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The Light of Reason

The Western Ideology

How can we speak of modern society unless we can at least agree upon a general principle that defines modernity? It is impossible to describe as 'modern' a society which tries primarily to organize and to act in accordance with a divine revelation or a national essence. But nor is modernity pure change or a mere sequence of events; it means the diffusion of the products of *rational* activity: scientific, technological and administrative activity. This is why it implies the increasing differentiation of the various sectors of social life – politics, the economy, family life, religion and, in particular, art. Instrumental rationality operates within specific types of activity and prevents any sector from being externally organized on the basis of its integration in to a general vision, or its contribution to the realization of what Louis Dumont calls a holistic societal project. Modernity precludes all finality. The secularization and disenchantment described by Weber (1904–5), who defines modernity in terms of intellectualization, marks the necessary break with the finalism of the religious spirit, which always invokes the end of history, meaning the final fulfilment of the divine project or the destruction of a perverted humanity which has betrayed its mission. The idea of modernity does not preclude the idea of the end of history, as we can see from Comte, Hegel and Marx, who are the great thinkers of historicism. But for them the end of history means, rather, the end of a prehistory and the beginning of a developmental process resulting from technological progress, liberated needs and the triumph of Spirit.

The idea of modernity makes science, rather than God, central to society and at best relegates religious beliefs to the inner realm of private life. The mere presence of technological applications of science does not allow us to speak of a modern society. Intellectual activity

must also be protected from political propaganda or religious beliefs; the impersonality of the law must offer protection against nepotism, political patronage and corruption; public and private administration must not be the instruments of personal power; public and private life must be kept separate, as must private wealth, and State and company budgets.

The idea of modernity is therefore closely associated with that of rationalization. Abandoning one means rejecting the other. But is modernity reducible to rationalization? Is it the history of the progress of reason, and is that history also the history of freedom and happiness, of the destruction of 'traditional' beliefs, loyalties and cultures? The distinctive feature of Western thought, at the point when it identified most strongly with modernity, was the attempt to move from a recognition of the essential role of rationalization to the broader idea of a *rational society* in which reason would take control of not only scientific and technical activity, but also of the government of human beings as well as the government of things. Does this conception have a general value or is it no more than a particular historical experience, albeit one of immense importance? We must begin by describing the conception that views modernity and modernization as the creation of a rational society.

At times, society was imagined to be an order or an architecture based upon computation; at other times, reason became an instrument of individual interests and pleasure. This conception also used reason as a weapon to criticize all powers so as to liberate a 'human nature' that had been crushed by religious authority.

In all cases, rationalization was seen as the sole principle behind the organization of personal and collective life, and it was associated with the theme of secularization, or in other words with a refusal to define 'ultimate ends'.

Tabula Rasa

The most powerful Western conception of modernity, and the one which has had the most profound effects, asserted above all that rationalization required the destruction of so-called traditional social bonds, feelings, customs and beliefs, and that the agent of modernization was neither a particular category or social class, but reason itself and the historical necessity that was paving the way for its triumph. Rationalization, which was an indispensable component of modernity, thus also became a spontaneous and necessary modernizing mechanism. The Western idea of modernity merges with a purely *endogenous* conception of modernization. Modernization is not the achievement of an enlightened despot, a popular revolution or the will of a ruling group; it is the achievement of reason itself, and it is therefore primarily the achievement of science, technology and education. The sole goal of social policies for modernization must be to clear a path for reason by doing away with corporatist rules, defences or customs barriers, by creating the security and predictability required by business, and by training competent and conscientious managers and operatives. The idea may seem banal, but it is not, as the vast majority of countries in the world took very different roads to modernization. In most countries, the desire for national liberation, religious or social struggles, the convictions of new ruling elites or in other words social, political and cultural actors, played a much more important role than rationalization, which was paralysed by the resistance of tradition or private interests. The Western idea of modern society does not even correspond to the real historical experience of the countries of Europe, where religious movements, the glory of the king, the defence of the family and the spirit of conquest, financial speculation and social critiques played as important a role as technical progress and the diffusion of knowledge. It does, on the other hand, provide a model for modernization, for an ideology whose theoretical and practical effects have been considerable.

The West therefore lived and conceived modernity as a *revolution*. Reason takes nothing for granted; it sweeps away social and political beliefs and forms of organization which are not based upon scientific proofs. As Allan Bloom remarks (1987: 164):

> What distinguished Enlightenment from earlier philosophy was its intention to extend to all men what had been the preserve of only a few: the life lived according to reason. It was not 'idealism' or 'optimism' that motivated these philosophers but a new science, a 'method', and allied with them, a new political science.

For centuries, the moderns looked for a 'natural' model for the scientific understanding of society, be it a mechanical model, an organicist or a cybernetic model, or one based upon a general theory of systems. And their attempts to find a model were always based on the conviction that if the past were swept away, it would be possible to free human beings from inherited inequalities, irrational fears and ignorance.

The Western ideology of modernity, which we can describe as modernism, replaced the idea of the Subject and the related idea of God, just as meditations on the soul were replaced by the dissection of corpses or the study of the synapses of the brain. According to the

modernists, neither society, history nor individual lives were determined by the will of a supreme being to whom one had to submit, or who could be influenced through magic. The individual was subject only to natural laws. Jean-Jacques Rousseau is part of this philosophy of Enlightenment because, remarks Jean Starobinski (1957), the whole of his work is dominated by a search for transparence and by a struggle against the obstacles that obscure knowledge and communication. The same spirit inspires his work as a naturalist, his musicological innovations, his critique of society and his educational programme. The spirit of the Enlightenment wanted to destroy not only despotism but also intermediary bodies, and the French Revolution did so. Society had to be as self-transparent as scientific thought. That idea is still very present in the French idea of the Republic, and in the conviction that the Republic is primarily the repository of the universal ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. This paves the way for both liberalism and a potentially absolute form of power which is rational and communitarian. *The Social Contract* (Rousseau 1762a) heralded that power, and the Jacobins tried to construct it. It is the goal of all revolutionaries who seek to construct a power which is absolute because it is scientific, and which is intended to protect the transparency of society against arbitrary power, dependency and the spirit of reaction.

What applies to society also applies to the individual. The education of the individual must be a discipline which frees him from the narrow and irrational vision forced upon him by his family and his own passions. It must expose him to rational knowledge and prepare him to be part of a society which organizes the action of reason. The school must be a place which allows him to reject his background and which exposes him to progress, in the form of both knowledge and membership of a society based upon rational principles. The teacher is not an educator who intervenes in the private lives of children, and children are not mere pupils; the teacher is a mediator between them and the universal values of truth, good and beauty. The school must also replace privileged individuals, who are heirs to a discarded past, with an elite recruited through the impersonal ordeal of competitive examinations.

Nature, Pleasure and Taste

This revolutionary and liberating image of modernity is, however, not enough, and it must be completed by the positive image of a world governed by reason. Should we be speaking of a scientific or a rational society? This project was to lead revolutionaries to create a new society and a new man, and to impose, in the name of reason, much greater constraints than those imposed by absolute monarchies. Communist regimes were to construct a scientific socialism which had more in common with the iron cage described by Weber (1904–5: 181) than with freedom from need. The Enlightenment philosophers of the eighteenth century gave a very different answer: the arbitrariness of religious ethics must be replaced by an understanding of the laws of nature. Yet, if man is not to renounce his humanity as he lives in harmony with nature, an appeal to reason is not enough, firstly because it is not easy to reconcile arguments which result in a diversity of opinions and laws, and secondly because it is impossible to enforce the rule of reason in the same way that belief in a revealed truth can be enforced. It therefore has to be demonstrated that submission to the natural order of things is a source of pleasure, and that it corresponds to the rules of taste. This had to be proved in both the aesthetic realm and the ethical domain. This is what Jean Ehrard (1970: 205) calls 'the great dream of the century: humanity at peace with itself and with the world, and living in spontaneous harmony with the universal order'. Pleasure corresponds to the order of the world. As the same author remarks (1970: 187):

> Just as the reason of the mathematician is in harmony with the general laws of physical nature, so the man of taste spontaneously perceives the truth of absolute Beauty. A providential harmony ensures that the definition of the ideal Good coincides with the hedonistic laws of taste. An absolute is thus revealed within the relativity of pleasure.

It is Locke who formulates this conception of human beings (Locke 1690). He rejects Cartesian dualism, and therefore the idea of substance and the Cartesian conception of innate ideas; more specifically, he rejects the central role Cartesianism gave to the idea of God. Self-consciousness is no different to consciousness of things, and man's experience of his identity implies the unity of body and soul. The understanding does not give things a form; it is a reflection based upon sensations, and Locke stresses its passivity. Locke thus defines thought as having no transcendental guarantee, and as being detached from God: reason is purely instrumental. Nature imprints itself on man through his desires and the happiness that comes from acceptance of the law of nature or the misfortunes that befall those who disobey it.

Naturalism and recourse to instrumental reason are complementary, so much so that the combination will endure throughout the entire modern era until Freud, who, to borrow Charles Taylor's image, describes the Ego as a navigator who is trying to find his way between the pressures of the Self, the Super-Ego and social organization.

Similarly, the ethical thought of the Enlightenment is dominated by the idea of man's natural goodness. Virtue moves him, and makes him shed tears of joy and tears of pity. It is a source of rapture. And if man fails to follow the path of virtue, it is because he, like Des Grieux in *Manon Lescaut* (Prevost 1731), is a victim of fate or a corrupt society. The language of the heart must make itself heard despite the lies of words, and Marivaux's plays dramatize love's triumph over the prejudices of education. Yet the triumph of good would not be possible if virtue were not a source of pleasure. 'So as to make the creature's happiness complete,' said Diderot, 'the favourable opinion of the mind is accompanied by the delicious and almost divine stirrings of the heart.'

Without being as pessimistic about human nature as Pascal or La Rochefoucauld, one wonders if it is in fact the case that only the good can be a source of pleasure. Sade is more convincing when he describes the pleasure of coercing, subjugating and humiliating the object of one's desire, and causing him or her to suffer. This conception of reason as a rational organization of pleasures will become more and more difficult to accept. Why should we now describe as 'rational' forms of mass consumption which have more to do with a search for social status, a desire to seduce, or aesthetic pleasure? The spirit of the Enlightenment was that of an educated elite of nobles, bourgeois and intellectuals *avant la lettre*, and they enjoyed their pleasures because these pleasures were liberating and, especially in Catholic countries, gave them the satisfaction of scandalizing the Church. Yet, as Edmund Leites has recently demonstrated (Leites 1986), even in puritanism, the idea of constancy made it possible, especially in the United States, to reconcile self-control with a rational search for sexual pleasure. The link between reason and pleasure was supplied by discourse and, if we understand the word in its secondary sense, rationalization. The primary goal of this ethics and this aesthetic is not, however, to construct an image of man; it is to eliminate all images of man and to eradicate all references to Christianity's teachings about the divine law and the existence of the soul, or in other words the presence of God within every individual. The main thing is to break free of all dualist thought and to establish a naturalist vision of man. This is to be understood in more than a purely materialist sense because in the Enlightenment era, the idea of *nature* had a much wider meaning than it does today. As Cassirer explains (1932: 242) so well:

> For the term 'nature' does not predicate merely the sphere of physical being from which the mind and soul is to be distinguished; it does not oppose the 'material' to the 'spiritual'. 'Nature' at that time does not refer to the existence of things but to the origin and foundation of truths. To nature belong, irrespective of their content, all truths which are capable of a purely immanent justification, and which require no transcendent revelation but are certain and evident in themselves. Such truths are now sought not only in the physical but also in the intellectual and moral world; for it takes these two worlds together to constitute a real world, a cosmos complete in itself.

The main function of this concept of nature and of reason is to *unite man and the world*. This had already been done by the idea of creation, which was more often associated with than contrasted with the idea of nature, but the new concept made it possible for human thought and action to act upon nature by understanding and respecting its laws and without relying upon a revelation or the teachings of Churches.

Social Utility

The function of this appeal to nature is primarily critical or antireligious in that it is an attempt to give good and evil foundations which are neither religious nor psychological, but purely social. The idea that society is a source of values, that the good is what is *useful* to society and that anything which interferes with its integration and efficacy is evil is an essential element in the classical ideology of modernity. If men are no longer to submit to the law of the father, it must be replaced by the interests of brothers, and the individual must be subordinated to the interests of the collectivity. The Protestant and Catholic reformations produced the most religious version of this theme: the identification of the spiritual with the temporal took the form of an attempt to create a community of saints. When the Swabian peasants published their Twelve Articles in 1525 – a date which marks the beginning of the Peasants' War in Germany – they defined themselves as a community or Church. As a result they refused to allow priests to own land in their own right; they should be paid by the community. This text, which has been well analysed by Emmanuel Mendes Sargo (1985), is close to the later spirit of Calvinist Geneva, but it is also similar to the policy of the Jesuits who tried to convince Princes that they should rule *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Before long, however, this vision became secularized, and the interest of the collectivity replaced the appeal to communal faith. Machiavelli's admiration for the struggle of the citizens of Florence against the Pope led him to formulate a new concept of politics: their love of their native city outweighed their fears for the salvation of

their souls. This is why the Renaissance and subsequent centuries so readily turned to examples borrowed from Ancient Greece and Rome. Antiquity made a virtue of civic morality and recognized citizenship within a free *polis* as the supreme good.

The formation of a new way of thinking about politics and society is an essential corollary to the classical idea of modernity, which is associated with the idea of secularization. *Society* replaces God as the principle behind moral judgement and becomes, rather than an object of study, a principle that can explain and evaluate behaviour. Social science was born as a political science. It originally developed in the course of struggles against the Popes and Emperors whose interests were defended by Occam and Marsilius of Padua, but the major factor was Machiavelli's insistence on judging political institutions and actions without falling back upon moral, or in other words, religious criteria. Then came the idea, which was common to Hobbes (1651) and Rousseau (1762a) – and very different to Locke's analysis (Locke 1689) – that the social order is created by a decision on the part of individuals who submit to the power of Leviathan or to the general will, as expressed in the social contract. Hobbes's analysis predates the others, and represents the first great study of society to have been made since Machiavelli. According to Hobbes (1651: 91), the original condition of man is one of 'war of every one against every one', as 'every man has a right to every thing' (*jus in omnia*). The fear of death that results from this universal hostility leads to the establishment of peace, as all men surrender their individual rights to an absolute power. This does not abolish the individual's right to rebel against the sovereign, should the latter fail to guarantee the social peace. It would be more accurate to speak in this context of political philosophy rather than sociology as, unlike Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau do not take economic activity as the starting point for their analyses. Nor, unlike Tocqueville's (1835–40), do their analyses begin with cultural or social characteristics. They deal directly with power and its foundations. The idea of a social actor does not play any great role in this political philosophy – and still less does that of social relations. The only thing that matters is that the political order can be founded without recourse to religious principles. This is particularly important for Hobbes, who is criticizing the attempts made by various religious groups in England to justify their attempts to take power with arguments drawn from scripture and from their religious faith. From Loiseau and the jurists to Richelieu and Louis XIV, the formation of the absolutist State in France was similarly based upon the transition from *universitas* to *societas*. Bossuet's thought was discredited as the political and not the divine came to be seen as the social expression of the sacred. The French revolution took this development to extremes by identifying the nation with reason, and public-spiritedness with virtue. All subsequent revolutions imposed increasingly onerous duties on citizens, and the outcome was 'the cult of personality'. Writing at the height of the Enlightenment movement, Diderot contrasts individual passions with the rationality of the general will. Analysing the idea of natural right in the *Encyclopédie*, he writes:

> The man who obeys only his individual will is an enemy of the human race . . . the general will therefore exists within every individual. It is a pure act of the understanding which decides in the silence of the passions what a man may demand of his fellow and what his fellow is entitled to demand of him.

In very different terms, Rousseau attempts to defend a principle of citizenship which breaks with the inequality that dominates what the Scottish thinkers of his age were beginning to call civil society. For Hobbes, writing in the seventeenth century, and for Rousseau, writing in the eighteenth, the social order is neither bourgeois nor sacred, and must be based upon a free decision. That free decision itself is, however, an expression of the general will.

For Rousseau, the widely-used expression 'the general will' has a rationalist meaning. He firmly rejects the view that the general will defends the interests of the majority or the Third Estate; it applies only to the general problems of society, and therefore to its very existence, and what can that universalism be based upon, if not reason? There exists a natural order in to which man must be able to insert himself. When, acting under the influence of his desires and ambitions, he leaves that order, he abandons that natural existence and moves in to the domain of evil where individuals are divided and in conflict. The social contract brings about the appearance of the sovereign. The sovereign is both society itself, which, provided that it is on a small scale, constitutes a social body, and reason. Like all the philosophers of the Enlightenment, Rousseau refuses to see divine revelation as the organizing principle behind society and replaces it with reason. Rousseau's Sovereign anticipates Durkheim's collective consciousness, just as his thought, like that of Hobbes before him, lies at the origin of all sociologies that define the principal functions of a society and evaluate modes of behaviour in terms of the positive or negative contribution they make to integration and the ability of institutions to control personal passions and interests. Durkheim is in that sense an heir to the political philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which was for a long time eclipsed by the

triumph of historicism and the representation of society as a field for social conflicts between future and past, interest and tradition, and public life and private life. One of the great representational models of social life is beginning to take shape, and it centres on a correspondence between system and actors, institutions and socialization. Human beings are no longer created in God's image; they are social actors defined by roles, or in other words by modes of behaviour related to their status, and their behaviour must contribute to the smooth workings of the social system. Because human beings are what they do, they must no longer look beyond society, or to God, their own individuality or origins, for definitions of good and evil: their criteria must be what is useful or harmful to the survival and workings of the social body.

In this classical social thought, the notion of society – which we will go on using in this book to refer to a concrete aggregate defined by frontiers, recognized sources of authority, organs for the application of laws and a sense of belonging – takes on a different meaning. It is explanatory and not descriptive, as society and positions occupied within society are elements which explain modes of behaviour and their evaluation. This sociologism is a central element in the modernist vision.

This vision is reinforced by the optimism of an essay by Shaftesbury which was translated by Diderot's. Man, it is argued, is upright or virtuous when, without any ignoble or servile motives, he forces all his passions to conspire for the general good of his species; this requires a heroic effort and yet it never goes against his individual interests. It has to be admitted that this idea is as weak as theories about man's natural goodness or the correspondence between virtue and pleasure. And Mandeville's critique of the social order (Mandeville 1714) is as devastating as Sade's critique of the moral order. How can anyone deny the strength of his eulogy of private vices or of his peremptory statement that we must choose between virtue and wealth, salvation and happiness?

The weakness of this ethics, this aesthetic and this politics stems from the fact that the modernist ideology is not very convincing when it attempts to give modernity a positive content, even though it is powerful when it remains critical. The social contract can create a community which is as oppressive as the Leviathan who puts an end to the 'war of every one against every one' by making all submit to an absolute central power, but it was taken to be a call to overthrow powers which were based on nothing but tradition and a divine decision. The conception of modernity elaborated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment is revolutionary, but it is no more than that. It defines neither a culture nor a society; it inspires struggles against traditional society rather than shedding any light on the workings of a new society. We find the same lack of balance in sociology; ever since the end of the nineteenth century, the language of sociology has centred upon the contrast between traditional and modern, community and society (Tönnies), mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim) and ascription and achievement (Linton), the contrasting terms of the axes that define Parsons' 'pattern-variables' or, more recently, Louis Dumont's 'holism' and 'individualism'. In every case, the term defining modern society remains vague, rather as though only traditional society were organized around a positively defined principle and were therefore capable of managing institutional systems, and as though modern society were defined negatively in terms of its ability to dissolve the old order and not its ability to construct a new order.

The explanation for the weakness of modernist thought's propositions and the strength of its criticisms is that the call for modernity is defined not so much by its opposition to traditional society as by its struggle against the absolute monarchy. This was especially true of France, where Rousseau was as active as Diderot and Voltaire in the struggle against the monarchy, its religious legitimation and the privileges it guaranteed. In France, the idea of modernity remained a revolutionary idea for a long time because there was no possibility, as there had been in England after 1688 and the abolition of the absolute monarchy, of constructing a new social and political order. That was the task that occupied Locke on the ship which brought William of Orange to England. That is why the idea of modernity appealed to nature against society, and to a new absolute power against inequality and privilege. The modernist ideology was not bound up with the democratic idea; it was truly revolutionary, and criticized, first in theory and then in practice, the power of the king and the Catholic church in the name of universal principles and reason itself.

The identification of modernity with reason is French rather than English; the English Revolution and the Bill of Rights of 1689 called for the restoration of the traditional rights of Parliament, whereas the French Revolution, as it became more radical, called in the name of reason for the unity of the nation and for the punishment of the agents of the king and foreign powers.

Rousseau: A Modernist Critique of Modernity

The name of Jean-Jacques Rousseau has now been mentioned several times, and it has been associated with that of Hobbes. Yet although

Rousseau was a disciple of the *philosophes* and of Diderot in particular – it was while he was on his way to visit Diderot in prison in 1749 that, on the road to Vincennes, he had the flash of inspiration that produced the first *Discourse* he submitted to the Académie de Dijon in 1750 – his thought is in fact the first great internal critique of modernity, and contrasts the harmony of nature with the social confusion and inequalities of society. It is, however, not the first *Discourse* (Rousseau 1750) but the second (Rousseau 1754) that gives Rousseau's work its exceptional importance because it paves the way for *The Social Contract* (Rousseau 1762a). The idea that progress in the sciences and the arts leads to a fall in moral standards – an idea which was popular in Antiquity and which Hesiod, in particular, held dear – produces a brilliant dissertation but does not transform social thought. On the other hand, Rousseau does break with the optimistic rationalism of the Enlightenment when he denounces inequality in his second *Discourse*. At this point, he is very far removed from Hobbes. It is no longer the fear of war and death that leads human beings to create a social order and to transfer their rights to an absolute sovereign. It is the development of inequality within modern society that leads to the foundation of a political order, as opposed to civil society. For Rousseau, the appeal to the general will becomes a weapon in the struggle against inequality. In practice, the State, which is a community of citizens, is an essential counterweight to the social differentiation that results from modernization itself. Rousseau's anti-modernism is both revolutionary and communitarian. Communities, which are of necessity small, as was Athens and as are Geneva, Corsica and perhaps Poland, are contrasted with large societies whose unity is threatened by the division of labour and the search for profit. This return to the political is still – or was until recently – one of the central principles of the French Left, which readily identifies civil society with capitalism and the triumph of private interests with egotism, and sees itself as the champion of the republican State and national integration. It is suspicious of the notion of society, and prefers the idea of popular sovereignty, as embodied in the Nation-State. This mystique of the political will reach its apotheosis with Hegel's analysis of the State as society (*Staatsgesellschaft*). According to the Rousseau of *The Social Contract*, it is only by being citizens that we begin to become human. That idea was to inspire the most ambitious attempts to create a new society, or in other words a new political power which could give birth to a new man. Modernism makes a virtue of the collective will to struggle against inequality and the negative effects of the increase in wealth. The struggle is waged in the name of nature, which is transformed in to popular sovereignty in order to establish an alliance between man and nature. Rousseau is, however, aware that the general will cannot go on existing in this pure form, and cannot override the interests of individuals and social categories in any absolute sense. He has no illusions about what an *embourgeoisé* Geneva would be like. Whereas Montesquieu and Voltaire attempt to make the contradiction between economic modernity and citizenship acceptable by placing restrictions on political power, Rousseau experiences it as something insurmountable and tragic because, as he writes at the very beginning of Book I of *Emile* (Rousseau 1762b), it is based upon the contradiction between the natural order and the social order. Jean Starobinski (1957) stresses the importance of the dichotomy between being and seeming, which is found in its most elaborate form in the 'Profession of Faith of A Savoyard Vicar' (*Emile* Book IV). Here, natural religion is contrasted with dogmas, which vary from one society to another and which can therefore be denounced as relative and artificial. How is this contradiction to be overcome? Not by going back to primitive society, which was amoral rather than moral in any positive sense, but by overcoming social contradictions and constructing a communicative society based upon an intuitive knowlege of the truth.

Rousseau criticizes society, its artifices and its inequalities, but he does so in the name of Enlightenment, even though he does increasingly turn against the *philosophes* who were once his friends. He appeals to nature because it is the realm of order and harmony, and therefore reason. He wants to replace man within that order, and to allow him to escape the confusion and chaos created by social organization. That is the goal of education, as expounded in *Emile*: the production of a natural, good and reasonable being who is capable of sociability.

This naturalism is a critique of modernity, but it is a modernist critique which goes beyond the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and it is an enlightened critique. From Rousseau, who in this sense is a forerunner of Kant, to the mid twentieth century, intellectuals will combine their critiques of social injustice with the dream of a self-transparent *polis*, of a philosophical return to being and reason. That dream will often take the political form of a new society constructed under their leadership once they – the servants of reason – have been brought to power by the people's rebellion against a society of appearances and privileges. Jean-Jacques Rousseau inaugurates the internal critique of modernism. Rather than opposing power in the name of personal freedom or collective traditions, it opposes disorder in the name of order, private interests in the name of nature and community.

Yet is not Rousseau also the author of the *Confessions* (1778), the *Rêveries* (1782) and the *Dialogues* (1772–6), and the archetype for individual resistance to society? Rousseau does not in fact oppose social power in the name of a moral subject; he feels that he has been rejected by society and is therefore obliged to bear witness to the truth and even to denounce his own weaknesses as the products of a depraved society. If defined in positive terms, his individualism is primarily a naturalism and his psychology and conception of the understanding are similar to Locke's, especially in that he gives primacy to sense perception.

The idea that modernity will in itself lead to a rational social order is acceptable to Voltaire – an admirer of the success of the English bourgeoisie and a past master at reconciling his conscience and his own interests – but not to Rousseau. Society is not rational and modernity is divisive rather than unifying. The mechanisms of self-interest must be opposed by the general will, and especially by the return to nature, or in other words to reason. The alliance between man and the universe must be re-established. Rousseau is the source of both the idea of popular sovereignty, which will inspire democratic and authoritarian regimes alike, and the idea that the individual represents nature against the State. For Rousseau, the radical critique of society leads to the idea of a political sovereignty which serves the cause of reason. Bernard Groethuysen (1949) analyses the transition from *The Social Contract*'s call for republican despotism to the character depicted in the *Confessions*:

> Rousseau might be compared to a modern revolutionary who, being aware that society is not what it should be, contemplates both the socialist and the anarchist solution. He finds that the two forms of political regime are incompatible but, being above all a revolutionary, he espouses both ideals because both are opposed to existing society.

It would be a mistake to transform Rousseau in to a romantic, as in the interval separating *The Social Contract* and *Emile* he introduces the theme of the construction of a social 'We' that transcends the individual and raises him to a higher level. We must, on the other hand, agree with Groethuysen that the break with society is all-important and is the key to understanding both the creation of a political utopia and the loneliness of an individual who, in the name of truth, challenges a society obsessed with pride and appearances.

Kant too will say that the sovereign Good is defined in terms of the unity of virtue and happiness, and therefore of law and individual, system and actor. And how can that unity be attained, if not by raising man above his inclinations, and above any object or form of behaviour that can be identified with the good, by elevating him towards the universal that exists within him, namely reason, which allows man to commune with the universe? This is the underlying principle of Kant's eminently modern ethics, which replaces external ideals and commandments with a reform of the will. The union of the will and reason renders the latter practical. The Good is an action which conforms to reason, and it is therefore subject to the ethical law of finding universals in particulars, both by opting for potentially universal modes of behaviour and by taking man as an end and not a means. Man is a moral subject, not when he seeks his happiness or what he has been taught to see as virtuous, but when he submits to duty, or in other words to the ascendancy of universals. And his duty is to know. As Kant puts it: 'Dare to know! Have the courage to use your own understanding' (cited, Cassirer 1932: 163). The categories of the understanding and the categories of the will can be unified only as the result of the striving that leads man to posit the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, which provide the basis for the never-ending attempt to attain a potentially universal mode of action. The transcendence of all hypothetical imperatives leads to the categorical imperative to submit to the law which proclaims that the will must conform to the universal law of nature.

There is a striking parallel between Kant's ethics and Rousseau's politics. Rousseau argues the case for the absolute submission of the individual to the general will. He constructs a society which is both a product of the will and natural, or in other words which ensures that individual and collectivity can commune with one another, and which founds the social bond as both necessity and freedom. Neither Rousseau nor Kant chooses happiness against reason, or reason against nature; they reject both the stoic reduction of happiness to virtue and the epicurean illusion that virtue lies in the quest for happiness. Writing at the height of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*), their main purpose is to unify reason and the will, to defend a freedom which is not so much a revolt against the social order as a submission to the natural order.

This is the central principle behind the 'illuminist' conception of what had yet to be called modernity, but which must be retrospectively known by that name. It is not a philosophy of progress, but almost its antithesis, namely a philosophy of order which combines classical and Christian thought. It can be seen as a break with tradition or as a secular mode of thought which destroys the sacred world, but at a deeper level, it must be seen as a new and powerful attempt to preserve, within a culture that has indeed been secularized, *the unity of man and the universe*. The philosophy of the Enlightenment will

be followed by a final attempt at unification with the historicism of idealist philosophies of progress, but after Rousseau and Kant, man will never again be at one with the universe. The universe will become history in action, and man will no longer submit completely to the universalist call of reason. Man will no longer see reason as a principle of order, but as the ability to transform and control, and lived experience, both individual and collective, will rebel against it.

The modernist ideology is the final form of the belief that man and nature form a unity. Modernity, identified with the triumph of reason, is the final form taken by the traditional search for the One, for Being. After the Enlightenment, this metaphysical will becomes either nostalgia or revolt, and the inner man will become increasingly divorced from an external nature.

Capitalism

The modernist ideology, which corresponds to the historically specific form of Western modernization, triumphed with the philosophy of the Enlightenment, but its triumph was not restricted to the domain of ideas. The same ideology was also dominant in the economic domain, where it took the form of capitalism, which is not reducible to either the market economy or rationalization. The market economy corresponds to a negative definition of modernity; it signals the disappearance of all holistic controls over economic activity, and the independence of economic activity from both the characteristic goals of political or religious power, and the effects of traditions and privileges. Rationalization, for its part, is, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, an indispensable element in modernity. The capitalist model of modernization, on the other hand, is defined by a type of leading actor: the capitalist. Whereas Werner Sombart thought that economic modernization had resulted in the breakdown of social and political controls, in the opening up of markets and continued rationalization, and therefore in the triumph of profit and the market, Weber argues against this purely economic definition and defines the capitalist as a specific social and cultural type in both his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber 1904–5) and his *Economy and Society* (Weber 1922). Weber's general intention is to demonstrate how the great religions either facilitated or hindered modern secularization and rationalization. In the case of Christianity, he concentrates mainly on the Reformation and the Calvinist idea of predestination, which replaces 'otherworldly' asceticism with 'worldly' asceticism. The capitalist sacrifices everything, not to money, but to his calling – *Beruf* – and to work. Work does not guarantee his salvation, as the Catholic Church believed, but it may reveal signs that he is one of the elect – *certitudo salutis* – or at least bring about the detachment from the world demanded by his faith. Reformation man turns his back on the world. Milton's *Paradise Lost* ends, Weber reminds us (1904–5: 87–8), with a call for action in the world that goes against the spirit of the *Divine Comedy*.

This celeberated thesis is open to question for two reasons. The first is historical. Everyone knows that capitalism initially developed in Catholic countries like Italy and Flanders. We might add that the most strictly Calvinist countries did not experience any noticeable economic development, that Calvinist Scotland for a long time lagged behind Anglican England, that northern countries remained underdeveloped for a very long time, and that Amsterdam was brought to the forefront of the capitalist world by the Arminians or Remonstrants, who were much less strict than the Calvinists of Geneva, a city which experienced neither any conspicuous economic activity nor any noteworthy academic activity in the sixteenth century (it was only with the arrival of the French Cartesians a hundred years later that the University of Geneva became a centre for intellectual production). On the other hand, in seventeenth-century England and in the emergent United States, where Franklin was the emblematic figure, the presence of Calvinism had been attenuated and austerity had given way to a highly secularized utilitarianism. It is therefore difficult to explain the development of capitalism in terms of the influence of the most puritanical forms of Calvinism. What Weber is trying to understand is, rather, a particular or extreme type of economic activity: not the modern trader or industrialist, but the capitalist in the strict sense of the term. The capitalist is fully immersed in economic activity and his ability to invest depends upon his personal savings. He is interested in neither speculation nor luxury, and regards the things of this world with the indifference recommended by St Paul.

The second reason is closer to Weber's own central line of inquiry. Does a given faith encourage the appearance of a particular form of economic activity? How can we accept such a paradox, given that the religious spirit, as transformed and revived by the Reformation, is indeed a worldly asceticism resulting in a detachment from worldly goods and that it is difficult to reconcile this with a life devoted to work, trade and profit? We thus arrive at a more limited interpretation of the realities analysed by Weber. The essential factor is not, it would appear, faith, and therefore a religious culture, but the breakdown of the social bonds imposed by the fear of being judged by a hidden God. It is the breakdown of the family, of relations based upon

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friendship, and a rejection of religious institutions which, following the example of the Popes and Cardinals of the Renaissance, made no distinction between the sacred and the profane, faith and wealth, or religion and politics. This brings us back to Weber's theme of disenchantment, of the break with all forms of interpenetration of the sacred and the profane, or of being and phenomena, to borrow Kant's terminology. It is in chapter 4 that Weber goes furthest in this direction. If we interpret his thought in this restricted way, it is quite consonant with the whole of the classical Western idea of modernity, which Weber sees as intellectualization, as a break with the 'meaning of the world' and action in the world, with the elimination of the finalism of religions, revelation and the idea of a Subject. The importance of protestantism does not stem from the content of its faith, but from its rejection of the enchantment of the Christian world, which was previously defined by both the role of the sacraments and the temporal power of Popes.

Weber's thought therefore does not coincide with a general definition of modernity, but with *capitalism*, with the economic form of the Western ideology of modernity, seen as a break and a *tabula rasa*. The Reformation itself and the subsequent transformation of catholic piety, thanks to François de Sales in particular, gave rise to a different ethics inspired by a faith which was quite different to the fear and trembling of those who awaited a decision from a God they could not influence. Whilst capitalism did therefore help to create an *ethos* favourable to capitalism, it also made a major contribution to the development of an ethics of conscience, piety and intimacy which led in a different direction, towards, that is, a *bourgeois* individualism which can be contrasted with the spirit of capitalism, just as Pascal contrasted the order of charity with that of reason. Capitalism, which Weber analyses in such depth, is therefore not the economic form of modernity in general, but the form of a particular conception of modernity based upon a break between reason and belief. Reason breaks with all social and cultural loyalties. Phenomena amenable to analysis and computation become divorced from both Being and History. Hence the violence – inspired by the principle of a *tabula rasa* – that accompanied capitalist modernization. Violence ensured the dominance of capitalism, but it also resulted in tragic divisions that cannot possibly be seen as a necessary precondition for modernization.

Weber's definition of capitalism – a particular social form of economic rationalization – is also central to the thought of Karl Polanyi (1944) and Joseph Schumpeter (1912). Polanyi gives central importance to the divorce between market and society, which is symbolized by the repeal of the Poor Laws in 1834 and by the break with social and political interventions such as the sixteenth-century Poor Laws, the Statute of Artificers, and the later Speenhamland System. The same divorce between economy and society led Schumpeter to predict the collapse of a capitalism which no longer enjoyed the support of public opinion in the capitalist countries.

Is this divorce a permanent and necessary element in modernization? Certainly not. Very few countries, even in the modern world, have experienced a purely capitalist form of development. France did not, as industrialization there was the result of State *dirigisme*. Nor did Germany, where Bismarck eliminated the bourgeoisie of Frankfurt, or Japan, where the State has played a central role in economic development ever since the Meiji revolution, to say nothing of countries where the capitalist bourgeoisie was either much weaker or non-existent. The distinguishing feature of the English, Dutch and especially the American capitalist model is the creation of a space for autonomous action on the part of private agents of economic development. It should also be added that industrial capitalism was largely based upon the exploitation of a workforce, whereas Weber's analysis tends to apply to a pre-industrial or 'household' economy in which the success of productive or commercial undertakings depends primarily on the capitalist's ability to limit his consumption in order to invest. The interest of Weber's analysis of capitalism is therefore that it concentrates upon on a historical case in which religious beliefs made a direct contribution to the divorce between an economic logic and the rest of social and political life. What Weber is describing is not modernity as such, but a *particular* mode of modernity characterized by both a high concentration of resources for economic rationalization and the harsh repression brought to bear on traditional cultural and social loyalties, on the personal need to consume and on all social forces – women and children as well as workers and colonized peoples – identified by capitalists as belonging to the realm of immediate needs, indolence and irrationality.

Because Western modernization occurred much earlier than any other form of modernization and because it had a dominant role in the European States and then in the United States for three hundred years, thinkers in those countries often identify their modernization with modernity in general, rather as though the break with the past and the formation of a truly capitalist elite were necessary and central preconditions for the formation of a modern society. The dominant model of Western modernization minimizes the action of a will influenced by cultural values or political objectives, and therefore does away with the idea of *development*, which is based, in contrast,

on the interdependency of economic enterprises, social movements and state political intervention and which has, increasingly, become more important than the purely capitalist model. This brings out the complexity of Weber's analysis, which is based upon the general idea that social behaviour is culturally determined, but also attempts to show the shaping of an action which is divorced from all world-views, governed by instrumental rationality alone, and acknowledges only the law of the market. As a result, Weber himself had a tragic awareness of the impasse facing a modern society trapped in to instrumental rationality, devoid of meaning and constantly set in motion by charismatic action and therefore by an ethics of conviction (*Gesinnung*) that modernity seeks to eliminate in favour of rational, legal authority and an ethics of responsibility (*Verantwortung*).

Capitalism, the appeal to a natural ethics and the idea of the *tabula rasa* combine to define particular aspects of the modernist ideology of the West. It should not be identified with modernity in general and it would be dangerous to recommend it to the entire world or to enforce it as the 'one best way', to borrow an expression from F. W. Taylor.

The Modernist Ideology

This classical conception, which is at once philosophical and economic, defines modernity in terms of the triumph of reason, liberation and revolution, and modernization as modernity in action, as a purely endogenous process. History books rightly describe the modern period as lasting from the Renaissance to the French Revolution and the beginnings of large-scale industrialization in Great Britain. The societies in which the spirit and practices of modernity developed were attempting to put things in order rather than to set them in motion. Trade and exchange became organized. A public administration and a legal State were created. Books were circulated, along with critiques of traditions, taboos and privileges. At this time, the principal role was played by reason rather than by capital and labour. These centuries were dominated by jurists, philosophers and writers – all men of the book – and the sciences observed, classified and categorized phenomena in order to discover the order of things. Throughout this period, the idea of modernity – which was present, even if the word was not – gave social conflicts the form of a struggle between reason and nature, and the established powers. This was not simply a conflict between the Ancients and the Moderns; nature or even the word of God were being set free from forms of domination which were based upon tradition rather than history and which spread the darkness that would be dispelled by the Enlightenment. The classical conception of modernity is therefore primarily the construction of a rationalist image of the world which integrates man in to nature, the microcosm in to the macrocosm, and which rejects all forms of dualism of soul and body, the human world and transcendence.

Anthony Giddens (1990) provides a highly integrated image of modernity as a world-wide project of production and control with four main dimensions: industrialism, capitalism, the industrialization of war and the surveillance of every aspect of social life. He adds that the central tendency within the modern world is towards an increasing globalization which takes the form of the international division of labour and the formation of world-economies. It also results, however, in an international military order and the strengthening of Nation-States with centralized systems of control. This vision combines elements of faith in and doubts about accelerated modernization, and gives particular emphasis to the idea of system by extending Durkheim's notion of organic solidarity. According to Giddens, modern society is usually thought of as a system which is capable of 'reflexivity', or in other words capable of acting upon itself. This means that it is the antithesis of the natural societies in which individuals can commune directly with the sacred by means of traditions, or even in the absence of traditions. Modern societies, in contrast, reject both the individual and the sacred in favour of a self-generating, self-controlled and self-regulating social system. There thus emerges a conception of modernity which actively eliminates the idea of a Subject.

This classical conception of modernity, which dominated Europe and then the whole of the Westernized world before retreating in the face of critiques and transformations of social practices, has as its central theme the identification of social actors with what they can produce thanks to either the triumph of scientific and technical reason or society's rational responses to the needs and desires of individuals. This is why the modernist ideology is primarily an assertion of the death of the Subject. The dominant current in Western thought from the sixteenth century to the present day is *materialist*. Reliance upon God and references to the soul are constantly regarded as the heritage of a traditional thought that has to be destroyed. The struggle against religion, which was so intense in France, Italy and Spain and which was so central to the thought of Machiavelli, Hobbes and the French *Encyclopédistes*, was not simply a rejection of the divine-right monarchy, of an absolutism that had been strengthened by the Counter-Reformation or of the subordination of civil society to the alliance of throne and altar. It was also a rejection of transcendence and, in more

concrete terms, of the divorce between body and soul. It was a call for the unification of the world and for thought to be dominated by reason or the quest for interest and pleasure.

We therefore have to recognize the vigour, even the violence, of the classical conception of modernity. It was revolutionary, like any call for liberation, like any refusal to compromise with traditional forms of social organization and cultural belief. A new man and a new world had to be constructed by turning away from the past and the Middle Ages, by rediscovering the Ancient World's faith in reason, and by according a central importance to labour, the organization of production, freedom of trade and the impersonality of laws. Disenchantment, secularization, rationalization, rational legal authority, and an ethics of responsibility: the now classic concepts developed by Max Weber provide a perfect definition of this modernity, but it has to be added that it was also bent on conquest, that it established the dominance of rationalizing and modernizing elites over the rest of the world by organizing trade and factories, and through colonization. The triumph of modernity meant the suppression of eternal principles, the elimination of all essences and of artificial entities such as the Ego and cultures in favour of a scientific understanding of bio-psychological mechanisms and of the unwritten and impersonal rules that govern the exchange of commodities, words and women. Structuralist thought was to radicalize this functionalism, and to take to extremes the elimination of the subject. Modernism is an antihumanism, because it is well aware that the idea of man is bound up with the idea of the soul, which necessarily implies the idea of God. The rejection of all revelation and of all moral principles creates a vacuum which is filled by the idea of society, or in other words of social utility. Human beings are no more than citizens. Charity becomes solidarity, and conscience comes to mean respect for the law. Jurists and administrators replace prophets.

The world of reason, pleasure and taste that the philosophers of the Enlightenment opened up for the moderns is either oblivious to internal social conflicts, or interprets them as the irrational's resistance to the progress of reason. The modernists have a clear conscience: they are bringing light in to the darkness, and place their trust in the natural goodness of human beings, in their ability to create rational institutions and above all in their self-interest, which prevents them from destroying themselves and leads them to tolerate and respect the freedom of others. This world advances under its own impetus, and thanks to the conquests of reason. Society is no more than the sum of the effects of the progress of knowledge. Affluence, freedom and happiness progress as one, as they are all products of the application of reason to every aspect of human existence. History is no more than the rise of the sun of reason in the firmament. There cannot be any divorce between man and society. Ideally, man is a citizen, and private virtues contribute to the good of all. The world of the enlightenment is transparent but, like a crystal, it is also self-contained. The modernists live in a self-contained world, protected from everything that disturbs reason and the natural order of things.

The attempt to construct a rationalized society ended in failure, primarily because the idea that a rational administration of things can replace the government of men is tragically mistaken and because social life, far from being transparent and governed by rational choices, proved to be full of powers and conflicts, whilst modernization itself proved less and less endogenous and increasingly stimulated by a national will or social revolutions. Civil society was divorced from the State, but whilst the birth of industrial society signalled the triumph of civil society, it was the State that championed national modernization in the nineteenth century. The increasing divorce between modernity and modernization, and between capitalism and nationalism, destroyed the dream of a modern society defined by the triumph of reason. It paved the way for the invasion of the classical order of modernity by the violence of power and the diversity of needs.

What remains of the modernist ideology? Criticism, destruction and disenchantment. Not so much the construction of a new world as the will to destroy and the joyful destruction of everything that stands in the way of reason. The idea of modernity does not derive its strength from its positive utopia – the construction of a rational world – but from its critical function. And it retains its strength only so long as the past continues to resist.

That resistance was so strong and lasted so long, especially in France where the absolute monarchy claimed to be founded upon divine right, that the main concern of the philosophy of the Enlightenment was, from Bayle onwards, the struggle waged against religion, or rather against the Churches, in the name of natural religion, or sometimes scepticism or even militant atheism. Cassirer (1932) rightly points out that this was primarily a French position and that both the German *Aufklärung* and the English Enlightenment were on better terms with religion. Yet throughout Europe, the new philosophy rejected the authority of tradition and placed its trust in reason alone. This critical thought and trust in science were to remain the principal strength of a conception of modernity which associated the idea of progress with that of tolerance, particularly in the thought of Condorcet (1795). Its destructive work was, however, more convincing

than its constructive work, and its social practices did not correspond to the ideas of the philosophers, whose critique of superstition was more formidable than their analysis of social transformations.

Before we turn away from modernism, it should not be forgotten that it was associated with the jubilatory liberation of individuals who were no longer content to escape political and cultural controls by taking refuge in private life, and who proclaimed their right to satisfy their needs, to criticize princes and priests and to defend their own ideas and preferences. Whilst the exclusive trust they placed in instrumental reason and social integration was fraught with danger, the joyous destruction of the sacred and its taboos and rites was an indispensable part of the entry in to modernism. Rabelais is the exemplary representative of this lust for life, food and learning, this desire for pleasure and this wish to construct a new world shaped by the imagination, desires and reason rather than sacred texts, customs or established hierarchies. Today's advanced industrial societies are far removed from this initial liberation, and feel trapped by their products rather than by traditional privations, but they are also in danger of being drawn to the dream of a closed communitarian society which is protected from change. The best defence against this return to a closed community is a combination of Rabelais's appetite and Montaigne's doubts. If we are to defend ourselves against all the forms of repression that are brought to bear in the name of the State, money or reason itself, we must constantly go back to the flamboyance of the Renaissance and to the beginnings of modernity, to the solitary triumphal march of Guidoriccio da Fogliano, as depicted by the Siennese painter Simone Martini, and to the laughter of Molière's servants. A critique of the modernist ideology must not lead to the return of what it destroyed.