural law. A disconnection from the image of society is what helps Bergson account for the figure of the remorseful criminal, or even the psychoanalytic reading of the criminal who 'wants' to be caught. This is the second 'source', the desire to exceed the accrual of evolutionary habits, of nature.

Whilst Durkheim makes religion a social function only, a force, Bergson focuses on the relation between the individual and the social whole in which the former can transform the image of the latter. This is the introduction of the second source of morality, what he calls 'appeal' in contrast to 'pressure'. Man operates in his daily life on the intellectual plane, a plane of words, symbols, images, in short a plane of representation. Bergson suggests that man is bound to himself on this plane, and this is part abnegation and part appeal, for without appeal man would be the ant of his analogy and without abnegation man could not live with others.

The supra-intellectual is the plane that the mystic participates in when experiencing divinization. Unlike Plotinus, for whom action weakened contemplation, for Bergson true mysticism is action. It is in the father figure of the logos, Socrates, that Bergson finds the knot of intuition and reason. The supra-intellectual cannot be separated from the intellectual and infra-intellectual, because the will of the mystic remains what it is for nature, a social will.

“When the darkest depths of the soul are stirred, what rises to the surface and attains consciousness takes on there, if it be intense enough, the form or an image of an emotion. The image is often pure hallucination, just as emotion may be meaningless agitation. But they both express the fact that the disturbance is a systematic readjustment with a view to equilibrium on a higher level: the image then becomes symbolic of what is about to happen, and the emotion is a concentration of the soul awaiting transformation.” [Bergson, 1935; 229, Cf. 64] This is an emotion which is causative of representation and not an effect.

The mystical experience which translates into possible representation has the capacity to transform the representational plane. Perhaps it would change the mould which nature has given to the infra-intellectual system of habits and social organization. Bergson writes, “...if the fringe of intuition surrounding his intelligence is capable of expanding sufficiently to envelop its object that is the mystic life... But just as the new moral aspiration takes shape only by borrowing from the closed society its natural form, which is obligation, so dynamic religion is propagated only through images and symbols supplied by the myth-making function”. [ibid; 268] The force of life taken up in the form of the human as one line of the bifurcated evolution – ‘pure’ instinct’ (ant) and intelligence [human) – is both supra and infra intellectual, and the force that pushes the dynamic into the surpa is re-appropriated by life in the form of the infra. The impetus ultimately ends in the closed, only possibly taken up by what Jaspers refers to elsewhere as ‘paradigmatic’ individuals. The vital impetus is conceived as the act of placing in matter a freely creative energy. The significance then of attaching to matter a creative energy is the capacity for that matter to change the form. Here I mean form not in the sense of the physical form characteristic of evolution, although certainly Bergson means also this, but the representational form that constitutes and is constituted by man’s existence. He suggests that if all men were mystics man would evolve into a new species. (Bergson, 1935 ; 213)

Bergson seems to be articulating a non-synthetic (i.e. Hegelian) dialectic of mechanism-mysticism, we might say oscillation with a view to the possible relation between EEG readings and Bergson’s theory of the co-evolution of matter and form. Humans like ants have tools, only our capacity to build is virtually structured and not actually structured. This virtuality takes the form of the possible, in which on the one hand we have the joy of the mystic, the ‘simplicity of life’ that the mystic represents and on the other the techno-scientific capacity of man to create. The question becomes whether we will eclipse pleasure with Joy?

### *Nature and Grace in De Lubac*

Following on from Bergson, De Lubac, articulated an ontology between the field of pure immanent being proper to philosophy on the one hand, and the field of revelatory event proper to theology on the other. His struggle was with neo-scholasticism over their reading of Thomas Aquinas and the legacy of Aristotle and the ramifications of a particular reading of Thomas for the Church’s view of the relation between nature and grace. His book on the “Supernatural” is a historical account of the term. Up until High Middle Ages the main contrast was natural/moral not natural / supernatural. The natural/moral distinction according to de Lubac did however reflect the

'authentically Christian' sense of the notion of the supernatural. On the one hand there was created nature, on the other there was created spirit, which was free and intellectually reflexive ('personal').

What upset the moral/natural schema was the irruption of Aristotelianism. Whereas Neoplatonism itself in its own way explored a complex boundary between supernatural deity and material nature and so had been readily Christianized by the Church fathers, Aristotelianism, even in its Arabic neoplatonized forms tended to insist that human nature could be adequately grasped as belonging to a natural cosmos, and with the help of a strictly analytic rather than intuitive reason.

The neo-scholastics argued for an autonomous natural sphere, comprising all of human activity, outside the order of salvation. De Lubac was looking for a way out of a human autonomy / external gratuity choice. As Milbank writes, the problem, according to John Milbank's text on De Lubac *The Suspended Middle*, is that in early modern scholasticism, "the 'natural' mode of being of a creature began to be thought of in terms not of its normative maximum flourishing, but its minimum self-sustainability, given the most fundamental facts about its mode of existence and operation." (Milbank, 2005; 21) The danger of a pure humanism focused on melioration, without reference beyond humanity, is "a joyless disciplinary program for the maximization of corporeal efficiency" (ibid). We return then to the question of the good life and of whether man will eclipse pleasure with joy.

In Milbank's reading of de Lubac, Aquinas represented the possibility of an East-West Christian synthesis and even more importantly that the attempt to incorporate Aristotle was positive in so far as it meant a deeper reckoning with reflection upon the operations of nature and of this-worldly human behavior. De Lubac's view on Aquinas' view of grace is that grace intrinsically completes nature (is not superadded). Nothing is free from the possibility of sin or can be completely destroyed by sin, i.e. nature is not neutral and all of spiritual nature is permeated by freedom. The natural desire of the supernatural is not elicited, because this desire is an ontological state rather than an act of consciousness (or will). Curiosity – and this is one of the insertion points for this theology's interest to an anthropological question vis-à-vis modernity - is but the spiritual manifestation of a general ontological drawing back towards God that is consequent upon the radical origin all things from God, such that they are nothing of themselves. De Lubac himself always insisted that the 'will' of humanity was no mere faculty, but an integral expression of personhood itself: will, intellect and feeling.

De Lubac linked the loss of the true account of the supernatural to the loss of teleology. For De Lubac - and this will be echoed in the discussion of Foucault's text *The Order Of Things* – the big problem was the loss of a metaphysics of existential participation. De Lubac, according to Milbank, "insisted that analogy concerned the range of judgment of a soul participating in divine spirit, not simply the range in meaning of a linguistic concept." (Ibid; 31)

*Participation and anthropology:*

What role does the figure of the primitive play in anthropology today and can it shed light in the previous discussion regarding a participatory ontology within a certain Christian tradition of thought. For Durkheim the primitive is representative of the elementary located in an evolving but determinate series proceeding from a substantialist view of the social function of religion. By contrast, Lucien Levy-Bruhl, in his *Notebooks*, asks us to consider, from a French rationalist tradition of thought, another mode of thought.

For Levy-Bruhl, primitive thought is not elementary of our thought. Instead he asks us to consider a different set of elements that rationalist thought has lost the capacity to think about. He writes of two kinds of representation in primitive mentality; the first he calls bio-physiological, which is the capacity to meet basic needs (this is certainly mirrored in Malinkowski's biological functionalism and Bergson's representation of the 'habit' of closed society). The second kind is what Levy-Bruhl calls the participation of these individual objects represented in the totality. "We", rationalists, disengage ourselves from participations by logical abstractions and concepts. We (further) mediate ourselves from our objective reality by means of conceptual thought. For primitive man, the objectivity of the feeling of affective participation is independent of the conditions of possibility. The organizing concepts of space and time function differently in primitive mentality. Echoing Bergson's critique of Kant, Levy-Bruhl writes that the role of concepts in the primitive mind are closer to 'concrete images'. Not only is the transcendental subject put into question as the universal model of consciousness but it also puts to rest the search for a priori ethics. Ethics is instead taken up as participation based in belief. In Leenhardt's reading this is crystallized in the aphorism "to be, is to participate". Whether this 'fact' of participation is taken up as a "structural element of man" as Maurice Leenhardt suggests or taken up as a celebration of difference per se – particular participation for particular modes of thought - is part of the legacy of anthropology.

As Evans-Pritchard will write regarding the Azande, Levy-Bruhl poses the question of the relation of causality to sociality. The distinction is that Levy-Bruhl asks the specific question of the relation between causality as the "affective category of the supernatural". This category, for Levy-Bruhl, is an "immediate datum" and it seems as though he is indebted to Bergson's text *Time and Free Will* on this point. In this text Bergson lays out a critique of the primacy of the concept of space in Kant's schema for the mediation of the immediate data of consciousness (Cf. Levy-Bruhl's note August 13<sup>th</sup> 1938 "participation independent of space"). In relation to the question of which categories are privileged in mediating the immediate data of consciousness Levy-Bruhl writes, "the affective category of the supernatural expresses the fundamental character of a certain experience, and it is this character which is always present when an experience of this type occurs, which justifies the use of the word category." (Levy-Bruhl; 1975; 27) He takes up this insight to its limit in line with the facts he presents to us and in line with the data presented in texts such as Maurice Leenhardt's *Do Kamo*.

If participation needs to be thought outside the limits of the prioritization of the concept of space, then the way in which the space of the body is experienced is not privileged as the location of personhood; "that is to say that each feels himself – in so far as there is here an object of thought for him – represents himself to himself as an element of everything social and organic to which he belongs and in which he participates." (Levy-Bruhl, 1949; 76)

## *History*

Reinhart Koselleck names the entry into modernity as a structural change in 'temporality'. If the Renaissance is one element in the beginning of modernity because of the focus on man's self-assertion in nature which then marks a distinction of *anthropos* from cosmos and heralding *anthropos*' entry into an open field of linear history, then it is the Reformation which breaks theologically speaking the prior theology of history and heralds an awareness of man's historicity.

## *Koselleck*

For Reinhart Koselleck in his 1959 text *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*, political practice in modernity has become depolitized and the malady is traced to the changing relations of authority in the age of Absolutism and Enlightenment. During this period a division emerged between politics and ethics which characterized two spheres named state and society. The political was challenged by the ethical, this is the critique, but because the ethical had divorced itself from actual state power, it was completely ineffectual - utopian to use Koselleck's term - and hence lead to the crisis of critique. The apex of the analysis is the insight that utopianism is rationalized and radicalized into philosophy of history. As Victor Gourevitch notes, "...the philosopher of historical progress, by stationing himself in the hoped for future typically looks back upon the conflicts and the suffering caused by the clash between intransigently held norms and political realities as if these conflicts had been happily resolved and therefore justified." (Koselleck, 1959; ix) The point is that philosophy of history justifies the conflict between these spheres and justifies the inefficacy in the political sphere by stationing critique in a hoped for future. Koselleck's claim is that, "...the Enlightenment itself became Utopian and even hypocritical because - as far as continental Europe was concerned - it saw itself excluded from political power sharing" (Ibid; 1). The structure of Absolutism, as a political response to the Reformation and the ending of the wars of religion produced a private sphere of morality out of which critique and enlightenment developed. this space prevented this movement from seeing itself as political.

Koselleck's describes his two phase theoretical framework; "...this book tries to interpret the origins of Absolutism as an outgrowth of religious wars. As a next step, it attempts to explain the genesis of the modern Utopia from the context of the political interaction in which the men of the Enlightenment found themselves vis-à-vis the system of Absolutism" (Ibid; 3). Koselleck is pointing us to the difficulty in our post-Reformation age to justify politics and morals without the possibility of reconciliation between these spheres – a diagnosis familiar to those indebted to Weber's *Vocation Lectures*.

Koselleck is not so much interested in the contents of philosophies of history or the relation of those ideologies to economic structure. He is interested in the political situation of the bourgeoisie in the Absolutist state. Koselleck is interested in where utopianism came from and what he considers its under belly, political crisis.

“Enlighteners historic-philosophical self consciousness” is considered as a reaction to the Absolutist state. Absolutism generated the enlightenment and the enlightenment conditioned the development of the Revolution. Koselleck quotes Ferdinand Christian Baur when he writes that “in critique, history turns automatically, into philosophy of history” (Ibid.; 9). Because of the way he characterizes modernity as a specific philosophical reaction to a political settlement after the wars of religion, Koselleck takes the secularization thesis as normative. Salvation is turned into rational planning of the future by this new politically disempowered bourgeois elite

The state and its mode of reason became a space of rational calculation arbitrating a formal peace. “The exclusion of ‘morality’ from politics was not directed against a secular ethic, but against a religious one with political claims” (Ibid; 21). Koselleck claims Hobbes’s theory of the state contains the nucleus of the bourgeois notion of the government of laws and the bourgeois reaction of critique framed as ‘morality’ in contrast to politics. The bourgeois moral laws originated in the interior of the human conscience in the space which Hobbes had exempted from the realm of the state. Although the citizens, having ceded all their powers to the state could do no more against any of their fellows than was permitted by the law of the state, they could pass moral judgment.

The threat to the state came from a historical consciousness which hid behind the cloak of moral critique in its ‘dialectical’ (Koselleck’s term) relation with politics<sup>8</sup>. For Koselleck, modernity is characterized as the pathogenesis resulting from the Enlightenment’s reaction to the Absolutist state and the resulting relation between morality and politics embedded in future vision of the past, a critique of the present by means of a projected future.

### *Blumenberg*

Blumenberg’s book, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* takes as its object of contention Karl Lowith’s thesis that “progress” is a secularized Christian eschatology. Blumenberg wishes to assert two main points against this line; firstly that the ‘future’ in the concept of progress is immanent and not transcendent (making it hard to assert that such a concept is eschatological) and secondly that there can be a different account of the idea of progress. Such an idea would include the overcoming of the fixed status of Aristotelian science by the method of science and the overcoming of ancient art and literature as the sole model of perfection, in favor of a ‘spirit of creation’. Whereas the secularization thesis makes sense if the content of the solution to old great problems is transferred to new problems, Blumenberg suggests that the continuity from the Christian period is not that of the content of solutions but of the kind of questions that are continued to be asked.

The Medieval problem of divine omnipotence is that to which ‘modern self-assertion’ was a response. Robert Wallace suggests that modern progress can be characterized as “a hypothetical projection into the future of the kind of process and success that Europeans had begun to experience in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century”. He writes that Loewith

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<sup>8</sup> The Illuminati “saw the course of history as the fulfillment of their secret plan to abolish the state. The course of this plan was projected temporally into the future in order to assure the peaceful victory of morality, freedom and equality, and with it the achievement of the political objective.” 132

might well have asked of this characterization, “Why then if ‘progress’ is an empirical phenomenon, do the philosophies of history name it as necessary and universal?” The response Wallace suggests might be something along the lines of the fact that these philosophies of history are an attempt to answer premodern question with modern means. This premodern question is specifically Christian, in the sense that Christianity claimed to be able to account for world history through the poles of Creation / Eschaton. With this mode of meaning making Christianity put onto the proverbial table a question unknown to the ancient Greeks: the meaning of world history. In Blumenberg’s terminology then, philosophies of history make sense when they are acknowledged to have “reoccupied” a “position” established by old questions through new means. What is interesting is that Blumenberg’s point regarding the reoccupation of old problems by new can be thought in relation to transformations in theology itself, not in terms of the avante-guard or the search for the new per se, but new configuration of thought that take up past resources in light of new formulations of problems.

When ‘modern’ (for the most part western European) thinkers abandoned scholastic Christian answers, they still felt an obligation to retain the questions. The compulsion for these modern thinkers was to “reoccupy” the “position” of the medieval scheme of Creation / Eschaton. The scheme of “reoccupation” leads Blumenberg to analyze “self-assertion”, which for him is the fundamental mode characteristic of a modern ethos, as a mode which is forced to take the place of “self-preservation” understood as a fundamental and basic human attitude responding to the dangerous character of the world.

Wallace’s introduction provides two more examples of “reoccupations”. The first is the early modern mechanistic mode of explanation of nature reoccupying the position of late medieval explanation regarding divine will. A reality that can be grasped mathematically for the purpose of self-assertion was forced into the inherited position of the sole explanation of the world. The other example is that of communist utopia, where in the same way that philosophy of history was to reoccupy a “salvation story”, so too the communist utopia ends by reoccupying the Christian theological ‘beatific vision’ as a vision of happiness “that cannot be disappointed by concrete experience” (Blumenberg, 1966; xxiii).

The thesis of secularization transposes the salvation story onto the certainty that knowledge can provide with the emergence of the ‘early modern’ period. The idea of progress as a transformation of a providentially guided story of salvation means either the *infinity* of this progress is read as a secularization of divine omnipotence or of an expected final stage of progress. “The world of the middle Ages was finite, but it’s God was infinite; in the modern age the world takes on this divine attribute; infinity is secularized” (Ibid; 15.) We might say that the relation of the finite attributes of the world and the divine attributes of man are inverted. By making a claim to this inversion we can keep open the question of man’s finitude as the condition under which knowledge is possible and of the significance of this knowledge for ‘life’, pace Bergson and de Lubac.

In wanting to characterize modernity as an “absolute new beginning” Blumenberg is confronted with the argument that such stark ruptures are illegitimate. He responds to this criticism by suggesting that history is only

made to appear continuous because of analytic difficulty in moving away from “inherited questions” (Ibid; 48). Blumenberg then makes his real insight that the property of ‘autonomous reason’ was ‘overextended’ in the totalizing historical assertions about an idea of progress to the extent that reason and philosophy of history are ‘burdened’ by the presumed need to answer ‘great questions’, which are now the wrong the questions for the wrong time.

The genetic nexus between Christian salvation and modern progress is not self-evident, in part because other theses about where progress came from are possible, for example astronomy as a field which developed its own model of the forward movement of history. Blumenberg is making the point that method is a crucial term for establishing the threshold of modernity. I feel that this is an open question as to whether modernity is reducible to a single form of reflexivity, method. By form of reflexivity I mean the question of how to think about thinking or as Rabinow puts it, “exercises of thought in which the act of thinking is itself made an object of thought” (Rabinow, 2003). For Blumenberg, it was not secularization but ‘novel expressions’ which accumulated over time into a coherent and necessary idea of the optimistic forward movement of history. Blumenberg suggests “the unity of methodically regulated theory” (Blumenberg, 1966; 31) is one such novel experience. He agrees with Koselleck’s thesis about Utopianism being grounded in the political deficit of Enlightenment’s moralistic critique, but wonders how this supports Koselleck’s attribution of such a phenomenon to a secularized eschatology. He asks; “why should the divine salvation plan be ‘transformed’ and enlightened when the relation to history had become that of moralistic critique, which after all certainly does not want to imitate the function of a Last judgment in relation to which all of history becomes a pure past, that is, the opposite of a process that can be influenced by critique?” (Ibid; 32) By contrast in Blumenberg’s reading progress is a constant self-justification of the present by means of the future, of the vision and hoped for future that this justification founds for itself relative to a past and against which it distinguishes itself. Method does not transform eschatology into Utopia but establishes a new ‘disposition’. However, as a side point and one we will have to return to, it seems clear to me that where ‘method’ comes from is itself an open question, not likely to be correctly answered with the reply of 16<sup>th</sup> century scientific rationalism. It will have to be shown, but I’d like to contend that it is in fact a series of theological moves which establish method as the modern disposition of self-assertion against a past and toward a hoped for future. The methodological domination of nature becomes the condition of the historical ‘marcher avec assurance dans cette vie” only once nature has been established as a domain to be intervened in.

### *Foucault*

Writing of the breakdown that occurs at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century paralleling the rupture at the end of the Renaissance Foucault asks, how is it that thought detaches itself from the squares it inhabited before? The change is charted as moving from general knowledge being comprised of identities and differences to organic structures –

from a table of unbroken simultaneities to series. Analogy and succession become the organizing principle. It is no longer the identity of elements but the identity of the relation between the elements and the function they perform relative to the series. We should keep in mind de Lubac's concern regarding the distinction between analogy as range in participation and analogy as range in meaning.

Whereas previously knowledge could be located on the fixed table now knowledge is organized by the succession of the relation of analogy to analogy. Previously the Order of the table of representation organized identities and differences, with the breakdown of this table "History gives place to analogical organic structures" (Foucault, 1970; 219). The text can be characterized as showing the mutation of Order into History (Ibid; 220). He asks, how was it that discourse, the table and exchange transformed into philology, biology and economics? Two successive phases between 1795 and 1800 in which first of all "the fundamental mode of being of the positivities does not change", that is to say, "order" does not disappear. In the transformation in these domains which became "life, labour and language" there is still a set of relations which constitute identities and differences organized by a general principle. "It is only in the second phase that words, classes and wealth will acquire a mode of being no longer compatible with that of representation." (Ibid; 221) The point is that in each of the three domains he explores the double representational function of designation and articulation changes such that it is no longer the transparent and coherent relation of words and things that marks the labour of designation and articulation, but rather the series of relations between signs that constitutes a new "configuration of positivities" (Ibid; 221). As Foucault writes of the signs whose representations were affected, "...none of these can henceforth be based solely upon the duplication of representation in relation to itself.... The relation of representation to itself, and the relations of order it becomes possible to determine apart from all quantitative forms of measurement, now pass through conditions exterior to the actuality" (Ibid; 237). Value is no longer just a relation between desire and an object, a natural being is no longer just the elements we can designate, language is not just the "way in which it represents representations" (Ibid), in each case it is a relation not internal to the representation itself. Representation lost the power to provide a foundation for the relation between elements. The threshold of "our" modernity is marked by the the limits of representation. The internal identity of words and things is brought into question and from Kant on marked as a metaphysics which we have no right to, per se.

We misunderstand Classical knowledge if all we say is that it is rationalistic, or that it accords absolute privilege to Mechanism which was later challenged by a vitalism (Cf. Cassirer, vol 3 of the problem of knowledge) or that classical knowledge privileges general order of nature. What Foucault suggests is the real question of significance, a question which he says is only possible to ask because of the relation of elements in the modern form of knowledge, is, what made this arrangement possible? It is by delving into the structure of thought that one can begin to ask what "we" are in our modernity. The designation of the visible that allows it to be put into language is what he calls a structure. This structure has epistemic constraints, boundaries within which knowledge is possible and of which discourse is an expression which are 'historical a priori's'. This is a fact that distinguishes Foucault's work from "structuralist" human science.

The former coherence between words and things are juxtaposed against what can only amount to an inchoate analysis of our own episteme. Foucault writes; “The threshold between Classicism (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries and Modernity (19<sup>th</sup> Century)(though the terms themselves have no importance – let us say our prehistory and what is still contemporary) had been definitively crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things” (Ibid; 304).

In classical thought, of which Las Meninas is the exemplar, the person for whom representation exists and represents himself within it, is never found in the representation itself. It was impossible for classical thought to know nature and man himself as natural. For 19<sup>th</sup> Century thought the relation is between signs in which man becomes subject and object of knowledge with limits to his representations of himself, insofar as his representations point to other representations and not to an identity. The mutation can be characterized as one from classical thought in which words and things have a necessary and transparent connection to the modern episteme where the order belongs to “things themselves in their interior law” (Ibid; 318). These representational relations are the product of man’s labour, his organism, his arts and the things he says about himself. Man in his being is no longer the truth of his representations which used to have a “common locus” with his representations, but is governed by his representations – the truths he can say about himself, man is, as Canguilhem showed us with nature, what he does. Whether an analytic of finitude is adequate to grasp man in his capacity to make, say and do is I think the question that Milbank, Bergson and de-Lubac pose, even if they are still caught up in Foucault’s diagnosis of the struggle for re-constituting a metaphysic of life, labour and language after the metaphysic of representation. One may disagree that the problem of metaphysics is the right problem for the work on the logos of *anthropos* today, but as a question it poses the limit to the limit of the analytic of finitude for grasping *anthropos*’ being as *anthropos*’ doing.

### *Cassirer and the Renaissance*

Cassirer, as we will see with Louis Dumont, approaches the topic of the individual in the Renaissance from a universal point of view. As he says, this view in no way coincides with an empirical universality [Cassirer, 19635]. Why then take this point of view? He wants to reconnect ‘philosophical thought’ (which is undoubtedly connected to his philosophical anthropology of symbolic forms) to the intellectual movement in the Renaissance which sought a new “universal life”. This search for a new life required a ‘new cosmos of thought’, which is part of the problem space laid out by Dupre – the destruction of a prior synthesis and the search for a new cosmos. He poses a problem which again we will re-visit in Dumont’s comparative ideological work on India and “the West”, namely, how did a qualitatively ordered hierarchical life and the transcendent metric of evaluating ‘things’ in relation to this hierarchy, come to be a problem? As Mario Domandi writes, Cassirer “shows how the hierarchical, neo-Platonic view of the cosmos, with its qualitative differences between the various strata that constitute the spiritual and physical universe, gave way to the ideas of homogeneity of nature and the essential similarity of historical phenomena, making it possible to deal with both scientifically” (Ibid; viii). This will be his later strategy in the fourth volume of *Das*

*Erkenntnis Problem* the only volume to be translated into English where his task was to take the reader through the transformation of thought in the nineteenth century from geometrism of thought to historicism.

The 'great' transformations in modernity usually named as the evolution of scientific method in the seventeenth century are traced by Cassirer to transformations in philosophy and theology in the Italian humanist writers Cusanus and Giordano Bruno, approximately a century before Galileo. Cassirer's method is "Hegelian" insofar as he considers philosophy to embody the spirit of an age and is "Weberian" insofar as 'figures' representing types can be opposed and in their opposition contribute to the perception of the spirit of an age which can given meaning in relation to a previous epoch such as the 'Middle Ages'. This narrative is different to both Dupre and Milbank insofar as the former names his historical hermeneutic strategy in contrast to a formal history of ideas, of which Cassirer's certainly is and the latter contests a philosophically Hegelian historical narrative from the position of a catholic metanarrative on the historical process.

The transformation Cassirer is interested in is the following: From Aquinas to Cusa. The Medieval search for absolute truth in which man must go beyond the limit of his existence and with it give up the autonomy of his reason and existence but also find his reason in the absolute was embodied in the thought of Aquinas. The Renaissance characteristic of thought was that the universal is found within this world and specifically is now mediated by an individual consciousness. The figure of Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) is identified as crucial for understanding the difference between these two forms of thought. As Dumondi writes, "the meaning of his life and experience is not defined by his relation to God, nor is it rendered nugatory in the face of God's omnipotence. On the contrary, the very need for God seems dependent upon the character of that experience. In Petrarch's mind, God's place is determined through and related to the entirety of Petrarch's own experience. And that is precisely the kind of consciousness of individual self and its value that Cassirer considers a Renaissance trait." (Ibid; xi)

Cassirer considers Cusa among the most significant crystallizations of the transformation between modes of thought and the demand for a new cosmos of thought. He is significant because he took up the old problem of knowledge inherited from Scholasticism and approached it with a single principle which "presented itself to him as a new fundamental truth" (Ibid; 8). Echoing Blumenberg we must remind ourselves that Cusa is answering 'old' questions, with new means. This new fundamental truth was a vision and an intuition but to say that '*docta ignorantia*' – the principle of his new truth - and the coincidence of opposites are just Byzantine mysticism would to be miss the point.

Scholasticism had already assimilated Pseudo-Dionysius (the Areopagite) which in addition to being Eastern Christian Orthodox 'mystical' texts of the sixth century were given a place in the Scholastic corpus because they could be read in line with Thomas' thought which shaped medieval Latin Christian conceptions of God and the world. In the Areopagite's work "the problem of hierarchy is presented in all its sharpness and metaphysical breadth" (Ibid; 9). These texts are part of a corpus of Patristic texts on the Divine economy in which, to quote

Cassirer “the infinite passes over to the finite on this path and the finite returns back to the infinite. The whole process of redemption is included in it: It is the Incarnation of God, just as it is the deification of man” (Ibid). Participation in the Divine economy is order in a graduated cosmos. This is how Areopagite could be read in line with Thomas. To what extent this is a reading of the Areopagite through Latin commentaries I leave as a question to specialists, but what is important is that the Eastern tradition was not essentially contra the Scholastic cosmology, with the implication that Cusa’s innovation relative to scholastic thought was not ‘just’ mystical intuition born of time spent in the Byzantine Empire – his revelation of the principle of the coincidence of opposites happens as he was travelling back from Constantinople.

The reason that Cassirer can call Cusa the first modern thinker was certainly not his indebtedness to sixth century Christian texts but rather the transformation of the opposition between finite and infinite from a dogmatic statement to something ‘known’ that is “conceived of through the conditions of human knowledge” (Ibid; 10). He asks not about God, but about the possibility of knowledge about God.

The problem, for Cusa, is that knowledge presupposes comparison – this thing I know I know in part because it is not that – and comparison requires a common metric relative to the same quantitative order. This is a problem because the infinite lies beyond measurement. Knowledge of the infinite cannot be fulfilled by the condition of homogeneity. In addition to what would become Occam’s shaking of the grounds of Scholastic Logic we have Cusa’s insight that there is no rational method of thought to close the gap that would constitute knowledge. Once Cusa had laid out the problem of measurement as crucial to the problem of knowledge of the infinite the next necessary point was to explain how Aristotle’s logic, crucial to the Scholastics, was a logic only of the finite as all its concepts are concepts of comparison. The problem for Cusa is that the content of Scholastic thought, God, contradicts its form, logic.

Whilst for Cusa God was not ‘accessible’ through logic or the interrelation of concepts, his position is not anti-intellectual. Cassirer suggests it is an intellectual mysticism which privileges intellect over will. Participation in God for Cusa presupposes knowledge because “no one can love what he has not in some sense known” (Ibid; 13). Cusa thus articulates a new mode of knowledge in which the unknowability and knowability of God coincide. This mode is the ‘intellectual vision’ which needs to be contrasted with two other modes; first Scholastic privileging of the ‘discursive concept’ - against which the vision takes us beyond conceptual differences - (Ibid; 14) and The Areopagite’s understanding of ‘theosis’ – whereas for the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Eastern theologian deification takes place in a determined series of steps (movement, illumination, union) for Cusa *theosis* is “a single act, one in which man puts himself into an immediate relationship with God” (Ibid). What Cassirer identifies as so ‘modern’ about Cusa is that whereas in the Eastern Church emphasis is laid on experience only, a pure mysticism, his ‘intellectual vision’ proposed a ‘self-movement’ of the mind. Whilst this may sound a little anachronistically Hegelian what is important is that this mode of knowing is not a passive contemplation, but reliant on mathematics as the “precise symbol of speculative thought and of the speculative vision that resolves contraries” (Ibid).

Methodologically, Cassirer paints a picture of dissatisfaction on Cusa's part of the juxtaposition of philosophies and looks towards mathematics as that mode of knowing through which contradictions – between the visible and the invisible – constitute the possibility of knowledge. The dissatisfaction is with the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus which produces the concept of 'emanation' as a means of keeping the transcendence of Plato's philosophy while using Aristotle's insight that reality is one and that this reality is explained by 'development' in order to resolve the tension between opposed 'forms'.

Plotinus's 'resolution' of the tension between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle was crucial for the concept of *theosis* developed by the Areopagite. Given his critique of Aristotle's logic, Cusa had to rethink the relation of participation (*methexis*) and separation (*xorismos*) necessary to a relation between the finite and the infinite. Cassirer characterizes Cusa's thought as a negative theology thought with a positive theory of experience. The consequence for his cosmology is that it brings him into conflict with medieval physics. Predicated on Aristotle's four elements medieval physics posited an ordered space within the graduated cosmos. Because Cusa does not grant any proximity or distance between the finite and the infinite all finite differences are annihilated relative to the absolute. What we have then is relative differences in a homogenous space. Finite space is then not opposed along a gradation with the infinite but rather opposed along the principle of participation *and* separation. Every 'point' in finite space is held in a participatory relation to the absolute. This insight relative to the physical world (*de docta ingortantia*) is read in relation to spiritual beings (*de pace fidei*); Cassirer writes, "Individuality is not simply a limitation rather it represents a particular value that may not be eliminated or extinguished. The One that is beyond being can only be grasped through this value. According to Cusanus, a theodicy of religious forms and practices is attainable only by means of this thought" (Ibid; 28) the term religion although in its contemporary meaning only assumed it in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century at least etymologically it meant the forms and practices of tying oneself to the divine. Cusa represents a transformation of thought, not reducible to his own thought but indicative of a shift which includes Cusa's early education in the Brother's of the Common Life and the religious movement known as the *devotio moderna* which advocated the studying of texts to fasten an individual to the divine.

The manner in which the individual took on the place of importance is traced by Cassirer from Gerard Groote, founder of the Brotherhood to Meister Eckhart. Cassirer writes of Eckhart's thought that "the mystery of the incarnation cannot be explained, nor even merely described, by any analogy taken from the world of nature or the world of history. The place where this miracle of the Incarnation occurs is the soul of man as such, i.e. as single individual soul" (Ibid; 33). The absolute can only be known through the limitation of its opposite, the individual.

However, Cassirer suggests that this leaves Cusa with a problem, and the problem is a choice between the contemplation of the 'negative' and the 'positivity' of experience. Cassirer makes a bold move by interpreting book 3 of *de docta ignorantia*, usually excised as a dogmatic theological appendix, as "the dialectical transformation of his basic idea ... the consciousness of difference implies the mediation of difference. But this mediation cannot in turn, mean that the infinite, the absolute being stands in some relation to the finite, empirical consciousness of self – we still cannot jump over that abyss. In place of the empirical there must be a general self; in place of the human

being as an individual particular existence, there must be the spiritual content of all humanity. This ... Cusanus sees in Christ" (Ibid; 39).

What Cassirer is pointing to is that in Cusa's thought the relation between the individual, consciousness and the Absolute undergo a change. Knowledge no longer simply aims at reproduction of reality divinely ordered. Rather, knowledge implies a mediating subject for creative activity held in a unity which is the spiritual content of 'humanity' (Pico's *Oration on Human Dignity* is a crucial text in terms of the development of this thought). The categories are no longer an external ordering force as in the neoplatonic graduated cosmos but are internal to the subject as mediator of the world; "In this foundation of the sciences the creative power of the rational soul reveals itself in both its basic aspects; by virtue of this power the human mind enters into time and yet remains above time understood as mere succession. .. Invention does not come from without; it is simply the material and sensible realization of the concept" (Ibid; 42).

Cusa's philosophical interventions into Scholastic theology can be arrayed under two headings, method and form. Following Duhem's research on Leonardo, Cassirer tells us that Leonardo inherited the problems left by Cusa and the reason he could 'work' on these problems, outside of a theological frame was because, in his words, "both men had the same attitude towards method" (Ibid; 50). This attitude stems from what would become, thanks to Cusa suggests Cassirer, the problem of form in the Renaissance. If, as Cusa claimed, knowledge is definable as measurement, then in Cassirer's terms 'proportion' contains the possibility of measurement. We might also use the term ratio to indicate this relationship between the possibility of knowledge through measurement under the banner of 'form'. For Cusa this knowledge and the form of mathematical knowledge was not for its own sake but for a foundation for the possibility of knowing God. However, as with Bergson we see a bifurcation of thought – exact science and mystical participation - and Cassirer gives us the figures of Campanella and Leonardo to represent this bifurcation. Indeed we are told that what he had tried to reconcile intellectually actually diverged in his life due to political conditions (Cf. Ibid; 60).

From Cusa, the direction of the problems of form and method can lead either to a renewed metaphysics or to an exact science of nature (Ibid; 53). In both cases, as metaphysics and as exact science (and indeed for the metaphysics underlying the exact sciences) the form of mathematical knowledge had become the possibility of foundations of meaning in a cosmos which was no longer graduated and penetrable through syllogistic logic. Whilst Cusa broke the content of Scholastic thought he still spoke in Latin and was within the textual tradition of the Latin rite. With the bifurcation and the growing capacities and unique individual capacities of Italian 'discoverers' such as Leonardo a new organ was needed to express the turn away from 'letters' and towards experience. This organ was the *volgare* understood as "an independent form of expression" (Ibid; 57). As a scientist recently remarked at one of our annual conferences; "every time I hear Rabinow speak, I learn a new word".

Dumont, as we will see, considers individualism as the institutionalization of an outworldly individual. Whilst Cassirer's thesis does not historically aid any such thesis, Cassirer's thesis regarding Cusa, that he found a means of posing the problem of knowledge by a new means of 'justifying' the world and inquiry into the world, which contra what Cassirer actually says, is not any such 'secularization' thesis. It is, as we saw before, a question of how to pose the question of knowledge as the question of human capacity to create as the mediating point of that creation; "Because he is the representative of the universe and the essence of all its powers, man cannot be raised to the divine without simultaneously raising the rest of the universe by virtue of and within the process of man's own ascension" (Ibid; 64)

Echoing what would become the major problem of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the Catholic Church and specifically at the Second Vatican Council the question of the relation between nature and grace is reworked in Cusa's thought away from "Pauline-Augustinian dogma of predestination" (Ibid; 65) and towards the idea of self-movement of the soul. Cassirer reads this, through Ficino, as a rendition of redemption which precludes mediation or the instruments of mediation ('absque medio' such as the church) and as such sees in this Renaissance figure the road to the Reformation. 'The world' becomes the medium through which man acts to become conscious of himself in his capacity to give form and through this form giving - and this ratio - to know.

What is the status of the question of limits/infinity in relation to man's capacities in relation to the Absolute? Cusa distinguishes between three forms of the infinite; absolute, relative-mind, and relative-world. The absolute infinite is the unattainable to the human mind, the mind becomes limit in relation to the absolute. The relative infinite of the world is reflected in a universe without spatial limits. The relative infinity of mind recognizes no limits to the 'striving' of intellect, but a limit to the form in which it can know. Knowledge both poses the question of limits and puts itself outside the limits by the ability to pose the question, the possibility of knowledge (this sounds a little bit Kantian). As Cassirer writes, "the mind is raised above time one and for all by its knowledge of time" (Ibid; 70). The representation by the intellect to itself of knowledge is the condition for Cusa's "coincidence of opposite". The possibility of Kant posing the limit to what man can know through his capacity to pose the question shows the outside to this limit, whether transcendent or transcendental.

This representation of man to himself is perhaps best exemplified in the Renaissance in the transition from the old image of 'fortune' which was the figure of Fortune with a wheel to Fortune as the figure of man in sailboat. One might say that this transformed figure hybridizes the stoic conception of life as test within the opening plane of history which Koselleck narrates. This figurative transformation moves the reader from the philosophical change (from Scholastic logic to 'mathematics' as the representational form of man's possibility of grounded knowledge) to the institutional. In this move we leave Cusa and take up Lorenzo Valla's work *De libero arbitrio* and his legal criticism of the textual authority of Papal claims to secular dominion. The ethical counterpart of this, in Cassirer's reading, is that whilst Valla never attacks the content of faith he attacks the institutional form (Ibid; 79). What is significant is that he is read as a precursor of the Reformation formulation of faith over works and the distinction between spheres of creation. With this we have echoed Dupre's analysis in which theos – anthropos – physis are

involved in a double separation, first of the “Maximum” in Cusa’s language, from anthropos and cosmos and then in Valla’s legal-ethical critique the justification for a sphere of ‘subjective’ faith opposed to the natural world of which Da Vinci’s spirit is exemplary. Or indeed Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on human dignity* which Cassirer following Burckhardt characterizes as summarizing “ with grand simplicity and in pregnant form the whole intent of the Renaissance and its entire concept of knowledge. In this oration we can clearly see the polarity upon which is based the whole of the moral and intellectual tension so characteristic of the Renaissance. What is required of man’s will and knowledge is that they be completely turned towards the world and yet completely distinguish themselves from it” (Ibid; 86).

How was a differentiation between speculation and experience, or between ‘thought’ and calculation achieved? Through what path did it become possible to have a Copernican revolution? The content of the old cosmology had to be negated and then it had to be given a new form with methodological foundation. Cassirer cites the transition through Averroism of astrology into both a practice and form of knowledge with theoretical grounds (Ibid; 105) as the forerunner to a purely mathematical conception of the study of the cosmos.

In the final chapter of the work, Cassirer takes Descartes not as the ‘beginning’ of modern philosophy – as a historically unmediated event - but as the outcome of the transformations in philosophy and theology through the fifteenth century. That which Cassirer wants to trace is less a unity to Renaissance thought and more to show the decompositions and recompositions necessary for the ‘specifically modern’ view of the relation of ‘subject’ to ‘object’. By specifically ‘modern’ Cassirer refers to the manner in which the motions of separation and participation constitute a way of knowing the object, namely, through “consciousness”. We must not over sell how ‘modern’ this view of ‘nature’ and “man” is in the early sixteenth Century but it is safe to say that a theorization of nature was emerging which laid a foundation for nature as a domain which could be described in itself – rather than through scholastic categories of thought – and experimented on as an object to find out its inner logic and principles. This foundation for a future experimental science oscillates between mathematics and experience, a theme developed and unpacked in Daston and Galison’s recent history of *Objectivity* (Daston and Galison, 2007).

The problem of form was the central problem of the Renaissance. What does this mean? Rather than the categories of the graduated cosmos ordering knowledge of the world, self and the absolute, with the philosophical transformations we have traced, the individual as ‘subject’ of the knowledge must give that possibility of knowing a form, which means a ratio and a metric. The ratio and metric is inspired from many sources, both ‘revelation’ and observation of the ‘natural’ world. It is in this motion between man’s capacity and demand to give form and the matter and inspiration which structures that form giving that the problem of freedom and necessity is constituted in a reciprocal relationship (Cassirer, 1963; 161). Leonardo constitutes this relationship through mathematics and this is why Cassirer wishes to make the genetic link between Leonardo and Cusa; “the ideality of mathematics lifts the mind to its greatest heights and brings it to its true perfection. It thrusts aside the medieval barrier between nature and mind and between the human and divine intellect” (Ibid). With this Cassirer is highlighting how mathematics as

a foundational form of knowing structures the experience and knowledge of matter and thought through the 'individual'.

### *Nihilism and anthropology*

Nihilism, understood as the equivalence of everything, is a modern problem. It is a problem of language, politics and ethics in which meaningful differentiation is leveled. Even anthropology, the study of man or the inquiry into the reasoned discourses by which forms of the human thing are made object and subject of knowledge for that being, has not escaped this cultural and historical process. It has perhaps contributed to it. In American cultural anthropology this process was accelerated with two responses in American social science (Rabinow, 1987), firstly the Boasian critique of cultural evolution and secondly what would through Parsons and finally Geertz become the symbolic school of anthropology, which, while trying to limit the overly broad and thereby intellectually unfruitful concept of culture ended up 'bracketing' both truth (given that cultures are relative) and seriousness (I as anthropologist acknowledge the difference of the other and study the other in order to translate their difference into terms I and the small group of people in the audience at the AAA can understand).

The symbolic school of anthropology replaced a formal category of 'humanity' a universal category filled by the particular cultural whole in question with an evolutionary picture of culture. This picture is of culture as an evolutionary development, not as an epiphenomenon of 'humanity' which can then be distinguished from that underlying humanity and then ranked in the vein of 19<sup>th</sup> C evolutionism but as the mediation of social, that is to say functional existence. Anthropology becomes the interpretive handmaiden of sociology's functional descriptions of social action – this is how the society is divided up and then this is what it means to the people who act in this system of functional differentiation. The difficulty that Rabinow points out is that if the Boasian critique admirably bracketed truth in the name of anti-racism then symbolic anthropology left anthropology in the position where we know both that the Other's truth is not my truth and that we can thickly describe, indeed it is our job to thickly describe, the seriousness of the other's meaning making without having to it seriously ourselves. If serious has three general meanings, weight, purpose and danger we can say that by the 1980s anthropology lost its purpose, its weight and its dangerousness as a means of contemplating and being effected by 'things human'. Symbolic anthropology lost the possibility of asking its original Weberian question of significance through the endeavor to describe webs of significance. I have taken up Rabinow's response to this disciplinary problem in a separate fieldstatement.

A different reaction vis-à-vis the question of significance was the effort which took up the work of the French sociological tradition, attempting a truly global anthropology that is not the task of translation into 'western' social science categories. For Louis Dumont, "the essential problem for contemporary thought is to rediscover the

meaning of wholes or systems and structure provides the only logical form as yet available to this end” (Dumont, 1970; 41)

The referent object for Dumont is the unity of mankind and his intention is to show anthropologically the universal rationale of hierarchy which is obscured by the egalitarian ideal instituted in the democratic revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. It is in this sense that reflection on caste as part of a whole can offer reflections on “ourselves” (Ibid, 1) and can put “modern society in perspective in relation to the societies which have preceded it or which co-exist with it” (Ibid, 2). Dumont asks, if one leaves the shelter of one’s own “values”, namely egalitarianism and the “value” of the individual, then man may not begin with the Declaration of the Rights of Man. In his study “there is nothing like an attack... on modern values ... it is only a question of attempting to grasp other values intellectually” and by doing this see the contrast with ourselves which would mean to take an anthropological view of our own values. Through his text we will travel a circuit, from ourselves to caste and from caste to ourselves, a classic anthropological move but with not only a formal universal intent, but rather a substantive global intent. As he writes in the introduction to *Essays on Individualism*, to which we shall return, on the distinction between methodological individualism and holism “...British and American anthropologists, for all their inclination towards individualism and nominalism they derive from their culture, have been unable to do without the sociology of Durkheim and his nephew Mauss” (Dumont, 1986; 2).

In *Homo Hierarchicus* Dumont’s starting point is that caste is not just a form of social stratification, a term used to diagnose ‘modern’ society. By taking a concept foreign to the context we miss the role of a set of different values, beliefs and ideas – ideology - in structuring the whole set of relations within which Indian social and cultural life takes place, regardless of changes that have occurred in Indian societies over millennia. Dumont is testy with a sociological tradition that operates with a general as opposed to universal orientation. He suggests the use of non native categories for comparison is doomed to mid range generalization; This kind of generalization which although he does not specify is basically Ideal-type sociological inquiry, involves for Dumont; “the mere consideration of the *similarities* which allow phenomena taken from different types of societies to be grouped under a common label. But such an approach can only ever achieve the general as opposed to the universal, and with respect to our goal of comparison it represents another short circuit. In sociological studies the universal can only be attained through the particular characteristics, different in each case, of each type of society. Why should we travel to India if not to try to discover how and in what respects Indian society or civilization, by its very particularity represents a form of the universal?” (Dumont, 1970; 3) One wonders given his goal why then he so at ease with the *general* category of “the West”, characterized as “modern” and hence individualistic and egalitarian (which “we “consider an adequate expression social life) with which to contrast his India.

Society, for sociology, is a collection of monads, a “non human residuum” which is the result of the individualistic mentality bequeathed to sociology due to its confusion of its object’s ideals with the actual facts. Dumont writes that “while sociology as such is found in egalitarian society, while it is immersed in it, while it even expresses it – in a sense to be seen – it has its roots in something quite different: the *apperception* of the *social*

*nature of man*” (Ibid). As a science of the social, sociology in Dumont’s terms conceives man not in terms of his essence with regards to an “abstract humanity” but as “a more or less autonomous point of emergence of a particular collective humanity, of a *society*. To be real, this way of seeing things must, in the individualistic universe, take the form of an experience, almost personal revelation, and this is why I speak of sociological apperception”

As ‘already Christian’ – that is to say the product of an individualism indebted to the relation with a personal God – for sociology, the social nature of man can only be recognized ‘in’ the individual and by the individual and not through the structure of the whole – unless one counts de Maistre or de Bonlad’s revelatory social theology. This is a different way of posing the same contrast I made earlier between Bergson and Levy-Bruhl.

Dumont opens two lines of inquiry; the first is the individual as a sociological problem. By this means the individual is a sociological problem inasmuch as reflection on the individual causes ‘sociological apperception’ as a reaction, a reaction which questions sociology’s core assumptions about its unit of analysis, the individual. Secondly, starting from equality as a modern value Dumont wants to throw into relief *in our society* its counterpart, hierarchy. In order to inquire into these question he needs an object relation and this relation comprises two mutually opposed configurations: traditional societies (organized by a logic of order and hierarchy and “Modern society”. This opposition of organizations is not a juxtaposition but a dialectic, there is sublation; detour to ‘modern Western self’ by way of ‘India’ (and these quotation marks are necessary) will show, that man as individual does not ‘really’ exist, for he is by nature social and even when modernity makes him think he is a value in and to himself he still has a social apperception and “lives on social ideas” (Ibid; 10). The realization of man’s “social nature” is not new, but Dumont asks us to look for the sociological reaction to what became understood as individualism and stratification in Rousseau and then, echoing Milbank, in the French Catholic reaction to the Revolution (de maistre / de bonald). Dumont points to the paradox that stratification and even Marx’s philosophical reaction to stratification through the division of labour actually re-inscribed individualism as a value; writing of the social apperception which we can read in Rousseau Dumont suggests that

“the same apperception is present in an indirect form in Hegel’s conception of the State, a conception which Marx rejected, thus returning to individualism pure and simple: a somewhat paradoxical attitude for a socialist... this individualistic tendency, which became established, generalized and popularized from the eighteenth century to the age of romanticism and beyond, was *in fact* accompanied by the modern development of the social division of labour”. The paradox is that we moderns think that society functions as we thought politics should function. The problem for Dumont is the ideology of equality. We moderns think at the level of the individual and act at the level of the collective, whilst simpler societies think at the level of the collective and ‘juxtapose identical particular persons’ (Ibid; 11).

In France, de Tocqueville sees equality developing from the Middle Ages and regards it as providential. A political historical approach might have seen this “leveling” as the outcome of the breakdown of the Holy Roman Empire, the recognition of state sovereignty and the need to levy war resources from multiple sectors of the new

states encouraging the formation of new positions and class mobility with support from the sovereign. De Tocqueville makes this kind of argument in *The Ancien Regime* (that the Revolution was a product and not a cause of a general and providential transformation in social structure) however in the work Dumont cites, Tocqueville's question is the following; why does democracy function well in the United States and not in France? The difference he claims is in the relation of politics and religion. "From the beginning of his book he deplores the fact that in France there had been a divorce between religious men and those who loved liberty". (14) In a functioning democracy, de Tocqueville tells us, church is separated from state, however, 'unlike in France' the political domain should not set itself up as a religion. There needs to be complementarity between religion and politics, not just separation. Dumont writes, "the particular domain of politics, while setting itself up as the absolute within its own sphere, can be no viable substitute for the *universal* domain of religion" (Ibid; 15) this then is the defining logic of Dumont's work, to orient oneself to the universal, which a global sociology (by way of anthropology) should, one looks for a rationale of hierarchy which encompasses all functional domains, like politics. The universal domain, for Dumont, operates on a rationale of hierarchy; "man does not only think, he acts. He has not only ideas, but values. To adopt a value is to introduce hierarchy, and a certain consensus of values, a certain hierarchy of ideas, things and people, is indispensable to social life" (Ibid).

Dumont references Parsons as a step beyond Tocqueville because he takes up the question of the realization of democracy after the point at which Tocqueville leaves us. Parsons combines the recognition that representation dominates action with the question of action in the world as represented. Most sociological accounts try and explain caste from an explanation of "parts", especially via concepts like stratification. Most accounts are "socio-centric" and its chief characteristics are: the reduction of the religious to the non-religious, the tendency to take the part for the whole, either the caste instead of the system or one aspect (separation or hierarchy) instead of all the aspects together.

In his chapter entitled "From system to structure", by focusing on ideology, Dumont can make sense of caste in terms other than class stratification. Without a clear indigenous ideology, the separation and interdependence of groups would be subordinated to "obscure or shamefaced hierarchy" (Ibid; 36), the reason is that in Hindu ideology there is an absolute distinction, ideologically, between power and hierarchical status. Dumont however accepts that whilst his method necessitates privileging the *ideological*, he must account for politico-economic domain of power relations. He does this by making power an 'extraneous factor' that counterbalances ideology *once the extremes* have been located, that is the poles of the ideological system which structure the whole. The system is a structure. System interdependent entities form a whole. A structure is a system of oppositions based on a principle. This principle is purity-impurity and is generalized throughout the division of labour, kinship and consumption of food. Dumont gives an example of the 'extraneous factor' of power when the king or a man of royal caste, an eater of meat, takes precedence over a vegetarian merchant or farmer. He claims this does not make ideology false, but that the empirical fact of structural interdependence needs to be seen on a different 'level' than the ideological fact of structural interdependence.

We owe the term structure to Levi-Strauss and Dumont notes that it comes from phonology. Using a parallel example of quantum physics Dumont tries to show how it is a particularly “modern” way of thinking to separate individual being from the relation it is in, a way of thinking to which the concept of structure is an antidote. “A phoneme has only the characteristics which oppose it to other phonemes, it is not some thing but only the other of others.” (Ibid; 40).

The fundamental unit, for Dumont, is the relation, not the element, an other’s other. Writing of Hobbes, Rousseau and Hegel he says: “these three philosophers are united, and opposed, to the majority of their contemporaries, by the fact that, starting from an apparently or really extremely individualistic position, they reversed it as they went along in order to force the individual to make himself, or to recognize himself as a social man – in the form of a citizen that is, on the political plane; it is this circumstance which hides the true nature of the fact. All three have the distinction of having gone beyond the modern ideology in order to harmonize it with social reality, and this is why they often give offence.” (Ibid; 238

#### *Genesis of the problem*

Dumont’s Maussian project takes up his master’s double methodological caution; that one should maintain the global sociological orientation and that one must maintain a “reciprocal reference of comparison between observer and observed” (Dumont; 1986, 5). The former caution must be distinguished as an orientation to the universal encompassment of that which is being compared in contrast to the orientation to “generalization” of the first British anthropological school of Frazer. The latter caution must be recalled as being the privileged form of difference which Dumont takes up as the ‘modernity’ of the observer with the ‘tradition’ of that observed. Even if one contests the idea that anthropology’s object of concern is per se other than modern, the caution still stands as a question to reflect on how to put the modernity of observation into question for the purpose of an anthropological insight not presupposed in modern ‘values’. As Dumont writes of his project; “it follows that a comparative study of modern ideology does not lie beyond the concern of anthropology” (Ibid; 6). This comparative project oriented to the encompassment of differences can only be done by a greater stress than usual on ‘values’, for comparison of the values leads one to the comparison of hierarchical orderings.

The anthropological approach for Dumont is the classic return to Self by way of the Other. Remaining within the logic and field of modernity will ‘condemn’ inquiry to miss the unity of modernity. One must go external to the modern in order to put it in “perspective”. How can one put a distance on oneself, by questioning the ‘values’ of modernity by way of the principle of hierarchy found in traditional cultures.

His method is textual for reasons of scale and history. He claims the objections to his method will be numerous but says the major one will be that “there is no such thing as a common configuration of ideas and values beyond all the differences between individuals, social milieux, epochs, schools of thought, different languages, and distinct national cultures” (Ibid; 11). The justification for pursuing the project is taken from Polanyi and Mauss, that modern

civilization differs from 'other' civilizations. One wonders whether modern here is a temporal or spatial designation. The objection Dumont claims comes from a nominalist metaphysics which is one of individualism's facets (Ibid).

After making his methodological point, he outlines three axes of research. The first is historical and has three lines of research; the history of the Church to show how "the Christian individual, at the beginning a stranger to the world, found himself more and more involved in it". This history is read somewhat anachronistically from the point of view of the Reformation, a point to which we will have to return<sup>9</sup>. The progress of individualism through the rise of the 'political' as a distinct domain of action (itself a product of the Reformation). And thirdly a reminder of the economic line of inquiry relative to the rise of individualism. Dumont does anthropologically what Milbank does theologically, namely; tells you he will inquire into a genealogy of modernity but in fact presents you a metaphysics of modernity.

The second axis is cultural. Dumont offers a comparative analysis of France and Germany as sub-cultural phenomenon of a formal modern ideology. He focuses on the ideas of nation and self-formation crucial to the German cultural form. The third axis is both cultural and historical taking up the question of National Socialism in relation to modernity.

For Dumont the problem of modernity is the failure to recognize the partialness of modern "values", specifically the value of the individual. As a way of formulating the problem he looked for the genesis of this value which he claims is the figure of the world-renouncer, a figure who plays the same role in "India" and the "West". Dumont's claim following Troeltsch's *Social Teachings of the Christian Church* is that with the institutionalization of the Church, the 'value' of the individual is universalized in society. This is because man is an individual-in-relation-to-God making him absolutely individual and universal, man in his essence, as Dumont says, is an outworldly individual. A dualism is thus posited between the value of the individual and the negation of the world as it is. What is crucial for Dumont is the way in which he can show inworldization of what became understood as the essence of man, outworldiness. He is showing the reader the transformation from a social essence of man to individualist essence of man. By focusing on the early Church and its institutionalization by King Constantine and other historical processes Dumont wants to get a perspective on the major social questions of modernity The State, governance, private property, by not asking from within a logic of 'inworldliness' but rather through a transformation. What is crucial ideologically, Dumont tells us, is that the 'individual-in-relation-to-God' is both an essential value in himself and is equal to all in the brotherhood of the church.

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<sup>9</sup> Troeltsch is ultimately interested in the relation of dogma to contemporary problems: "For at the outset we are faced with the fact that the churches and Christianity, which are pre-eminently historic forces, are at all points conditioned by their past, by the Gospel which, together with the bible, exerts its influence ever anew, and by the dogmas which concern social life and the whole of civilization." [25] The relation of the universal history of the civilization to the Christian ethos is Troeltsch's concern. Troeltsch takes up the Weberian thesis in order to write this history of the connection between a universal civilization and the Christian Ethos. The Church is a vehicle for rationalization and the monastery as a voluntary association is a prototype of a society of contracting individuals. Contrast with Milbank.bvg

The “fall” plays a particularly crucial role in Dumont’s analysis of this transformation, through his reliance on Carlyle and Troeltsch. The Fall accounts for how one can understand political subordination in a tradition that posits the brotherhood of all men in Christ. However, whilst Dumont quotes Irenaeus on the necessity of political subordination given man’s fall he makes explicit that one must treat Augustine separately for he “renews the conceptual framework that he inherits” (Ibid; 38). Crucially, this kind of specificity comes not from reading Troeltsch, as he says in footnote eleven, as the text on Augustine was unavailable, but rather he relies on Etienne Gilson. Gilson’s reading is very much in the vein of Bergson’s problem oriented method whereby the inheritance of problems and their reformulation is what counts in the register of significance. This is quite different from Troeltsch’s method whereby the Reformation problem of spheres of creation and individual authority to interpret the bible is taken as given as read back into the historical situation. I will return to this in my conclusion but I can flag the question now; depending on whether one follows Troeltsch or Gilson in method the ‘problem’ of modernity begins to look quite different. Is it the problem of the outwardly individual? Or is it, pace Gilson, the problem of our inheritance of Augustine’s problem of the ‘city’, after the Reformation, and its ordering today? For Dumont the problem of the order of the ‘city’ is in fact encompassed by the problem of the individual as value, as the individual as value is the problem of hierarchy and the problem of ordering the city is the problem of reconciling equality before and hierarchical order.

For Dumont, the significance of Augustine is relative to Dumont’s concern for the institutionalization of the outwardly individual; “What Augustine does is to demand that the State should be judged from the world-transcending view point of man’s relation to God that is the Church’s point of view. This is actually a step forward in the imposition of outwardly values to inwardly conditions” (Ibid; 40). Dumont cites two key events, Constantine’s conversion (AD 312) and Gelasius’ theorization of the relation between Church and State. Dumont claims his anthropological perspective will restore the logical structure to the theory of Gelasius which modern ideology misrepresents because it is unwilling to understand it from the view of a hierarchical relation, or more specifically hierarchical complementarity. This means, submission of priests to king’s is the case in worldly affairs, but only worldly affairs making priests “inferior only on an inferior level” (Ibid; 46). Dumont uses Gelasius to back up the point he makes in *Homo Hierarchicus* that authority is distinguished from power. The third key event, and the event which will precipitate the split between Eastern and Western Christianity is the papal assumption of a political function through Leo III’s crowning of Charlemagne as Emperor (AD 800). As Dumont writes, “With the claim to an inherent right to political power, a change is introduced in the relation between the divine and the earthly: the divine now claims to rule the world through the church, and the Church becomes inwardly in a sense it was not heretofore.” (Ibid; 50). The hierarchical complementarity is transformed and the world is given a status different to that previous complementarity under Gelasius’ reasoning. Dumont claims that with the Church becoming ‘more’ worldly, the political realm is made to participate in universalist values, the Christian individual participates in the world and is a forerunner to Dumont’s argument about the development ideologically of the modern state.

Regarding my previous question about Dumont's anachronism vis-à-vis the reformation, he puts the question himself in the following way; "In what sense can Calvin be taken as standing at the end of a process? ... his Church is the last form that the Church could possibly take without disappearing." (Ibid; 53). Calvin is considered as theological culmination of the process of the transformation of outworldly to inworldly individualism. Not only does the Church not mediate the relation between the world and God in Calvinism, even the idea of community is the product of individuals coming together. In Dumont's terms this is significant as any remnants of 'holism' has been transformed into 'individualism'. He cites Troeltsch quoting Schneckenburger; "The Church does not make the believers what they are, but the believers make the church what she is" (Dumont; 58).

For Dumont, as for Dupre, the nominalism of Ockham is traced as a catalyst in the problem of modernity characterized as problem of individualism. When Dumont writes of nominalism, he designates first a distinction with Aquinas' realism, a realism which grants substance to secondary categories and second he points out that "general terms do have some basis in empirical reality, but they signify nothing in themselves, only an imperfect and incomplete knowledge of all real entities, the individual entities (as we may well call them in this view)" (Ibid; 64). From his metaphysical denial of the existence of secondary substances this means he cannot derive any normative conclusions from the general terms we use, such as 'humanity'. "In particular there is no natural law deduced from an ideal order of things; there is nothing beyond the actual law posited either by God, or by man with God's permission. i.e. positive law" (Ibid). This leads to his epistemological conclusion, that the empirical reality is all man has access to and not the ideal order of things. In Ockham's logic we have the start of the break up of Aquinas' synthesis of things and universal ordering categories. Dumont reads this as a precursor to the differentiation between Renaissance and Reformation (see Gilson, Heloise and Abelard, 217-224). This differentiation then manifests itself in political realism of which Machiavelli is the archetype. The realism and positive legal apparatus of Ockham, which was intended to pose the limit of the juridical sphere was in turn transformed into natural law, and what were 'positivities' manifest from divine will became deducible legal categories such as the rights bearing person. As Dumont writes of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, they are in direct conflict with the solution to the problem of individual and the socio-political whole insofar as the fictions of Natural Law are elevated to the level of positive law.

I think it is possible to say that Dumont gives us this genesis of the political category of the rights bearing person in the state in order to link what is generally understood as the distance between liberal and socialist ideas of freedom and equality with the insight from his 1970 text regarding the universal orientation of hierarchy. Hierarchy disappears as a visible object, Dumont claims, when one takes up the nominalist metaphysic, because groups cease to be 'real' objects. With this disappearance goes the distinction between power and authority – all authority is the exercise of power. Authority can then only be understood as the consent of individuals and hence the birth of social contract theory.

Dumont's is concerned with Rousseau as antidote to the problem inherited from Locke and Hobbes. His desire to adequately account for man's freedom and his 'social' essence led him to theorize an identity between

individualism and holism as a solution to the problem of the individual as the political unit of analysis which nonetheless is not adequate to himself. If Rousseau is the precursor although no 'cause' of the Revolution, his thought is significant insofar as it was not made manifest in Revolution but rather only followed partially. In contrast to the total alienation of the member to the community, in the Declaration of the Rights of Man we see a retained bourgeois sensibility over the individual as political unit. In this sense, Dumont wants to show an analogy, although not an identity between the French Catholic reactionary sociology of de Bonald and de Maistre with Hegel, Comte and Tocqueville. Dumont sees in these authors a common task; "the task of redeeming the ideals of the Revolution from the condemnation that history had pronounced on them in their actual manifestation, or of building a political or social theory which would enshrine them in a visible form" (Ibid; 100). In this sense Dumont is inclined to value Tocqueville's *sociological* analysis because rather than positing an Absolute Idealist synthesis of politics and religion as Dumont claims Hegel does in the *Philosophy of Right* Tocqueville shows both that politics cannot encompass the question of ultimate values whilst not leaving the concrete reality of the outcome of the Reformation political settlement and the differentiation of spheres of authority. This then is the *value* of a sociological analysis and insight. In Dumont's terms, "sociology represents in the guise of a specialized discipline that awareness of the social whole which was embedded in common sense in nonindividualistic societies" (Ibid; 103).

#### *Conclusion: Modernity and a Third City?*

Pico's Oration, among other Renaissance texts, focused on the creation of humanity. It did not concern itself with the other foundation of Christian belief, the Fall. The Fall was of course central to Augustinian theology. As MacCulloch writes, "humanist optimism, and with it the whole project of calling on cultures older than Christianity to improve the Christian world, had from the earliest days of humanism clashed with this inheritance from Augustine, who has been as fundamental to western Christianity as he has been more or less ignored by the Greek eastern Churches" (MacCulloch, 2004; 107).

Augustine lived through the sudden collapse of the western Roman imperial system, a disappointment after a decade in the 390s that had seemed to promise a Christian future for the empire. Looking for meaning in the disaster (and having to defend Christianity against the pagans who blamed the fall of Rome on Christian practices) he found an explanation in Paul, man's depravity and the solution, God's grace.

The big problem for Augustine is the problem of sin and salvation. His theological enemy was Pelagius who emphasized that future salvation depended on efforts to live with purity in this life. Augustine counter claimed that sin was biogenetic and hence the Pelagians were wrong to argue that any action could earn salvation. All depends on the grace of God. Predestination became central to Augustine's soteriology. This soteriology, not the individualist force of humanism nor the greed of the old church was the major force behind the breaking of the church. As MacCulloch suggests of writing the history of the Reformation, "social or political history cannot do without theology in understanding the 16th century" (Ibid; 110)

Why did such a restatement of Augustine have such a particular impact at that moment? It was a particular moment where the tension in Augustine's own thinking between on the one side salvation and grace and on the other obedience and the church, became paradigmatic for the problems of the 16th Century. We might pose it as a problem of on the one hand 'nature' and on the other hand hierarchy, which Dumont suggests is the essence of 'social' life in anthropological perspective from a universal point of view. Quoting BB Warfield, MacCulloch suggests that, "the Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the church" (Ibid; 111).

However, it is dangerous, as John Milbank points out, to interpret Augustine as foreshadowing Protestantism by inventing an 'individualistic' understanding of Church, State and the operation of grace. It was rather a Reformation re-formulation of the 'Augustinian' problem of articulating both a doctrine of the Church and a doctrine of grace.

The problem posed and resolved by Augustine is certainly the origin of ours, the one we began with. This problem is that modernity whatever else it is involves the decomposition and recomposition of relations and ratios which produced pathoi and ethoi. If we are 'failing to resolve' our problem, it is because its solution perhaps overly presupposes a solution which was the outcome of the Reformation re-problematization of Augustine's problem. What is our problem today that we can look for the solution to it by reading Augustine? Or by taking up Augustine's problem through its reformulation in the Reformation?

Gilson writes in his 1958 introduction to *The City of God* "if we examine St Augustine's own teaching more closely, we shall see why the notion of a temporal human society, endowed with its own unity and including the whole human race, could not present itself to his mind. The two cities which he describes are, as we have seen, mystical, that is supernatural, in their very essence. The one is the City of Truth, of the good, of order, of peace; it is indeed a true society. The other since it is defined as the denial of the former, is the city of error. Midway between these two cities, of which one is the negation of the other there is situated a neutral zone, where the men of our day hope to construct a third city, which would be temporal like the earthly city, yet just in a temporal way, that is striving towards a temporal justice obtainable by appropriate means."(Augustine 1958; 32)

I offer this as a starting point for a conclusion on the grounds that I have selected 'genealogies' of modernity which all in one way or another deal with the theological and philosophical transformations the authors claim produced this event in the history of thought post-facto understood as 'modernity' – in the guise of 'secular' political authority, a structure of thought or as 'individualism'. A starting point to ask how these multiple claims regarding modernity can be given a form that does not recapitulate old problematizations but rather attempts to address 'our problems' today in relation to these multiple traditions and histories of thought.

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