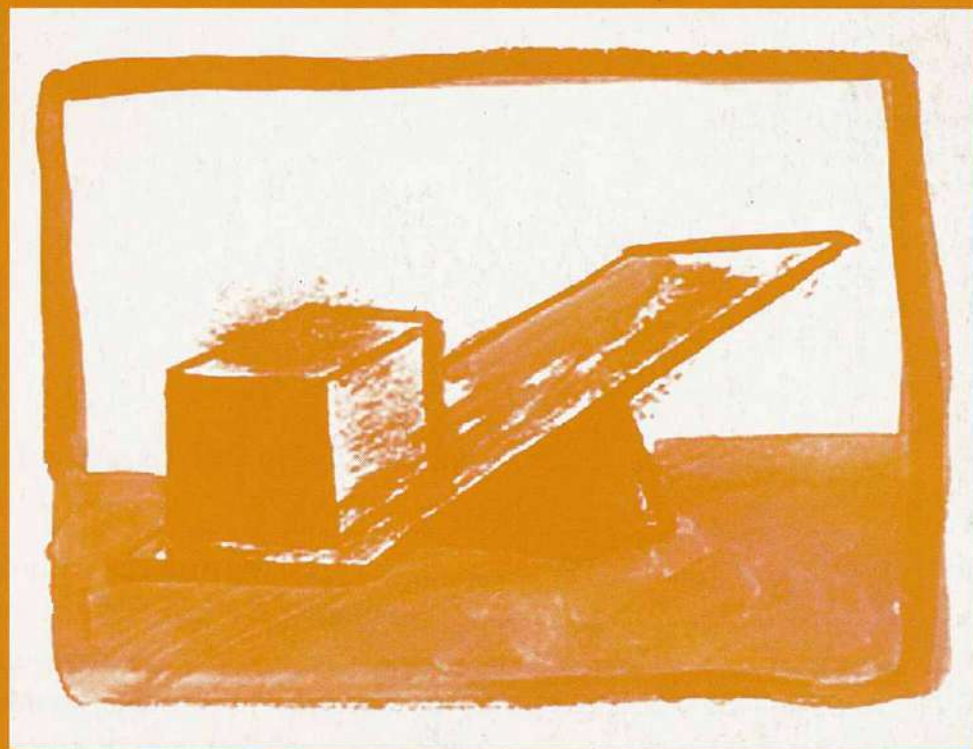


booklets

EQUALITY

a pending subject



Antoni Comín Oliveres

EQUALITY
A PENDING SUBJECT

Antoni Comín i Oliveres

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We are all equal before the law. Before what law? Before the divine law? As before the law of this world, equality becomes unequal all the time and in all places since power has the habit of sitting in one of the pans of the balance.

E. Galeano (Patatas arriba, p 207)

Antoni Comín graduated in Philosophy and in Political Sciences. He is preparing his doctorate. Member of the *Foundation Alfonso Comín* and collaborator of *Cristianisme i Justícia*. He has published *Els canvis són possibles* (Barcelona 1998).

INTERNET: <http://www.fespinal.com>

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Summary of the Booklet

Among the challenges which the Third Millennium has pending, the most flagrant perhaps, is the abandonment of that ideal of equality, proclaimed by Modernity and by the French Revolution. This Booklet aims at explaining *why this betrayal of equality has been produced* (the author would have wished to add a second part of a more socio-political note, which however, was not possible due to the dimensions of the Booklet). Let us only say that *equality has been abandoned because there was no meaning fighting for it*.

The author demonstrates this with an analysis of Modernity's philosophical thought. Although we feel that the Booklet is strikingly diaphanous and clear, it may be a little difficult for those not too familiar with philosophical language and in our world that has become so specialised, it is to be expected that nobody can be familiar with all languages. So the reader should not worry if there are certain things that escape his full understanding. Perhaps the first chapter might result a little difficult, but if he carries on reading, he will soon familiarise himself with the author's language, and will at the end probably have a sufficient intuition of his thesis.

Given the value and quality of the Booklet, and keeping in mind readers who are afraid at the start to read philosophical themes, we have thought it would be useful to give a little introduction which would summarise for the reader and keep him company in the different stages of this booklet. The reader will be able to find a similar summary in the little introductions, which open each chapter, and which perhaps could be read one after another before beginning the reading of the actual text.

The intuition of the Booklet appears to be the following: equality among us is impossible (and may even be bad) because *our obsession for happiness leads us to create inequalities* (which does not make us happier either). But something within us makes us see that equality is a great human value.

How to get out of this dilemma? On the one hand, the authentic religious experience is a path of renunciation of our own happiness and is given to us by grace. On the other hand, the religious experience leads us to a goal in which equality and happiness meet in brotherly union.

Chapter One: Following a global intuition, the Booklet puts forward a thesis in the first chapter and develops the same in the following ones, in almost narrative fashion till it is summed up in the last chapter. We can formulate it in three steps: a) the modern world has been incapable of achieving equality because it has no reasons for equality. b) And it does not have them because equality needs a "transcendent" or "religious" basis. Moreover, c) modern reason has always tried to base itself on itself and be self-sufficient.

The author begins the development of this thesis by the last step. The proof that modern reason aspires to base itself on itself lies in its forgetfulness of death. But by having nothing to do with death, it does away also with the sphere that is beyond death and which only religion can speak about. Only the experience of the "Transcendent" shows that equality and happiness are not incompatible. Since the experience of the "beyond" is overlooked, these two qualities appear irreconcilable to Modernity. This is as far as the first chapter goes.

Chapter Two: This chapter is fundamental; it establishes the political consequences of what the previous chapter had expressed in philosophical terms. The author shows how this supposed incompatibility between equality and happiness is at the bottom of the divisions between leftists and rightists. And it revolves around the concept that both have of freedom and its relation with freedom.

The reader will read in the following two chapters a sort of dialogue between rightists and leftists that would more or less run along these lines:

Chapter Three: —We are right in rejecting equality (so speaks the rightist) because nature itself has made men unequal. Unequal not only in colour or stature but also in human freedom (understanding by freedom —according to the definition of the author— *the capacity to achieve one's own happiness*). A system of equality without freedom is converted into a life of unhappiness for all. A system of freedom without equality is converted into a life of happiness only for a few. And there is no other way out.

Chapter Four: —If what you say is true, there would not be so many social conflicts: these show that humanity is not content with unequal happiness.

—No, sir. Social conflicts do not rise from men's desire to fulfil themselves, acquiring more human value, but from resentment and envy. This is explained very well by your philosopher Nietzsche.

Along these lines go Chapters 3 and 4. From then onwards, the remaining three chapters reflect the efforts of the leftists to reply to this apparently triumphant objection. This reply picks up the thread from where the first chapter left off: modern reason tries to base itself on itself alone, as is shown by its forgetfulness of death.

Chapter Five: Indeed: all happiness is threatened by the fear of losing it, the symbol of which is the fear of death. (If we do not always have this fear, it is because we are not fully happy. But, who is the one, for example, who lives a deep relation of happy love, will accept the possibility of death breaking it?). Read paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2.

The threat of death then leads either to desperate fear (that impedes happiness), or attempts to trivialise death by what the author calls "obscene" reactions: clinging to progress, riches or power, hoping that some of these will bring (an illusion of) immortality (5.3).

Chapter Six: Here a human experience comes into play that the author (in Christian slang) describes as the experience of the "world of grace". A world that religions have experienced as the Transcendent Source of Life, neither contrary nor alien to the world of nature, being as it is, its Foundation and Plenitude. But this world of grace can only be spoken about with symbols and moreover, is only received gratuitously. And the reception of this experience demands the risk and the jump that is implied in the trustful acceptance of death.

From here, our leftist speaker can answer his rightist friend that the fact of *nature producing men unequal does not mean that he is in the right*. Because it also produces mortal and limited beings with a desire for immortality and unlimitedness. Nature would thus contradict itself and so this is a sign that it needs Grace.

Chapter Seven: Taking a step forward, the author draws consequences from the observations made in the previous chapter. To accept that my happiness comes from Grace and that this is not the result of my efforts makes my happiness have the same value as that of others, and cannot be achieved at their cost (this is for the author the essence of what is called the *mystic experience*). By loving the happiness of others as my own, I am loving my full happiness, although it may appear at times that I am reducing my merely natural happiness. Because this love for the happiness of others necessarily implies suffering.

Chapter Eight: The first part of Chapter 8 can be skipped by the reader if he is not familiar with the history of philosophy. It is a confrontation with the ethics of the philosopher Kant (father of Modernity) precisely because he tried to look for an ethic that could have universal value. What the author affirms is that what is universal is not reason but Grace. Grace includes all that is human (including reason) while reason does not admit some very human trans-rational dimensions. For this reason, Kant does not know any universality other than that of an imperative or duty. And so, he either excludes the happiness of ethics or if he includes it, he will have to exclude equality. This has been the dilemma of modern reason, explained in 8.2. And here are sketched the "left" and "right" after Kant.

It seems then that in the discussion between the rightist and the leftist, the latter has a valid answer if for his argument he has recourse to the

“spiritual” experience or that of the “Transcendent”. From here the reader should see what is said in paragraph 2 of the conclusion. If the way of achieving equality is through democracy, then this democracy requires for its foundation a reference to Grace. “Without religion there is neither democracy nor human rights”. Let the reader see the four steps that (in paragraph 3 of the conclusion) summarises the trajectory of the author, and we feel that –although the reader may not know the world of philosophy– he will be prepared to peruse without fear this Booklet.

What nobody should do is content himself only with the summary (which of necessity does not do sufficient justice) and mistake the handrail up the climb for the actual climb to the top.

The Booklet is not a “say-all” on the matter. What is left on hold for the leftists is what is called “Mystagogy” and a policy. That is to say, an introduction to that spiritual experience of happiness given and *gratuitously* recovered, as also an analysis of the reality which shows the obstacles and ways to carry on advancing towards equality, instead of drawing away from her.

Cristianisme i Justicia

1. INTRODUCTION: THE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION OF SOCIALISM

The ideal of equality has, at the end of this millennium, undergone deep commotions of a cultural and political nature, which have left it without a foundation. So-called Modernity, that is to say, the crisis of modern reason, on the one hand, and the fall of the wall of Berlin and the failure of the main historical attempt of "real socialism", on the other, seem to have left the champions of equality in a situation of profound confusion.

At the outset, common sense tells us that equality is a value that cannot be renounced if we are to organise the living together of human beings in a just way. But historical happenings and our daily experience of what we call "human nature" (the capacity of man for egoism, injustice and abuse of our neighbour) leave us perplexed before the possibility of whether this ideal can ever be achieved.

Should we carry on aspiring to build up a society on a footing of equality or is it better that we should succumb to realism and renounce this "useless utopia"?

It is necessary to give a base for what common sense sees as pure intuitions. 1) One has to explain at the outset, why equality is a desirable ideal that cannot be renounced. 2) Then we will have to demonstrate that the social achievement of this ideal is possible. This is the double aim of this text.

To demonstrate this, we have to

rediscover the foundation, which will permit us to justify the value and the necessity of equality and to show the ways of their progressive accomplishment.

In our modern times, equality is based on distinct ideologies that we know by the name of "socialism", nourished principally from Marxism. It was Marxism that set out the ethic

of equality and took care of its defence. And it did this on the basis of a version of modern reason on a purely materialistic note. However, with the crisis of the above reason, the end of Marxism was reached and with it, the main advocate of the ethic of equality. We could say that the crisis of Marxism has been the definitive form of the crisis of modernity. Not in vain was it the last example of illustrated reason and of its confidence in indefinite progress.

Postmodernity of the eighties was born as a natural consequence of an epoch (the sixties) which perceived the contradictions, which were between the ideals of Illustration and its concrete achievements. The philosophers of the School of Frankfurt wanted to make evident the tragic dialectic that existed between bourgeois liberalism and Nazi totalitarianism, but in doing so, although still remaining Marxists, they laid the conditions for the parallel criticism: the criticism of the contradiction between Marxist egalitarianism and Soviet totalitarianism. When this "dialectic of the Illustration" was made clear, modern reason as a whole and all its political incarnations, whether liberal or socialist received a blow.

Socialism certainly tried to give a reply to the insufficiencies of liberal political reason as it was superior to liberalism insofar as political ideology was concerned. But for this same reason, when confidence in Marxism came tumbling down, all confidence in modern political reason in general was annulled. If the reply that mod-

ernity—in the form of socialism—had given to its own insufficiencies—displayed in liberalism—had failed, then it seemed no other alternative remained in the bosom of modern ethics. The "second modernity", that of socialist revolutions, not only was not able to correct the "first modernity", that of liberal revolutions, but, moreover, fell into the same errors dragging in its downfall the whole of modernity.

1.1. Overcoming the crisis of modern reason

Marxism, the incarnation of modern reason in its egalitarian facet, was the direct offspring of Hegelism, although it was supposedly an inversion of the system in a materialistic key. Hegelism, in its turn, was the direct offspring of the Kantian system, although supposedly it was a turning upside down of the system both in the dialectic key and that relating to the community. So, *Kantian reason was, in the ultimate analysis, the true foundation on which the ethics of equality had been based.* Kantian analysis of Practical Reason was the discourse, which explained to us the essence of good and justice. Up to this point no problem. It would not be difficult to defend, from the position of Kant, that equality is the essential content of justice.

The problem lay in that Kantian analysis tries to explain too, implicitly or explicitly, why this justice is desirable and why it is possible that,

from time to time, it materialises in human reality. And for these two questions, it finds really *no reply*. Kantian analysis of ethics tries to be merely descriptive and does not deal with these two questions, but the whole description of the content of ethics necessarily bears these questions implicitly. When we speak of the crisis of modernity, we wish to say that *we no longer can believe* the reply that Kantian ethics implicitly gives to these two questions, and that indirectly lays the foundations of the Marxist defence of equality. *Where can we find the reply to these questions when modern reason, in its Marxist and Kantian genealogy, can no longer reply to these?*

In these pages we defend the thesis that the ideal of equality as the principle of justice that organises the life together between human beings, can find again its foundations through dialogue of the reason with the world which is opened up to a person through a “religious” *experience*. The spiritual reality which is offered to the person when he is capable of listening to the mystical dimension of things, is the reality on which human reason ventures to give a justification and grounds for equality, and with it, as we will see, for freedom and happiness.

This “reality” transcends the knowledge that reason can have of it. Of it we can have explicit information only through the religious world. However, that this reality only becomes explicit in religious formulations does not mean that it is not

present in all the facets of life. We can have experience of it no doubt through art or in our contact with nature, for example, or in our most decisive human relationships. What is important is to realise that this world, the world of the *spirit*, is one that transcends reason. We cannot try, like Hegel, to have spiritual reality identify itself with, and exhaust itself in, reason.

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Modern reason has tried to lay its own foundations. That was the “sin” of modernity that ended up leaving without justification the very ideals of reason. Kantian reason was the maximum expression of this endeavour for self-foundation. Its ethics leaves the world of freedom reduced to the sole power of the reason; it ends up identifying the world of the spirit with practical reason and its in-

ternal laws. With this the knowledge that reason brings to us ends up being the only dimension of reality; reason ends up absolutising itself. From here one comes to the Hegelian invention of the absolute Reason just one step away from the identification of this absolute Reason with the absolute Spirit. *Modern endeavour to found reason on itself ends up with reducing spirit to the ambit of life that remains under the power of reason.*

However, the world of the spirit, the mystical dimension of reality, transcends reason and its possibilities of moral decision or knowledge. Spiritual reality is precisely what remains on the other side of reason and its basic dimensions that are space and time. Reason is only capable of knowing what remains *within* space and time categories, what we normally call the *natural* world. On account of this, the spirit is something reason knows nothing of neither at a practical nor theoretical level, granted that it is the world that is *beyond* death.

Human consciousness of death is the fundamental experience which shows clearly the limitations of reason. It represents, better than any other concept, how open a person is to the world of the spirit.

In the face of death, reason is only left with the possibility of surrendering itself, as happens always when one is in front of a big mystery.

1.2. Happiness and justice

The fact we have just described:

that of modern reason wanting to lay its own foundations *was the cause of modern ethics causing the split between the experience of good and justice, and the experience of happiness.*

These two experiences are split apart in the measure in which reality is contemplated only from the point of view of the natural world alone. In the natural dimension good and happiness do not coincide. For modern ethics –that of Kant and his heirs– the essence of justice remains irrevocably separated from the dynamics of happiness. But the problem, looked at from the world that transcends space and time and that reason does not acknowledge, appears under a very different light. In the world of the spirit, it is possible to reconcile happiness and justice, the achievement of one's own vocation and *respect* for others.

This conception of Good irremediably separated from happiness thanks to modern reason is the cause of equality being an unachievable ideal. If equality goes against human nature, that is to say, against happiness, it can never be achieved. However, by reflecting on death and what opens out to us by this reflection, we will be capable of re-discovering *the lost unity between happiness and Good*, and if we are able to show in what way our own vocation in life corresponds to collective justice, then equality will once again be an ideal within the reach of humanity. In this case, our own vocation, that which in principle motivates our acts, will

impel us to achieve that which is ethically desirable, that is to say, a just society, based on equality. In what way our own vocation coincides with social equality is something we will have to elucidate in the course of these pages, since this is **not always** the case, nor is it something that is produced in a spontaneous and automatic way.

In the measure in which we are capable of showing this coincidence, we will be able to reply to the initial questions.

We can say: *equality is desirable because in this precisely we have our own happiness at stake*. And for this same motive, because it goes in favour of our own desire, we must affirm that equality can be achieved historically.

without reflecting
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1.3. Happiness and death

This then is our thesis expressed in a little provocative way: *without reflecting on death it is impossible to find an effective basis for the ideal of equality and social justice*.

Socialist thinking has done without the question of death, and for this, it is now inevitably in crisis. Reflection on death is precisely what modern reason, in one way or another, has ignored, and as a result equality lacks now a theoretical basis. When we say *reflection on death* we refer to the possibility of debating with experience of the spirit –not rational– that normally has been focused on by the world of religions.

Modernity leaves out completely the world of religion. Even more, modern reason was developed in the majority of cases *against* this world. And she did this knowing that she herself was feeding from this world. This rejection is understandable if we think in the historical context in which modernity was developed.

Religion before which the newly born modern reason found herself was a superstitious religion that occupied not only the space that corresponded to her (related to the wisdom of “the beyond”), but also the space that did not correspond to her (knowledge of “the here and present”). Pre-modern religion not only claimed her legitimate rights on the world of the spirit, but also spuriously attributed to herself rights on the world of nature.

Before this sort of religion, the only alternative that modern reason had was radical opposition and rejection. Modern reason in her incipient phase had necessarily to affirm herself *against* this religion to snatch from the latter her own space. But, in affirming herself, she absolutised

herself, trying to find her basis in herself alone and ended up snatching from religion both what corresponded and did not correspond to herself. She ended up making identical the worlds of the spirit and reason. She committed the same mistake made by pre-modern religion: legislating on the "here and present" as well as on "the beyond", the world she was not capacitated to know.

Today, when modern reason has already completed her historical task, to push back the world of religions to the space that corresponds to them—that is, the symbolical programming of themes relating to what is "*beyond death*"—, and to recover for herself the world which was hers, that is, that of the "here and present", the world of nature, this reason should now renounce her own absolutisation. She should give up her useless effort to take over the world of "the beyond". What is desirable for our relation with the different dimensions of reality is a reason which offers us her scientific explanations for us to understand better the natural world, and a "religion" that offers her symbolical explanations so that we could maintain the right relations with the spiritual world.

Having obtained the secularisation of religion, reason should now secularise herself too. Post-modernity is, in fact, this secularisation of reason. However, reality is one: with its two sides but one alone. The world of the spirit and the world of nature are two sides of the same coin. For this reason, the logical consequence

of post-modernity should be that reason should go out to meet the world of religion. If reason acknowledges that she has nothing to say about the world of "the beyond" but knows that reality is one, she will need the knowledge of religion about that world.

This does not mean returning to the world of pre-modernity, in which reason was the *ancilla*, the slave of theology. Absolutely not. It means to say that she starts dialoguing with an illustrated religion which has passed through the sieve of modernity and assumes the autonomy of reason in the sphere that is proper of her. Also such a religion, that limits herself to ruling about her own world while acknowledging the unity of reality, will find herself in the need of going out to meet reason and science. Each one to herself, but both in dialogue. Reason and religion, nature and spirit, need each other. Without reciprocity, both lose their meaning. But each one in her function is irreplaceable.

For this reason we can claim that a reflection on the ideal of equality—and on socialism that wishes to represent this ideal—necessarily calls for a reflection on death and the world which opens out as a result of this reflection. We propose to explain in what way socialism needs a religious basis so as not to end up denying itself. We propose to base socialism in the *mystic* dimension of reality.

Equality, in effect, is a reality that pertains to the natural world, to the organisation of the life of man in society. Reason should explain to us in

what way this equality should be materialised. The problem rises when reason tries not only to reply to the *how* but also to the *why* (a question that can only be replied from the world of “the beyond”). Modern reason, Kantian, can explain *how* or *what* is justice but cannot explain *why* one should be just nor can it give us the hope that justice is achievable. For this reason, if her only basis is herself, she can in no way achieve the attainment of her own ideals and will end up denying herself.

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Historical experience of modernity is this experience of a reason that cannot fulfil her promises. So, liberalism leads to Nazi totalitarianism, Marxism to Soviet totalitarianism, without the progenitors of either having any *direct* responsibility for it.

The only responsibility that goes beyond individuals who carry out the actions is the dynamics of self-absolutisation of reason. Self-absolutised, reason finds herself obliged to reply to questions for which she has not and cannot have any answer. Believing herself absolute, she has not allowed anybody else to offer her that answer.

That is why *reason needs a basis that transcends herself if she wishes to see fulfilled historically the ideals she herself proposes*. This basis she will find in the world of the spirit or that of “religion”. Because in the world of the spirit, happiness and justice are reconciled. That is why socialism, an ideal of reason, needs a religious basis to keep herself on her feet. That is why to give a basis to equality, one has to speak of death and one has to have recourse to a reflection on the “world” that opens up to us through it. If reflection on socialism is capable of entering into dialogue with reflection on the mystical side of reality and finds support in her, the ideal of an egalitarian society, will have overcome its present crisis and will become again a desirable and viable horizon of the evolution of human history¹.

2. THEORIES OF JUSTICE: LEFT –OR RIGHT– WING?

The double question that we have to reply to and that will guide us in our itinerary is: Why is social equality desirable? And is it achievable historically? To look for these answers is the same as trying to build up a *theory of justice* of the socialist or egalitarian type. The inescapable starting point of any theory of justice is freedom: the consideration of the person, as a being endowed with freedom, the recognition of freedom as the essence of human nature. This is the fundamental premise of any theory of justice. What is *liberty* from the social and political viewpoint?

2.1. Two notions of freedom

The difference between the left and right wing lies precisely in the relation that each establishes between freedom and equality.

2.1.1. The **right** regard freedom and equality as incompatible: more of one, less of the other. However, the left regard freedom and equality as reconcilable: equality must base itself on freedom and freedom can and should end in equality. On the other

extreme, the right consider that a large degree of equality can only be obtained at the cost of sacrificing freedom. That is why the right tend to identify the idea of equality with that of dictatorship. Equality, say the right, would be fantastic if it were compatible with freedom, but as it is not like this, one has to renounce equality. Equality can only be imposed by sacrificing freedom and, in this case, the alternative of freedom without equality would always be more just

than that of equality without freedom. There is no more to choose from, say the right.

Note should be taken that in this approach of the right, there is a split between the world of the possible and the world of the desirable. The right acknowledge that the ideal should be an egalitarian freedom better than an anti-egalitarian freedom. But this is absolutely impossible. That is why when comparing the two possible alternatives, the right choose that which they consider better and they fight against the left on the ethical code, appealing to justice. However, this "ethical" option of the right pays certain tribute to cynicism, by virtue of its supposed realism. If we compare the justice of the better real alternative (freedom without equality) with the justice of the better ideal alternative (equality with freedom), the right will have to acknowledge that the first is less than the second.

The right remain with the better "possible" alternative, but not with the better "imaginable". The most desirable ideal from the moral viewpoint always remains out of their choice. In their approach of the relations between equality and freedom, *there is always an ideal that remains totally excluded from reality. And a split of this type between the ideal and the real is the basis of all moral cynicism.*

2.1.2. The **left** have as their starting point a totally different approach. For them, freedom and equality are reconcilable. Moreover: without one, the other is degraded. On the one

hand, the left recognise –or should– that equality without freedom is an untenable caricature of itself, that sooner or later, will have to succumb. On the other hand, they are aware that freedom without equality will end up becoming totalitarian; when freedom is incapable of leading progressively to equality, it gets blocked. And then freedom ends up handing itself over to the social principle of *hierarchical order* that is so characteristic of fascisms and that is in principle its own negation, the abolition of freedom. Liberalism hands itself over to totalitarianism of the right wing. That is why, the left have the tendency of associating political dictatorships with the right, exactly the opposite of what her adversary does.

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The hierarchical order, the left would say, is the typical category of the right who wish to prevent freedom from leading to its natural goal: equality. That is why the right do not hesitate to annul freedom itself in the name of which they have declared the supposed illegitimacy of equality. Equality without freedom is not legitimate. But, the question that the

left should provocatively raise to the right is this: between a dictatorship that sacrifices freedom in the name of equality (Stalinist totalitarianism) and a dictatorship that sacrifices liberty in the name of an anti-egalitarian order (Nazi totalitarianism), which of the two would they choose?

a dictatorship that
sacrifices freedom in the
name of equality:
Stalinist totalitarianism;
a dictatorship that
sacrifices liberty in the
name of an anti-egalitarian
order:
Nazi totalitarianism

2.2. Freedom for –or against– equality

When liberalism, as the representative of freedom, does not find a channel to evolve in the socialising mode –socialism understood as the representative of equality– then it begins to drift towards fascist totalitarianism –this understood as the representative of the hierarchical order–. This would be for the left the *biology* proper of the social organism. In ac-

cordance with it, liberalism, inasmuch as it is the incarnation of freedom, would be a vulnerable dynamic balance that will not be able to hold itself back or remain quiet at a point: either it will move “forward”, towards an ever-greater equality that does not annul freedom, or will regress “backwards”, towards a totalitarian order that will end up defeating itself. If liberalism wishes to carry on existing and not end up disappearing in the totalitarianism of the right, it will have to advance towards a socialism that starts with freedom, maintains freedom and ends up merging with it.

This description of the left and the right has transformed our first question with a new one: *is reconciliation possible between freedom and equality?* But both questions are identical. Along the way we have been trying to discover who would have the answer right. Probably if the right and the left give different answers it is because deep down *they have a different concept of freedom*. What we have been trying in these pages is to discover which of the two concepts of freedom adapts better to human reality. Only then will we be able to determine if the true vocation of freedom is equality, that is to say, if possible equality is ethically desirable and if desirable equality is really possible, or not.

3. THE LOGIC OF DESIRE AND NATURE'S LITTLE TRICKS

Our double question on equality has been transformed into one single question on freedom: what is freedom? What is the concept of freedom that adapts better to the reality of human life?

Only at the end will we be able to see why there are different concepts of freedom and in what they differ. At the outset, we have to choose a concept of freedom that should be as neutral as possible.

We will define freedom as *the capacity to satisfy the strategy of happiness that an individual has chosen for himself*. The interest of this definition lies in its ties to a eudemonistic anthropology*: the end of man is happiness and freedom is the political principle that establishes the possibility of conforming the existence of each one in conformity with his particular notion of a "good life".

3.1. Freedom and happiness

In accordance with this eudemonistic anthropology, the human being presents himself as a system of desires, and happiness consists in the satisfaction of these desires. Human life in effect is polarised by *desires and needs* of different types: material as hunger or sleep, affective as love, social as the Hegelian desire of recognition, spiritual as creativity, etc. All along the history of philosophy, authors have kept in mind one or many of these as the most important for human nature.

Unnecessary for the moment to establish hierarchies of these desires and to choose any particular one, we

will conform ourselves with describing the individual as a system of desires, needs and interests governed by their rationality and we will grant that in principle desires are personal and intransferable. In conformity with this vision as a starting point, man will be that subject whose aim is happiness, understood as the satisfaction of his desires; and freedom will be the capacity to satisfy them *by himself*, that is to say, it will be that which permits man to be happy.

Some of these desires, the most basic, are common and shared by all members of the human species, but many others are original and the particular desires of each one. Desires, or combinations of desires, that no-

* Technically eudemonistic alludes to all reflections on man and on ethics which are structured around happiness, rather than around duty (note of CiJ).

body else can share, or nobody else knows other than *the person himself*. Desires change, evolve, are in permanent transformation, and cannot be satisfied other than by oneself. For this motive, freedom is an unavoidable political and social principle, because with it many desires would remain unfulfilled, and so man would not be happy. Without freedom then, human life would be unfulfilled, because it would be deprived of its aim, of its end.

We could distinguish between "desires" and "needs". Desires are particular and specific for each person. Needs are basic desires which everybody shares: desire for food, shelter, health... If the individual were only to have common desires, that is to say, "needs", we could perhaps organise a social system that has fundamentally nothing to do with freedom. A system in which *my* desire is satisfied not by myself but by another. If everybody knows my needs, because they are common to all, anybody can satisfy them for me. In this case we will have men happy, satisfied but not free since freedom is not necessary for happiness.

But this is not the case; reality shows us that man has needs but also original desires. Not always is the distinction clear between both. But, even if we were to reach an agreement on this distinction, experience shows us that basic and common desires too are articulated in practice in a fragmentary fashion, in an infinite and complex tangle of partial desires that again leave off being common in their

concrete materialisation to take on the most original and varied forms. All this seems to demand that freedom, which is the same as saying, fulfilment achieved *by one's own self* should be the organising principle of social and political living together, which is living together between individuals, that is to say, *between systems of desires*.

3.2. Here begins the problem

So far so good. But the same nature that created all individuals, as beings that have desires, and with a potentially infinite capacity for desiring, has created too some individuals who are stronger and others who are weaker. Stronger and weaker meaning to say *with greater or lesser capacity to satisfy their desires*, more or less intelligent, more or less skilful, with more or less talent... This means to say simply that some are in a condition to be happier than others are. "By nature" all men are not equal. So if natural gifts are "badly distributed" it seems that the logical consequence should be that happiness be also badly distributed.

That the natural differences of strength are converted into "differences of happiness" is something that is seen in all types of desires. When various individuals coincide in their desires and the resources to satisfy them are scarce it is evident that the strong will satisfy their desire and the weak will remain without resources to do so. When there is not sufficient

to go round, if people are allowed to exercise freely their freedom, the strong have everything in their favour to win and the weak every chance to be "unhappy".

It is nature, then, that makes everybody desire infinitely but it is her again that makes some better able to satisfy more desires than others do. She throws everybody in search of happiness and permits some to be happy and impedes others from being so. Let it be said then, that nature has put things a little difficult for equality. It is Nature that should take all the responsibility for preventing equality, the establishment of which is a big undertaking requiring an enormous effort.

So, the right are correct: equality is only possible at the cost of freedom. Equality is no longer a utopia but a fantasy. The *nature* of man is freedom and Nature has made some men "freer" than others.

Nature understood in this way merits a frightening respect, because

she makes the *greatest possible justice* be cruel and very little just: only a few can be happy. Any other alternative will be even *less just* because if we leave out freedom, then there could be equality but absolutely nobody would be happy. Why then, should the defenders of equality insist on going against Nature and carry on defending equality as an ethical value and a political principle?

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4. NIETZSCHEAN DESPAIR BEFORE AN UNFREE EQUALITY

Nevertheless, something is lacking in this vision of *possible justice* that conceives it as "the happiness of a few", that is to say, of the strong. If this conception were legitimate, social peace would reign. On the contrary, it is easy to observe how the incompatibility between desires, the superposition of freedoms and the different forms of inequality have been, historically, the sources of social conflict. And that means that *there exists in individuals a desire of justice that goes beyond that which is derived from natural freedom.*

Well now, does this exist in all individuals or only in a few? Are not they, in reality, losers in the game of freedom those who provoke the conflict? It seems that *conflict is the form that the weak have in a society that is ruled by natural freedom to express their discomfort and disagreement with their condition of victims of inequality.* Equality will be, therefore, a beneficial ideology for the disadvantaged.

And then there is always the danger that what really matters to these defenders of egalitarianism is

not so much equality among different members of society as "their" particular position in the social group: that equality interests them not for equality itself but for the related improvement that this would bring them. *And this is something very different from equality.* This "equality" of losers will be an indirect form of obtaining what natural liberty has not permitted them to acquire.

This is what Nietzsche in his analysis of "the moral of lords and the moral of slaves", called the "ideology of resentment", the "rebellion of slaves in morals". Nietzsche wished to

undo this hypocrisy that consists in criticising and punishing the mode of life of the lord when in reality this criticism is the fruit of envy of this mode of life. Nietzsche refuses to admit that what in reality is desired should be killed because this would be like putting a gag on life. For him, one should extol what we have called "natural liberty" and celebrate its inequalities.

slaves
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lords themselves.
Their strong desire for
equality, says Nietzsche,
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But it is impossible to
proclaim to all an
anti-universalist doctrine.

Moralist among moralists, the Nietzschean critique is like lucid despair vis-à-vis the impossibility of the individual to be good, despair turned inside out and presented as an impossible positive hymn. What is not valid, he will say, is a critical moral of the will to power which in reality is the instrument of a twisted form of one's own will to power. Slaves are opposed to the lord when in reality what they feel is resentment since

they would wish, if they dared, to be lords themselves. In reality, Nietzsche says, *universality means nothing to them*, neither good nor evil, nor equality. Their strong desire for equality, Nietzsche accuses, is a form of fear for life. Slaves, afraid to admit their own will to power, instead of trying to be lords, finish off with their lords. This is why for Nietzsche justice does not exist, only valour.

However, the alternative that the philosopher offers is as impossible as it is lucid. In substitution of the ethic of justice, Nietzsche announces a luminous madness: "the moment of the wedding between light and darkness has come". Zarathustra proclaims to the multitude the end of the morals of good and evil, and hands over to the moral of lords, the will to power which only a chosen few can dare to have. But there is no place under the sun for everybody to be lords. It is impossible to *proclaim to all an anti-universalist doctrine*. One cannot announce to everybody morals for which only *a few* qualify.

The doctrine of Nietzsche, that castigates implacably the snares of universalism is not only valid but also *necessary*. It is the most radical challenge the defence of equality has had to face. More so than ever if we recall that in the fall of soviet communism, the falsehoods of egalitarianism, safeguarded by a few privileged élites who lived better than their fellow-citizens, were made manifest. Simone Weil denounced Bolshevism because *it was only an inversion of the roles* that, according to her, did not differ

from the same logic of power and control of the capitalist world.

Even in the Welfare State, that tries to be a version of equality that does not excessively contradict freedom and is capitalism with some ingredients of socialism, the Nietzschean critique has often been confirmed. This system attempted to correct "*private corruption*" inherent in the capitalist market. However, when the Social-democratic parties were in power, episodes of "*public corruption*" were often repeated. It occurred that the supposed defenders of equality, the lords of the State, were in reality mere imitators of the lords of the market. The "public lords" behaved themselves as a perfect replica of "private lords".

It is coherent, from the moral point of view, that the lords of the market do not fulfil the law of the redistributing State, evading taxes, since they are, in principle, against that law and that State. What is ethically not logical is that the "lords of the State" should keep public money, since they are supposedly in favour of redistribution. In savage Capitalism, capitalists keep others' wealth, but public administrators of the Welfare State that had arrived on the scene to stop that did exactly this. As a result even in the Welfare State, the supposed champions of justice have turned out to be simply the incarnation of the "hypocrisy of the slaves" denounced by Nietzsche.

In synthesis

The philosopher advises us: when equality is merely instrumental, when it is at the service of particular interests, it ends up refuting itself. He believed that only the will to power was possible, ruling out the possibility of a disinterested equality.

justice and equality,
cannot deny
creativity,
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spontaneous and direct
passion

But, besides alerting us about this, Nietzsche's prose teaches us that an equality that is not on the side of life, on the side of the power of freedom, an equality that does not take into account that man is a being that is born to better himself as Mounier liked to remind us –quoting precisely Nietzsche– such an equality will always restrict something that should not be restricted, will restrict a dynamism that is latent deep down life. Justice and with it, equality, cannot deny creativity, self-betterment, strength, spontaneous and direct passion.

5. MORTALITY, IDEOLOGY AND GRACE

What can we do, then, to achieve an equality that does not go against what is good in Nature –creativity, spontaneity, strength, power, dynamism– but which would avoid its bad effects: arbitrary differences, incapacity for universality?

It seems an impossible task. Is not nature a unitary whole? Is it possible to separate “its parts”, keeping some and doing away with the rest? It does not seem so. The only alternative is that of justice, determined by Nature, that gives happiness to a few, at the cost of the rest. It is a question of *sacrificial* justice, based on the *sacrifice of the other*, in the manner of old religions. The happiness of each individual does not come through the achievement of other people’s happiness, but by its negation.

Our trajectory seems to have come to an end. We have not found in nature any “force” that leads to the achievement of equality. Quite the contrary. However, if we were to remain at this point, we would be leaving out a most important detail, precisely that which makes of a person, a person.

5.1. Insatiability of desire

What is this *detail*? We said that the vocation of a person is happiness and this consists in the capacity to satisfy his own desires. The *detail* is the fact that *the faculty of the individual to desire is infinite*. Why is this so important?

In principle, faced with his own desires, the individual can choose one of the two possibilities: satisfy them by virtue of his freedom or renounce them for whatever reason. If the individual does not wish to renounce a desire the satisfaction of which is impeded by another much stronger individual, then he always has the possibility of “resentment” such as men-

tioned by Nietzsche which is a form of not renouncing one’s own desire, being on the watch for another occasion to satisfy it. The fundamental thing in any case is that the individual for all and every one of his desires, has only two alternatives: satisfying them with his natural means, or renouncing them when he sees clearly the possibility of never being able to satisfy them, his happiness shattered as a result.

However, the fact that human capacity for desiring is infinite complicates things. Because it inevitably causes “to be born” in the individual a type of desire that he can in no way either renounce or satisfy by his own means. And the worst thing is that

man knows that he will never be able to satisfy this desire which he finds impossible to renounce. This infinite desire is represented in the *desire for immortality*. This then is the fact: that *man desires immortality and has no possibility of acquiring it.*

There is no natural hope for man that this desire can be fulfilled. Neither is there the possibility of keeping himself back from the attractiveness and seduction of this desire. Ancient philosophy situates man as a creature between animals and gods in the scale of beings. Half god, half animal, or worse still, neither god nor animal. Neither a god who wishes to be immortal and can be so, nor an animal that is mortal and does not care that it is so as it is unaware beforehand of its mortality. Man is an animal that aspires to be a god, a mortal that wishes to be immortal.

Man distinguishes himself from an animal in that he is capable of *anticipating his own mortality*. But this anticipation is converted *spontaneously* in a desire for immortality. An animal with no consciousness of self does not wish to be immortal because it does not know that it is mortal. Man wishes to be immortal because he knows that he is not so. The awareness of one's own mortality and the desire of immortality are the two sides of the same coin.

5.2. Happiness and Immortality

The desire, then, of immortality will be the maximum expression of

that Nietzschean will to power, of wishing to be like gods, of being beyond good and evil, of the longing to be valour itself. This desire is the justification of this will to power. Because *one can only try to do without morals when one is immortal*. If power were not to have limits in time, then it would be logical to do without (the limits of) good and evil, in our relations with men and nature.

But this is not the case. Nature took its biggest step when it created the human conscience and manifested its greatest power when it made a being that desires immortality. However, on taking this step, it defeated itself in the most radical way possible. Who would ever think of giving a being the desire of immortality if he did not give at the same time, immortality itself? Either both things or none.

The desire of immortality is something like the *fundamental desire* of the person because in it is represented the dynamics of infinity inherent in the very fact of desiring. In some way, the desire of immortality is what permits the existence of all other desires. In the desiring structure of man there is a pile of desires that nature can satisfy, but all of them are upheld by a desire in origin before which nature remains silent because it cannot satisfy this desire in origin. That is why death or better the consciousness that man has of it, supposes a total negation of the will to power. With the consciousness of mortality, the will to power and the freedom to satisfy one's desires with no limit

other than that of one's own strength, become something tragic. And when this tragedy is not acknowledged, they are converted into something still worse, into something "obscene" .

The consciousness, therefore, of mortality is what radically contradicts all forms of possible happiness. Because if happiness consisted in the satisfaction of desires and the fundamental desire can never be satisfied, then happiness is unattainable. There will be experiences of partial happiness, momentary flashes of happiness, in the measure other desires are satisfied. But these flashes will be suspended in an abyss of unhappiness the moment they go in search of their own foundation. Partial desires, those that can be satisfied, will claim their desire of origin, and when they do find it, the desire of origin will contradict the partial desires in a way that admits of no appeal.

5.3. Possible Replies

So, the happiness of man comes up against an insurmountable wall, the wall of death.

Before reaching this wall, we had a world based on natural strength in which the strong were happy and the weak unhappy. After the absolute wall which death supposes for man, we have a world in which all are unhappy.

But this unhappiness of all is not a product of nobody's happiness, as before. It is not the fight for happiness that explains this new situation. The engine of human life seems to have come to a standstill.

Before this wall of death, there are various possible *reactions*:

a) Existentialists speak of death as that which converts human life into something *absurd*, and considered exclusively from the point of view of natural capacities, it runs every chance of being converted into something absurd. Camus said that the only philosophical problem that really exists is suicide. Because in the face of the absurd, a logical reply, although not for that matter simple, would be suicide.

b) Then there are the "obscene" reactions: those that in the face of the magnitude of the tragedy prefer to be left in the dark and remain blind. Whether they admit it or not, they are conscious of the insoluble contradiction between the desire of immortality and death, but afraid, they prefer to run away from this truth.

These are ideological covers. They are reactions that abound in the history of humanity. Let us point out three that have been present let us say from times immemorial in the history of man:

— In the first place, *the ideology of scientific advancement and technical progress*. This ideology believes that science and technology will bring about some day a society of complete happiness. But this supposes deep down the belief that science will discover some day the potion of immortality, that which children's stories call "the secret of eternal youth", that will make all of us eternal. But immortality eludes

human science. To escape through science and technical progress from the problem of death and from the unhappiness that accompanies death is a snare, perhaps the most modern, of the three ideologies.

— In second place is *the ideology of "wealth"*, which best symbolises the collective dreams of current western societies. The very survival of the capitalist system depends on this blindness. In synthesis, the belief is that money makes happiness. It is believed that anything can be bought, that in the measure in which societies get richer, they will become freer and finally happier. However, this ideology is not aware of this little detail, and if it is it tries to give the opposite impression: immortality cannot be bought, not with all the money of the world. Multimillionaires may die at a ripe old age, but they too end up dying. Neither does money give an accurate answer to the problem of death.

— The third *ideology* is that "*of power*", social power. All men and societies have experienced the fascination of power. It seems that this desire is the key factor of the psychological structure of the human being. This ideology believes that by climbing the ladder of power, happiness is achieved. The belief is that the powerful at the top achieve total self-fulfilment. Because it is they who dictate the law and the law is the means to satisfy one's own desires. However, no law can decree immortality for anyone. And power too dashes against the wall of death.

— Neither power nor technology nor money can bring happiness.

That does not mean that they are not necessary realities for the survival of man and for the betterment of his living conditions. Science and technical progress are positive factors as are also the creation of wealth or the political institutions that dictate the laws and regulate the relations of power. But, *they are partial relative realities*. And the error of the ideologies that are based on them is that they give them absolute value. Because mortality frightens, and these ideologies, these "obscene" reactions are the fruit of fear, a way of making fear vanish. That is why, historically, the human being has looked for happiness in these avenues. And precisely for this has not been happy.

What way out is left for the human being? Renounce happiness? Choose only between the tragic reaction and the obscene ones? No. Before the wall of death, there is still another possibility, another *reaction* that perhaps seems to us the strangest, the most impossible, but which, in reality is the one that has been building at the moment of truth the history of humanity. A reaction that says that *the wall of death is the threshold of a new reality, distinct from the natural reality* —which in principle, is the only one that we know.

5.4. Renounce immortality

It is about giving what Kierkegaard calls a spiritual "leap". To explain it we make use of the words of a *witness* of this leap. Because only

witnesses can speak of it. In a series of notes written in 1941, Simone Weil wrote as follows:

“Like gas, the soul tends to occupy fully the place it is assigned. A gas that contracts and leaves a vacuum would be against the law of entropy. (...) This is contrary to all the laws of nature. Only grace can do that. Grace fills but cannot enter where there is no vacuum to receive it, and it is grace that makes the vacuum...”

“Accept a vacuum within oneself is supernatural. Where is one to find the energy for an act without compensation? The energy has to come from elsewhere. But nevertheless at the beginning a tearing away, something desperate is necessary to produce the vacuum. Vacuum: the dark night.”

“Loving the truth signifies putting up with the vacuum and, consequently, death. Truth is on the side of death.” (*La gravedad y la Gracia*, ed. Trotta 1994, pg. 61-62)

What is the **vacuum** that Simone Weil talks of? It is renouncing the desire of immortality, the desire of being like God. But with human nature it is impossible to renounce this desire. That is why, renouncing it is something that is not within the reach of human nature. It is an act, as Weil says, “supernatural”. When man experiences the renunciation of his desire for immortality, he automatically perceives that this renunciation has not been his work as this is not within his power. If the individual experiences this renunciation, then he automatically feels himself obliged to

acknowledge that this renunciation has been the work of some agent outside him. And this outside agent Simon Weil, following Christian tradition, calls *grace*.

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The vacuum is the acceptance of one’s own mortality and the renunciation of one’s own desire for immortality. That is why, says Weil, “truth is on the side of death”, because truth only comes through a vacuum. However, what is characteristic of nature is “gravity”, that is to say, the desire of survival, the “conatus” about which Spinoza speaks. This gravity rules nature, rules the world of physics and psychology and is what drives us to desire immortality. That is why, *to renounce this desire of being is something human nature cannot do, because it is something that goes against the law of gravity that rules human psychology*. Because it is renouncing one’s own power. That is why, “the energy has to come from elsewhere”.

However, when the vacuum is produced, “grace fills it”. A reward is then received which is not in our hands but is *the only answer to the problem of death*. This reward, how-

ever, only comes in the measure man has passed through the experience of *total unhappiness* that implies the vacuum. The renunciation of one's own fundamental desire, although it is the work of grace, is all the same "something desperate", he writes: *the "vacuum" implies a "black night"*. But in this dark night, he tells us, one can *experience* grace:

"This vacuum is fuller than all plenitudes". "It is necessary to find the fuller reality in suffering that is nothingness and vacuum. So, *it is necessary to love life very much to be able to love death even more.*"

Through the vacuum, that consists in the acceptance of death itself, *another world* opens up to us, fuller than all plenitudes". Death when accepted opens to us the doors of grace. To acquire grace we have to renounce the fulfilment of the desire of immortality, leave by the wayside our *natural* happiness. But through grace one can attain a new spiritual happiness. And this new happiness is much higher, much "fuller", because, unlike the happiness of nature, it is capable of filling the vacuum left by death. The happiness of nature appears to fill the vacuum through the ideologies, but this is just a false impression.

That is why we must avoid the ideologies, because it impedes the vacuum that is necessary for grace to

come to us. Weil writes: "The imagination takes care continuously to close the slits through which grace passes". The imagination is equivalent to the generating force of what we have called *ideologies*. For this, says Weil, every individual has to "suspend continuously in himself the work of the imagination that fills the vacuum."

However, the human being is afraid of the "dark night", of death, and rejects the unhappiness that is implied by the fact of accepting his death without conditions. That is the reason he often prefers the natural happiness of the imagination, of the ideologies, to the spiritual happiness of grace. He prefers a false happiness to a full happiness. "One has to put aside beliefs that fill the vacuum and make bitternesses suave. Weil writes: *The only way for grace is to renounce one's own desire of immortality* and not to avoid bitternesses.

To love death, "to love life much in order to love death even more", this is what the French mystic proposes to us. But this is impossible to the human being if he has to work with his own strength, because it goes against gravity. *However, to love death is almost the biggest supernatural gift which has been given to man*. Or the only one. That is why Weil says, "*death is the most precious thing that has been given to man*".

6. RISK AND THE WORLD OF THE SPIRIT: FREEDOM FREED

Through this love for death, “another world” opens up to us, that of “beyond death”. This world is a mystery. And mystery has by nature, a certain degree of impenetrability to reason. Weil warns us that it cannot be explained through intelligence. However, from this certain teachings can be had, that derive precisely from its obscure character, and these teachings do admit a certain logical penetration. We have already been acquainted with them from what has been said up to here. Now it is a question of clarifying them.

6.1. Gravity and Grace (or heaviness and the leap)

To begin with, we know that we are confronted with two worlds of a totally distinct character: the natural world, that of “this side” of death, which is ruled according to the known law of gravity, and the world which from now onwards we will call “of the spirit” or that of “the other side” of death which is ruled according to the ineffable law of grace. Between these two worlds a relation of total opposition is established from the start. Grace is contrary to gravity. In the world of nature, knowledge, scientific reason, empirical investigation, deduction and induction reign. To speak about the natural world we make a scientific use of language and in this world freedom, understood as natural strength, finds itself as fish in water.

About the world of grace, on the other hand, we can only speak with a symbolic use of language. Scientific reason and natural freedom cannot understand it. In it only spiritual leaps are valid, as Kierkegaard would say. It is full of abysses. We can only gain access to it through a wager, as Pascal would say. In it only risks are valid, considering that in every leap there is risk. It is a world which generates as a fundamental experience doubt and confidence, that though appearing as opposed to each other, necessarily need each other. One trusts what is not known, that is why confidence is always full of doubt. Symbols have as their mission to preserve on the plane of language the leap that is taken on the spiritual plane –and the obscurity that this leap implies. For this reason, religious language that is always symbolical rejects a literal in-

terpretation, in the scientific key, that is what makes religion fall into fundamentalism.

From the start, these two worlds are radically opposed just as doubt is opposed to arithmetic, trust to certainty, and risk (spiritual) to prediction (scientific). Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel starts precisely from this premise: of the extra-rationality of the spiritual world. The Dane was annoyed with the German because he considered that the other, by identifying Spirit with Reason, that is, by colonising the world of grace with a faculty that belonged to the world of gravity, had eliminated the risk, the leap. In the Hegelian system, certitude and trust had substituted anguish by prediction.

This is the terrible consequence of the self-absolutisation of modern reason. With it, man's freedom remains permanently in the hands of gravity –that is to say, of egoism– and it becomes impossible to have the experience by which man's freedom is liberated from desire by means of grace. That is why, freedom for Hegel could not be more than the consciousness of necessity, granted that necessity is the law that rules in the world of gravity.

6.2. What do we refer to when we speak of the world of the spirit?

Now then, if we speak of the natural world that we know by means of scientific reason, it is clear what we

are speaking about, but what are we really referring to when we speak of the world of the spirit? Weil speaks of a plenitude fuller than all plenitudes. But what does this consist in? It is about a life that is fuller than the life that is presented to us by means of the natural will, reason and desire. Therefore, if the only limitations that life has in its natural conception are its spatial and temporal limits, the spiritual world would amount to *something like life, life itself but having overcome all these limits*. It is a question of a different way of relating oneself with life, transcending the barriers that rational knowledge imposes on the world.

That is why, by means of grace, *the natural world is received transfigured*. It is conceived beyond its limitations of space and time and this means that the sacred background of life is discovered. It is not about a life that is different from that we know, but about this same life in its sacred dimension that we cannot know by means of reason but what we can *experience* by grace.

Only symbolical, mystical and religious language can speak to us of this sacred ineffable background.

This perspective is what allows us to resolve the problem of the relation between the natural world and the world of "the beyond". Grace does not supplant nature but crowns it. From this perspective, nature becomes a sacrament of its sacred background, in which everything is focused and directed towards the maximum transparency of this background.

If nature proceeds from grace, the very fact of life itself has to be conceived as a mystery, fruit of pure gratuity. This is how we close the circle: grace has been revealed on the limit of nature, when this finishes—at death, or on the limits of space and time—and once revealed, she has allowed us to re-discover nature which is also a pure gratuity, like a reality with a “why”. Through grace which transcends life, we discover that life exists *because it exists*².

nature
becomes a sacrament of its
sacred background...
but one has to accept the
“dark night”

So we can say that grace is, in reality, stronger than gravity and that in fact the energy of grace is what animates the energy of gravity. How is this possible if we have agreed that we are talking of energies with opposed dynamics? Let us say that on the ontological level there is no contradiction between gravity and grace. *It is the relation of man with each of them, his way of acceding to each of these dimensions of life that are in contradiction.* That is why, says Weil, only a crucified person is capable of uniting these two worlds, the natural and the sacred, and that “at the high price of being quartered”. Because only with this sacrifice the internal contradiction of man could

be saved and elevated from gravity up to the access to grace. One has to be ready to accept the dark night to find the link between nature and its sacred background³.

6.3. Life and death, two sides of the same coin

If in the newly discovered perspective, grace creates the basis of gravity and the spiritual world lays the foundations of the natural world, then life and death are no longer two different things, opposed realities; rather they become two sides of the same coin. This is the main teaching of mysticism. If through the leap and the wager, life can be experienced as a reality that transcends space and time, then *death is no longer the negation of life, but only its mystery.* Replying to Camus, suicide has no meaning. In the spiritual perspective, death, in effect, is good, but it is not necessary that we commit suicide because it is good in the measure that it is in harmony with life, in the measure in which it is of the same substance as life. And this is what mysticism says. Suicide would be necessary to pass from bad to good, but not to pass from good to the same good. That is why St. Francis could speak of “sister death” and praise her side by side with the other creatures of nature.

That is why we said before that the experience of grace was capable of filling the vacuum left by the consciousness of death and the renuncia-

tion of the desire of immortality. Because only the spiritual experience is capable of revealing life and death *as a mysterious –and fecund– unit*. For this reason we also said that grace is the fountain of true happiness. Thanks to mystical trust, that is, to a certain sense of the sacred dimension of reality, it becomes possible to consider human mortality from another perspective than that which is derived from the mere impotence of the will. Grace is precisely the spiral that allows one to rise from fundamental fear –the fear of death and finitude– to trust which consists in renouncing the desire for infinity. And the risk that is implied in trust is the only answer that man can give himself to his desire for immortality. Through risk, the overcoming of death ceases being the object of desire to turn into the object of hope⁴.

We are talking here of a mystical observation. When desire is substituted by grace received, the human being attains his own divine background, to which all individuals can have access to. In this way men come “to be like gods”. With respect to his immortality, however, the individual has only spiritual trust, unlike the rational security sustained in the natural will that he had in the case of other desires. That is why, it is only through his relation with grace that man can be happy. Mozart, the musician, wrote in a letter to his father: “I give thanks to the good God because he has allowed me to realise that death holds the secret of our happiness.

6.4. The full happiness of man ceases depending on himself alone

The fundamental teaching that is to be learnt from this *discovery* of grace is that the *full* happiness of man stops depending on himself alone. To attain *natural* happiness man depends on his own power; but to attain *spiritual* happiness –that which is made available by grace– depends on an alien power. And this power is maximum power, granted that it is what satisfies the maximum vocation of man: “my vocation depends on another”.

That is why man when he changes perspectives from the *natural* to the *spiritual*, undergoes a process of disorientation. He stops focusing on himself and as Mounier would say, it is this *disorientation that converts him into a person*. The paradox of the human being, Mounier points out, is that he only finds himself on the personal plane (only achieves his vocation, only finds happiness that fills him) by renouncing himself on the biological plane (by accepting his own death). He stops focusing on himself, that is, he gets disoriented to remain centred on a new Centre which he gets access to only through a leap and risking the void.

So then, conversion consists in acknowledging that my own happiness as far as its fundamental nucleus is concerned –that is, immortality–, does not depend mainly on myself. It means admitting that the centre of reality is not oneself nor one’s own

desires, which is a way of acknowledging that one's own desires are relative and not absolute. So one has to renounce one's own self-deification –something that only grace can achieve.

With this new instance, with this alien power, there is no longer *a relation of skill and possession*, as in the case of one's own power, that of natural freedom, but *a relation of surrender*. There is no longer a relation of dominion, but one of praise and gratitude. With the natural world, the individual establishes *a relation of control*. Now with the spiritual world, the subject establishes *a relation of respect*, of contemplation. In the world that is known through science, power belongs to the individual. In a world that one can only talk about through symbols, the individual has to venerate and be grateful, because power is not his. But not with a fearful veneration and servile gratitude, but a joyful and transparent veneration and tender and loving gratitude. Because they do not make slaves of one, rather they make one free.

This Centre, which is maximum power, has been all along in history, the reality to which different religious traditions have referred to normally. And religions in general have tended to take a step further which consists in identifying this Centre with love or in saying that its nature is love. It is not an inexplicable step as it has its logic. The Centre manifests Himself as the maximum power in the measure in which man receives from Him what he cannot obtain by his own

efforts: transcend the limits of space and time, fill the vacuum of death and acknowledge the gratuitous character of life.

This power, therefore, manifests Himself to man in the measure in which man receives something from Him, that is to say, in the measure in which he surrenders something to Him. So, what is revealed by means of the spiritual leap, the void and grace is a Centre that is the maximum power in the measure in which He is capable of giving. It is here where religions have characterised the essence of this power as love. Because for human experience, love implies the capacity to give, to surrender oneself gratuitously. The Centre, then, *is the maximum power only and in the same measure in which He is love, a gratuitous gift*.

6.5. Freedom as capacity for accepting grace

The dynamic of the world of the spirit, then, is not a dynamic of a will to power, as that of the world of gravity, but a dynamic of contemplation or, what is the same, of conversion. Conversion is contrary to the will to power. Conversion is on the side of prayer that is the height of activity with the maximum immobility. The will, on the other hand, supposes the least activity with maximum movement. The surprising thing about grace is that it supposes at one and the same time *passion* (passivity, that is to say immobility) and *risk*. Certainly, ma-

ximum risk is always inherent in maximum passion, which is none other than the acceptance of death itself.

Conversion supposes a possibility of liberating the freedom of man from the weight of gravity. By grace, liberty remains free; that is to say, natural freedom can go beyond itself and renounce its maximum expression that was the desire for immortality. It can acknowledge its own indigence and accept its failure. But *it is precisely on making this acknowledgement that the necessary void is created for the coming of grace.* That is why, we can say that by means of reflection on death, a radically new possibility is presented to freedom: that of renouncing itself.

So, natural freedom, that was the capacity for achieving one's own desires, is now transformed into a capacity for accepting grace. A capacity that, when attained, freedom can no longer recognise as its own work but necessarily as the work of grace itself, of this "energy that comes from elsewhere". If we did not think this way, we would fall in contradiction. Because we cannot consider the act of renunciation of one's own strength as the work of this same force. This act—that consists in *loving death without desiring it*—is an act effected by virtue of grace. That is why we can say that this is the maximum exercise that

freedom can permit itself because in it, precisely, freedom transcends itself, since by self-renunciation, it surpasses itself. *Grace suspends freedom, but by doing so, completes it, that is to say, achieves the vocation of freedom itself.* Grace achieves what freedom desires but is incapable of doing: giving a reply to the problem of death.

Therefore, it is not a question of obtaining a reply but rather of receiving it. In the face of orphanhood in which the individual finds himself because of his finitude, he has the possibility of receiving a revelation, of receiving it unconditionally, not because he wants to carry on looking for happiness but because he has already renounced happiness, he has forgotten about it and he has resigned himself to leaving his vocation incomplete. Then, unexpectedly, the happiness he had renounced is returned to him gratuitously. The surrender to the void can only be unconditional and unconditionality does not admit cheating. Gratuity does not admit manipulation. One does not seek grace in order to be happy; rather one is happy as a result of having found grace. If grace is a fiction of the mind to satisfy our desire for immortality, if in reality it is a ruse of the natural will to be happy, then it would serve no purpose and man would forever remain unhappy without solution.

7. SACRED ROOTS OF HAPPINESS, OR SUFFERING AS THE CONTENT OF HAPPINESS

What relation is there in meaning between gratuity and equality? In this consists the last and definitive step to return once again to the beginning of our dissertation. With the discovery of grace, the central reality of one's own life stops being oneself and is instead the loving Centre from Who one receives happiness as a gratuitous gift.

Making necessarily a symbolic use of this term, we designate the relation of man's dependence on an alien power at the time of completing his vocation as a relation of affiliation. If nature is the sacrament of the divine background from which grace proceeds, the happiness of a person, the crowning of this nature, will be like a sacrament of the creative love of this divine background... It will, therefore, also be sacred.

7.1. Sacred dimension of equality

What has changed then with respect to that natural happiness that, according to Nietzsche, granted the valiant and honest individual, the right to override the happiness of others? If this new sacred happiness is no longer through one's own merit, nor the result of the power of the individual, rather it is a received gift, the result of an external power, a grace that has arrived from "the beyond", then things change remarkably. Because if the happiness of an individual is sacred because it is the fruit of affiliation, then *the happiness of other*

individuals is also sacred, because it is the fruit too of affiliation. When happiness is the fruit of one's own will to power, what mattered to each individual was "his" happiness. If happinesses are incompatible among themselves, it would always be the stronger man whose happiness would prevail.

When happiness is shown to be the fruit of the sense of gratuity and of affiliation, my happiness has the same value as that of others. Before "mine" was all that mattered because it was "I" who had attained it. Now the happiness of everybody matters because it is not me who achieves it

but *another, another who is absent*, who gives it to me and claims that I take the leap, the risk and trust as ways to accede to *Him*. If my happiness has value because another gives it to me, then the happiness of all people that proceeds from the same affiliation should also have the same value as mine. *Therefore, I cannot acknowledge the value of my own happiness received without acknowledging immediately the value of the happiness of all those who are also in the situation of affiliation.*

And who are these? Mortals with conscience, that is to say, all human beings. This is the justification of equality and the explanation of its sacred dimension: men are all equal because all are *children of God*, and all are children of God because all are mortal. The fact of being equal in front of death makes men equal in front of life. But this equality is only made effective when men are willing to achieve their vocation and, consequently, assume the risk of taking the leap into the void and the dark night.

7.2. "My" happiness claims "theirs"

Therefore, it is not possible to acknowledge the value of one's own happiness without acknowledging the value of the happiness of all human beings. This is contrary to what the perspective based on natural freedom teaches us. So, other people, because of the affiliation, are no longer "my rivals", but become "my brothers", if

I want to achieve my happiness. If I do not acknowledge the happiness of others, I am making the achievement of my own happiness impossible. Because in spiritual happiness, by virtue of affiliation, "my" happiness is inseparably united to that of other mortals like myself. "My" happiness claims "theirs".

In this way, "others" are converted into a sacred reality. As a result, *the personal experience of the overcoming of death as a limit is necessarily tied to the personal experience of brotherhood. Because only gratuity can fill the vacuum of death but from it brotherhood is inescapably derived. Therefore, without brotherhood there can be no happiness.*

This is what is meant by "love your neighbour as yourself". Love is the capacity to acknowledge the right to happiness. The loving Centre has returned to us, through the experience of grace, the possibility of loving ourselves. That is why, when the barrier of the void has been crossed, narcissism proper of the will to power has no longer any value. Love of oneself gets identified with the love of others. And this is brotherhood.

If I were a son of myself, other men would not be my brothers and then their happiness should not affect me in the least. But if I am the son of a *Father/Mother* that is common to all mortals, it is revealed to me that my happiness is sacred because of the fact that it is the daughter of this common Father/Mother and so is the happiness of others because it too

is their daughter. *From being a son of myself and brother of nobody, I have come to be a son of a loving Centre and brother of all.* My happiness is equal to that of another because the criterion of value and meaning has ceased being *myself*. So, equality must inescapably be the object and the criterion of justice.

There is then an intimate relation between the overcoming of death and human brotherhood, between sacred and terrestrial justice, between mysticism and social equality. Our journey concludes with this discovery: the “ideology” of grace –which is contrary to all ideologies– is equality. Equality is the result of brotherhood that in turn is the fruit of the discovery of the sacred roots of life, observed on the limits of the natural world. Equality will be, then, like a sacrament of what we have earlier called the promise of eternal life that is to be had in the experience of grace. When man loves the desire of another, that is to say, acknowledges the value of his happiness, he is *actualising* his experience of grace.

With the conversion of natural freedom –dominated by might and the egoism of gravity– into spiritual freedom –dominated by justice and the generosity of grace–, it is made evident to man that the maximum power that is within his reach is the power of love (universal love) or of brotherhood. Love is the maximum expression of human power because through it alone can man participate in the power of the loving Centre, through it alone can man be capable

of overcoming death and the void that grace frees from death. It is through love that man, in imitation of the loving Centre, frees his brother from injustice. Power, then, does not consist in possessing, in dominating but in giving, since giving is the essence of love. *He who gives is more powerful than he who has.*

7.3. Reply to “the little tricks” of Nature

We know now the reason for equality, the reason we were looking for at the beginning of these pages. But the journey is not over yet. The experience of equality as the actualisation of grace brings home to us another teaching. As we know, the particular desires of individuals for natural happiness often clash and compete with one another. Nevertheless, the *new ethics* that is derived from the experience of grace demands the acknowledgement of the happiness of others. The differences of might can now no longer be used as a criterion for acting, nor for personal benefit. So the ideal of equality enters into conflict with natural happiness. Because it necessarily supposes that when the desire of a person conflicts with that of another, if both are ruled by the ethics of equality, they will be willing to share their own desire with that of the other, working to make them compatible.

This, in practice, supposes, in the first place, a *logic of sharing*, when the incompatibility of the different

natural happinesses is determined by the fact that the necessary resources to satisfy the desires are scarce. And in second place, a *logic of active solidarity* of the strong with the weak, when it is not a question of resources being scarce, but a difference in the "speed" with which one and the other satisfy their respective desires, causing the differences of strength to result in inequalities.

Therefore, to achieve equality it is necessary to renounce one's own desires to a point in which all desires are made compatible. All renunciation of a desire necessarily supposes a certain degree of suffering big or small. This is contrary to natural happiness which consists in the satisfaction of one's own desires. For this reason we have to conclude that spiritual happiness is incompatible with full natural happiness or that happiness derived from grace supposes a certain degree of natural unhappiness. In other words, spiritual happiness, that has overcome the pitfall of the consciousness of mortality, implies necessarily and always a certain dose of self-sacrifice and suffering.

In the measure in which this sacrifice is a demand of love, and in the measure in which this love, as we have said before, is maximum power that has been granted to man, *the sacrifice will be a manifestation of maximum power*. The power of sacrifice is, thus, much greater than the power of might. Let us take note that this mysterious and fecund power of weakness, is what has been building the history of humanity.

The experience of grace, when it is embodied in the ethics of equality, supposes a gain of spiritual happiness and a loss of natural happiness. As we see we have passed from a liberal ethic based on the sacrifice of the (natural) happiness of *others* to a new ethic of grace based on the sacrifice of *one's own* (natural) happiness.

By virtue of this step, the weak pass from playing a *sacrificial* role to playing a *sacramental* one, from being victims to being preferential objectives of the social order. Because the acknowledgement of the happiness of the weak, who stand all the chances of remaining on the margin of natural happiness, is the proof de facto that the social order is being organised on the basis of the ethics of equality. Equality of the weak is the touchstone of ethics and political philosophy that rule in a human community; it is the litmus test of social justice.

That is the reason why, when it happens that in the social order universality is broken and equality does not rule, the way of remaining with the whole group is being on the side of the victims. If there is no social justice and the difference between the strong and the weak is converted into a difference between victims and tyrants, opting for the victims is the way of being with all. Since the victims are the only place from which one can aspire for a reconciled future social order, the only place from which disagreement with a broken and irreconciled present social order can be expressed.

The evaluation of one's own suffering when solidarity claims this *—and only in this case—* is the element which was lacking to illumine in a complete way the content of justice. Grace that permitted us to discover the unity between the sacred and the universal unites (spiritual) happiness and suffering too. Love is the capacity to renounce one's own desires so as to permit the satisfaction of the desires of others and in love is all experience of true human fulfilment. Through love is achieved what at first glance would appear a union of two extremes: suffering appears as the content of happiness. As the saying goes: "The man who loves is by essence a being who suffers". This identification between happiness and suffering is, perhaps, the most profound teaching of mysticism.

We discover thus that the natural world can only get transfigured *—converted—* into the world of the spirit at the cost of one's own suffering. Love has permitted the reconciliation of that split between Nature and Justice, equality and freedom, particularity and universality. But this always at the cost of personal suffering that acquires in this way a sacred value, as sacred was too the value that happiness of people acquired in the eyes of grace. A certain amount of personal suffering is a sacrament of the ascent from nature towards the spirit or from the verification of finitude to the promise of eternity, and

consequently, from unhappiness to happiness.

So, personal suffering stops being, from the perspective of the will to power, a messenger of guilt and of the absurd that occurs to an individual and becomes instead a messenger of liberation and happiness, *a messenger of conversion*. Personal suffering should definitely not be desired as this would suppose a neurotisation of necessary sacrifice that is derived from the ethics of grace. The suffering that we are talking about stems from brotherhood and solidarity, not from masochism. But it has to be acknowledged if we wish to face with realism the problem of human fulfilment: there is no authentic happiness without pain. That is why, suffering, when it comes as a result of brotherhood, is not desired but, quite the contrary, *humbly accepted* in a spontaneous way for motives of growth and maturity. But never rejected or hidden. When it comes, as a price of happiness, one has to penetrate its meaning, so as to redeem it.

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8. BEYOND MODERNITY

The ethics of love (of grace) implies the reconciliation of two ethics that in traditional moral philosophy were often presented as two ethics in mutual conflict: the autonomous ethics or happiness understood as an egoistic ethic and the heteronomous ethics or of duty –which we have called the capacity to respect the desire of others on the basis on an ethic of equality.

This perspective places us on the way to making a radical criticism of the Kantian ethics, representative of modernity and, therefore, ultimately responsible for the crisis of the “ideologies of equality”.

8.1. Kantian “duty” and happiness

Kantian ethics is the best expression of an ethics with the vocation of laying the foundation for universality. For this ethics, there is no universality without duty. However, as all later philosophy has taken care to remind us, this duty in Kant seems almost incompatible with happiness. It looks as though, according to Kant, there were in human nature two forces, that of duty, based on reason and that of the inclinations (or of self love, as Kant says), based on the desire for happiness. Man is free when reason is capable of obeying itself and not

the inclinations derived from the desire of happiness. Freedom is characterised by the capacity to self-determine itself in an autonomous way.

However, how can we make an ethic which obliges man to choose between his happiness and his duty? The ethics of love reconciles these two extremes and makes one see that in the exercise of duty are to be found the greatest happiness possible as also the only true self-love. Because before the wall of death, man has no possibility left to love himself other than with the love received from grace. And in the love received, duty and self love, that is to say, universality (justice as equality) and happiness,

coincide. The difference between the ethics of grace and the Kantian ethic of Practical Reason is that in the first there is no place for duty without self-love, nor for happiness without duty. And, on the contrary, there does exist this possibility in the second.

For the ethics of love the strength to comply with duty does not stem from reason itself but from the experience of the limit as religious experience, that is to say, from the experience of being as love. In the ethic of grace it is not that one behaves ethically because he looks for happiness but that ethic behaviour in itself is a proof of happiness, because both happiness and duty are born from the same transcendent source.

Unlike the Kantian ethic, in the mystical perspective, justice is always accompanied by happiness, to the extreme that this vision even permits a Christian to understand that he is called to "give his life for his brothers" (which on the natural plane can be understood as the fruit of justice and love but never of happiness), also in terms of happiness considered on the religious plane. In short, it is the same love for which man justly wants for himself and can, in time, be happy, that is to say, *hope for (trust obscurely)* a life that goes beyond death. In this sense we say that brotherhood *actualises* the eternity of man because, thanks to love, both are in perpetual communion.

For Kant, on the contrary, **unity** between duty and good or justice and happiness can only be a *postulate* of the reason. For Kant and his modern

vision, things reason cannot explain end up outside life. However, Kantian reason can only explain nature which is limited by the categories of space and time. For this reason, Kantian ethics is not capable of discovering the secret unity between happiness and suffering.

Nevertheless, spiritual experience also forms part of life, and is an experience which transcends the limits of reason. Reason is not the source of universality –as Kant thinks in a radical fashion and with him all modern thinking– rather it is grace. And in spiritual experience, that transfigures nature, unity between happiness and suffering is undeniable evidence.

8.2. Universality of reason = not to shut itself out to grace

To lay the foundations of ethics exclusively on the experience of reason –and do without the experience of grace– is what has brought about, to our mind, all the problems characteristic of the ethics and political philosophies of modernity (Kantian, Hegelian, Marxist). In order to be just and comply with duty, freedom needs grace. If the compliance of duty is left to the strength alone of reason, then freedom will end up falling under the weight of gravity –because it owes its own strength, its spontaneous dynamics to gravity.

Reason cannot counteract gravity, because it does not have its own energy. There is no moral spontaneity in the individual –there is no natural

capacity for good— but a natural tendency towards egoism, by virtue of the law of gravity. A law that only grace—supernatural— can defeat. That is why, freedom, in order to obey reason, that is to say, to comply with the imperative, needs grace, that “energy that comes from another part” and which transcends the possibilities of freedom. *It needs the forceless force of grace if it wishes to carry out its own ideals of universality.* This discovery is the key difference that separates the “*philosophy*” of grace from the thinking of Modernity.

Obedience to the imperative—or the capacity to be ruled according to the criterion of equality—is, so to say, something that *happens to me*, not something that *I do*. It is something that I am allowed by an alien energy, not something that I do by virtue of the strength of my will. If it is considered that my will is capable by itself to obey the universal law (the imperative), then the risk is run immediately of laying the foundations of totalitarianism. Because if, *by myself*, I am capable of the unconditioned (the absolute), in that case, I am conceiving that my freedom has an absolute value. I am absolutising myself.

However: *if I conceive my will as a passive principle*, when I believe that it is capable of the unconditioned, I am respecting the transcendence of the absolute—of the

spirit. To put the spirit under the control of the reason, that is to say, to conceive the will as an active principle capable of the absolute is to convert every human will into a universal will. This was, more or less, Nietzsche’s criticism of Kantian ethics. If universality as a moral rule does not have its basis in the experience of *the sacred root of brotherhood*, then it runs the risk of being what Nietzsche accuses it of: a way towards totalitarianism, a subterfuge of the will to power.

Modernity identifies grace with reason, but in doing so, runs a great danger. Because modern reason is a reason that attempts to found itself on itself. And on this account, *reason turns inevitably totalitarian*: because it only depends on itself—is based on itself—and believes that it disposes of the universal power of grace. So, when reason takes possession of the spirit, the stage is set for totalitarianism. According to our analysis the bases for this seizure—crowned in Hegelism and materialised historically in Marxism—were already in Kantian ethics.

What cannot be done, in short, is to speak of grace without mentioning it by name. Because grace is too powerful and therefore too dangerous. This is what time and again modernity does unconsciously. But the demons that are bred with this concealment cannot be turned back.

CONCLUSION: ON THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF EQUALITY

If brotherhood is capable of reconciling justice understood as equality with unequal nature, because by the work of grace a person is capable of renouncing his natural strength to permit the satisfaction of good of the "other" (who ceases being a rival to become a brother), then we can answer all the questions that we raised at the beginning of this journey.

1. Equality, justice, happiness

Why is equality the content of justice? Because only in equality can man achieve his maximum vocation, that is happiness. *Justice* for oneself and collective justice coincide.

Why should we be just, if natural freedom is opposed to equality (and justice is not assimilated to this natural freedom, as would be proper of a liberal vision)? Because only in justice does man find spiritual happiness that makes of him a person, a happiness much greater than natural happiness that he can find through natural freedom.

These two answers prepare us to reply to the last and definitive question. *Is equality really possible?* Is it possible to think of an egalitarian social order and consider it as a prac-

ticable order, besides being desirable? We can reply affirmatively because we know that it is the very strength that governs the life of men –the desire to be happy– that leads them to knock at the doors of the palace of justice. Certainly, freedom can remain halfway, it may not consent to give the leaps of the spirit, it can flee from the void and not leave place for grace. In this case, equality has no chance of being achieved. But then neither will the human being be really happy.

The one who believes that the vocation of man towards his full self-achievement is might which, in the ultimate analysis, is at the base of human behaviour, this person could rescue the ideal of equality as a possible social horizon. The only problem would be the difficulties that the human being encounters in the maturing

process of his freedom. Because the step from natural freedom to spiritual freedom is not a step that is automatically taken. It is the fear of the leap, the enemy of maturity, that impedes human communities from achieving their happiness as well as their justice. Equality –unlike what Marxism believes– is only a possibility of human freedom, and not a necessity guaranteed by nature. There exists a *possibility* for equality, and this possibility is engraved deep down in the human being. This is all. We cannot make scientific predictions on the evolution of human society.

2. If equality is possible, in what way is it so?

So, a just society based on equality is not sure, but it is possible. At this point of our journey, a new question is raised. If equality is possible, in what way is it so? In what way is it materialised historically? How can it be achieved in society? These questions open up a last stage of the journey which in reality would suppose a new horizon for our investigation. For this reason we will not expatiate on them here. We would need a *political philosophy* and a *philosophy of history*. And we have limited ourselves here to an attempt *to set the basis* for equality as an ethical criterion and as a political principle.

We will only say that in history a dialectic is produced between what we could call *mystical moments* and the *institutionalisation* of the same.

There are stages in which certain social (reformist, revolutionary, transforming) movements embody new ideals of justice and equality. Social achievement of equality is, therefore, a process that is always incomplete, that can attain ever-greater heights, ruled by the dynamics of progressive improvement. These social movements –without a desire to make simplified identifications– correspond to the mystical moment that we have pointed out in our journey.

This first *revelation* at the social level of grace has to establish itself later by means of permanent realities, that is to say, of institutions. That is why, the mystical moment is followed by a second phase where justice is institutionalised. And through this dialectics, equality is perfected all along history in an infinite way⁵.

This said, we could currently define **democracy** as the institution which embodies what we have described as an *acknowledgement of the right of others to happiness*, irrespective of their strength or weakness. It permits equality being given as the fruit of a process of reciprocal acknowledgement of the rights of different individuals among themselves. Democracy is considered to be a *dialogue* that permits a process of creation of consensus by means of which the desires of different individuals are made compatible.

But not a dialogue that is based on any of the transcendental instances typical of modernity but a dialogue that requires the unflinching collaboration of *grace*. To resume it in a graphic way, it is a question

here not of a two-people dialogue between two individuals, but of a three-people dialogue between two individuals and an *absent third*, the third being the loving Centre from Whom grace proceeds. This does not mean that this structure of a "three-people dialogue" is made patent in the social process. We are referring only to the *setting of the basis* of democracy that requires necessarily a reference to grace. Without religion, then, there can be neither democracy nor human rights.

This text has been a reflection on grace and a reflection on democracy at the same time. How is this possible? Because only grace makes of men ends in their own right. And democracy is that form of organising the living together of human beings in which men deal with each other as ends in their own right, or individuals with inalienable rights.

We will leave for another occasion a more detailed reflection on these last questions. But our present challenge, if we wish to make human society progress towards a dwelling place of more justice and, consequently, more happiness, is *the deepening of democracy in all spheres of society*. We referred to this when, at the beginning of these lines we spoke of *socialism*.

3. Summary

Let us re-do in as synthetic a way as possible the journey we have covered: (natural) happiness has led us

to finitude; finitude has revealed to us grace as the fundamental dimension of life, and from grace we pass to brotherhood and equality, besides recovering (spiritual) happiness. Our journey can be built as an *ethical theory* (that is, a theory of happiness and freedom) which gives rise to a *theory of religion* (that is, a theory of mortality and grace), which finally leads to a *political theory* that is, a theory of brotherhood and equality).

It has been freedom in search of its own happiness that has traced this journey leading to brotherhood. A freedom that along the way *was converted*, because it had to renounce itself, and was then capable of leaping, to be later received again as grace. What has made man truly free has been his capacity to love. Because only love banishes fear, the fear of renouncing oneself. And fear—and not slavery—is the other extreme of freedom.

By means of conversion achieved by grace, equality has been reconciled with freedom, and nature reconciling itself with justice has been made spirit. So, brotherhood and its political correlative, solidarity, pave the way for equality. Only by means of the sense of gratuity, equality can be a disinterested exigency. If the strong suspect that equality is simply the ideology of the weak, they will consider it as something illegitimate, and not assume it as *their own ideology*. In this situation, there will never be equality, however much the weak defend it, because the strong have every chance of winning. Only when the

strong discover that their happiness too is linked to equality, this equality has the possibility of getting converted into a universal doctrine, and of getting developed into social reality by means of the institutional-

sation of solidarity. Equality is desirable not only because in it is the happiness of the weak, but also because in it is to be found true happiness for the strong.

NOTES

1. Two pioneers of this attitude of dialogue between a non-absolute scientific reason and the world of religion, were, each one in his own field, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, in the field of natural sciences, and *Emmanuel Mounier*, in political philosophy. The second put forward in dialogue the materialistic reason –final culmination of the modern absolutisation of reason– so typical of the Marxist vision of society, with the spiritual experience of love, as conceived by Christianity, and of its transforming potential of social reality.

2. But then one has necessarily to turn *Feuerbach* round. That man has invented God is precisely the test that God exists. Because only God could have created a being who should want to be divine. Only from the creative power of love can a person be created who desires to go beyond his possibilities. The projection of which *Feuerbach* accuses religions is, precisely, the best proof of the existence of God. Nature, that is ruled by the laws of causality, time and space, and the implacable mortality that these imply, has created a being that does not resign himself to being a simple mortal, a spiritual being, that can transcend the law of gravity through freedom, thanks to his encounter with grace. Because nature rises from the spirit, it is for this that the spirit can rise from nature. Because gravity is based on grace, gravity can aspire for grace.

3. In the general schema we have traced, art will be that activity that re-presents the hidden presence of grace in the world of nature. Art suspends gravity, tries to get materialised in a work that pertains to the natural world, what is not materialisable, what is experienced not through

knowledge but through the leaps of the spirit.

4. In this distinction the difference between resurrection and immortality takes on meaning. It is only congruent to speak of “desire of immortality” and “hope of resurrection”, since desire can only have as its aim, immortality, while hope can only have resurrection as its objective. Hope is what is given as compensation for a risk, a leap, that is to say, of a dark night and therefore, something which comes after passing through death. Desire, which supposes continuity without rupture, desires immortality, the continuation of life. Whereas hope that has passed through the rupture of the night and the void, hopes for the resurrection.

5. This perspective is that which permits us to resolve the problem of confrontation between the left and the right that we had pointed out at the beginning of our journey, in a non-Manichean way. To put it synthetically, today’s right would be simply yesterday’s left. When a degree of justice has been institutionalised, the foundations are laid for a new mystical moment that pushes society one step further towards the achievement of justice. In this way, he who remains in the degree of institutional justice is forgetting the possibility of achieving greater justice. But by the nature itself of grace, justice can transcend the factic reality of a society, and grace will always demand that it should carry on being incarnated in new institutions and progress further. The sky is never reached definitively. But the left, inasmuch as they are the defenders of equality, walk in the direction of history, that is to say, of human happiness.

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Roger de Llúria, 13 - 08010 Barcelona

Tel: 93 317 23 38 - Fax 93 317 10 94

E-Mail: espinal@redestb.es - <http://www.fespinal.com>