

# Republican perspectives on populism and hope (Beyond Christopher Lasch)

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## Abstract or Description

This dissertation begins by contrasting hope with optimism and pessimism, the two 'principal categories of public debate' that have allowed a particular political 'culture of critical discourse' to settle into place (Lasch 1990: 13). It brings together a great variety of perspectives (classical republicanism, liberalism, conservatism and religion) and reflects on the works of Hannah Arendt, Simone Adolphine Weil, William James, John Milton, et al. In agreement with Lasch, the present study claims that only populism can satisfy the criteria of hope, conceived as a probability for justice, truth and beauty. This populism (henceforth it will be called the 'vita civile') advocates self-government. It opposes the centralisation of power and the arbitrary imposition of rule, which political pessimists consider the only safe remedies for lawlessness and aggression, from the consequences of the (potentially) inherent human hubris (see the glossary). At the same time, the vita civile questions the quasi optimistic assertions of modern liberalism, which project the impersonal market pattern as the sole arbiter of all human affairs, seeing history as a steady trajectory towards a destination of assured happiness. However, the vita civile does not consider active participation in government a recipe for perfect happiness. Instead, it seeks to adjust the classical republican/democratic view of popular sovereignty to James' idea of

meliorism and pragmatism. It questions the rosy view of human nature but instead of surrendering to the fatalism of pessimism, meliorism (or hope) sees justice and common decency as open possibilities and shares the unshakable conviction that hubris and conflict could be more effectively tackled through active citizenship, when (in other words) the 'common people' concentrate power as close to home as possible, and instead of being locked out from the political structures and hierarchies, can access and reshape them. Through this process an ethos of political experience and virtue is acquired.

Furthermore, this populist synthesis, following Arendt's insights, is centered in logos—implying speech, dialogue, open public debate and persuasion—as a means of political action and participation. In addition, the *vita civile* shares a high respect for tradition, religion and heritage. Common memories and lore shape a popular identity that unify heterogeneous crowds, allowing them to function as political agents.

Transcendent archetypes and religious insights can on certain occasions inspire prudence over aggression. Finally, several historical events are examined as case- studies: these include the American Revolution, the agrarian revolt in the American South and West (in the late nineteenth century), and certain aspects of the American Civil Rights Movement.

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**Republican perspectives on populism and hope  
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## Abstract

This dissertation begins by contrasting hope with optimism and pessimism, the two ‘principal categories of public debate’ that have allowed a particular political ‘culture of critical discourse’ to settle into place (Lasch 1990: 13). It brings together a great variety of perspectives (classical republicanism, liberalism, conservatism and religion) and reflects on the works of Hannah Arendt, Simone Adolphine Weil, William James, John Milton, *et al.* In agreement with Lasch, the present study claims that only populism can satisfy the criteria of hope, conceived as a probability for justice, truth and beauty. This populism (henceforth it will be called the ‘*vita civile*’) advocates self-government. It opposes the centralisation of power and the arbitrary imposition of rule, which political pessimists consider the only safe remedies for lawlessness and aggression, from the consequences of the (potentially) inherent human *hubris* (see the glossary). At the same time, the *vita civile* questions the quasi optimistic assertions of modern liberalism, which project the impersonal market pattern as the sole arbiter of all human affairs, seeing history as a steady trajectory towards a destination of assured happiness. However, the *vita civile* does not consider active participation in government a recipe for perfect happiness. Instead, it seeks to adjust the classical republican/democratic view of popular sovereignty to James’ idea of meliorism and pragmatism. It questions the rosy view of human nature but instead of surrendering to the fatalism of pessimism, meliorism (or hope) sees justice and common decency as open possibilities and shares the unshakable conviction that *hubris* and conflict could be more effectively tackled through active citizenship, when (in other words) the ‘common people’ concentrate power as close to home as possible, and instead of being locked out from the political structures and hierarchies, can access and reshape them. Through this process an ethos of political experience and virtue is acquired. Furthermore, this populist synthesis, following Arendt’s insights, is centered in *logos*—implying speech, dialogue, open public debate and persuasion—as a means of political action and participation. In addition, the *vita civile* shares a high respect for tradition, religion and heritage. Common memories and lore shape a popular identity that unify heterogeneous crowds, allowing them to function as political agents. Transcendent archetypes and religious insights can on certain occasions inspire prudence over aggression. Finally, several historical events are examined as case-studies: these include the American

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## Glossary

**Action, *agonal* and *narrative*:** According to Hannah Arendt (1990; 1998), the term *action* confers *political action*. Together with *work* and *labour*, *action* constitutes the third element of the *vita activa* (see Chapter 2). To a degree Arendt's *political action*, also called *agonal action*, is synonymous with direct democracy, with open participation within a *political realm*, like the ancient Athenian *polis*. The term *narrative action* belongs to Seyla Benhabib (2000), referring to political discussions and open conversations that take place not within a *political realm* but in public spaces not designed specifically for political purposes, such as churches, pubs, theaters, *et al.* These discussions gradually alter public perceptions.

**Anthropocentrism:** This term is widely used by the Hellenist scholar Georges Contogeorgis. It has nothing to do with the anthropocentrism of 'evolutionary biologists' which 'neglect species more removed from us' (Breithaupt 2019: 21). For Contogeorgis (Κοντογιώργης 2006; 2014; 2020) the term anthropocentrism points to political and economic freedom. In my view, it has to do with the *ability* of every human being to contribute to common decency. It does not, however, imply that human ability is boundless.

**Common decency:** This points to a set of moral rules and obligations that have to be followed by everyone, inasmuch as economic and political justice, transparency, mutual understanding and the right to life are effectively protected. Common decency also refers to the Platonic triad of beauty, truth and justice.

**Chain of equivalence:** this term belongs to Ernesto Laclau (2005). An equivalential chain is a bridging discourse, a political discourse, more precisely, which attempts to unify heterogeneous groups for a specific common purpose.

**Cosmosystem:** According to Georges Contogeorgis (Γιώργος Κοντογιώργης 2014; 2012: 133-5), the term cosmosystem refers to social and political models with a) common mechanisms that safeguard their self-sufficiency and coherence (governance, structure,



economy, communication, *et al.*), and b) common values and ideological or cultural worldviews. Contogeorgis identifies two cosmosystems: the *anthropocentric* (which emerged during the Greek antiquity, the Hellenistic and the Byzantine age) and the *despotic* cosmosystem. According to Contogeorgis (Κοντογιώργης 2006; 2014; 2020), the despotic *cosmosystem*, as opposed to the anthropocentric, points to the organisation of political and social systems of the non-Hellenic ancient world. It also refers to the political organisation of absolutist Western European and Asian empires, princedoms and kingdoms (the Roman empire, during the pagan and Christian age is included)..

**Cultural decomposition:** inspired by Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's (2001: 120; 2006) view on nihilism, and by Simone Weil's (1987a) notion of 'uprootedness', cultural decomposition stands for the destruction of one's culture, the eradication of old folkways and traditions.

**Deep emotions:** This points to cases of intense sentimentalism which obstruct our capacity for rational thinking, making our mind unable to pass good judgment. Deep emotions (as opposed to our serene emotions) are not dialectic. They are acute and chimerical; they cannot be easily put under the surveillance of the *empirical mind*, which has the capacity to erect moral fences against selfishness and/or against rampant anger (else called *mēnis*). Martha Craven Nussbaum (2013) uses the term 'emotional foundationalism' to describe the process whereby deep emotions obstruct judgment.

**Democratic or classical republicanism:** The term 'democratic republicanism' (or classical republicanism) has to do with the political thought of Aristotle and Cicero (Nelson 2006: 196). Drawing on the *polis* (or the *res publica*), it proposes a polity consisting of representative and participatory institutions at the same time. Often authors associate classical republicanism with modern republicanism and liberalism. This has been the case of Margeret Canovan, see *The People* (2005). Modern republicanism refers to representative systems of government *tout court* (Gustafson 2011: 41-70). Unless emphasis is required, the adjective 'classical' or 'democratic' could be omitted, making the text easier to read.

**Eucosmia:** This term has a twofold meaning. First, it refers to the obligation of every human being to recognise the worth and value of others, *id est.*, their ability to overcome their natural inclination towards sin and error through speech, memory and spiritual enlightenment. At the same time, it stands for cosmopolitanism: it points to the ability of every member of a nation to recognise members of other nations as equal, capable of contributing to humanity as a whole. *Eucosmia* is a profound enunciation of anthropocentrism.

**Fido amor:** Types of friendship that rely on deep emotions (emotional foundationalism) are enunciations of the *fido amor*, as opposed to the friendship of *eucosmia*, which brings emotions and reason together, without allowing excessive sentimentalism to hijack rational thinking.

**Homo Hellenicus:** the type of being that corresponds to ancient Greece (particularly of ancient Athens), the Hellenistic and the Byzantine age. The *homo hellenicus* is a mixture of the anthropocentric elements that sprung from these three different historical periods (according to Contogeorgis [Κοντογιώργης 2006; 2014; 2020]). These elements are: a) democracy and political participation, which characterises ancient Athens (Arendt 1998), b) economic participation, a main trend Contogeorgis (Κοντογιώργης 2014) has identified in the Hellenistic and Byzantine age, and c) spiritual enlightenment, which is linked to the Christian age of Byzantium (Contogeorgis 2020 [Κοντογιώργης 2020]).

**Hubris:** According to Castoriadis (2007a [Καστοριάδης 2007α]), *hubris* points to the frantic impulse for exaggeration (177) and for the violation of moral limits (Καστοριάδης 2008: 210 [Castoriadis 2008Q 210]). It also refers to major injustices and atrocities (e.g. the concentration/extermination camps and/or the enslavement of peoples) (Castoriadis 2007c: 123). Most of all *hubris* refers to the exaggeration of the *demos* (the people), to its possible slip towards insanity, to its abandonment of prudence (111). In short, *hubris* and common decency are opposites. From a Christian point of view, *hubris* refers to ‘the root of all evil’, to ‘the noblest human aspirations, to become like God’ (Passmore 2000: 169). *Hubris* is

‘the sin of sins’ (ibid).

**Katabasis:** This derives from the Greek word *κάθοδος* (*kathodos*) or (verb) *καταβαίνω* (*kataibaino*), translated as ‘descend’ or ‘climb[ing] down’, according to the Oxford Dictionary (2008: 102). It is a symbolic process of introspection, where one dives into the dark realms of his/her mind, into the *underworld* (I will shed more light on this term later on), in order to identify the exact forces (the passion for lust, greed, revenge and domination) that influence one’s attitude and personality. The aim of *katabasis* is *self-purification, id est.*, the removal of perceptions and settled ways of thinking (incited by such passions) from one’s personality.

**Idolatry:** This refers to the friendship between human beings and lifeless objects. Idolatry lies at the bottom of the hierarchy of friendship, beneath the *fido amor* and the friendship of *eucosmia* (see above).

**Liberalism; possessive and permissive:** the term *possessive liberalism* or *possessive individualism*, according to Crawford Brough Macpherson (1983), points to the emphasis the theory of economic liberalism (developed during the eighteenth century) on individual improvement as well as in the unlimited accumulation of property and capital. I consider *permissive liberalism* a mutation, an evolution, of *possessive liberalism* itself. The term *permissive liberalism* is widely used by Christopher Lasch (1991b) to describe the post-war socio-political model of American liberalism, which exalts individual self-expression against culture, tradition and sexual/moral hindrances.

**Logismikon:** Also called the *empirical mind*, it is the aspect of the human mind empowered with the capacity to exercise good judgment, to reject acts that do not comply with the basic principles of common decency (truth, beauty and justice).

**Metakénosis:** According to Adamantios Korais, a major figure of the Greek Enlightenment, metakénosis stands for the process whereby elements of a culture are transformed (and absorbed) from another. This process alters the identity consciousnesses

and the historical course of the former (Mytilinaki Kennedy 2018: 25).

**Memory; ethical and bonding:** the former stands for experience, namely, for the capacity to avoid repetition of morally deplorable acts through remembrance. In turn, *bonding memory* (or *connective memory*) speaks about the sum of common characteristics that bind groups together in membership. *Bonding memory* is divided into *civil memory*, which deals with aspects of the common political history of a nation or group of nations and *cultural memory*, referring to a set of values, ideas, gestures and folkways that ascribe to groups a precise cultural identity. From a different angle: *bonding memory* (*civil* and *cultural* alike) is also divided into *material* and *immaterial* bonding memory. The former refers to physical objects, that is, to statues, monuments, buildings and open spaces, in short, to objects that symbolically represent aspects of a common historical past (*civil memory*) or to aspects of a common culture, such as common religion (*cultural memory*). The latter, according to Pierre Nora (1996), revolves around non material means of remembrance, such as rituals and/or worldviews that spring from a particular culture and ‘revamp the foundations of historical memory’ (xvi).

**Public and political realm:** For Arendt (1998), the political realm (or the *polis*) refers to the public assembly of direct democracy in ancient Athens. In Arendt’s works the political realm is identical with the public. Although the political realm is public in the pure sense of the word, not all aspects of public life *per se* deal with political participation (albeit they can influence politics through non-political means of public engagement). For more in regards to this see the second chapter.

**The underworld:** It is the aspect of the mind which is dominated by iniquitous passions (lust, greed, selfishness, ruthlessness, passion for revenge, *et al.*) and deep emotions.

**Serene emotions:** as opposed to deep emotions, serene emotions are moderate and, therefore, tamable. They can be put under the command of the *logismikon*, of its capacity to pass good judgments (in line with the principles of common decency).

**Social (or collective) institutioning:** This term was coined by Cornelius Castoriadis (2005) and describes the complex process whereby human collectivities gradually create and re-shape their own cultural and social norms, and political procedures that follow, through which political debates take place and laws are passed.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Hypothesis and objectives

Christopher Lasch, a historian, and a cultural and social critic, set out to persuade his readers ‘that reconstructing a populist vision ... might point a way out of our troubled politics’ (Brandt 2020: 2). Lasch’s view of populism, as it is outlined in one of his most representative works, *The True and Only Heaven (TTOH)* (1991a), is synonymous with participatory democracy (which I also term self-government) and springs from a tradition sceptical towards the eighteenth-century Anglo-American idea of progress, which (he thought) is profoundly engraved within the foundations of American liberalism (1991a; 1995a). To a degree, Lasch’s understanding of democracy has been influenced by Hannah Arendt’s republican thought, and more importantly, by her emphasis on direct involvement in the process of decision-making (*action*), taking place within a *political realm*, a political space of open participation (Lasch 1991a: 133; 376; 457, ff; 1995a: 88)<sup>1</sup>. According to De Ste Croix (1999), Lasch’s ‘populistic’ democracy ‘is squarely in line with American notions of a democratic republicanism’ (305), notions that had also inspired Arendt (1990; 1998). His critique on the doctrine of economic progress, a doctrine that advocates faith in reforms in favour of economic expansion, which (according to its advocates) could elevate the living standards of all Americans, rests on the following assumption: economic progress itself does not only increase social and political inequality that Lasch loathed and despised. Simultaneously, it leads to erosion and destruction of the institution of family and religion (Lasch 1991a: 63), capable of preserving social cohesion and stability. More importantly, the optimism of economic progress, its belief in the maximisation of economic expansion, resting ‘securely on statistical charts and tables certifying the steady upward tilt of economic production’ (Goodwyn 1976: vii) that would (ostensibly) eradicate poverty and social conflict (Lasch 1991a: 13-4; 39), leads to the intensification of political disenfranchisement so long as it results in the rapid concentration of wealth by a small ruling elite of capitalists and large landowners (Lasch 1991a; 1991c; 1995a). Lawrence

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<sup>1</sup> Also, in an interview with Beggy Brawer and Sergio Benvenuto, Lasch (1993) mentions Arendt’s *Human Condition* (1958/1998), claiming that ‘[a] lot of my ideas are ultimately hers’ (130)

Goodwyn (1976), another notable historian (cited above) of American Populism that had decisively influenced Lasch, pursued a similar understanding of democracy as a grassroots political activity of direct engagement. Like Lasch (1991), Goodwyn (1976) associated democracy with populism, which draws on the political tradition of classical republicanism that (as mentioned earlier) is linked to self-government, active citizenship, economic independence and civic virtue (Lasch 1991a: 172-180; 1995a: 92-116). Lasch (1993) juxtaposes the optimism of economic progress with hope, which does not advocate 'blind faith' in endless betterment that somehow things will automatically 'work out for the best' (14).

A review of Lasch's *TTOH*, published by James Kloppenberg (1992), calls for further elucidation on the dividing lines between progress (or optimism) and hope (1402). As a matter of fact, Lasch's *TTOH* is not a philosophical work but (mainly) a general review of the hitherto published literature on populism, hope, progress and optimism. This dissertation takes into account the works of several authors mentioned mainly in *TTOH* and elaborates further on them. It sheds further light on Lasch's juxtaposition between optimism (as well as pessimism) and hope from a philosophical/theoretical angle. Additionally, as De Ste Croix (1999) argued, Lasch 'refers to classical republican thought only tangentially' (305). By reflecting on republican thinkers discussed by Lasch (such as Arendt, Niccolò Machiavelli *et al*), while identifying errors and filling in gaps and omissions in their thought, this dissertation digs deeper into concepts of classical republicanism, upon which Lasch's populism and democracy, the 'hopeful' democracy (to use his terms), is partially predicated. *Prima facie*, this dissertation strives a) to identify the key arguments upon which the advocates of political optimism (as well as pessimism) base their position. Thereupon, b) it addresses the impasses of both categories, evaluating simultaneously the practical results of the implementation of political programmes (or initiatives) that rely on pessimistic and/or optimistic worldviews, and finally c) it rigorously explains how (and to what extent) a populist project, predicated on hope could respond to such impasses, creating conditions within which justice, truth and beauty are more effectively promoted. In order to respond to these *problématiques* we must initially attempt to sharpen our definitions of pessimism, optimism and hope accordingly. Thereupon, problem-solving research will attempt to investigate to what degree the political ideas of

classical republicanism, upon which the idea of hope is (partially) predicated, could offer practical solutions to the impasses of pessimism and optimism alike. Put otherwise, what are the main objectives of this (hopeful) democracy, inspired by classical republicanism? What particular problems does it attempt to solve? What makes systems of thought, built upon pessimistic and/or optimistic predictions about politics and society, unable to identify such problems, offering viable responses in return?

### 1) Pessimism, optimism and hope: definitions and clarifications

Another significant influence for Lasch was the psychologist and philosopher William James (Eric Miller 2010: 228). In the latter's work *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907/1968), one finds clear and precise definitions of pessimism, optimism and hope (or meliorism). Such definitions seem to be in agreement with the *weltanschauung* Lasch spotted in the philosophical thinking behind these three categories. In short, pessimism is the state of mind of those who 'think the *salvation* of the world impossible' (James 1968: 137; *emphasis added*), of those who see no escape from troubles and injustices (Lasch 1990: 13). Let us clarify that for James the term 'salvation' is open to multiple interpretations. 'You may interpret [it] in any way you like, and make it as diffuse and distributive, or as climacteric and integral a phenomenon as you please' (ibid). We are, therefore, allowed to associate 'salvation' with all sorts of victories and triumphs against social injustices and conflicts brought forward by means of self-government and democratic participation (populism). In addition, by acknowledging James' definition on pessimism, we may reckon pessimistic a perception that considers the salvation of the 'common people' (namely their endeavours to build up self-organized republics) futile and impossible. A good example of pessimism in political philosophy is Hobbes' (1994; 1998; 2006) anti-populism. Upon questioning the moral capacities of human beings, Hobbes dismisses self-government and active citizenship as a ticket to social chaos and disarray. In response, he proposes authoritarianism and coercion.

On the other hand, optimism, a 'regnant doctrine in European philosophy', considers 'the world's salvation' inevitable (James 1968: 137). Optimism manifests itself as a form of 'cheerful fatalism' and approaches the future with confidence, assuming that certain procedures or political moves will automatically generate prosperity and happiness (Lasch 1990: 13) (as the first paragraph made already clear). John Passmore in *The*



*Perfectibility of Man* (2000) identifies a wide spectrum of political ideologies advocating optimism. From eighteenth-century economic liberalism (the matrix of modern optimism, according to Lasch) to Marxist (or Leninist) communism (374; 376) and (to a degree) social anarchism (272-89), from modern evolutionary theories of positivism (295-331) to certain variants of the Christian Reformation (5-7; 174-225), including Christian millennialism (220-1). Among the plethora of existing ideologies and philosophical currents that exhibit overt political optimism this dissertation will focus exclusively a) on variants of optimistic populism, which reckon self-government a ticket to ‘inevitable salvation’ and b) on the optimistic worldview of the eighteenth century economic liberalism, which derives from the philosophy of thinkers, such as Adam Smith (Lasch 1991a: 13-4; 52). These two different types of optimism will be examined separately. The primary objective behind the examination of populist trends exhibiting ardent optimism, like (for instance) those brought forward by some leaders of the French Revolution (see Chapter 6), rests on the following assumption: while rejecting the anti-populism of the Hobbesian pessimistic *weltanschauung*, namely its negative stance towards initiatives that push forward reforms in favour of popular participation in government, one has to avoid the impression that projects inspired by the republican idea of self-government strive towards an earthly kingdom of heaven. Also, the reason this dissertation (apart from optimistic populism) examines economic liberalism rests on the following factors: first, economic liberalism has been the main subject of Lasch’s critiques, from the early stages of his career until his very late writings (Eric Miller 2010: 57-8). Second, optimism, ‘the state of mind encouraged by a belief in progress’, in boundless economic and scientific expansion (Lasch 1993: 13), lies deep in the underpinnings of our contemporary (western) world (Barndt 2019: 8). Notwithstanding the horrors of the twentieth century, the rise of totalitarian movements (more particularly), the Second World War and the Holocaust forced many ‘[l]iberally-minded Western intellectuals’ to abandon ‘their belief in the inevitability of progress’, claims Passmore (2000: 441), in Lasch’s view, this blind faith in endless betterment has been salvaged (1991a: 13; 41; 1991c; 1993: 13). It lies deep in the underpinnings of the Western liberal world (as the next chapters will claim). The way our societies function and operate owe much to this idea (Malliaris 2017a). In other words, the concept of progress is still here with us. It ‘has proved surprisingly resistant to the shocks to easy optimism

administered in rapid succession by twentieth-century events’ (Lasch 1991a: 78). Optimism and pessimism still ‘remain the favorite categories of political debate’ (39). For Lasch, this indicates that ‘the theme of progress is not yet played out’ (ibid). Liberal optimism is ‘sustained not by any objective evidence but by the belief that the only alternative is [pessimism, that is] “to abandon hope, all ye who enter here”’ (Lasch 1993: 13). Or as Sydney Pollard put it, “the only possible alternative to the belief in progress would be total despair” (quoted by Lasch 1991a: 42). The ultimate objective of economic expansion today is the pursuit of ‘painless progress toward the celestial city of consumerism’ (Seaton 1994).

To avoid misunderstandings, Lasch (1991a) was not an advocate of the ‘widely accepted interpretation’ (40) of liberal optimism, that its adherence to the idea of progress (economic expansion) rests ‘on the promise of an ideal society’ (48). Such an approach on liberal optimism can be found in John Gray’s *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (2007). Christianity (Puritan cults, more precisely) injected messianic expectations into the heart of western civilization (16; 30; 39). Liberalism (and, more importantly economic liberalism) has secularised such expectations, predicting that an ideal world could through the endless expansion of the market forces rather than through God’s Grace come about. Consider, also, Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Notes From Underground* (according to John Carroll’s interpretation). Carroll believed that Dostoevsky linked the idea of (liberal) progress to the desire to build up ‘[c]rystal Palace[s], eternally indestructible’, that is, a new world free of suffering, ‘destruction and chaos’ (Dostoevsky 2009: 32). But for Lasch (1991a), the (eighteenth century) liberal idea of progress does not promise a brand new world, emancipated from all miseries and sorrows (40; 78). ‘Millennial expectations are [not] the only grounds on which to base a belief in progress’ (41, ff). Instead of proposing an ideal society, liberal optimism promises ‘steady’ and ‘open-ended ... improvement with no foreseeable ending at all’ (47), ‘linear social progress’ and unlimited capitalist expansion, according to the ‘utilitarian model of *homo economicus*’ (Carroll 2020: 2). In the process of endless betterment there is no *telos*, no ‘natural end’, namely, no historical point of absolute satisfaction, to use Passmore’s (2000: 12) terms. Fukuyama’s liberal theory, on the other hand, elaborated in his book *The End of History and The Last Man* (1992), does exemplify a type of optimism partially anchored

to the millennial belief in some new world, standing in its perfection, according to Bijukumar's (2008) and Gray's (2007: 6) interpretation. Human history, claims Fukuyama (1992), is on a steady trajectory towards an end-point of assured peace and stability. Setbacks will not halt the inevitable victory of humanity against political oppression and barbarity. Fukuyama interpreted the triumph of capitalism, the victory of liberal democracy (over communism) and the rapid improvement of the living standards in most countries of the western world as signs indicating the linear direction of history (Bijukumar 2008: 30; 34) towards a final moment (xi), a *telos*, where most fears and injustices would have disappeared (Popkin 2019: 558). The Greek word *telos* stands for the inevitable (and) natural end of a 'goal or purpose that a process can serve' (Gray 2007: 6). Etymologically speaking, it also derives from the (Greek) word *teleios*, 'commonly translated as "perfect"' (Passmore 2000: 15). Hence, Fukuyama's 'end of history' could (at least implicitly) point to teleological perfection of humanity, to a certain moment where most serious competitors to liberal (representative) democracy and capitalism would have disappeared (Bijukumar 2008: 29).

Such as optimism, the category of pessimism is broad and can include ideologies, political movements and trends from all across the political spectrum: from fascism, unconstitutional royalism, religious fundamentalism and traditionalism to deep ecology, anarcho-nihilism and so on. This dissertation casts a critical eye on Hobbes' theory, which (to a degree) rests in the underpinnings of the philosophical thinking behind the optimism of economic liberalism (or progress). As I explain in what follows (and more importantly in Chapter 3), strong indications permit us to treat the philosophy of economic liberalism as an evolution of Hobbes' absolutist royalism. Furthermore, behind the latter's tendencies to exchange political freedom, that is, active participation in (self)government with the security promoted by coercive institutions, lies the conflation of populism and self-government with the so called lawlessness and irrationality of the 'common citizen', with his/her proclivity to follow mob leaders 'who are hard to distinguish from demagogues' and who also make 'any kind of promise ... tweak[ing] legal procedures and institutional arrangements' (Arditi 2005: 76). The same anti-populism is also echoed in the philosophy of liberal optimists (economic liberals), who (borrowing Hobbes' scepticism concerning the moral capacities of human beings) consider unrestricted popular sovereignty

impractical (if not dangerous). The latter's primary objective is the implementation of programmes pursuing automatic and unlimited economic growth through procedures involving little or no human (political) intervention (see Chapter 3). Such programmes could bring endless innovation and 'ever-expanding abundance' (Lasch 1991c), giving 'mankind mastery over its own destiny' (Lasch 1991a: 120), overcoming major conflicts (Lasch 1991c).

Eventually, (Hobbesian) pessimism and (liberal) optimism can be seen as ideological twins. Seemingly at odds with each other they have a good deal in common. Both (liberal) optimists and (Hobbesian) pessimists discourage political participation to a great extent, producing anti-populism (in response). Moreover, as Malliaris (2017a) pointed out, while elaborating on Lasch, the idea of progress has 'nothing to do with democracy and freedom'. It was 'in the name of this same Progress that American society gradually came to be dominated by oppressing and alienating forces that crush the individual and dismantle communities, forces such as industrial capitalism, technology, state bureaucracy, and the corporate and public organizations that serve these Believers in liberal optimism' (ibid). In Lasch's (1991a) words, '[b]elievers in progress' so long as they think 'they have history on their side', are in no need of hope (81), if we think of it as 'a belief in justice' (80), which presupposes continuous and determined exertion with no guarantees of absolute triumph against defeats and disappointments (81). Their lack of hope, which also constitutes the central manifestation of the *weltanschauung* of the pessimists, 'incapacitates them for intelligent action' (ibid). This 'intelligent action', in Lasch's (1991a) view, refers to political action and, more precisely, to 'Arendt's suggestion that political life represents the institutionalization of the capacity for action' (457, ff), for self-government (in my terms). It is coextensive with democracy, whose 'most authentic voice ... [is] populism' (Lasch 1995a: 106). Before discussing further the way hope (or meliorism, to use James' vocabulary), in relation to populism and *action*, could respond to the impasses of both pessimism and optimism alike, let us shed more light on the melioristic cast of mind. According to James (1978), meliorism stands as a medium between optimism and pessimism (137). As with Arendt (1978), '[e]very hope carries within itself a fear' (2: 35). But contrary to what the author suggests, that 'every fear cures itself by turning to the corresponding hope' (ibid), in my view, hope does not guarantee

redemption from all anxieties. As John Milton's poem *Paradise Lost* (1667/2004) suggests, the only reinforcement 'we may gain from hope' is 'resolution from despair' (17), rather than complete annihilation of fear itself. Through acts of self-government this resolution becomes the duty of the 'common people'. More precisely, hope draws on a tradition which 'is quite un-utopian, often anti-utopian' and 'tends to be skeptical of programs for the wholesale rehabilitation of society' (Lasch 1993: 125). Hope (or meliorism) does not turn a blind eye on what Brené Brown (2012) called 'inherent human imperfection' and 'vulnerability' (2). The latter term derives from the Latin word *vulnerare*, 'meaning "to wound"', or "'capable of being wounded'" (39). It points to all sorts of moral transgressions, to our exaggerated passions that stimulate rapacity and aggression, causing psychical and/or physical harm. Vulnerability implies susceptibility to our own innate frailties and rapacious pursuits. The existence of frailty and vulnerability deem absolute victory unattainable. Nonetheless, such an assertion by no means reinforces pessimistic convictions, assuming that life is nothing but a permanent defeat. Frailty and vulnerability consider both defeat and victory open possibilities (2).

The melioristic *weltanschauung* 'treats salvation as neither inevitable nor impossible' (James 1978: 137). '[I]n the face of the world's irrefragable hardships' meliorism rejects the belief in 'society's innate, inexorable tendency toward improvement' (or perfection) (Kahn 2009: 37). It values the *potential* (James 1978: 137; Lasch 1990: 11-3) of 'intelligent action', to use Lasch's (1991a: 81) terms again, that is, 'political action', as also Arendt (1990; 1998) understood it. It points to the *potential* of active citizenship and self-government to bring 'victory' over vulnerability and aggression. This victory, as we can understand, is not a certainty. Action and self-government do not promise a secularized utopia, an *end (telos) of history*. Or as Lasch (1991a) conveys, political projects inspired by the idea of hope do not prevent us 'from expecting the worst' (81). In other words, a melioristic mind does not underestimate the (potentially) tragic consequences of human involvement (in politics), due to the abrupt explosion of rapacity and aggression.

## 2) Hope/meliorism: its relation to populism, *action* and 'common decency'

Action and self-government, as Arendt (1969a; 1990; 1998) pointed out, are connected with the *political realm*, which (in Arendt's thought) points to the ancient Athenian *agora* or the Roman *res publica*, 'the market-place, or the *polis*, the political

space proper' (Arendt 1990: 31). The political realm is the self-governed sphere of decision making, ruled by individuality and equality (Arendt 1990: 41; 1998: 41; Deneen 2018: 163). 'Arendt's desire to restore to political action the glory it obtained in ancient Greece' (Klein 2014: 858) is expressed through her intense sympathy for the council system of democracy, 'of democratic republicanism', being both participatory, federal, representative and (to a moderate degree) hierarchical (Disch 2011: 352). The council system (in Arendt's thought) embodies the idea of *action* and it is well represented in the American Revolution (Arendt 1990; Gustafson 2011: 34). *Action* allows every individual to 'become an acting member of the common government, transacting in person a great portion of its rights and duties', in terms borrowed by Thomas Jefferson (1999: 385). *Action* is the *sine qua non* of the populism of the *vita civile*, elsewhere called *vivere civile*, to use Pocock's (1975) terms, referring to a life committed to the '(ultimate political) activity of citizenship' (56), to the populism of the *vita civile* (in my terms).

According to Bruce James Smith (1985), political action values public life as 'appropriate and worthy of human dignity' (xi); it is the life 'that of the citizen who, having entered the political process in pursuit of his particular good' joins forces with others, directing 'the actions of all in pursuit of the good of all' (Pocock 1989a: 86), in the pursuit of what we could briefly label as 'common decency'. This term (common decency) officially belongs to George Orwell, implying warmth, dignity, responsibility, and (more importantly) the common good (Rodden 1989: 174). The 'common people', he asserted, that is, the plebeian workers, the 'underdogs', are better exponents of common decency than most of the intellectuals of the political left, whom Orwell accused of 'impractical theorizing' (175). For the same author, the moral clarity and dignity of the former is far superior to that of the latter (Orwell 2001: 165). Making the term 'common decency' more specific: we could associate it with the Greek *ευπρέπεια* (*eu-prēpeia*), a compound word, formed by the prefix *εὖ* (*eu*)—denoting the 'descent', the morally 'just', the 'good/beautiful' and/or the 'true'—that all individuals are obliged—*πρέπων* (*prēpon*)—to follow in order to master their aggression, protecting their common world from falling apart. 'Justice, truth, and beauty', as Weil (2005) put it, 'are sisters and comrades' (93). 'Truth, and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All' (Emerson 2000: 13). Whatever is not beautiful, whatever is disagreeable, can hardly be just. At the same

time, truth is a fundamental prerequisite for justice: nobody can be fair to a person who falsely accuses him/her. Thus, common decency (the *eu-prēpon*) is synonymous with commitment and obligation. For Weil (1987a), the notion of obligation is superior to that of rights, for the latter becomes recognized ‘not from the individual who possesses it, but from other men who consider themselves as being under a certain obligation towards him’ (3). In other words, ‘the foundation of common right or interest’ (Harrington 1992: 8) rests upon the ‘just’, the ‘*good/beautiful*’ and/or ‘*true*’ that all individuals are *obliged* to follow in order to serve and protect the common good.

In agreement with Orwell, I argue that popular attitudes could be better examples of the *eu-prēpon* than the attitudes of professional politicians (or organic intellectuals). ‘[P]opular attitudes contain ... common sense’, notwithstanding ‘[t]hey are often ambivalent’, argues Lasch (1995a: 111). We could acknowledge these claims as indications in support of the participation of the ‘common people’ in politics, in the process of decision-making (*potestas in populo*). This assertion will be further substantiated through a deeper investigation of *action*. Initially, some important clarifications must be made: my understanding of common decency differs from that of Orwell (2011: 165) in one aspect: it is not associated with socialism. Since the *eu-prēpon* derives from *action*, from the open process whereby the ‘common people’ join forces in order to decide what is *good* and *just* for their common affairs, it does not prefigure a fixed social reality. For example, members of a collectivity may either consider *eu-prēpon*—good and just for all—to implement policies inclining towards the free market or towards socialism and economic equality. Consider also the American cooperative movement, whose democratic self-organized communes and production networks combined mutualism and cooperativism with free market ideas based on economic competition. The Populists, argues Lawrence Goodwyn (1976), were neither socialists nor capitalist reformers. They saw ‘man as a cooperative being’ but also accepted the idea of man ‘as a competitive being’ (xiii) Populists ‘cannot conveniently be compressed into the narrow ... categories of political description sanctioned in the capitalist creed, nor can they be compressed into the ... categories of political description sanctioned in socialist thought’ (ibid). More importantly, the Populists were not optimists. They believed in ‘*possibility*’ (ibid; *emphasis added*), in hope, in the human *potential* for decency (as well as for evil). Likewise, the populism of the *vita civile*

conveys a ‘hopeful view of democratic possibility’ (ibid; *emphasis added*). It does not strive towards an *end of history* and, instead, emphasizes the idea that the ‘common people’ as *sovereign*, through commitment to democracy and active citizenship, *can* achieve good standards of common decency.

As it seems, the melioristic *vita civile* must be dissociated from optimistic populist trends, which assume that the complete removal of absolutist institutions, which restrict political participation, will automatically lead to the emergence of a brand new world of absolute happiness and brotherhood. As Chapter 6 explains (while reflecting on the French Revolution), these types of populism often unleash threatening tendencies. They can shape conditions within which nihilism, rampant political violence and aggression are justified and glorified<sup>2</sup>. Democratic regimes (like the ones promoted by the *vita civile*) promise ‘no surgical miracles’ but keep ‘the patient alive’ (Kloppenber 2016: 18) to struggle against all sorts of indecencies caused by human selfishness and exaggeration. They reject optimistic estimates around popular sovereignty and do not consider active citizenship a means for perfect justice and brotherhood. As Kloppenber (2016) suggests, democracy is ‘the power (*kratos*) of the people (the *demos*)’ (3). Where, however, ‘does that power end?’ (Castoriadis 2007c: 122). Who, in other words, will impose limits to a public whose freedom to posit its own (even unjust) laws is not restrained by coercive central governments? At this stage it should be made clear that democracy is not simply the regime of *self-rule*. A democratic polity also confronts the issue of individual and collective *self-discipline* and *self-limitation* (Castoriadis 2007c: 93; Deneen 2018: 174-5). ‘Fulfilling the promise of democracy depends on individuals’ internalizing limits on the freedom that democracy gives them’ (Kloppenber 2016: 710). Therefore, democracy is ‘a tragic regime, subject to [*ὑβρις*] *hubris*’ (Castoriadis 1997a: 93)<sup>3</sup>. In Kloppenber’s (2016) words,

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2 In the same chapter, following Arendt’s (1990), Wood’s (2003), Kloppenber’s (2016) and Israel’s (2017; 2019) interpretations, I contrast the optimism of the French Revolution (1789) with the relative meliorism of the American (1776). What does, nonetheless, revolutions have to do with populism *per se*? Revolutions are widely concerned with popular sovereignty; revolutionaries often set up networks of popular participation, networks of active citizenship, against absolutism, nepotism, monopolism, or any other form of arbitrary rule that restricts popular sovereignty and freedom of expression. Hence, they could be construed as populist events.

3 For the term *hubris* see the Glossary.



‘popular rule can be a rationale for cruelty’ (10). The majoritarian rule, so ardently praised by populists as ‘supreme over every other standard’ (Canovan 1981: 4), can be arbitrary (Pettit 1997: 8) and ‘potentially tyrannical’ (12). It is ‘far from perfect’ when it comes to certain groups (minorities, as an example) (Matsusaka 2020: 207).

In my view, the reasons anti-populism (either supported by political models founded upon Hobbes’ pessimism or even upon the optimistic idea of progress, that is, upon models of eighteenth century economic liberalism) is less effective than the populism of the *vita civile* in combating *hubris*, promoting a culture of self-limitation, safeguarding common decency in return, rests on the following reasons: the latter employs a) the power of *logos* and b) the strength of ethical memory, the strength of experience, ‘of the social construction of knowledge by people who define themselves in terms of what they know’, to use Winter’s (2006: 115) terms. The populism of the *vita civile* assumes that *logos* (public speech) and ethical memory have the capacity to optimise our ability for good judgment and self-limitation. Through the exercise of public speech (*logos*) and through collective remembrance, the chances for popular attitudes to become exponents of common decency can improve. In short, collective (ethical) memories, collective past experiences, are often treated as moral benchmarks. Their primary objective is to discourage repetition of acts and decisions with allegedly destructive implications. Consider, for example, a populace within a democratic assembly making a decision whose practical implementation has disastrous consequences. As I explain more rigorously in Chapter 3, the remembrance of such a devastating experience may prompt the same body politic at some point in the future to refrain from making a similar decision. Thus, memory and collective remembrance point to the moral capital, which improves the ethical resources that regulate exaggeration, highlighting the necessity of acting prudently. ‘In a democracy memory is the best institution of self-limitation’ (Καστοριάδης 2007α: 452 [Castoriadis 2007a: 452]; *my translation*). One could, however, object the sufficiency of the use of (ethical) memory alone in safeguarding prudence and self-limitation. A past experience may, indeed, contain moral lessons. Nonetheless, such a lesson in order to be fully understood ‘[t]here must be discussion, to show how experience is to be interpreted’, claims John-Stuart Mill (1998: 23). There must be *logos*, that is, *speech* ‘in which words are put together to form a sentence that is totally meaningful by virtue of synthesis (*synthēke*)’ (Arendt 1978 1: 99) and

sentences are “‘composed of nouns and verbs’” (117). As Chapter 6 argues (while reflecting further on Arendt and Mill), speech and public dialogue, *logos* and rhetoric (*ρητορική*), which—according to Contogeorgis (2006 [Κοντογιώργης 2006])—was a *sine qua non* of the existence of the (ancient) Athenian democracy (446), allows dissimilar opinions, perspectives and interpretations to be expressed in the *political realm*. Because of this, *logos* can illuminate different aspects of a past experience. In the event such aspects contain important moral lessons, absence of public dialogue would leave these moral messages concealed. *Logos* is the means through which the ‘common people’ constantly strive to identify what is ‘decent’ (*eu-prēpon*). As Aristotle pointed out, ‘in public [political] life hearing becomes the dominant sense’ (quoted from B. J. Smith 1985: 19).

This is not to say that moral messages concerning past experiences cannot be passed through other means, for example, through civic education or even through lore and custom. The main advantage of the *vita civile*, with its emphasis on *logos*, ‘the most characteristic political activity’ (B. J. Smith 1985: 19), rests on its capacity to constantly promote *logos* (public dialogue) in the *political realm*<sup>4</sup>. However, as it has been already made clear, one should not conflate the populism of the melioristic *vita civile* with optimistic populist trends. In fact, *action* itself is never fully sealed from *hubris*. As with Castoriadis (Καστοριάδης 2007), democracy erects fences against *hubris*. It does not, however, promise complete annihilation of *hubris* itself (457). More precisely, opinions concerning the moral lessons one obtains from past experiences do not always converge. Simply put, whether the practical implementation of a past decision was devastating or not sometimes is a matter of interpretation. In turn, not every interpretation is correct (from a moral point of view). In the event *logos* becomes too impotent and, consequently, incapable to safeguard common decency and when memory loses its effectiveness in bridling rapacious pursuits, what else could positively contribute to this endless battle against forces that make life seriously unbearable? Clearly, an additional *problématique* has emerged here. Large sections of this dissertation attempt to respond to this *problématique*, arguing that common decency does not derive from secular/classical republican sources alone.

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4 Of course, emotions (apart from *logos* and memory) can stimulate action for justice, as Nussbaum (2013) made clear. More extensive discussions concerning the contribution of emotions (love, disgust, anger, lust, *et al.*) to common decency will take place in the next chapter (third section).

### 3) Transcendent morality and the impasses of *action*

According to the hopeful/melioristic cast of mind, only '[s]ome conditions of the world's salvation are ... extant' (James 1978: 137; *my emphasis*). To put it in my terms, some probabilities for political projects, influenced by *logos* and memory, to inspire common decency, exist. Hence, the probabilities for such projects, the probabilities of popular sovereignty (in other words), to offer a *rationale* for hubris, are also extant. When, however, *logos* and experience (ethical memory) cannot guarantee 'salvation' (common decency), when *action* cannot safeguard decency, when a populace has lost its capacity for self-limitation and its will takes precedence over morality and prudence, its *hubris*, to use Castoriadis' terms, could be denounced through acts of civil disobedience. Castoriadis (2007) considers works of ancient drama as means of civil disobedience against the *hubris* of the majority (of the *demos*)<sup>5</sup>. Religion could also offer a similar potential. For example, Lasch in the ninth chapter of *TTOH*, 'The Spiritual Discipline against Resentment' (1991a: 369-411), discusses Martin Luther King Jr's religious philosophy and, more importantly, the way his Christian thinking became a source of inspiration both for himself as well as for other African Americans of the Old South to defy the laws of racial segregation, that (as he believed) conflicted with higher divine (moral) laws of racial brotherhood and love.

For King (as Chapter 2 and 6 will further explain), religion was a fountain of *psychical enlightenment* and moral clarity that led him to choose the path of (peaceful) civil disobedience against the *hubris* of racism, which for centuries was accepted as a norm by large sections of the American populace (particularly of the American South).

For Lasch (1995a), 'King was a liberal in his social gospel theology but a populist in his insistence that black people had to take responsibility for their lives and in his praise of the petty bourgeois virtues: hard work, sobriety, self-improvement' (83), as well as in his praise of the Southern petty bourgeois ways of living, integral aspects of which are the institutions of religion and family (Lasch 1991a: 393-8). It does not follow, of course, that King was an advocate of direct democracy in the classical republican sense of the term (self-government). His insistence that blacks must 'realize that, in a democracy, their chances for improvement rest on their ability to vote' (quoted by Garrow 1986: 97) was

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 5 (first section) for more.

proper. But this understanding of democracy does not imply ‘direct democracy’. Instead, it mainly refers to a genuine representative system, in which no racial barriers would exist. The main reasons I take King as a case-study rests on fact that his high-flown eloquence and his methods of civil disobedience (deriving from religion, as noted earlier) offer inspiration in terms of how individuals can persuade large sections of a populace that has lost its capacity for self-limitation.

As a matter of fact, Lasch (1991a) shared the fears of William James and Thomas Carlyle regarding the ‘desiccation’ of religion as a far ‘greater danger to the modern world than religious fanaticism’ (16). By elaborating on King he attempted to shed light on the human face of religion, namely, on its healing powers, on its capacity to halt resentment and vengeful passions, improving our inner strength, opening up pathways for *psychical enlightenment* and, subsequently, for prudence and common decency. To avoid misunderstandings, *psychical enlightenment* does not derive from the Christian religion alone. Consider Buddhism, for example. The Buddhist *weltanschauung* (unlike the Christian) does not share the belief in natural malevolence. It is, however, profoundly concerned about the consequences of human selfishness (Huston Smith 1991: 103) and, as an antidote, proposes introspection (112), striving to identify inner realms of calmness, inner realms of light and knowledge. Other religions, including Hinduism (12-81) and Sufism (Islam) (Huston Smith 1991: 257-268; James 2004: 348-351), can open up pathways for *psychical enlightenment* too. However, to elucidate the process whereby Buddhism or Sufism enhance *self-enlightenment*, inspiring civil disobedience (potentially), requires extensive analysis. Such an analysis can take place in another project. For the time being, we limit our scope to King’s Christian *agape*.

As it has become obvious, only one-half of the theoretical basis of the *vita civile* is concerned with the way *action* (*logos* and ethical memory) *improves* the conditions for justice, truth and beauty. The other half examines the process whereby the transcendent morality of Christianity could elevate prudence and mental clarity, stimulating common decency in return. Hence, apart from King it takes into consideration a) Milton’s, Weil’s and James’s insights, and b) Carl Gustav Jung’s psychoanalytic takes on religious

archetypes<sup>6</sup>. Such insights will shed light on the ‘sinful’ aspects of human nature, the main cause of frailty, vulnerability and *hubris*. To a degree, transcendental benchmarks and religious archetypes (gods, saints and other divine symbols that oppose deviation from moral rectitude) embodied in lore and popular traditions, far from being hallmarks of superstitious thinking as liberal modernists and optimists tend to believe (Lasch 1991a: 16), strengthen prudence and modesty without which a populace becomes too licentious. Historically speaking, religious archetypes inspired civil disobedience amongst slaves in the American South and promised them ‘deliverance as a people in this world as well as in the next’ (Lasch 1990: 13). In addition, religiously-inspired political movements and campaigns (including the Civil Rights Movement, under King’s leadership) contributed to the spread of ideas the project of the *vita civile* will acknowledge as compliments to classical republicanism<sup>7</sup>.

Consider, for example, King’s praise of love (*agape*) and nonviolence, his rejection of resentment and revenge (according to the moral injunctions of his Christian faith), in conjunction with his charming civic eloquence. These are, perhaps, among the finest virtues that not only those who are involved with acts of civil disobedience could consider, but also charismatic populist leaders in government. More importantly, King had ‘faith in the common people’, as Nikki Giovanni (2018) argues. This faith springs from the Christian the friendship of *agape*, which I also link with the notion of *eucosmia*. As I explain in Chapter 2, *eucosmia* is synonymous with friendship. In Greek, friendship—or *philia* (φιλία)—derives from the verb *philo* (φιλῶ), signifying ‘to love’ (Καστοριάδης 2008: 266 [Castoriadis 2008: 266]). Apart from *eucosmia*, I have identified two additional types of friendship. These are: a) *idolatry* and b) the *fido amor* (faithful love). Idolatry is located at the bottom of the hierarchy of this triad, as opposed to *eucosmia*, which rests at the top of the pyramid. The motivational idea behind the conception of this schema, as well as behind the hierarchisation of this triad, derives from Aristotle’s view of friendship being

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The reason we focus on Weil has to do primarily with her emphasis on *psychical enlightenment* through different forms of religious experiences, as she explains in her essay *On Human Personality* (1943), included in Weil’s *Anthology* (2005). The perspectives offered in this work, along with William James’ and Reinhold Niebuhr’s perspectives, can shed light on the way King’s Protestant faith became a spiritual cresset for mental clarity and inner wisdom.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Eugene Dominic Genovese’s work *The World The Slaves Made* (1974).

possible only between human beings (Αριστοτέλης 1993β: 60 [Aristotle 1993b: 60]). Friendship (or *philia*), argues Aristotle, cannot exist between a human being and a slave who is considered a ‘soulless’ (or ‘lifeless’) object (ibid). From a moral point of view, we deem such an assertion unacceptable, so long as it exhibits elitism and violates the moral principles of common decency, for which justice (as well as truth and beauty) ‘consists in seeing that no harm is done to men’ (Weil 2005: 93), irrespective of their race or class. However, the basic conception behind Aristotle’s axiom, that friendship cannot exist between human beings and lifeless objects, seems valid. If love is ‘a free act of will’ that cannot be ‘enforced’ (Nash-Marshall 2003: 47), and if lifeless objects (idols) are incapable of free will and thinking, eventually such idols have no capacity to form relationships of true friendship with us. As opposed to idolatry, the *fido amor* is a form of *philia* expressed towards living objects, towards other human beings (for example). The main reason it has to be located below *eucosmia* rests primarily on its excessive adherence to emotions, which can obstruct good judgment (see Chapter 2). As Nussbaum (2013) rightly stressed, emotions (love, pity or disgust) do have the ability to promote moral decency by stimulating the feeling of aversion towards social injustices. However, the intensity of emotions may convert an object, with which one feels emotionally attached, into an object of absolute value that escapes criticism<sup>8</sup>. Thus, idolatry and (to a lesser extent) the *fido amor* can incorporate threatening proportions: both have the capacity to incite narrowness, confusion, political extremism and violence.

Thus, I consider *eucosmia* the most advanced form of friendship (*philia*). *Eucosmia*, like *eu-prēpeia*, stands for the *εὖ* (*eu*) (the ‘descent’, the ‘good’) and the *cosmos*, from the Greek word *κόσμος*, implying the ‘world’, the humanity (as a whole) and/or the ‘worldly’ affairs of the ‘common people’ of society (Δημητράκος 2008, τόμος Η [Dimitrakos 2008, 6: 4069]). The meaning of *eucosmia* is twofold: on the one hand it comes with a quasi-cosmopolitan outlook (‘love’ for humanity). On the other, it prompts us towards democratic forms of populism (like the *vita civile*), since it advocates ‘love’ (*philia*) for the ‘ordinary people’. The love of *eucosmia*, so long as it draws on King’s Christian *agape*, acknowledges aspects of his religious philosophy, highlighted by Lasch

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<sup>8</sup> More extensive discussions on the negative implications of idolatry and the *fido amor* in politics take place in Chapter 2, Chapter 4 and Chapter 7.

(1991a), his belief in the so-called original (or ancestral) sin, in the inherited corruption of the human soul (386-398). But instead of encouraging pessimism, considering the world's damnation inevitable, to use James' terms. *eucosmia*, is anchored to 'anthropocentrism', which according to Georges Contogeorgis [Γιώργος Κοντογιώργης 2014]), a historian of ancient Greek and Byzantine political thought, implies freedom for action and inclusion. In my view it refers to worldviews (partially shared by King) *centred* around the capacities of every *anthrōpos* (human being), regardless of race or class, to combat *hubris* (the possible effect of the original sin), contributing to the common good as long as he/she is capable of a) conveying thoughts into the public-political realm (*logos*), b) of memorising and remembering (ethical memory), or c) passing judgments by exercising reason and critical thinking, and d) of experiencing *psychical enlightenment*. To a degree, *eucosmia* incites *action*. However, it approaches *action* from a Christian standpoint, which raises awareness concerning man's vulnerability and capacity for *hubris*. *Eucosmia* acclaims life's inexorable suffering as a given condition and inspires awareness concerning the necessity for human beings to join forces, to *act* in concert, exercising reason, dialogue and memory. Because of this, *eucosmia* discourages optimism and sees no pathway of automatic progress toward a brand-new dawn of absolute happiness. It adopts a melioristic (or hopeful) belief in common decency that we could think of it as the product of a long and constant struggle against our inherent *hubris* rather than the inevitable outcome of the direction of human history<sup>9</sup>.

#### 4) Further aims and objectives.

As Bockmuehl (2012) pointed out, '[h]ope, in any philosophically ... serious sense' has long ago 'disappeared as a topic of public discourse in Anglo-American societies' (7). Instead, optimism and pessimism have become the 'principal categories of public debate' (Lasch 1990: 13). We understand, therefore, the reasons public conversations that revolve around the notion of hope (or meliorism) in politics must be initiated. To avoid misunderstandings: this dissertation does not offer a blue-print for the construction of a participatory republic that would embody the notion of hope. It does not view historical creations (like the Greek *polis*, for example) as models for political action today. It builds

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<sup>9</sup> For more about *eucosmia* (in relation to *action*) see Chapter 2 (see the third part of section 3).

upon the ideas of distinguished republican and Christian thinkers. It acknowledges interpretations of major historical events, as (for instance) the American Revolution or the American cooperative movement, which led to the emergence of political realms similar to the Greek *polis*. The primary objective is to offer general inspiration to those who attempt to push forward political reforms closer to a more participatory model of democratic (active) citizenship, beyond the system of “representative democracy” where the people’s role is restricted to choosing their representatives’ (Matsusaka 2020: 5). Eventually, this dissertation will call into question the anti-populist tenacity of those who reject the possibility of direct democracy, expressing fierce doubts concerning the moral capacities of the ‘ordinary citizen’ to achieve good standards of common decency through active citizenship. As it has already become obvious, this dissertation does not categorically assume that all these doubts are unreasonable and totally unjustifiable. Quite the contrary. It will, however, argue that a belief in the so-called ‘inherent vulnerability’ and *hubris* is not necessarily a ticket to anti-populism. Politics could, indeed, become more open and participatory. Furthermore, a populist and melioristic tradition, from which one could draw inspiration in order to create initiatives that could push forward such democratic reforms, already exists. On this tradition, Lasch, as well as Goodwyn and Arendt, have already reflected upon and engaged with.

Consider also Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s work *The Government of Poland* (1772/2005). Here the author offers crucial insights in terms of how open political bodies, popular assemblies (in other words) such as in another context, the Town Hall meetings in New England and Massachusetts, could play a dominant role in the process of decision-making: representatives in the national parliament should change with a high frequency. For Rousseau (2005), such a move could ensure that no central power holds sway upon popular councils (188-9), given the decrease of the maximum time a representative spends in office. Additionally, it is necessary for all the elected representatives to stay as close as possible to the electorate, as it happened during the early days of the American Revolution, according to Gordon Wood (2003: 41) and Lisa Disch (2011: 352-3). In that case, their roles are becoming primarily executive. On the other hand, most legislative duties are attributed to the popular councils. To make a long story short, the *vita civile* emphasises the importance of reviving old fashioned republican concepts and ideas that are still alive



(albeit marginalised) in most liberal western countries. It also makes the case for a spiritual/religious reawakening.

### Combined Methodologies

Since most of the topics and themes of this dissertation are philosophical and use abstract ideas, the basic methodology has to be *qualitative*, which ‘emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data’ (Bryman 2008: 366). From the variety of different qualitative methodological frameworks I will have to rely on interpretivism, that is on impartial analysis of influential opinions, considering also commentary and discussion on these opinions by others (Turner, Hoque & Gerson 2015: 21). Interpretivism appears as the most applicable methodology for such a dissertation that bases itself largely upon analytic explanations, presented in philosophical books, pamphlets, monographs and academic journals. In order to *triangulate* data, cross-checking information and confirming to what extent a theoretical assumption accurately represents the reality to which it refers (Hammersley 1992), several techniques are brought into consideration. Apart from phenomenology (as it has been employed by Arendt), I resort to a) *syllogism* (or else *logicism*), b) *genealogy* (as it has been understood by Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche or Michel Foucault), and more importantly c) to William James’ *pragmatic method*.

#### 1) Syllogism/logicism

*Syllogism/logicism* was initially ‘discovered’ by Aristotle and the Stoics (Mueller 1978: 2). Instead of defining and describing philosophical viewpoints, *syllogism* generates theories and constructs arguments by acknowledging *premises* and *conclusions* through *propositioning*. For example: ‘If A implies B, and C and B imply D, then C and A imply D’ and ‘if C and A imply D, and D implies E, then C and A imply E’ (5-6). ‘This is the core of Stoic logic’ (6) where an argument is a system of *premises* (7). More precisely, let us consider war against our neighbors as something objectively reprehensible (argument A). Additionally, war by Athens against Thebes is a war against neighbors (Argument B). Arguments A and B are *premises* which lead to the following conclusion: war by Athens against Thebes is reprehensible (*axiom*) (3). Primarily, some conditions have to be met for such conclusions to be considered accurate: First, one must ensure that the *premises* A and

B are valid (4). Hence, we must clarify what the *lekton*, the term ‘war’ (or the term ‘neighbor’ respectively), *signifies*. Further experience and evidence must be taken into account: do the actions of the Athenians (against the Thebeans) include all the elements that could allow us to classify them as ‘acts of war’? Second, a proposition is said to be ‘logically true’ only if the *premises* are not *anapodeiktoi*, that is, ‘undemonstrated’ or ‘undemonstrable’ (11). For example, if among two premises that lead to a conclusion the one is incorrect (undemonstrable), the same conclusion will not be taken as ‘logically true’. It cannot be used as a premise for further reasoning and analysis.

## 2) Genealogy, contextualism and universalism

Broadly speaking, *genealogy* comes from the Greek word *γενεά* (genea, in English: generation) and *λόγος* (logos), which (on this occasion) does not indicate vocal communication (speech) but general commentary and research. A genealogical research seeks a) to trace the causes of current affairs in the process of history, and b) to investigate how past generations have disseminated through time certain ethical codes, values and ideals to successors (*heritage*). It has been formally developed by Nietzsche who in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887/2003) identifies the origins of modern ideals and perceptions in the linguistic systems of antiquity. Nietzschean genealogy seeks to trace ideas or institutions ‘back to a sort of founding era or moment when their essential meaning was first revealed’ (Shiner 1982: 387). Unlike Nietzsche, Foucault’s *genealogy* rejects the idea of ‘origin’ (*ursprung*) ‘as presupposing an essence or truth which has either unfolded or degenerated’ (ibid), proposing instead ‘descend’ (*herkunft*). Through this method one can identify in the long past not simply the accidents, the errors, ‘the false appraisals, and faulty calculations that gave birth to things that continue to exist and have value for us’ (Foucault 1977: 81), but also positive and inspiring elements that remain enshrined in some sort of collective memory. These elements emerge (and re-emerge) at the surface of certain forms of public life from time to time, giving birth to new political phenomena of high historical significance. As it seems, genealogy involves a historical sense, that is ‘a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence’, to use T. S. Eliot’s (1964: 4) words. In particular, genealogy rejects the belief that a concept can suddenly emerge out of the blue. Instead, it strives to understand morals, ideas and *modes of being* in relation with successive events. *Genealogy* seeks to identify the roots of a precise political concept in

influential philosophical notions that emerged in the deep past. Therefore, analysis of philosophical texts produced by certain theorists considered as the most influential figures of the modern liberal paradigm, like Hobbes and Locke, will show that political pessimism is not simply a stance. It is not an *ursprung* but a perception that reverberates concepts and ideas of the deep past (*henkfurt*), expressed by philosophical systems of the previous centuries, which proposed solutions that would (ostensibly) defend a rational social order.

*The limits of genealogy*: contextualist thinkers have raised intense objections as to what degree one can accurately interpret issues afflicting the contemporary world by simply relying on ideas and viewpoints offered by philosophers and political orators of the distant past, by authors who lived and worked within socio-political contexts fundamentally different from the current reality. For example, '[e]very philosophy is the expression of its own and only its own time' and hence, '[t]here are no eternal truths', claims Oswald Spengler (1961: 54). Bryman and Burgess (1994) argued that '[c]oncepts are, of course, the building blocks of theories, but they do not constitute theories in their own right' (220). Pocock (1989a) juxtaposes the method of *contextualism*, which treats 'the phenomena of political thought strictly as historical phenomena' with the idea that text itself is self-sufficient (11). Skinner in his essay *Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas* (1988), identifies also two systematic approaches that historians of ideas should regard in order to interpret a text-work: one insists that 'it is the context "of religious, political, and economic factors" which determines the meaning of any given text, and so must provide "the ultimate framework" for any attempt to understand it' (29). Those who claim that the autonomy of the text itself is sufficient for understanding what the author conveys, focus exclusively on the universality of ideas deriving from the particular theoretical approach which is under examination (ibid), on its "'dateless wisdom'" (30) considering the historical and cultural background of the author an irrelevant subject (29). In fact, the understanding of an idea or a philosophical concept, presupposes 'an understanding of all the occasions and activities in which a given agent might have used the relevant forms of words' (57), that is, in what sort of society the given author was writing. Hermeneutic philosophy has insisted that the interpretation of a text requires knowledge of the historical and cultural context 'in which it was originally created as well as the cultural context within which it is subsequently interpreted', but also of 'the

conditions under which a human act took place' (Patton 2002: 113). In the end, by concentrating solely on the text itself, on the development of a sovereign idea, we are crediting the author with a meaning he/she would not intended to convey (Skinner 1988: 33). Consider, at this stage, the following assertion: according to the contextualist point of view Hobbes' pessimistic theory and Locke's optimistic liberalism are products of particular socio-historical contexts. However, if convergences exist between Hobbes' and Locke' worldviews (as Chapter 3 will argue), we can assert that a *genealogy*, a connection, between these historical contexts exists as well. In other words, what motivated Hobbes to embrace absolutism and anti-populism was also present in Locke's experience. We can, therefore, assume that conceptual convergences between pessimism and liberal optimism can be traced, since both attitudes are products of theories of socio-historical contexts characterised by conceptual connections.

Without acknowledging that viewpoints are (to a degree) products of a particular cultural and historical context, without acclaiming society as the matrix of some of the ideas an author expresses and a reference point for understanding what exactly the same author attempts to *say*, we risk interpreting a philosophical text from a standpoint that meets our own expectations about what the thinker may have said (Skinner 1988: 31). In addition, the universalist approach is susceptible to the miscalculations of the so-called *socio-centric* judgement. For Castoriadis (2005) socio-centrism refers to the condition where societies, or even individuals who are members of the same society, consider themselves 'the centre of the world' and construe all others from their own standpoint (34). Thus, philosophical texts (products of an older socio-historical age) are approached as if they are the fruits of our contemporary society. The reader assigns to the same texts elements of the present socio-political environment the author had never experienced. More importantly, by assuming that a *genealogy* of concepts and ideas between the present and the deep past exists, without cross-checking if, indeed, there are connections between motives, perceptions, and cultures produced within these distinct historical periods, we risk extracting elements of the present to the same past we strive to examine. Thus, all the current impasses depart from errors of the deep past, which hypothetically have remained with us ever since. Consider, for example, Nietzsche's abhorrence of liberalism and democracy, which (in his view) led to the reduction of all standards to the level of the so

called ‘uncultivated masses’, overwhelmed by the slavish moral of *re-sentiment*. For the same thinker, *re-sentiment* was nothing but a legitimate offspring of the ‘herd mentality’ introduced by Christianity (Nietzsche 2001; 2003; Williams 2001: xiii). In fact, most radical movements in the non-Anglophone western world regarded the French Revolution as an exemplary movement against oppression and absolutism, as Arendt explained in *On Revolution* (1963/1990). The thinkers and leaders of the French Revolution were inspired by Rousseau’s notion of compassion and lumped together the destitute into an aggregated depersonalized crowd (23; 85), into a ‘herd’, to use Nietzsche’s terms. Nietzsche assigns to the whole history of democracy elements that belong solely to the socio-political consensus within which he lived and wrote (socio-centrism). His polemics against liberalism and democracy echo the hostility of the German social consensus towards liberalism and, more importantly, towards the extravagances of the French Revolution. It is even more remarkable that he associates democracy itself with the ‘slavish morality’ of the so-called Judeo-Christian *weltanschauung*, praising the Apollonian (ancient Greek and Roman) civilisation for its insistence on fortitude and heroism, but (curiously enough) ignores that democracy and politics (the *polis*) were central ‘in ancient Greek creation’ (Castoriadis 2007c: 3) he so ardently admired. In the same way, he systematically disregards the individualism of the Anglo-American Protestant *weltanschauung* and its contribution to the American Revolution.

In order to minimise such risks we have to think of genealogy in terms of *metharmōsis*. In brief, *metharmōsis* derives from the Greek μεθαρμόζω (*metharmōzo*). The prefix *μεθ* (*meth*) is the prefix ‘with’ (in English). In turn, *armōzo* implies ‘to befit’ (to suit) (Oxford Dictionary 2008: 29). Thus, *metharmōsis* implies ‘synthesis’ or (more precisely) the process of ‘bringing two concepts together in order to make one suitable for another’. Consider the following example: on the one hand, the spirit of an ‘enlightened individualism’ in the modern liberal and republican tradition is identified by Arendt (1998) in the *realm* of democracy, in the *political realm* of the ancient Athenian *polis*, namely, in the realm of (political) *action*. For Arendt (1998), the political realm was the space where each free Athenian citizen could express his individual views (41). As Chapter 7 will make it clear, this ‘enlightened individualism’ is widely echoed in schools of modern republican

and liberal thought<sup>10</sup>. Consider, for instance, Tocqueville's (1994) praise for individualism, which (in his view) is of 'democratic origin' (2: 98), or John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644/2016) for its apparent defense of individual expression (5; 27) and freedom of choice (18)<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, when Machiavelli in the *Discourses on Livy* (1517/1992) evinces the capacity of the 'common people' to make 'far superior' judgments than princes do, suggesting that a government by the populace is more preferable than a despotic/monarchical government (254), he indirectly stresses the importance of individual expression. As the previous section argued, public speech (*logos*), exercised in the (republican) political realm where the 'common people' gather in order to make decisions, is a means through which good judgments can be made. In this respect, notable republican thinkers, such as James Harrington, who (like Machiavelli) in *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1611–1677/1992) speaks of the superiority of popular judgment (as opposed to the judgment of a prince or a king), indirectly accept the notion of 'enlightened individualism'. These thinkers are continuators of a tradition whose possible origins are located in ancient Greece, according to Arendt (1990;1998) and Castoriadis (1997). We can label this genealogy 'case A'.

As opposed to the *political realm*, which was reserved for individuality, the spirit of the *private realm* corresponds to the monarchical/despotic organization of the Athenian household (Arendt 1998). The *metakénosis* of the Greek democratic paradigm to the Roman world led to the distortion of the distinction between the *political* (or the *public*) and the *private realms* (28; 37). As we will see in the next chapter in a review of Arendt's *Human Condition* (1958/1998), this gradually led to a *metharmōsis* of the democratic *political realm* to the despotic/oligarchic environment of Rome, which resembled the monarchical Athenian *private realm* (the household/family). In simple terms, this led to a

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10 This responsible individualism, otherwise called 'republican individualism', must not be conflated with the 'rugged individualism' of economic liberalism which Chapter 3 criticises.

11 Milton (2016) in this polemic against censorship condemns book burning and defends individual expression on religious grounds. As he asserts, 'books are not absolutely dead things' and 'do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them' (5). Thus, those who destroy a book deprive this potency of life. To use a more vernacular language, those who destroy a book 'kill a man' and those he '[w]ho kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image' (ibid).

synthesis, to the emergence of a new realm, the *realm of society* (genealogy ‘case B’). In Arendt’s (1990) view, the French Revolution took place within a cultural environment nurtured under the dominance of the *realm of society* (as Chapter 2 will also discuss in more depth). We can, therefore, assert that (to a degree) the French Revolution, is a *henkfurt* of this *metharmōsis* which brought into existence the ‘amorphous, anonymous, uniformizing reality’ of the social realm (Benhabib 2000: 23). Arendt’s (1990) views on the American Revolution, in conjunction with that of Gordon. S. Wood’s (2003), Bernard Bailyn’s (1967) and James Kloppenberg’s (2018), along with Tocqueville’s (1994) testimonies from America, reveal the existence of a political tradition in the New World dissimilar to the one within which ideas that gave birth to the French Revolution were nurtured. The American Revolution was the offspring of a tradition (or *genealogy*) more decisively influenced by democratic (enlightened) individualism in comparison to the philosophical tradition behind the French Revolution. This tradition is predicated on the idea that every free citizen has the right to express his/her views within the *political* realm, within the popular councils, the town-hall meetings (in our case), without acting as if he is a ‘herd’, a unanimous crowd of an undifferentiated sum of persons. Let us not forget that the notion of individualism is central to the populism of the *vita civile* (see Chapter 7).

Eventually, by identifying different genealogies to which particular historical events correspond, the chances to avoid interpretive errors due to sweeping generalisations are increased. We can, thus, rescue both republicanism, populism and Christianity itself from negative connotations, such as those attributed by Nietzsche’s socio-centrism, or by the pessimistic anti-populist polemics (of Hobbes and Le Bon). If republican *genealogy* corresponds to case A and the *social realm* to B, the existence of these two distinct *genealogies* implies that elements corresponding either to A or to B exist in the modern world. Hence, it is essential to identify which particular *genealogy* each political manifestation expresses and, simultaneously, which elements of this *genealogy* are prevalent in such manifestations.

### 3) William James: pragmatism

Before discussing pragmatism in depth, let us return to the method of universalism. In spite of its tendency to ‘commit philosophical mistakes’ (Skinner 1998: 29), distorting and blurring the actual meaning of a text (31), in some cases it yields useful results. For

example, one may criticise the American Founding Fathers who ‘were products of an eighteenth-century culture quite different from our own’ and this culture resonates in their unacceptable (according to the current standards) beliefs (enunciated in some of its writings) about African Americans and Native Americans (Breen 2019: 9). Such an assumption, albeit expressing an indisputable truth, does not imply that one cannot extract from the writings of the American Founders ideas of *positive value* in the process of shaping and disseminating viewpoints that favour the political emancipation even of African Americans (see Chapter 6). For Skinner (1998) this particular approach, which reflects on (even incidental) remarks and phrases of a certain text in order to construct a precise viewpoint, leads to ‘absurdities’ and ‘mythologies’ (32). Furthermore, such an attempt obscures and neglects the actual aspirations of the author (31). While this assertion seems valid, let us not turn a blind eye to cases where such ‘mythologies’ have contributed positively to political causes that inspire common decency. A reader (in other words) can extract from philosophical texts ideas that strongly emphasise the importance of self-limitation in politics (regardless of the actual intentions of their author). The influence the ideas of the American Founders had in the destruction of black slavery in the American South (as mentioned above) is such an example. Terms like *practical contribution* (or *practical value*) are central to the whole idea of pragmatism. It is time to elaborate further on James’ pragmatic method, upon which the primary theoretical foundations of the *vita civile* have been laid.

Pragmatism is ‘a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable’ (James 1978: 28). James brings the following example: a man ‘tries to get sight of a squirrel by moving rapidly around the tree’ (27). Although he goes fast, the squirrel keeps moving even faster ‘in the opposite direction, and always keeps the tree between himself and the man, so that never a glimpse of him is caught’ (ibid). The ‘metaphysical’ dispute that emerges is summarised in the following question: ‘*Does the man go round the squirrel or not?*’ (ibid; *emphasis original*). The man, indeed, ‘goes round the tree’ but so does the squirrel. Does, therefore, the man ‘go round the squirrel?’ (28). Axiom A: if, by the term ‘going around’ we imply that a man passes ‘from the north of [the squirrel] to the east, then to the south, then to the west, and then to the north of [the squirrel] again, obviously the man does go around [the squirrel], for he occupies these



successive positions' (27-8). Axiom B: if the man is first in front of the squirrel, then 'on the right', then behind the animal, 'then on his left, and finally in front again, it is quite as obvious that the man fails to go around [the squirrel]' (28). Obviously, there is no clear answer concerning which axiom (A or B) is more accurate. However, what James would consider important in this case is to offer a concrete definition regarding what the *lekton* 'going around' signifies. In addition, James' pragmatic method interprets assertions and viewpoints 'by tracing their respective practical consequences' (ibid). It examines, first and foremost, the *practical impacts* of A and B in one's life (regardless of which axiom is right or wrong). More importantly, the *practical value* of certain ideas is also determined 'on their relations to the other truths that also have to be acknowledged' (41). For example, what practical value may axiom A have for a particular idea or project? In order to shed further light on these queries we will need to take into account the following examples:

First, as mentioned earlier, the present study builds upon the idea of vulnerability, upon the Christian conception of original sin, upon the belief in the so-called natural human propensity towards hubris, towards *sin* and evil, which is conveyed in the Christian philosophy of Saint Cyprian, Saint Ambrose, Saint Augustine, Bishop Iraneus, *et al* (Cross 1966: 994-5)<sup>12</sup>. A similar view conception of human wickedness deriving exclusively from the nature of man and woman (Passmore 2000: 258) is also echoed in the realist thought of Hobbes (2006) and Niebuhr (1960). Or as Iris Murdoch (1970), from a different angle, argued, 'human beings are selfish' and this 'seems true on the evidence, whenever and wherever we look at them, in spite of a very small number of apparent exceptions' (76). 'The psyche', says the same author, 'is a historically determined individual restlessly looking after itself' (ibid). In contrast, a more optimistic view of human nature is shared by the followers of Rousseau (2004), who consider 'compassion and altruism' inherent aspects 'of our animal heritage' (Nussbaum 2013: 113). Human beings in their default position are benevolent, 'capable of altruism and emotional concern', predisposed to sympathy towards the suffering of their fellow humans (ibid). Locke in his *Thoughts*

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12 To suggest that the notion of original/ancestral sin is central in Christianity does not imply that there have never existed Christian thinkers who rejected this idea. Consider, for example, the social gospel movement with its 'excessively optimistic view of human nature' (Lasch 1991a: 381) or the case of Pelagius, for whom '[s]in is not inherent in man's nature' and only begins 'to grow upon us in childhood' corrupting us 'little by little' (Passmore 2000: 139).

*Concerning Education* (1693/1968) shares a quite similar view: here the thinker rejects the doctrine of original sin and insists that there are no inbuilt moral deficiencies in men and women. For the same author, ‘there are secular processes, controllable by men, by which they can bring about moral improvement of their fellow-men’ (Passmore 2000: 249)<sup>13</sup>. This ‘metaphysical’ (in James’ terms) dispute on whether human nature exists or not (and if it exists, to what degree it is characterised by rapacity or benevolence) remains largely unresolved. In fact, no fully conclusive research has been published hitherto. In response, many have adopted a more ‘agnostic’ stance: nothing really ‘entitles us to assume that man has a nature or essence in the same sense as other things. In other words, if we have a nature or essence, then surely only god could know and define it’ (Arendt 1998: 10). From a pragmatic point of view, the validity of these assertions should not be our primary concern. First and foremost, one should look at the *practical consequences* of realism, of Rousseau’s optimism and/or of Arendt’s agnosticism in the process of shaping the conditions within which common decency is better served and protected. As Chapter 3 will stress, optimistic convictions of human nature may cultivate perceptions that unwittingly turn a blind eye on the potentially disastrous consequences of the abrupt explosion of rapacity, jealousy and aggression. Optimistic populist trends, the ones espoused by the most prominent leaders of the French Revolution, partially anchored to Rousseau’s notion of original benevolence, instead of establishing commonwealths free from oppression and violent conflict, have many times stimulated political extremism and violent conflict (as mentioned in the previous section)<sup>14</sup>. To avoid misunderstandings: while a great deal of democratic

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13 Of course, Locke’s view on human nature in his *Second Treatise* (1689/1998) (discussed in chapter 3) is dissimilar. Herein Locke considers human beings rational by nature, however, aspects of Hobbes’s *realist* view are indirectly echoed.

14 It goes without saying that while optimistic populist trends can often draw on Rousseau, at the same time, not every ‘optimistic’ political ideology relies on his notion of original benevolence. Consider, for example, the optimistic republicanism of the fourteenth-century Florentine civic humanists (like Pietro Pomponazzi), who saw ‘the attainment of the maximum possible civic goodness’ a ticket to perfection (Passmore 2000: 227) and strived to ‘remake the world in the image of universal benevolence, to perfect it in secular charity’ (239). Or (more importantly) the genealogical connections between economic liberalism and Hobbes’ pessimistic realism. To a degree, the latter’s scepticism regarding human nature is partially echoed in variants of eighteenth century economic liberalism (as Chapter 3 will discuss more thoroughly). However, the responses eighteenth-century economic liberals proposed against the natural human proclivity towards war

enthusiasm ‘descends from the ideas of people like Rousseau, who believed in democracy’ because he thought mankind to be ‘wise and good that everyone deserves a share in government’, as Clive Staples Lewis (1986: 7) claims, the rejection of his idea of original benevolence and the acknowledgment of frailty and vulnerability, the consequence of ‘man’s first disobedience’ (Milton 2004: 10), as an inherent human condition, is not a ticket to anti-populism, nor does it lead to a pessimistic paralysis of the political will. The realist perception raises awareness concerning the possible sudden emergence of evil and hubris and the need for self-limitation as a means of ‘salvation’. In Lewis’ (1986) words, ‘[m]ankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows’ (7). *Logos* (dialogue), experience and the transcendent morality of religion are among the most essential means through which power is checked and human aspirations are effectively measured. Let us not ignore that ‘[t]he belief in human sinfulness was a staple of both Calvinism and classical republican ideology’ (Kidd 2012: 7), an ideology that springs from the republics ‘of ancient Greece and Rome’, and emphasised ‘the importance of checks and balances in political power and the need for a virtuous people to preserve liberty’ (7). To a degree, this approach converges with the (Greek) Orthodox Christian view of the original sin. Orthodoxy, according to Antony Hughes (2004), holds a more moderate position (than that espoused by Saint Augustine). Orthodoxy never speaks of the original sin *per se*. Instead, it is the ‘ancestral sin’ with what the Orthodox fathers are concerned (ibid). The Augustinian point of view (claims Hughes) associates the ‘original sin’ with the ‘original guilt’ for Adam and Eve’s transgression, in which humanity *continuously* participates (ibid). Evil, for Augustine, is ‘a permanent feature of the world’ (Gray 2007: 10). According to the Orthodox *weltanschauung*, sin has been transmigrated to Adam and Eve from Satan and, thereupon, from Adam and Eve to successive generations (Hughes 2004). In this respect the (Greek) Orthodox fathers, much like Augustine, accept the ancestral inheritance of sin, which (in their view) constitutes an essential aspect of the nature of men and women. For the latter, nevertheless, humanity does not *continuously*

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and conflict rely on ‘optimistic’ socio-economic reforms (Lasch 1991a: 13-4). More precisely, their basic remedy was the rapid and constant expansion of production and consumption of goods that would (ostensibly) gratify never ending human wants. The outcomes of this process would end up being beneficial without the need for major political engagement,

participate in Adam and Eve's transgression and, hence, sin and evil do not manifest themselves in every single human deed (ibid). Thus, in the Greek Orthodox *weltanschauung*, *hubris* constitutes a possibility rather than a certainty. This modest *realism* does not necessarily foster pessimism; it does not consider every human deed a literal manifestation of the ancestral sin that will somehow lead to wretchedness. It does not destroy any hope in free will and *action*, that is, in the mastering of evil and *hubris* through *logos* and memory, or through means of *psychical enlightenment* (religion, art, *et. al.*).

Of course, to acknowledge the practical contribution of this hopeful realism in the process of shaping and sustaining an ethic of common decency against the threats of extremism (deriving from variants of political optimism) should not automatically force us to treat Rousseau's original benevolence with complete disdain, considering all viewpoints justified on Rousseauian grounds destructive and futile. The aim of this dissertation is to highlight the advantages of the realist approach over the optimistic/Rousseauian (or Lockean) without discarding cases where optimistic views on human nature contributed to political enfranchisement and social equality<sup>15</sup>. For sure, this preference for the realist *weltanschauung* should not come at the price of neglecting other worldviews that share a quasi similar conception about life and human nature, like (for instance) Gandhianism, which assumes that the source of evil is 'man's will to power (his ego) and his insatiable greed for more and more material possession' (Doctor 1992: 152), or systems of thought, such as Buddhism or Sufism (mentioned in the previous section), which are also concerned about the consequences of human rapacity and *hubris* on human nature itself. Nonetheless, in order to shed light on the (potentially) positive contribution of these belief systems to common decency, more extensive analysis is required. Such an analysis can only take place in another study.

Second: philosophically speaking, republicanism and Christianity (especially the most mystical and monastic ends of the latter) are often seen as opposites. According to

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<sup>15</sup> Consider, for example, Mary Wollstonecraft's (1993) feminist cause, grounded upon the radical belief in the so-called inherent rationality of men and women alike. Instead, for the populism of the *vita civile* rationality and goodness are not given to men and women by nature. These virtues can be acquired through experience and/or through means of spiritual enlightenment (*psychical enlightenment*, in other words).

Machiavelli, civic virtue had little use for Christianity (Pocock 1975: 49-54; 214; 492; B. J. Smith 1985: 43; 45), precisely because Christians give “‘strength to suffer rather than strength to do bold things’” (quoted by Lasch 1991a: 174)<sup>16</sup>. For Pocock (1975), Christianity (and mainly Catholicism) turns to the inside world in the pursuit of truth. It prioritises the *vita contemplativa*, ‘the abstract world of unmotivated contemplation’ (56) and inner reflection (Arendt 1998: 316), as opposed to the *vita activa*. Christians emphasised ‘divine judgment rather than political justice’ (Kloppenbergh 2016: 40). Classical republicans, in contrast, acclaimed as the highest human achievement the worldly life of the public-political realm, which is founded upon common appearance and open dialogue (rather than introspection in isolation). In contrast, ‘[t]he end of Christian education’, says B. J. Smith (1985), is the abandonment of the political realm, the renunciation ‘of the world of men and the vanity of the flesh’ (43). ‘A customary community in one corner of an eternal order is not a republic of citizens’ (Pocock 1975: 49). Having renounced worldliness *tout court*, Christianity looked for salvation in immaterial and immemorial realms situated above this world, into what Arendt (1998) called ‘uncompromising otherworldliness’ (251). Instead, political communities preserve immortality by giving chances to every individual to be remembered by his words and deeds (B. J. Smith 1985: 41). Perhaps this explains Arendt’s (1990) admiration for the leaders of the American Revolution, who ‘remained men of action from beginning to end, from the Declaration of Independence to the framing of the Constitution’ (95). More precisely, in the view of an open rebellion against the Coercive Acts of 1774 (imposed by Great Britain), new forms of popular governments, ‘from the bottom up’ emerged (Wood 2003: 47). ‘Mass meetings that sometimes attracted thousands of aroused colonists endorsed resolutions and called for new political organizations’ (ibid). These local committees, assemblies and gatherings spread across the colonies until the days of the Revolution of 1776. For Arendt (1990) the American Constitution sought to consolidate the power of the Revolution’ whose main objective was freedom (154). It sought to give to these political spaces ‘formal recognition and foundation’ (239). Thus, it ‘came to be ... *Constitutio Libertatis*, the foundation of freedom’ (154). The leaders of the Revolution, by

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16 This is evident in *The Discourses on Livy* (1517/1970), particularly in Book 1, chapter 2 (142-6).

acting within such spaces, while they were shaping the Constitution, preserved their names to be remembered forever. As opposed to immortality rooted in remembrance through heritage and history, the (mystical and/or medieval)

Christian worldview, claims Arendt (1998), associated immortality with is otherworldliness (13). Or as B. J. Smith (1985) noted, immortality ‘in time’ was replaced ‘with an immortality beyond time’ (44).

How could pragmatism establish a common ground between these two opposite trends? Despite the existing divergences between Christianity and republicanism, nothing indicates that the former does not incorporate elements of practical significance for projects inspired by republican ideas. Do both systems oppose self-centrism, championing mutual love and altruism instead? Do they emphasise prudence in one way or another? Are both currents preoccupied with the notion of judgment and free will? A positive response to these questions does not immediately end the dispute. Soon another question arises: is the ‘prudence’ advocated by Christian mysticism similar to the one exalted by classical republicanism? Obviously, for Christianity prudence and decency spring from contemplation and asceticism. In the republican *weltanschauung* prudence is, strictly speaking, obtained through our mundane experiences. Notwithstanding the Christian ‘prudence’ is not fully identical with what the Greeks or Romans had in mind, one has to consider its effects, its actual contributions, in short its *practical consequences* (positive or otherwise) to projects inspired by political systems that draw on classical republican ideas. Consider, as an example, the case of the American Revolution, which had been influenced by unique synthesis of ideas revolving around the republican notion of self-government on the one hand, bridging classical Enlightenment concepts and religious viewpoints (originating from variants of the Christian Reformation), on the other (Kloppenber 2016: 353; 362).

In short, the project of the *vita civile* embraces the legacy of political leaders and philosophers who applied Christian ethics not exclusively for the purpose of eternal salvation, but in order to overcome social and political injustices in this world, seeking to combat hubris and corruption, and therefore inspiring self-governance and prudence, should be given consideration. This includes influential Christian leaders like the Baptist Martin Luther King Jr and the abolitionist orator Frederick Douglass, who can be compared

to the earlier English Puritan and the revolutionist republican John Milton, to name one example. King was no less a ‘man of action’ than Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were. In his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize (1965) he insisted that ‘[t]he most important feature of the civil rights movement ... was the “direct participation of masses in protest, rather than reliance on indirect methods which frequently do not involve masses in action at all”’ (Lasch 1991a: 404). His praise of the Christian *agape* opened up pathways for the creation of alternative public realms in churches and squares (as Chapter 5 will discuss more thoroughly), of spaces of action, which brought black and white communities together, allowing them to collectively discuss the future plans of the movement. King emerged as a leader while acting and speaking within such spaces. His words touched millions of hearts and minds. Thus, he became immortalised as a true historical legend whose legacy will always be remembered.

To conclude: whether Plato, or Jung, or Hobbes, or Dostoevsky (*et al*) were opponents of the *vita activa* (the life of *political* action) or not, whether ‘[i]t is difficult for those ... who believe in ... democracy to follow Nietzsche very far from down the road that he takes’ (Fukuyama 1992: 313) or not, are questions of minor significance. Pragmatism allows us to trace and extract from philosophical texts (written by these authors) viewpoints of real value in our attempts to examine the structure of the human soul, identifying the underlying reasons the latter produces energies that stimulate selfishness, *hubris* and passion for revenge, which the democratic and anthropocentric (but melioristic) populism of the *vita civile* attempts to master (through *logos*, memory and through methods of ‘psychical enlightenment’).

### Chapter outline

Chapter 2 offers a general review of certain published works in the fields the present study seeks to cover, coupled with explanations concerning gaps and omissions that exist in the same works. By reflecting on John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Hannah Arendt’s *Life of The Mind (LOM)* (1978), on the three faculties of the *vita contemplativa* (*thinking, willing and judging*), a psychoanalytic investigation of human nature will be offered. Psychoanalytic insights, produced out of such critical reflections and reviews will be used as explanatory models in the successive chapters, where the socio-political impasses of pessimism and (liberal or populist) optimism are rigorously assessed. This analysis offers

a clear *rationale* concerning the notion of Original Sin, which links to my approach to the question of populism and politics.

Chapter 3 opens up with a discussion on Hobbes' tribute to pessimism and absolutism. In Hobbes' view, human beings without being under the subservience of a coercive government cannot restrain their desire for pride, possession of power, property and goods. This leads to a catastrophic *war of all against all* (Hobbes 2006: 72). Hobbes's solution to this menace is subjection to the unquestionable commands of an absolute Sovereign, who directs everyone's actions towards the common benefit (Hobbes 2006: 72, 95; 121; Furedi 2013: 182). Locke's response to Hobbes' pessimism and anti-populism was the ideology of possessive individualism. Locke (1998) rejects Hobbes' obedience to absolute governments, seeing the principle of '*Salus Populi Suprema Lex*' as a 'just and fundamental' rule that 'he, who sincerely follows it, cannot dangerously err' (373). Notwithstanding Locke constantly points out the necessity to restrain the Sovereign's powers, stressing that civic authorities should first and foremost acknowledge majoritarian consent, at the same time he partially reproduces certain aspects of the Hobbesian philosophy, most of all, his fear of violent death (due to lack of protection and order). Solutions to this problem had to be found not through absolutism but through the market, through the unlimited exchange of goods that would 'turn universal selfishness to universal benefit' (Pocock 1975: 465), 'liberating desire from all constraints on acquisitiveness' (Fukuyama 1992: 333). The unlimited economic expansion, which aims to gratify the insatiable desire (pathos, in my terms) for possession, becomes the ultimate purpose of all collective enterprises. Economic liberalism, a *henkfurt* of the Hobbesian absolutism, substitutes the political pessimism of the latter with an overt optimism. Both models share one common feature: the exclusion of the 'common people' from the decision-making. For the Lockean model all social relations must be put under the dictates of the market, whose tendency to generate wealth through the constant increase of the availability of consumable objects would (supposedly) generate stability and prosperity, emancipating mankind from all fears.

Sections of this chapter call into question this liberal (optimistic) *weltanschauung*. They rely on the psychoanalytical schemas developed in Chapter 2 and, simultaneously, on historical case-studies. In addition, Chapter 3 juxtaposes the anti-populism of the



Hobbesian and the Lockean model with the melioristic populism of the *vita civile*, centred around the idea of political participation (*action*). As mentioned earlier, ethical memory, one of the main ingredients of *action*, is prominently pedagogical. It has the capacity to cultivate an ethic of self-limitation by raising awareness concerning the devastating outcomes of past decisions (collectively taken). Hence, through action, that is, through political participation, the ‘common people’ can become cognizant of their vulnerability. They become aware of their capacity for evil. They obtain the necessary experience, which averts the repetition of *hubris*.

Chapter 4 elaborates on aspects of economic liberalism briefly mentioned in Chapter 3. It focuses on the phenomenon of social nihilism, on the social implications of the ‘Lockean’ model with its emphasis on economic expansion and modernisation (at the expense of religion and tradition). More precisely, the rise of permissive liberalism can be interpreted as the consequence of post-war liberalism, which was influenced on the one hand by certain countercultural currents of the 1960s and 1970s<sup>17</sup>, and (on the other) by neoliberal economists and theorists, such as Milton Friedman and Friedrich August von Hayek, who, as Gray (2007) claimed, subscribed to the belief in the ‘free market’ as ‘the most productive economic system’, as ‘the most efficient’ and ‘peaceful’ way of ‘organizing the economy’ (120). To a degree, (neo)liberalism constitutes a *genealogical* evolution of the ‘Lockean’ and ‘Smithian’ (optimistic) liberal model, which thinkers from Marx and Engels (2013) and Karl Polanyi (2001) to Eugene Dominic Genovese (1994), John Gray (2007) and Patrick Deneen (2018), including Lasch (1991a; 1991b), considered also to be solvent to tradition and culture. In other words, neoliberalism can accelerate cultural decomposition, contributing to the liquidation of social bonds and old-fashioned conventions. As Lasch (1984; 1991a; 1991b), Zygmunt Bauman (2000), Panagiotis Kondylis ([Παναγιώτης Κονδύλης] 2007), *et al.*, have argued, ‘neoliberalism’ champions material abundance and rampant consumerism, which intensified the process of social nihilism. As Nietzsche (2006) believed, social nihilism was prevalent almost everywhere in the liberal world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, resulting in the (partial)

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17 Mainly I am referring to trends promoting boundless social liberalization, rather on the Civil Rights Movement or cultural currents in support of the latter, like, for instance, the Folk Revival movement, as described by Elisabeth Hale (2011).

loss of tradition and common (collective) identity. It erased from the collective memory cultural elements and wore away the rigid common world of the national community, within which individuals could obtain meaning and common purpose. To a degree, cultural decomposition points to Weil's (1987a) notion of 'uprootedness', signifying the destruction of the past *in toto*.

As a reaction to this process of social nihilism (or cultural decomposition), traits that boost nostalgic trends rapidly emerge, encouraging the blind idealisation of the past, of the old disappeared world. The term nostalgia, the 'νόστιμον ἡμῶν' ('the day of return') according to Homer (1966: 2), derives from the word νόστος (*nostos*, translated as 'going back') and ἄλγος (*álgos*, signifying affliction and sharp psychological pain) and signifies despair, hopefulness and an overwhelming defeatist view on both the present and/or the future. The nostalgic mind idealises this golden age of a lost carefree world that used to offer 'delights no longer obtainable' (Lasch 1991a: 83). Lasch in *TTOH* speaks of the rising tide of nostalgia during the nineteenth century as a reaction to the cultural changes, and (more importantly) to the loss of traditional ways of life, brought forward by the spread of Industrial Revolution and the consolidation of urbanization, the consequences of economic progress. In the chapter 'Nostalgia: The Abdication of Memory' (82-119) of *TTOH*, Lasch reflects on literary and philosophical works of the nineteenth century, through which the pessimistic/nostalgic is often expressed through a deep 'regret for [an] innocence no longer accessible' (90), that is, for the lost idyllic and pastoral world (100-5), supposedly emancipated from all the hardships of the present (83). The 'pessimistic nostalgia' of today, to use Eelco's and Hartevelt's (2018) terms, is quite similar: it finds expression through various right-wing populist movements, which incite a desire (pathos) to resurrect the dead old (common) world, that is, the pre-1960s world. Unlike the present world, which (in the nostalgic mind) lacks meaning, cultural cohesion and community, the old disappeared world was capable of sustaining togetherness, common fellowship and purpose. In short, nostalgia converts the old disappeared world into an *idol*<sup>18</sup>. To avoid misunderstandings: arguments concerning the cultural superiority of the past and the quasi 'emotional appeal

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18 In Chapter 4, psychoanalytic insights will allow us to understand the mental processes through which nostalgic appeals (incited by uprootedness) incite idolatry, the so-called 'idolatry of the past', causing political paralysis and inactivity.

of happy memories’, which does not depend on any pessimistic disparagement for the present, neither on the idealisation of the past as a whole, must not be conflated with nostalgia (82). The nostalgic appeal does not draw ‘hope and comfort from the past in order to enrich the present and to face what comes with good cheer’ (83). As opposed to the populism of the *vita civile*, which approaches the past with gratitude and sees tradition and heritage as a source of inspiration, the populist right and its nostalgic idealization of the past promises a new social reality that could resemble this old disappeared world. By acknowledging as explanatory models the same psychoanalytical and phenomenological themes of Chapter 2, Chapter 4 will attempt to shed light on the precise reasons one should approach this nostalgic populist desire to turn the wheel of history backwards with scepticism and caution.

On completion of Chapter 3 and 4 the reader will have obtained a concrete understanding a) on the impasses of the main theoretical foundations upon which political systems relying on pessimism and (liberal) optimism rest, b) on their evident philosophical convergences (anti-populism), as well as c) on the negative impacts of the implication of political programmes (or initiatives) predicated on pessimism or, on the contrary, rely on optimistic liberal doctrines. In addition, discussions revolving around the role of ethical memory (the primary ingredient of *action*) in politics will elucidate the process through which the human potential capable of making common decency a true living experience is unleashed.

Chapter 5 elucidates the way *logos*, the second premise of *action*, promotes decency through dialogue and viewpoint diversity. As B. J. Smith (1985) argued, ‘[i]n *action* ... different persons may see different things’ (262). In the public-political realm experiences and memories are constantly discussed. Interpretations and opinions are scrutinised and judged by individuals who hold different worldviews and see ‘different things’, who (in other words) interpret these experiences and memories from different angles, shedding light on different aspects of them. This plurality of expressed judgments and ideas increases the chances for hidden aspects of a given reality to be unveiled. Consequently, *logos* brings us closer to the truth. But as it has been already stressed, *the vita civile* offers no guarantee that *logos* and memory will always promote truth over falsehood. The public-political realm is a fragile entity, always exposed to hubris. Publics

are never fully sealed from demagogic infiltrations, whose public speeches deceive a great portion of the citizenry. Thus, we have arrived at the fourth major *problématique*: when neither *logos*, nor ethical memory can safeguard decency, what could protect publics from deception and *hubris*? As mentioned earlier, religious insights (as well as art and drama) can inspire civil disobedience, though which a populace that has thrown off prudence and moral decency can be influenced, in order to rectify its stance.

The ninth chapter of Lasch's *TTOH*, '*The Spiritual Discipline Against Resentment*' (369-411), in which Martin Luther King Jr's case is discussed, the author identifies in the latter's life and philosophy elements that have enabled him to lead a successful campaign of civil disobedience against the hubris of racism, widely embraced by sections of the Southern American white populace. These elements are: resilience, patience, inner clarity and, above all, faith in the 'common people', which springs from the belief that every human being holds the means of salvation (*eucosmia*). For Lasch, it was King's exposure to the religious tradition of the black church (391-3), 'the most stable institution of the southern Negro community' (394), what converted his suffering, 'inflicted by membership in a persecuted racial minority' (391, ff), into an opportunity for introspection, through which he acquired the psychical enlightenment and the eloquence to inspire and motivate large numbers of black and white southerners to mobilize for racial justice. Chapter 2 sheds more light on the way this process of introspection connects us with what Weil would have called 'the *impersonal realm*' and stimulates self-purification. In simple terms, self-purification refers to the process whereby negative prejudices, biases, resentments and selfish pursuits are effectively removed from thinking. Furthermore, those who come through this process (of self-purification) increase their vigour, excitement and mental clarity. Chapter 5 explains how this self-purification leads to the dramatisation of the injustices and indecencies the hubris of the *demos* has caused, primarily due to its (passive or active) endorsement of negative prejudices. Finally, it should be mentioned that apart from being a remarkable example of civil disobedience, King's *eucosmia* (faith in 'the common people') could be acknowledged as a valuable quality that democratic/populist leaders could adopt. Discussions on leadership (in relation to *eucosmia*) are further advanced in Chapter 6, which elaborates on aspects of the French and the American Revolution and goes back to the discussion concerning active citizenship and open

participation.

As it has been clarified in the first section of this Chapter, a federal and participatory political system must first and foremost allow—if not demand—its grassroots constituent bodies (the political realm, in other words) to always remain capable of constituting. It must, therefore, ensure that none of these ‘elementary republics’ are under the sway or influence of a higher order. This, according to Arendt (1990: 267), was the main idea behind the American Revolution, whose leaders were modest and their aspirations relatively melioristic. In the *Federalist Papers* they view government ‘as a means of coping with human imperfection rather than an instrument for re-creating society’ (Gray 2007: 46). To a degree this could be attributed to their ‘common sense’, which had not been exposed to highly optimistic assertions concerning man’s perfect natural benevolence, claims Arendt (1990: 95). Consider, also, Thomas Jefferson, perhaps the most optimistic among the American Founders (after Thomas Paine). Through a close reading on his political writings one may see the hesitancy through which he approaches the belief in the so-called human perfectibility (see chapter 5). John Adams, in addition, ‘never had an optimistic view of human nature’ (Wood (2017). Both the American and the French Revolution were driven by basic Enlightenment anti-absolutist strands (Israel 2019: 256). They pushed forward identical popular demands, championing freedom of speech and the expansion of education, condemning religious autocracy (Israel 2019: 5-6; 256). But the leaders of the latter, profoundly inspired by Holbach, Diderot and Rousseau (Chartier 2004: 88; Israel 2010: 225), went one step further: they denounced Christianity and substituted original sin with Rousseau’s notion of man’s natural benevolence. If the notion of original/ancestral sin, the notion of human frailty and vulnerability, raises awareness concerning man’s ‘sinful nature’, concerning man’s capacity for evil (Passmore 2000: 17), discouraging optimistic (utopian) aspirations for a new brand world, sealed from injustices and disappointments, attempts that denounce this notion could, unwittingly, open up pathways for the acceptance of all sorts of optimisms for a perfect future world. Therefore (as Chapter 6 will discuss in more detail), the abandonment of original sin was one of the main reasons the leaders of the French Revolution accepted, according to B. J. Smith (1985: 230), Tocqueville (2011: 42) and Kloppenborg (2016: 458), the optimistic conviction of ‘human perfectibility’. They ‘clamored eagerly for man’s glory’ and put unlimited ‘faith

in his virtue’ (Tocqueville 2011: 142). They summoned all their efforts to regenerate not only the French society but the entire human race simply by eradicating all absolutist institutions’ (ibid). If the public sphere—initially created by the revolution itself—was entirely destroyed, if the revolution ‘failed to establish a viable democratic republic’ (Israel 2010: 230), this (to a degree) is attributed to the implications of this optimistic populism, which glorified extreme violence, justified under the principle of original benevolence). More precisely, the notion of original sin, this Chapter argues, was treated as a pretext for the moral legitimisation of the institutions of the *ancien régime* (for instance, the Catholic Church), whose ultimate objective (in the eyes of the revolutionaries) was the consolidation of its own despotic rule. As I have already explained in the previous section, the realist emphasis on the so-called inherent human hubris and vulnerability must not automatically encourage political pessimism and absolutism. While defenders of absolutism uphold the notion of ‘original malevolence’ in order to justify anti-populism, the *vita civile* begins with this notion but comes with different objectives: it values the potential of every human being to join the political realm, *act* in concert, in order to minimise the consequences of *hubris*. However, the existence of such a natural proclivity towards evil and destruction leaves no room for optimism, for an ideal future world. The French revolutionaries saw the oppressive power of the *ancien régime* as the main obstacle against the erection of such an ideal world within which man’s natural benevolence could be unleashed. This (along with other factors mentioned in Chapter 2 and 6, such as poverty and material destitution, the dialectics of foreign invasion or the acceptance of Rousseau’s controversial idea of the ‘general will’ by the leaders of the Revolution) contributed to the conversion of anger and social discontent against the *ancien régime* itself into an epidemic of uncompromising hatred and political terrorism. The leaders of the Revolution defended the Terror as a necessary means against ‘internal and external enemies’ (Gray 2007: 36) and as a ‘technique of civic education’, as an ‘instrument of social engineering’ (37). But while in France political optimism contributed to a spread of extremism, resulting in the destruction of the political realm, in the New World the blindness of those who laid down the frameworks of the American Constitution for the democratic experience of the townships and the town halls (self-government) condemned the *political realm* itself to marginalisation. In other words, the Founding Fathers saw political representation as ‘a

substitute for direct political action’ (Arendt 1990: 236). Thus, ‘[o]nly the representatives of the people, not the people themselves’ (235), ‘who constitute the republic’ (251) ‘had an opportunity to engage in those activities of “expressing, discussing, and deciding”’ (235).

To have modest goals, to be apprehensive towards optimistic (utopian) goals, could be a step towards meliorism (or hope). In Lasch’s (1993) view, hope shares the steadfast belief in justice, the deep-seated conviction that wrongs *can* be made right through persistent efforts and mutual sacrifices (13), and most of all, through political engagement, that is, through *action*. In that sense, a melioristic leadership should be limited inasmuch as ‘the ordinary person’ is not deprived of his/her capacity to *act* (to constitute and to make political decisions). A leader, more precisely, who bestows faith to the ‘common people’, who sees in every human being a capacity to serve the common good, would stand against measures that force direct political participation on pain of disappearance. The American Founders shaped a particular political school of thought, emerging as a *metharmōsis* of classical republicanism to modern republicanism, liberalism and Protestantism (Kloppenber 2016: 311-12). They emphasised the practical benefits of direct participation in politics, without bestowing unlimited faith to the moral capacities of human beings. Nonetheless, their preference for the system of representation and their ambiguous stance on the institution of slavery (based on race) would be deemed morally illegitimate should the ideas close to the notion of *eucosmia* had been adopted by the same school of thought. Consider also another case-study: the American cooperative movement and the rise of the People’s Party in the Great Plains (almost a century after the Revolution). As Goodwyn (1976) claims, Populism became the ‘mass movement of anonymous people’ (51). It opposed monopolistic capitalism, corporate greed, bureaucratic management and proposed direct participation (*action*) (Goodwyn 1976: 68-9; 185; 197; 612; Postel 2007: 18 Matsusaka 2020: 70). However, it lost its momentum when the leaders of the People’s Party detached themselves from the grassroots and joined forces with the Democratic Party, pushing its supporters (the ‘anonymous people’) back to the party of the financial monopolies, whose power and influence they had initially opposed.

On completion of chapter 5 and 6 the reader may come across a series of conceptual contradictions. Some of the ideas supported in Chapter 3 and (more importantly) in Chapter

4 (ostensibly) clash with ideas enunciated in sections of Chapter 5. More precisely, Chapter 5 (while elaborating on King's campaign against racial segregation) raises awareness concerning cases where particularism becomes demonic, incorporating provincialism, narrowness, racism and anti-intellectualism. In contrast, Chapter 3 and 4 expressed concerns regarding the loss of tradition, the significance of pastness, the value of particularism and traditionalism, and the need '[t]o be rooted ... perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul', according to Weil (1987a: 41), the need to preserve a common world within which individuals feel naturally included. This common world (that protects us from nihilism) is the national community. According to Canovan (1996), nations preserve the conditions through which individuals obtain 'the capacity to act as a collective people, to undertake commitments and to acquire obligations' (44). '[N]ations are political phenomena' (51) and their identities underpin 'the recurrent drive for popular sovereignty and democracy', according to Anthony Smith (1991: 143). As B. J. Smith (1985) argued, political action and past *remembrance* are related (5). The republic is 'a tissue of relations between citizens in space and time, and it is this which permits us ... to speak about a *public existence*' (6). Such relations and interactions (as the next chapter will explain) shape common memories, that is, 'a set of ... traditions ... and institutions which buttress public life' (ibid). They are founded upon 'a [common] founding myth that remains a point of moral reference and recalls men and women to an awareness of their civic obligations' (Lasch 1991a: 131).

In short, we deem particularism an important reservoir of constructive energy for democratic populism as well as a source of protection from the morbid threats of nihilism and uprootedness. Chapter 7 explains thoroughly how the *vita civile* makes a positive use of particularism itself, minimizing the chances to arouse demonic forces (pathos) that incite idolatry and hubris. As it turns out, the *vita civile* is relatively conservative in its general outlook. However, this *neolithic conservatism*, as Paul Goodman (1970) would have called it<sup>19</sup>, proposes a type of patriotism/particularism that relies on one of the primary principles of *eucosmia*, the strong faith that every human being can make positive contributions through *action*, that the 'common people' can be good exponents of common decency

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19 See the last chapter of his book *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative* (1969).



through *logos* and memory. *Logos* is associated with (responsible) individualism, freeing patriotism from the vices of extreme collectivism. Second, *logos* promotes dialogue and disagreement. It has the potential to hedge aggressive forms of nationalism by making inherited memories and cultural norms subject to public debates. Put otherwise, a political realm is a worldly space where inherited ideas, popular perceptions, narratives and concepts are brought under public scrutiny. They can be discussed and re-evaluated, ‘adjusted to new [emerging] conditions’, instead of being absorbed and internalised as rigid and lifeless static images, ‘cast in stone’ and ready to be worshiped as idols (Genovese 1994: 5). In sum, through *action* the chances for the ultimate objectives of *eucosmia* to be fulfilled increase: once forms of nationalist aggression are hedged, a nation acquires the capacity to become ‘decent’ (‘good’) in concert other nations and peoples, ‘good’ and ‘just’ with the rest of the *cosmos* (‘world’).

## Chapter 2

### Populism and the *Vita Civile*: Theoretical foundations and Classical Arguments

#### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to build upon the main philosophical thinking behind Lasch's distinction between hope from optimism (and pessimism respectively). First, it borrows insights from Hannah Arendt (who, as mentioned in the beginning of the previous chapter, has influenced Lasch's political views). Second, it takes into account Lasch's interest in religion and spirituality (Eric Miller 2010: 47; 256; 308; 400-2) and attempts to discuss further the potential benefits of religious thinking for the politics of civil disobedience. Thus, it elaborates further on Martin Luther King Jr and, reflects on the philosophy of Simone Weil (whose thought, along with that of Reinhold Niebuhr and William James, can shed light on the practical impacts of religion in the process of *psychical enlightenment*). Third, by examining Arendt and Weil, it will identify potential omissions and theoretical gaps in the theories of both thinkers. Fourth, in the course of expanding Lasch's thinking, as well as reviewing and correcting Arendt's and Weil's ideas by considering alternative viewpoints, new perspectives are shaped. These perspectives, which (in fact) are a synthesis of ideas, will function as the primary theoretical foundations in debates concerning the impasses of optimism and pessimism respectively. Simultaneously, they can be seen as the main philosophical pylons of the *weltanschauung* upon which the melioristic cast of mind of the *vita civile* is predicated. The process of building up these foundations begins with a general re-examination of Arendt's *vita contemplativa* (the faculties of *thinking*, *willing* and *judgment*), outlined in the *Life Of The Mind* (LOM) (1978)<sup>20</sup>. This re-examination (see the first section of this chapter) brings into the discussion psychoanalytic interpretations on Milton's *Paradise Lost* (especially concerning the fall of man and Original Sin) and on Homer's *Odyssey*.

Milton's PL is discussed in Lasch's *TTOH* (1991a): '[a] close reading of *Paradise Lost* ... introduce[s] a rich conception of virtue', which in modern republicanism is synonymous with vigor, courage and heroism (233), as well as with the 'Homeric virtues'

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20 The reasons this particular work has been chosen will be explained later on.

of simplicity and frugality (306). Moreover, ‘in the republican tradition, virtue and grace stood sharply opposed’, because ‘virtue enabled men to challenge fate in absence of faith’ (234). Nonetheless, in Milton’s Puritan republicanism ‘virtue and grace became closely entangled’ (ibid). The ability of men and women to challenge fate itself, in order to enjoy the gift of life, comes through vigour and through God’s grace (ibid). Therefore, Milton’s *PL* links republicanism with Christianity (Protestant/Puritan Christianity, more particularly), offering a perspective upon which the present study can reflect while striving to bridge the republican tradition with aspects of the Christian *weltanschauung*. Furthermore, in the last chapter of *The Revolt of The Elites* (1995a), Lasch brings into his discussion Jung’s psychoanalytic thought. For Jung, ‘spiritual needs [are] too urgent to be ignored’ (236) and ‘those needs ... are analogous to hunger’ (236). Herein Lasch refers to Jung’s essay ‘collected in 1933 under the inevitable title Modern Man in Search of a Soul’ (237). In this work Jung expresses profound scepticisms concerning the abandonment of religion and tradition by the ‘modern individual’ (ibid). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the fierce rejection of spirituality by the pioneers of modernity, namely by ‘those who believed that progress’ could ‘enable man to outgrow his childish need for religion’, was also among Lasch’s (1991a: 16) greatest concerns. Citing Tocqueville and Orestes Brownson, Lasch believed that religion and spirituality stimulate frugality, counterweighting rugged individualism and obsessive materialism (60; 189-194), which undermine civic virtue and ‘the old republican idea of citizenship’ (59). However, a more rigorous study of Jung’s psychoanalytic thought (than that made by Lasch) could allow us to identify additional reasons that constitute religion so valuable (apart from its practical contribution to active citizenship). First, religious texts, as well as works of art and literature inspired by religious concepts, contain archetypes (Jung 1960: 122). For Jung (1960), archetypes ‘are primordial images’ (112) that have the capacity to bring hidden aspects of the human instincts, of the most primeval human drives (that often operate unconsciously), to the surface of our conscious process of thinking (48). They are depictions of these drives which shape and influence our behaviour (often unconsciously) (115-125). Hence, if we approach Milton’s *PL* (a work profoundly inspired by the *Old Testament*) from the Jungian perspective, we can shed light on aspects of the functioning of the human mind itself. Northrop Frey (2005) was aware of the psychological aspects of

the *PL*, ‘which Milton [himself] completed after the failure of the revolution and the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660’ (Skinner 1978). In his disillusionment about the English Revolution, claims Frey (2005), about the failure of the English people to establish a commonwealth emancipated from the yoke of absolutism, Milton was compelled ‘to find the true revolution within the individual’ (110). He was driven to identify within the human mind dark ‘inner kingdoms’ of envy, of megalomania and greed, the rapacity of *willing*, to use Arendt’s (1978) terms. Milton sought to overthrow first and foremost (by means of reason and prudence), dark ‘psychical empires’, what Martin Luther King Jr (1986) later on called as the ‘internal violence of spirit’ (13), which prompt men and women to resentment, but also to exploitation and despotism. In short, Milton’s *PL* calls attention to the effects of our inner world in public action.

Thus, one way of looking at Milton’s *PL*, as well as on Homer’s *Odyssey*, is through Jung’s theory, which can shed light on the process whereby archetypal stories and allusions (included in myths and religious texts) depict and expose the devastating outcomes of some (often unconsciously processed) ‘indecent’ human thoughts (*hubris*) that spring from our instincts. Arendt’s notion of *judgment*, the third premise of the *vita contemplativa*, refers to the human ability to reject such thoughts, products of ‘*willing*’ (the second premise), or pathos, a term also used in Lasch’s *TTOH* (1991a) in order to describe the arbitrary tendency of the human mind to revolt against gratitude (87), or according to its Greek origins (*πάσχειν*), the suffering (Adam Smith 2006: 5), the illness of the human mind itself, its proclivity to transgress limits<sup>21</sup>. Making sense of Arendt’s *judgment* requires rigorous analysis of the other two premises and, more importantly, of *thinking*, which constitutes a by-product of judgment itself. Furthermore, in the process of reviewing Arendt’s *vita contemplativa*, philosophical insights of thinkers who evolved from a tradition similar to that of Milton (I am referring to Locke’s and Hobbes’ epistemological empiricism) will be taken into account. Through this re-examination a new (psychoanalytic and phenomenological) schema has been formed; this schema divides the human mind into the following categories: the *empirical* and the *underworld mind* (a term borrowed by

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21 Πάσχειν (*paschein*) also implies being *ἀρρωστος* (*arrostos*), that is, physically and/or mentally ill (Oxford Dictionary 2008: 29; 153).

Homer)<sup>22</sup>. The *empirical* is associated a) with ethical memory, referring to the ‘moral capital’, to the sum of memorable ideas, concepts and events we *experience*, in short to objects that produce some moral value (see Chapter 1). Upon these objects the human mind (through *thinking*) reflects in order to produce *judgment*, making itself capable of telling right from wrong, according to Arendt’s (1978) definition. Additionally, b) the empirical mind also refers to the common world of shared meanings, ideas, concepts, gestures and values. These notions are lodged in the individual and collective storehouse of memory (bonding memory)<sup>23</sup>. They ascribe to groups of people who embrace and internalise them a precise identity, which allows them to exist as a collectivity distinct from all others, defined by a common (be it political, or otherwise) purpose and orientation. On the other hand, the *mind of the underworld* is mainly dominated by the *will* (or pathos) to deceive, oppress and dominate, or (in other words) by rapacity and *hubris*.

To avoid misunderstandings: the *underworld* must not be conflated with Jung’s ‘unconscious mind’. The unconscious is ‘habitual’ (Jung 1960: 96), intense and explosive. As the third section of this chapter will explain, disagreeable elements of the *deep underworld* can be passively reproduced through the unconscious mind, and (according to the Jungian point of view) not all unconscious energies are disagreeable. Furthermore, through the *underworld* one does not simply approach pathos. It is the mind through which one can also access the *impersonal realm*, from where individuals (and political leaders) obtain the necessary vigour and mental clarity (*psychical enlightenment*) in order to heal a populace that has thrown off self-limitation (as the previous chapter explained)<sup>24</sup>.

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22 Consider what the previous chapter conveyed, concerning the necessity of interpreting modes of collective *action* (including populism) by establishing a concrete view on the way psychical energies give rise to particular social phenomena, identifying simultaneously the reasons precise socio-political realities developed such energies. For example, the rise of right-wing populism is understood (in chapter 4) as the consequence of the spread of permissive liberalism and, precisely, of its tendencies to generate pessimism and nostalgia. Permissive liberalism creates the conditions through which negative psychical impulses are emancipated, cultivating a social climate which right-wing populists exploit for their own political benefits.

23 The terms ‘bonding’ or ‘cultural memory’ are developed by Jan Assmann. See his work *Religion and Cultural Memory* (2006).

24 The reasons *impersonality* is connected with the *underworld* (rather than with the *empirical*) are partially explained at the end of the first section of this chapter; they are more thoroughly discussed in the second section of Chapter 5

The concept of *impersonality* and its practical value in this process of civil disobedience will be construed by bringing together Weil's and James' theories, as well as Reinhold Niebuhr's emphasis on the significance of religion.

The second section of this chapter focuses on Arendt's *Human Condition* (1958/1998). Herein Arendt discusses the *vita activa* and highlights the benefits of political *action*. However, as Arendt proceeds to elaborate on the *vita activa*, she concludes in favour of detaching political action and citizenship from issues related to wealth distribution, poverty and economic necessity. For Arendt (1990; 1998), economic necessity and poverty often contribute to the creation of social environments within which violence explodes and leads to the destruction of the *political realm*. Through this position Arendt interprets major historical events (such as the American and the French Revolution). By taking into account the psychoanalytic schema of the first section and by bringing into the discussion critiques and evidence from contemporary historiography, Arendt's position will be called into question. In brief, mass poverty alone cannot not explain the eruption of the extravagant violence that sent the Revolution to its doom. As I have already clarified, violence and political extremism can be also attributed to the ideological optimism that had largely influenced the leaders of the Revolution. In addition, the second section shows that wealth (re)distribution is not at odds with *action per se*. For the *vita civile*, debates revolving around economic justice constitute an integral feature of all political and public life. Finally, the third section of this chapter juxtaposes the *vita civile* with other types of populism, particularly with the top-down (hegemonic) populism of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. It employs Castoriadis' theory of social institutioning, which (along with Jung's psychoanalytic viewpoints) elucidates the human capacity for *hubris*, or to use different terms, on the sudden infiltration of *will* (pathos) into the empirical world, which renders human behaviour unpredictable. The *vita civile*, with its emphasis on hope (associated with *eucosmia* and *action*) can create environments through which the chances for pathos to explode are minimised. In general terms, the *vita civile* is a *synthesis* of the corrected (but also enriched) version of the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* simultaneously.

The empirical and the underworld mind: memory, pathos and *impersonality*

This section begins by examining the notion of curiosity (or wonder), taken as the core function of the human mind. According to Kidd and Hayden (2015) studies have revealed that curiosity is inscribed in human genetic make-up (1). Wonder constitutes ‘a basic element of our cognition [and] a basic component of our nature’ (ibid). From a philosophical point of view curiosity, the spirit of inquiry and inquisitiveness and the ‘*Desire*, to know why, and how’, the unceasing tendency of the human mind to accumulate knowledge (Hobbes 2006:31) is universal and common to every human being (43). First, psychologist Daniel Berlyne, ‘among the most important figures in the 20th century study on curiosity’ (Kidd and Hayden 2015: 3), has divided curiosity into two groups: a) *perceptual* versus *epistemic* and b) *specific* versus *diversive* (Berlyne 1954). *Perceptual* curiosity stimulates organisms to search for new motivations and constitutes the primary drive for exploration in infants but also in non-humans (ibid). *Epistemic* curiosity, on the other hand, does not strive for objects-bearing stimulation but for scientific, empirical and/or philosophical knowledge (1954; 1966). The latter applies predominantly to (adult) humans (1966). In turn, *specific* curiosity refers to the ‘desire for a particular piece of information’ (Kidd and Hayden 2015: 3). ‘[R]ats exhibit diversive curiosity when, devoid of any explicit task, they robustly prefer to explore unfamiliar sections of a maze’ (ibid). This dissertation is exclusively concerned with the former group, and more importantly with *perceptual* curiosity, which we will heretofore call ‘wonder’ (the primary drive for exploration). Second, as George Loewenstein (from a different point of view) suggests, curiosity is ““a cognitive induced deprivation that arises from the perception of a gap in knowledge and understanding” and ... functions like other drive states, such as hunger, which motivates eating...” (quoted by Kidd and Hayden 2015: 4). From this it follows that curiosity, including perceptual and epistemic curiosity (wonder), could be considered an indispensable element of the existence of the human mind itself. From a different angle, hunger is ‘an expression of the instinct of self-preservation’ (Jung 1960: 116). If curiosity functions like a hunger and if hunger is the alpha and omega-existence itself’ (ibid), the instinct of (perceptual) curiosity (wonder) constitutes *sine qua non* of the existence of human life itself. As with Arendt (1978), the human mind only in the state of absolute blessedness, in the state of eternal peace of the after-life, ceases producing thoughts and

volitions (Arendt 1978, 2: 144). Wonder passes into the state of quietness only once the biological functions that effectively sustain a human brain in life permanently stop.

Consider, at this stage, Jung's (1960) collective unconscious, an amalgam of archetypes, which 'like the instincts, are common to all mankind' and 'probably represent typical situations in life' (122). They are unknowingly ascribed to the individual's mind some of them by his/her 'remote and immediate ancestors' during his/her birth (Odajnyk 2007: 3). As mentioned in the previous section, these archetypes, whose 'presence can be proved wherever the relevant literary records have been preserved' (Jung 1960: 122), are mythological figures and have 'universal [or] ... regular occurrence' (Odajnyk 2007: 134). They can illuminate the moral implications of the influence of human instincts in our everyday life<sup>25</sup>. For Castoriadis (2007b [Καστοριάδης 2007β]), works of art (poems, paintings, plays, *et al*) are depictions of the inner forces of the human mind, and more precisely, of the Chaos and the Abyss, the matrix of *creation* and/or *destruction* (135-7; 164). Art is influenced by archetypes (by mythological motifs and by symbols, religious or otherwise). Thus, art highlights the existence of human instincts and, thus, the existence of human wonder, which is either capable of generating conditions within which common decency can flourish (*creation*), or (on the other hand) conditions within which *hubris* spreads like a wildfire (*destruction*). With this in mind, let us discuss Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*.

In Book VII Adam, whilst still in heaven, requests from Archangel Raphael to relate 'how and wherefore this world was first created' (Milton 2004: 211). As the poet recounts: 'but the evil soon / Driven back redounded as a flood on those / From whom it sprung, impossible to mix / With blessedness. Whence Adam soon repealed / The doubts that in his heart arose: and now / Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know' (231). A few scenes before Satan (disguised as a sleeping serpent) returns to heaven, in order to deceive Adam

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25 '[T]he growth of culture', writes Jung (1960), has brought 'with it so many restrictions of a moral and a social nature' in order to moderate the excesses of the influences of instincts, like for instance, the instinct of sexuality (116). Archetypes, that is, 'far-fetched mythological motifs and symbols' that 'appear autochthonously at any time, often, apparently, as the result of particular influences, traditions, and excitations working on the individual, but more often without any sign of them' (112), incorporate condensed moral lessons for the potentially destructive consequences of our unrestrained instincts.



and Eve to ‘Eat freely with glad heart’ (246) from the ‘wisdom-giving plant’ (285), from ‘the interdicted tree’ (212) that brings ‘Knowledge of good and ill...’ (247), the tree they had been ‘[c]harged not to touch...’ (213), we encounter the first expression of the human possibility (to use Jung’s terms) of wonder, of the inherent *perceptual* curiosity, in short, of the inherent human (psychical) ‘hunger’ to inquire and explore randomly, to strive for forbidden knowledge ‘which Adam should never have had in the first place’, notwithstanding ‘God is willing to give him’, according to Frye’s (2005: 45) interpretation. Thus, Raphael issues a clear warning against Adam. Despite that he received a positive response from God to answer his ‘hunger’, at the same time the knowledge he was going to supply should ‘remain within bounds; beyond abstain / To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope / Things not revealed, which the invisible king / Only omniscient, hath suppressed in night / To none communicable in earth or heaven’ (Milton 2004: 216). However, Eve’s decision to eat the forbidden fruit, from the tree of knowledge which should have remained secret to humans, entails that wonder itself cannot be restricted ‘within bounds’.

As Arendt (1990) argued, ‘the human mind stands in need of concepts if it is to function at all’ (220). As explained in the previous section, the human mind does not cease functioning in the absence of concepts. However, a stable empirical world, within which such concepts are produced, is needed for the mechanism of wonder to reflect upon. As the the above analysis (based on Milton’s interpretation of the archetypal story of the *Old Testament*) indicates, wonder is a restless mechanism. Eventually the eclipse of such an empirical world could allow the same mechanism to begin reflecting on the *underworld*. This could allow raw passions and self-destructive psychical energies (products of pathos) to explode in real life. On the one hand, such concepts that keep human wonder preoccupied, concepts of the empirical world, apart from encompassing norms that shape a common life for those who embrace them (bonding memory), incorporate moral lessons. They shape ethical memory, as I will explain in what follows by reflecting on Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651/2006), on Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding* (1689/1978) and, more importantly, on Arendt’s *LOF*.

#### 1) The empirical dimension: *ethical memory (thinking and judgment)*

Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689/1978) holds the

proposition that every human creature arrives into this world with no truth imprinted on his/her mind (18). ‘The senses at first let in particular ideas’ to furnish the human mind, ‘the yet empty cabinet’, the ‘unwritten paper’, a *tabula rasa* on which no innate practical principles exist (22). Hence, in the Lockean mind, human attitude and personal identity are purely related to our experiences with the external world. However, as Jung (1960) argued, ‘[t]he existence of the collective unconscious means that individual consciousness is anything but a *tabula rasa* and is not immune to predetermining influences ... [to] inherited presuppositions, quite apart from the unavoidable influences exerted upon it by the environment’ (112). If the collective unconscious is an amalgam of archetypes that influence conscious thinking (predetermining influences), as Jung stated, and if such archetypes, else called ‘primordial images’, are related to our instincts (which they attempt to illuminate) and pre-exist sense perception simultaneously (ibid) we arrive at the following conclusion: instincts pre-exist sense perception itself. The instinct (the ‘hunger’) of wonder, more specifically, pre-exists sense perception and conscious thinking. We could therefore assert that *thinking*, our capacity to reflect upon past experiences (Arendt 1978, 1) is motivated by wonder. Another theory emphasises the internal organs of the human mind, such as the language organ, specialised in solving problems (Chomsky 2002: 64). ‘The growth and development of these specialized organs, sometimes called “learning,” is the result of internally directed processes and environmental effects that trigger and shape development’ (ibid). The theory concerning the initial states of the faculty of internal language is called *universal grammar* (ibid). Internal language is ‘*not manifested at birth*, as in the case of other organs, say the visual system’ (ibid; *emphasis added*). Thus, instead of being an empty vessel (by birth), the human mind, claims Chomsky, incorporates mechanisms capable of producing language. Or (as the above analysis indicated) the human mind can include mechanisms of primary motivation, the instinct of *perceptual curiosity* (or wonder), in other words In what follows, more extensive analysis will take place about Arendt’s faculty of *thinking* (with the concept of human wonder in mind).

According to Locke (1978), experience is the knowledge deriving from our mind’s capacity to elaborate on objects and ideas it perceives through sensation. Ideas and objects are depended ‘wholly upon our senses’ (42-3). But when sensed objects are removed from sight ‘we still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it’

(Hobbes 2006: 9). This is what ‘the Latines call *Imagination*, from the image made in seeing; and apply the same, though improperly, to all the other senses’ (ibid). For Locke (1978), this power of reviving such objects (disappeared from our senses) is related to ‘the storehouse of our ideas’ we call *memory* (79) which reveals the meaning of what is absent ‘in the form of a story’ (Arendt 1978, 1: 133). Memory signifies the ability of every mind to retrieve immovable or moving *objects* when they disappear from our senses, according to Arendt (1978, 1: 51; 76; 193; 2: 11) and Hobbes (2006: 9-10). In short, memory ‘collects and re-collects what otherwise would be doomed to ruin in oblivion’ (Arendt 1978, 2: 12). For Jan Assmann (2006), re-collecting implies the retrieval of ‘things that have been dispersed’ and re-membering evokes ‘the idea of putting “members” back together’ (11). Objects re-collected from memory have been ‘absent from consciousness altogether’ but are ‘revived anew’, claims William James (1980, p.275). In short, memorised objects become invisible and imagined. They are lodged deep into the storehouse of our memory. Imagination is, thus, considered to be a reflection of *re*-presentation, of the process through which these objects are brought back into the *present time* by our so-called *thinking ego* (Arendt 1978, 1: 12).

For Arendt (1978, 1), *thinking* and *judgment* are interrelated: the former deals with representations of objects one has *experienced* and memorized. At the same time it applies the attitude ‘of examining whatever happens to come to pass’ (Arendt 1978, 1: 5). In other words, *thinking* is associated with *nóēsis*, with ‘the soundless dialogue we carry on with ourselves’ (6). This silent dialogue evaluates past experiences and gradually dissolves cemented ideas and viewpoints. To put it in my terms, motivated by our proclivity to endlessly inquire (wonder), *thinking* dives into the storehouse of our memory in order to identify objects for reflection. First, those objects the *thinking ego* brings back into the present potentially incorporate moral precepts. They may refer to events (or experiences) whose evaluation discourage repetition of activities with negative impact on others. Thus, *thinking* and *nóēsis* ‘the soundless dialogue of me with myself’ (31), are preoccupied with the endless re-interpretation of the moral value these memorial objects incorporate. In other words, *thinking* constitutes ‘among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing’ (5), and prepares the way for *judgment*, for discerning right from wrong (Arendt 1969b: 64; 1978, 1: 118) by measuring the consequences of our own actions while distinguishing

‘between what needs to be done and what needs to be avoided’ (Esposito 2017: xiii). From this it follows that judgment itself (in Arendt’s thought) ‘realizes thinking’ and ‘makes it manifest in the world of appearances, where I am never alone and always too busy to be able to think’ (Arendt 1978, 1: 193). Second, these memorable moral objects (experiences) are the products of prolonged collective interactions (Winter 2006: 139) of groups and individuals who congregate in public spaces, but often ‘on the borderline between the private and the public, between families, civil society, and ... state[s]’ (150). Often such interactions, being political or otherwise, take place within an empirical world, within a common shared space, as Pierre Nora (1996) and Margaret Canovan (1996) argued. The common space of the nation as the primary basis for collective engagement and, simultaneously, a vehicle for action and remembrance (Nora 1996; Canovan 1996). Jay Winter, in *Remembering War* (2006), criticises Nora’s exclusive emphasis on France and ‘adopt[s] a pluralistic approach to cultural history’ (136) from ‘the angle of small-scale, locally rooted social action’ (150). His aim is ‘to approach the regional, the local, the particular, and the familial realities of loss of life in wartime’ (139), so when ‘we speak of collective remembrance, we ... recognize that different collectives, within the same state, socially frame their memories in very different ways’ and that ‘[t]he nation is not the place where collective remembrance begins, though the local, the particular, and the national frequently intersect’ (150). If the collectivity of the nation (or the town and the village) constitutes the primary basis for interactions, from which collective experiences are shaped (ethical memory) and if, as Anthony Smith (1991), nations are constituted by groups and individuals whose cultural identity is shaped by gestures and norms (cultural memory), commonly shared by those who share membership (71-98), we arrive at the following conclusion: cultural memory comes before ethical memory. The concept of cultural memory, in conjunction with civil memory (the two ingredients of bonding memory) will be discussed more thoroughly in what follows.

## 2) Bonding memory: the construction of the empirical world

According to Winter (2006), ‘[h]istory and memory overlap, infuse each other, and create vigorous and occasionally fruitful incompatibilities’ (6). Historical events (election results, political movements, civil unrests and wars) often include moral lessons (ethical memory). Consider, for example, the memories of the Second World War, the Holocaust

and the extermination camps (Winter 2006: 27; Arendt 1969a: 14), or, as Arendt (1969a) argues, the ‘revulsion against ... [political] violence’ (partially) shared by generations that grew ‘under the shadow of the atom bomb’ (14). Or even the anti-slavery crusades in America, which exposed the suffering of the African Americans (Genovese 1976; Douglas 1991; Walker 1993), raising awareness against racism. More often, such events shape new perceptions, common for large portions of a population. Consider also the case of the American Revolution (see Chapter 7), which is revered and celebrated by a great percentage of the American people as the ultimate milestone of the birth of the American nation. Remembrance of such events refers to civil bonding memory.

Historical events are retrievable objects: they disappear from our experiences, from sight or hearing (especially since they have limited duration) but can always be retrieved by our *thinking ego*. As Winter (2006) suggests, ‘[h]istorical remembrance is a discursive field’ (11). Historical events are not directly experienced by everyone. They are, nonetheless, *re-presentable* through narration, through songs, poems, artistic works, ceremonies, commemorations, *etc.*, which links the past with the present. Narration (110) and teaching are methods of *re-presentation* used by institutions of civic education (such as schools, universities, *etc.*). Re-presentation (through narration) involves discourse and language. Discourse constructs images of occurrences for those who have not witnessed them. It constitutes these objects/images subjects of *indirect perception* (indirect since they are not sensed at the exact time when they have occurred, but they can be heard or seen through sources that record and recount such historical events). In addition, the power of photography (79), ‘[t]he expansion of the print trade, the art market, the leisure industry, and the mass circulation press, allied to developments first in photography and then in cinematography, created powerful conduits for the dissemination of texts, images, and narratives of the past in every part of Europe and beyond’ (24).

Heritage and bonding memory do not exclusively connote the ability of memorialising (and *re-presenting*) events of political significance (such as wars and revolutions). They may also refer to accepted cultural norms and codes of everyday life (including unwritten laws), to the so-called *ethimiko dikaio* or *dimodes* (δημώδεις), to use Pantazopoulos’ (1995: 9 [Πανταζόπουλος 1995: 9]) terms, from the word ‘*demos*’ (the people), denoting the ‘the popular’ folkway or the ‘customary right’, partially embodied in

the perception of justice of the *societas civilis* (Κονδύλης 2015: 63-81 [Kondylis 2015: 63-81]). We can compare it with Aristotle's (1993a: 120 [Αριστοτέλης 1993α: 120]) *ἔθεσι* (*ethesi*), implying the good traditions (ethics) that shape and improve (*ἐπικοσμηθέν*) the moral character of each citizen. According to Deneen (2018), this sum of cultural characteristics of a collective (empirical) life (of a *cultural bonding memory*, in my terms) are the consequences of collected practices passed down through generations (*tradere*) (190). Hence, they define what we call common *heritage*, which ascribes to heterogeneous groups a certain identity, allowing them to exist as a collectivity, bound by a common purpose and orientation. As Pocock (1989a) argued, societies and communities envisage their own continuity through elements of their structure 'of which it is sufficiently aware to consider them continuous' (234). These elements become images, symbols (objects) and/or archetypes, which are stored in our memory. They shape the 'formed ways of acting' and 'living', what we call tradition (ibid) and, gradually, define the identity of the same collectivity as a whole (B. J. Smith 1985: 262). Tradition, writes Genovese (1976), is the embodiment of elements, 'recovered in each generation, and adjusted to new conditions' (4-5). It transmutes into the present memorised objects through 'symbolic forms of [cultural] bonding memory' (Assmann 2006: 17), anchored in our yearning for belonging and 'to develop a social identity' (6).

At this stage we will discuss further Aristotle's *ἔθεσι* (in relation to tradition and custom). Let us consider, initially, Lasch's (1991a) analysis in '*The Sociological Tradition and The Idea of Community*', where he distinguishes between memory and custom<sup>26</sup>. For Lasch what is memory for custom is *action* for behaviour (133). Behaviour and 'custom' are immemorial, habitual, unconscious, ritualistic and repetitive (B. J. Smith 1985: 15-7; Pocock 1989a: 237; Lasch 1991a: 133); they fall 'into patterns that repeat themselves in a predictable fashion' (Lasch 1991a: 133). *Action*, on the other hand, 'is unique and idiosyncratic' (ibid). It is linked to *judgment* and free will, while behaviour and custom are automatic (ibid). Burke, for example, in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790/1982), defends conformity to custom and habit against the 'untrustworthy memory', writes B. J. Smith (1985: 118). Habits do not depend upon reflection or action which in

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26 This is the fourth chapter of *The True and Only Heaven* (1991a).

Burkean philosophy constitutes the biggest source of instability (119; 130). The ‘pleasing illusions’ of habits and customs, not only ascribe to certain populations a common identity, but more importantly keep them in awe and harmonise ‘the different shades of life’ (Burke 1982, 171). The spread of the philosophy of radical Enlightenment, according to the same author, of ‘this new conquering empire of light and reason’ (ibid), would wipe away customs, these ‘[p]rejudices guided conduct more reliably than reason’ itself (Lasch 1991a: 129). Eventually, ‘[all] the super-added ideas furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination’ that cover ‘the defects of our naked shivering nature and ... raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion’ (ibid) would fade away, tearing off ‘the decent drapery of life’ (Burke 1982, p.171), unleashing ‘man’s animality’ in return (Kloppenber 2016: 507).

Nonetheless, to suggest that the ‘people’ should passively (habitually) reproduce concepts and norms in order to avoid destruction indirectly reveals the pessimism and a form of elitist bias, so typical in various forms of conservative thought, especially in the anti-egalitarian philosophy of the European nobility of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Kondylis 2015: 181-1 [Kondylis 2015: 180-1]). In order to explain this, consider Nietzsche’s *genealogy*: when the origins (*ursprung*) of the values of ideas and concepts—once praised for being (hypothetically) ‘altruistic’, ‘good’ and ‘useful’—are entirely ‘*forgotten*’, the same ideas are reproduced ‘as a sheer matter of habit’ (Nietzsche 2003: 10). By the same token, concepts reproduced habitually (or unconsciously) in our daily life can include ‘indecent’ perceptions (products of pathos). Those who passively reproduce such perceptions may find themselves unable to understand where their daily attitudes and deeds derive from and if they mask major injustices. In short, custom makes normal negative prejudices, inasmuch as it decreases awareness concerning the origins (and the seriousness) of the ‘indecencies’ they potentially incorporate. Mary Wollstonecraft (1993), for instance, speaks about ‘the leading prejudices ... in the present constitution of society’ that are either ‘tolerated’ or ‘reckoned sacred’ (347). But if tradition creates and sustains a common empirical world that keeps the human mind preoccupied with meaningful objects, stalking civilisation by obstructing the passages to the dark forces of the underworld, and since republics are unthinkable without a set of traditions that buttress public life and create a tissue of robust relations

‘between citizens in space and time’ (B. J. Smith 1985: 6), we understand that Burke’s conservatism and traditionalism may have some positive *practical value* (to use James’ terms). His theory, however, must be re-interpreted. Tradition must not be synonymous with the unconscious/behavioral reproduction of (potentially) false concepts and appraisals.

In order to be able to recognise which elements of the past have to be conserved as long as they have value for us, and which must be thrown away respectively, it is important to treat the common past not as ‘custom’, but to associate it with (bonding) memory, which allows *thinking* and *public judgment*. Memory is related to Aristotle’s *ἔθεσι* (*ethesi*): «ὁ δὲ λόγος καὶ ἡ διδασχὴ μὴ ποτ’ οὐκ ἐν ἅπασιν ἰσχύει, ἀλλὰ δεῖ προδιειργάσθαι τοῖς ἔθεσι τοῦ ἀκροατοῦ ψυχὴν πρὸς τό καλῶς χαίρειν καὶ μισεῖν» (‘*logos* and education do not always bring the desired effects. Primarily the soul of a student must be accustomed to love things that cause happiness and to despise things that cause harm’) (Αριστοτέλης 1993α: 196 [Aristotle 1993b: 196]; *my translation*). *Ethesi* must not be conflated with the modern understanding of *ἔθος* (*ethos*) as *εθίζω* (*ethizo*), referring to habit and addiction. *Ethesi* involves memory, from which our *thinking ego* retrieves valuable objects—perceived by sensation and experience or through narration—and (subsequently) wonder reflects upon them. To be able to distinguish between objects that ‘cause happiness’ (to use Aristotle’s terms again) or cause harm requires *thinking* and *judging*, *in short*, ability to evaluate their possible (moral) consequences. The *vita civile*, with its emphasis on *logos*, has the capacity to prevent (cultural) bonding memory from becoming a mere custom (as Chapter 7 will explain). In brief, the *public-political* realm, the marketplace, the *agora*, the space of dialogue and consultation, increases the chances for absorbed norms and ideas to be re-evaluated through *logos*, through public dialogue and open debates (as the previous chapter stressed).

So much for the *empirical mind* and the role of *judgment*. It is time to explore the dark realms of the *underworld*. It is time to shed light on the evilness of pathos, the primary human vice the *vita civile* attempts to bridle. This requires extensive analysis of Arendt’s notion of *willing* (the second premise of the *vita contemplativa*).

### 3) The *underworld*: *willing* and pathos

As Fine (2007) stressed, *willing* ‘is a less studied section of Arendt’s *LOM*. Its long



historical passages on philosophical conceptions of the will fail to make transparent what Arendt was trying to say about this “faculty” (121-2). In general terms, after reading *LOF* and the Chapter *What Is Freedom* (143-171) from Arendt’s *Between Past and Future* (1961/1968a), one briefly senses the main reasons the author associates *willing* (or pathos) with all sorts of solipsistic and self-centered human impulses. It is necessary, nonetheless, in order to offer a clear understanding of this faculty to acknowledge, compare and contrast, similar viewpoints. Thus, Plato’s and Nietzsche’s ideas are given consideration, coupled with further relevant discussions of Milton’s *PL*.

Unlike *thinking* and *judging*, *willing* deals ‘not merely with things that are absent from the senses and need to be made present through the mind’s power of re-presentation’ (Arendt 1978, 2: 13). First, *willing* (I-will) is incapable of generating political freedom (Arendt 1968a: 162), the *raison d’être* of the political realm (151), of the human capacity to initiate, ‘an inherent quality of the I-can’ (159). Political freedom, the ‘I-can’, is totally paralyzed by the ‘I-will’ (162). The latter Arendt conflates with the notion of ‘free will’, with the boundlessness *liberum arbitrium* (Arendt 1968a: 163), the urgency and the need of possessing what the mind views as highly desirable (15)<sup>27</sup>. As we, however, see in Milton’s *PL*, ‘free will’ is not necessarily arbitrary and boundless; ‘free will’ does not undervalue the importance of self-limitation and the responsibility our freedom to act bears. In Milton’s *PL* Adam’s happiness is ‘[l]eft to his own free will’ (152). In another verse: ‘God left free the will, for what obeys / Reason, is free, and reason he made right’ (247).

Second, for Arendt (1978, 2) ‘[t]he will always addresses itself to itself; when the command says, Thou shalt, the will replies, Thou shalt *will* as the command says’ (69). What Arendt conveys here is that an ‘internal contest’ exists, an internal conflict between the ‘I-will’ and the ‘counter-will’ the ‘nil-will’ (ibid). The latter forces the mind to create ‘delusions’ that our desires are, indeed, the commands of the *eu-prēpon* and that our ‘wants’ are always in line with orders, written or unwritten laws and injunctions that preserve truth, beauty and justice. There exists a conflict ‘between *velle* and *nolle*’, claims the same author (ibid). In this respect, the phenomenon ‘I do not do the good I want, but

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27 For Spengler (1961), the Faustian (or modern) Western civilization is dominated by the unflattering belief in the so-called unlimited human potential, in short by optimism, by the will-to-power (in Nietzsche’s terms).

the evil I do not want is what I do' (The Bible, Romans 7:19) implies that the 'nil-will' has become too impotent to cancel the 'I-will', the 'evil-will', the 'evil I do', which is the evil 'I do not want to do' but implicitly something 'urges me to do'. Arendt uses the following phrase from Euripides' *Medea* in order to describe this phenomenon: 'stronger than my deliberations [*bouleumata*] is my *thymos* ... which is the cause of the greatest evils among mortals'" (ibid). In other words, stronger than the 'nil-will' is the 'I-will', the primary source of evil. Thus, *willing* (or *thymos*) points to the 'passionate drive of desires' (of pathos, in my terms) that weakens reason (70). Plato's (2014 [Πλάτων 2014]) notion of *thymos* is quite similar. *Thymos* is activated by the *ἐπιθυμητικόν* (*epithimitikon*), deriving from *ἐπιθυμία* (*epithimia*, translated as 'will' or 'desire'), which «ἄγοντος ὥσπερ θηρίον» ('rules like a beast') (314). In short, the *epithimitikon* the most irrational and destructive part of the soul (for Plato), activates the *θυμοειδές* (*thymoeides*), which produces rampant anger or rage (*thymos*). In my view, *thymos* is not always irrational, bestial and catastrophic. *Thymos*, according to Fukuyama (1992), is triggered when one's sense of worth is systematically deprived (xvii; 302). This type of anger, nevertheless, does not spring from the *epithimitikon*, from the underworld mind, as is the case of *μῆνις* (*mēnis*), the extreme, prolonged, vengeful and irrational *thymos*, the most extreme expression of the 'I-will', which in any case is deemed catastrophic. The word *mēnis* appears in the Homer's *Iliad*: «Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος οὐλομένην» (1924: 2), 'baneful wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans' (translated by A. T. Murray) (3). *Mēnis* suppresses the *logismikon* (the rational) aspect of the soul (from the word *λογίζομαι*, *logizomai*, that is, being able to exercise reason, to pass *judgment*), the *empirical*, the *judgmental* mind (in my terms). For Plato ([Πλάτων] 2014), the *logismikon* «τά δέ ἄγοντα καί ἔλκοντα διά παθημάτων τε και νοσημάτων παραγίγνεται» ('halts the drives and motivations incited by irrational desires') (316). In short, *mēnis* can deactivate the *empirical* mind.

As also Fine (2007) put it, Arendt's *willing* is 'about domination' (123). *Willing* does not preclude dialogue or communication (ibid). In order to shed further light on this *rationale* it is worthwhile to look at Quint's *Inside Paradise Lost* (2014). As opposed to Lasch (1991a), for whom Milton's Satan is an ideal hero-rebel (233-6), and to Albert Camus (2000), who considers Satan an oppressed jail-breaker, a runaway from God's

dictatorial rule, an ‘aggressive’ and ‘unworthy’ authority of ‘divine injustice’ (26), Quint (2014), views (Milton’s) Satan himself as the archetype ‘of universal envy’ (131). In the same way, for Jung (2009), Satan personifies ‘the sum of the darkness of human nature’ (323), It is the darkness of ‘envy, as much if not more than pride [what] triggers the original sin against God...’ (Quint 2014: 122). Adam and Eve, by yielding to Satan’s temptation, embrace evil after eating the forbidden fruit and make envy part of their own existence. Thus, the envy that had forced Satan to build his own monarchical kingdom, to create ‘a kingdom in hell which is a close parody of the kingdom of heaven’ (Frye 2005: 14), has been transmigrated to human beings. We can assert that this envy finds expression in pursuits striving to erect and defend worldly monarchical, dictatorial, and/or theocratic regimes in the pursuit of absolute power. From a contextualist point of view, it was common among seventeenth and eighteenth century Anglo-American liberal or republican thinkers of Christian origin (including Milton) to associate Satan with oppression and despotism. For example, Paine (1995) considered monarchy idolatrous and un-Christian. Monarchy is ‘introduced into the world by the Heathens’ (11). For Paine (1995), monarchy was ‘the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry’ (ibid). In the mind of the American Founding Father, writes Kidd (2012), the British ‘oppression was wrong in the eyes of God’ (253).

In the event one attempts ‘to imitate God through power’, argues Vetö (1994) (while discussing Weil), through brute force rather than love, he/she (like Satan) revolts against God (23). At the same time, he/she places him/herself ‘at the center’ of ‘this revolt against God’, masking his/her pathos (*will*) to reign supreme, to accumulate wealth (without restriction), to corrupt, exploit and oppress others (ibid) for his/her own personal benefit. Hitherto, we have examined the republican/liberal interpretation of this archetypal story (of Satan’s ‘revolt against God’). Nonetheless, does our ‘inherent’ envy, our ‘inherent’ will (or pathos) for domination, only cause despotism and oppression? Is not political optimism (as it is enunciated in millenarian interpretations of the eighteenth century idea of progress and, more importantly, in revolutionary proposals advocating, directly or indirectly, the erection of some utopian society) another expression of the same envy that initially had prompted Satan to rebel against God’s kingdom of heaven? The desire to erect ‘indestructible crystal palaces’, to use Dostoevsky’s (2009: 32) terms,

resembling God's heavenly perfection, could be interpreted as an expression of the same pathos for domination transmigrated by Satan himself to human beings. As Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish thinker who studied the Christian religion 'in the light of Greek philosophy' (Passmore 2000: 83) argued, '[o]f the passions, the most fatal ... is spiritual pride, the lust to be equal to the gods—the Greek *hubris*' (85). The sixth book of Milton's *PL* (where the battle between the army of the apostate angels and the soldiers of God takes place) , issues a stern warning against the pathos for perfection. 'Of rigid spears, and helmets thronged, and shields / Various, with boastful argument portrayed, / The banded powers of Satan hasting on / With furious expedition; for they weened / That selfsame day by fight, or by surprise / To win the mount of God, and on his throne / To set the envier of his state, the proud / Aspiter, but their thoughts proved fond and vain...' (180). In the same book Raphael (an angel of God) recounts 'how Michael and Gabriel were sent forth to battle against Satan and his angels' (179), and how the former struck the latter 'with horror backward, but far worse / Urged them behind; headlong themselves they threw / Down from the verge of heaven, eternal wrath / Burnt after them to the bottomless pit' (207). Like Dostoevsky (2009), who fears the collapse of the 'eternally' and supposedly 'indestructible ... Crystal Palace'<sup>28</sup>, precisely because it is 'made of crystal' (32), Milton's verses could be interpreted from a similar standpoint, expressing profound concerns regarding the potential disastrous consequences of optimistic (human) pursuits. In short, the pursuit of earthly perfection (or endless betterment) defies one crucial rule: there is only one kingdom standing in absolute perfection, and this is the kingdom of God, as the major official trends of Christianity—for instance, Augustinianism, Calvinism, Lutheranism (Passmore 2000: 124-5; 127; 135; 155; 157; 163; 224) and/or Orthodox Christianity (Hughes 2004)—support. Thus, to strive for worldly perfection is to revolt against God's divine monarchy, attributing to men and women divine characteristics, neglecting their worldly—and, hence, imperfect—nature, or (to use Dostoevsky's terms) that they are 'made of crystal', that they are susceptible to their own lust, envy, resentment and *mēnis*. As a matter of fact, '[t]he main tendency of Christianity remains resolutely Hebraic in its separation of God from his creatures' (119), that is, in its emphasis on the distinction

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28 We are reminded again that in Dostoevsky (2009) the 'crystal palace' is used allegorically as a symbol pointing to optimistic human desire for an ideal (utopian) society.

between the human and the divine nature. Thus, '[t]o ask whether man is perfectible ... is to ask how far man can be "like God"' (23). Or as Karl Barth and Niebuhr believed, the aspiration to 'to become like God' is a form of *hubris*, 'the root of all evil' (Passmore 2000: 169). Like Satan, who was forced to suffer down in 'the bottomless pit' of hell (Milton 2004: 207) for his arrogance and ingratitude, in the same way optimistic pursuits, so long as they turn a blind eye on the (potentially) inherent vulnerability of men and women (*pathos*), can lead to more suffering and destruction, as our analysis on the French Revolution will partially reveal.

Of course, one could easily conflate optimism with political movements seeking to improve the living standards of a population but do not subscribe to the millenarian belief in a perfect future world. Consider, for example, Gray's (2007) sweeping claim that 'faith in a condition of future harmony', which is of 'Christian inheritance', is nothing but 'a utopian faith ... and so is the modern idea of progress' (29). But the desire for a better future is not necessarily 'utopian', 'optimistic' (and, thereby, *hubristic*). Movements advocating reforms in favour of fairer wealth (re)distribution, calling for universal suffrage, *et al.*, do not necessarily strive towards 'perfect harmony'. More importantly, such reforms do not always derive from our *will* to erect 'crystal palaces; they are not necessarily part of some grand project promising a brand-new ideal society, or of political proposals advocating 'salvation' through progressive and 'open-ended' amelioration, to use Lasch's (1991a: 47) terms again. Presumably, the pursuit for 'improvement' could incline either towards optimism or meliorism (hope) respectively. Consider, for example, Aeschylus's (Αἰσχύλος) *Prometheus Bound* (1992). In this literary work, Prometheus appears as the archetype of the «πυρός βροτοῖς δοτῆρ» ('the one who bestowed fire on mortals') (78), the one who stole the fire of Zeus for «κοινόν ὠφέλημα θνητοῖσιν» ('the common benefit of the mortals') (ibid). What prompted the Gods of Mount Olympus to chastise Prometheus is not simply his act of theft as such. More precisely, the gift of fire, an archetypal symbol of god-like power, knowledge and intellectuality, according to Bachelard's (1964), allowed humanity not simply to overcome the dread of suffering and violent death. Simultaneously, it shaped the illusion of human perfectibility, that (for instance) knowledge and common effort could constitute men and women capable of living the eternal and indestructible life of the Gods. This knowledge, according to Aeschylus (1992), was '*thnátous āgan*'

«θνατούς ἄγαν» (72), excessive, or limitless (*āgan*) for the (*thnatous*) mortals.

In modern history, a good example of how initiatives, knowledge and common efforts proposed not worldly perfection (as historical records permit us to assume) but economic relief and better living conditions (meliorism) through political participation is offered by the case of American Populism (Goodwyn 1976; Lasch 1991a: 217-225). Drawing on American republicanism, the Populists pushed forward a series democratic proposals (I will shed light on them later on). As a matter of fact, classical republicanism in America (especially its more agrarian offshoots) has always been at odds with the (liberal) idea of progress, claims Lasch (1991: 203). Thus, movements inspired by American republicanism (during the nineteenth century in America), including Populism itself, approached the idea of unlimited industrial expansion and economic growth with scepticism (Lasch 1991a: 217; 1991c). Goodwyn's position, outlined in *The Democratic Promise* (1976), is quite similar: the Populists expressed their ardent enthusiasm for reforms based on political and economic justice. However, their deep yearning for justice and equality did not force them to look forward to the perfectibility of man, nor to consider their proposed reforms parts of a plan advocating 'salvation' through never-ending improvement. Robert C. McMath Jr's *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1989* (1992), and Gene Clanton's *Populism, The Humane Preference in America* (1991), which emphasises the pro-Enlightenment aspects of the movement, and Charles Postel's *Populist Vision* (2007), where Lasch's approach on Populism is criticised, as the author associates Populism with liberalism and, simultaneously, discusses the interest the front leaders of the movement demonstrated for technological education, do not give us the impression that Populism itself was an 'optimistic' movement.

#### 4) The *underworld: impersonality: individual and collective self-purification*

Returning to our analysis concerning pathos and the underworld: not all aspects of the underworld fuel pathos, exhibiting rapacity and desire for domination. Through the underworld one can also trace psychical energies that connect us with the *impersonal realm*, instead of inciting idolatry, envy, selfishness and *mēnis*, these energies incite *self-purification* and common decency. According to John of the Cross, men and women, in their pursuit for purification, where lust and passion for domination are mortified, must 'first pass through a period of darkness' (Passmore 2000: 195), like Christ descended into

hell before he could ascend into heaven (196). In Milton's *PL*, as Frye (2005) explained, the Garden of Eden is also 'internalized, transformed from an outward place to an inner state of mind' (109). The Garden of Eden corresponds to the small portion of the human soul, the so-called impersonal realm, according to Weil (2005), which can be discovered by everyone who seeks to escape from the collectivity (77). More precisely, '[o]ur personality is the part of us which belongs to error and sin' (75). Redemption from sin, for the same author, is offered when one raises above the personal and the collective level, approaching an *anonymous* dimension (the impersonal realm) where 'the highest things are achieved' (ibid) and where 'there is no part left in his soul to say "I"', and when the 'I' itself is given to God altogether (99). 'Weil speaks early on of the necessity, first, to adopt an "attitude of supplication"' (Freeman 2015: 163). 'I must necessarily turn to something other than myself since it is a question of being delivered from self' (Weil 2002: 3). Hence, the self, 'directly suggesting egotism, egocentrism ... and rapacity' (Vetö 1994: 18), must be *de-created*. It must be dissolved and annihilated (Vetö 1994: 11; Freeman 2015: 164), 'pass[ed] into nothingness' (Weil 2002: 33). Instead, *attention* must be directed 'outward, toward the other-than-self; only then will one receive the existential nourishment and inspiration required for true creation to come forth' (Freeman 2015: 164). Similar insights (common in Christian mysticism) can be also found in Saint John's (of the Cross) poem *The Dark Night* (1991): 'I abandoned and forgot myself, / laying my face on my Beloved [God]; / all things ceased; I went out from myself / leaving my cares / forgotten among the lilies' (52).

Freeman rejects such calls for the total *de-creation* of the self, as the only way of *purification* from all sorts of biases, earthly temptations and sinful appetites (products of pathos). When one elevates him/herself above the personal and the collective, accessing the impersonal realm, he/she still passes through his/her *memory*, through his/her personality and biography (165). In this respect, the complete annihilation of the 'I', by exhorting us to destroy the negative aspects of our personality (biases, egoism, negative prejudices, etc.) may (even unwittingly) force us to annihilate our own memory, biography and personality or, in simple terms, our own physical existence. The same idea was 'alleged to push Weil toward the desire for self-destruction' (Vetö 1994: 154). As James (2004) argued, '[t]he fruits of religion ... are, like all human products, liable to corruption by

excess' (297), including 'fanaticism or theopathic absorption, self-torment, prudery, scrupulosity, gullibility, and... morbid ability to meet the world' (321) and/or optimism<sup>29</sup>. Weil's case exemplifies some of these limitations of the mystical experience, spotted and criticized by Niebuhr (1960), with the most severe being the association of selfishness and egoism with the will-to-live, which inevitably leads towards the total physical annihilation of the latter (55-6). Drawing on James' and Niebuhr's views concerning the moral value of spiritual discipline, we could approach Weil's (2005) idea about the 'sacred' *impersonal realm* (75) from a perspective that allows us to discover a safer path towards *self-purification*. For James (2004), the condition of *saintliness*, this 'friendly continuity' with some 'ideal power', with the *impersonal realm* (to use Weil's terms), shifts 'the emotional center' towards harmony, activating inner psychical energies that purify thoughts and perceptions (241). Martin Luther King Jr's (1986) theology, which associates hope with the unfaltering conviction that *psychical enlightenment* comes through *agape*, which descends from the divine order 'to "something deep down within"', to something that dwells deep inside the human soul (260) is an example of such a case. For King, this 'inner voice' is not dissociated from personal experience. It is not an 'abstract metaphysical idea' but a moral incentive through which human beings overcome resentment and aggression (Branch 1988: 162). King's pacifism widely echoes Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy (Raboteau 2017; Ashcroft 2018: 470), and (more precisely) his policy of *satyagraha*, which is pledged to non-violence (Gandhi 2018: 586; 717). Gandhi's thought has also received influences from Leo Tolstoy's Christian philosophy of love, non-aggression and mutual respect (87; 162; 179; 243; 274; 515-8). King saw the Christian notion of *agape* as a method of non-violent civil disobedience and reconciliation. *Agape*, more importantly, made him aware of the divine and liberating aspects of the human self (Hunt 2006: 233). As Chapter 5 will discuss more extensively, *agape* encourages descent (*katabasis*)<sup>30</sup> into the underworld. Such as Ulysses (in Homer's *Odyssey*) voluntarily descends into the underworld of Hades in order to identify the causes of conflict and suffering he experienced in life (namely, the selfishness of his fellow human beings, their envy, their *mēnis* and their appetite for domination), in the same way *agape* through *katabasis* allows us to come into

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29 In regards to optimism and mysticism, see Chapter 5 (the Conclusion).

30 For the exact meaning of this term see the Glossary.



contact with our internalised vices, with the pathos that dwells in the underworld of our mind, which (sometimes unknowingly) influences our attitudes and modes of being. Through this *voluntary* submergence into our inner darkest realms fallible patterns of behaviour are identified and purged from the ‘I’<sup>31</sup>. The most profound types of religious introspection, claims Niebuhr (1960), ‘encourage judgment of past actions and attitudes in the light of an absolute moral power’ (60). This high moral power, so long as it stands in opposition to the corruptive ‘I-will’ (pathos), activates our ‘nil-will’. Thus, it boosts *nóēsis*, the silent inner dialogue (between the purifying ‘nil-will’ and the pervasive ‘I-will’), constituting the mind capable for *judgment*.

For James (2004), saintliness allows the splendid excellences of ‘blissful equanimity’ (241) as well as ‘[f]elicity, purity, charity, patience, self-severity’ to take place (321). Thus, one can expose him/herself to the absolute moral ideal, to the impersonal realm, one can reach the stage of purification, throwing away egoism and all sorts of biases without necessarily disqualifying the ‘will-to-live’ (Niebuhr 1960: 63). Eventually, the aim of ‘*impersonality*’ is *re*-personalisation rather than the physical destruction of the ‘I’. *Impersonality* entails the emergence of a ‘new self’, purified from negative surrounding influences, traumatic memories as well as from self-destructive energies. In other words, by connecting ourselves with the highest good, we sense the moral boundary-lines, the laws of nature, invoking the ‘the highest virtue’ of love, which ‘gives transcendent and absolute worth’ to human life (57). The individual who connects him/herself with the impersonal realm and ‘purifies’ his/her own mind (*individual purification*), the same person who temporarily withdraws from the public world, recognises his/her duty toward his/her peers. He/she becomes an eloquent leader (or civil disobedient). Through his/her words and deeds he/she strives to inspire others, encouraging a populace to abort the hubris that has poisoned its own mind (*collective purification*).

From a different angle, according to the Quaker George Fox, the ‘inner light’, the inward Christ dwelling within ourselves, the light that illuminates the darkness, shatters misery, leads to salvation (Ingle 1994: 49; 65) and has the power to ‘convict and convince’

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31 This voluntary *katabasis* into the underworld mind must not be conflated with the involuntary intrusion of pathos into the empirical world. (For more regarding the way pathos invades the empirical world, affecting individual and collective attitudes, see the third section of this chapter).

(111). It empowers individuals to resist pathos and hubris. First, as mentioned earlier, *impersonality* connects us with the higher good (God), with a high moral power. If the same power dwells (according to Fox's *weltanschauung*) in every human being, this connection with God entails connection with the 'common people' as well. Furthermore, if the individual who approaches 'something from God' within him/herself can also sense God in others, and if God symbolises moral prudence (the laws of nature), the same individual can sense how a populace could have been if its members have not thrown off decency. Thereupon, the same person projects the image of a prudent populace in stark juxtaposition with what the populace has finally become. Thus, he/she inspires *collective purification*. Such an attempt requires public deliberation and spaces of open communication. As Arendt (1968a) put it, truth is inconceivable without communication, without a form of re-connection (and interaction) with our peers (85). Hence, the eloquent orator, the civil disobedient, the 'purified' leader and his/her followers, attempts to inspire prudence in the public according to the image the high moral ideal (the *impersonal realm*) has provided to him/her. The process of public deliberation and communication (for the purpose of collective self-purification) results in the re-activation of the silent dialogue of the collective 'me' with itself. In short, it re-actuates *collective nóēsis* and *public judgment*, by making the members of the unified body of 'the people' speaking with each other, shattering cemented perceptions. To avoid misunderstandings, purification does not come solely through religious sources. Murdoch in *The Sovereign of Good* (1970/2001) speaks of the way art, the 'only spiritual thing which we love by instinct' (83), 'reveals what we are usually too selfish and too timid to recognize, the minute and absolutely random detail of the world, and reveals it together with a sense of unity and form' (84) (for more see Chapter 5).

To recapitulate: this section delved into Arendt's *vita contemplativa*. By acknowledging the concept of human curiosity (wonder) it focused on the faculty of *thinking* and *judging*, on the *logismikon* (or empirical) aspect of the human mind, as well as on *willing* (the *epithimitikon*). Finally, by exploring the impersonal realm, it emphasised the practical benefits of religious thinking, which (as also Diderot explained) far from imprisoning the mind to irrational superstitions, 'curbs human passions' (Israel 2010: 168) and paves the way for *nóēsis* and *judgment*, even in when all external influences are

incapable of stimulating decency and prudence. More importantly, this section focused on the significance of ethical and bonding memory in safeguarding stable forms of common life, protecting human collectivities and individuals from their own impulse to hubris and destruction (pathos). Finally, it placed emphasis on the faculty of *willing*, which incites moral transgression. With this in mind, the following section will re-evaluate Arendt's (1998) *vita activa*, namely the three 'basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man' (7). These are: *labour* and *work*, which is mainly associated with our *private* life and *action*, a *public/political* activity.

### The *vita activa*

#### 1) Labour, work and action; the Athenian *polis* and the Roman *metharmōsis*

For Arendt (1998) *labour* revolves around 'the biological process of the human body' (7). It is bound up with activities through which human life is sustained, with the inevitable *necessities of life*, with the production or consumption (or both) of food, 'that can neither be abandoned nor terminated, but repeats itself, day after day, year after year' (Straume 2012: 5). *Labour* is the characteristic of the despotism of the *private realm*, which corresponds to the (ancient) Athenian household. Within the household the task of safeguarding the means through which the necessities of life are fully covered were often appointed to slaves, considered part of their master's (the *economon*) property (Arendt 1998: 27; 45). The main distinction between 'a political community (the *πόλις*) and a private household (*οἰκία*) is that the latter constitutes a "monarchy," a one-man/woman-rule, while the *polis*, on the contrary, "is composed of many rulers"' (116). Etymologically speaking, the word *economon*—*οικονομών* (in Greek)—signifies the *oikos-ecos* (*οἰκία*: translated as *house*) and *nomos* (νόμος: the *law*). It refers to the individual who could set up *laws* and *rules* regarding the material supply of the household or other matters of *private life* in ancient Athens. On the other hand, *action* is located in the higher ranks of the *vita activa* (above *labour* and *work*), and presupposes the existence of an open space, of the *public* (or the *political*) *realm*. It is the only space where human beings can become *political animals* (*zōon politikon*, in Aristotle's terms), interacting with one another in a continuous dialogue (Canovan 1994: 143; Arendt 2005: 117), exercising the virtue of *archein* (ἀρχεῖν), that is, to take the initiative', 'to begin' 'to rule' (*archeste* - ἀρχεσθαι)

and to *be ruled*, ‘know[ing] both sides of [political] power’ (Arendt 1998: 177). As we see, ‘*action* is never possible in isolation, since to be isolated signifies the deprivation of the capacity to act’ (118). Action, what makes “man a political being” (Arendt 1970: 82), ‘is surrounded by and in constant contact with the acts and words of other men’ (Arendt 1998: 118). *Logos* (speech), as Canovan (1994) puts it (in her discussion of Arendt), ‘was the meeting point which united action and thought, giving objective and memorable form both to hidden ideas and to fleeting deeds, and therefore, containing within itself ‘the whole meaningfulness of human existence’ (143). Hence, action is essentially synonymous with *inter-action* (Canovan 1994: 131) and *judgment*. It is associated with the political discussions taking place within an open space (the political realm), and, subsequently, with the critical evaluation of all opinions expressed within the same space.

As opposed to *action*, *labour* is characterised by intense philistinism, and does not require the presence of others. *Labour* is a necessity (imposed by nature), without which no life could ever be sustained. Since the only interaction in *labour* is between man and nature (Arendt 1998: 13) rather than between human beings, we arrive at the following conclusion: the temporal dimension of this condition is limited within our *personal affairs* (*personal time*). Contrary to *labour*, the condition of *work*—located in the middle of the *vita activa* hierarchy (above *labour* and below *action*)—is an unnatural process that provides an “artificial” world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings’ (7). One of the primary features of *work* is the intense instrumentality through which the *homo faber*, ‘the fabricator of the world’ (117) constructs and produces goods, tools (such as tables or buildings) and/or pieces of art out of raw material. These goods are not offered for immediate consumption. Usually they have no expiration date (Arendt 1998: 94; Klein 2014: 858-9). ‘During the work process, everything is judged in terms of suitability and usefulness for the desired end, and for nothing else’ (Arendt 1998: 153). *Work*, in contrast to *labour*, guarantees permanence and durability (167). The *homo faber* ‘does not merely follow the dictates of a natural deed’ (Canovan 1994: 56) in order to sustain human life, which is this is the task of the *animal laborans*. On the contrary, he/she subordinates nature to his/her ends and desires (Arendt 1998: 144), and instead of safeguarding the material conditions for the preservation of life, enriches the world with his/her artificial products.

The *metakénosis* of the Greek/Athenian concept of democracy to oligarchical Rome

signaled the emergence of the realm of *society* (see the previous chapter). The *social realm* ‘blurred the old borderline between private and political’ and subordinated the latter to the extreme intimacy of the former (Arendt 1998: 38). Lucius Annaeus Seneca, for example, misinterpreted the *zōon politikon* (*political animal*) as *homo socialis* (23). The theorists of *societas civilis*, writes Kondylis (2015 [Κονδύλης 2015]), placed more emphasis on the private sphere and the right to privacy, against the political superiority of the *public realm* (67; 82). As a matter of fact, the word *societas* was unknown to the Greeks. Aristotle (1993a) in *The Politics* makes it explicit that when he talks about ‘*πᾶσαν πόλιν ὁρῶμεν κοινωνίαν τινὰ οὖσαν*’ (‘every *koinonia* [society] constitutes a city’) (48) he is mainly interested for the «*κοινωνία τῆς πολιτικῆς*» (‘the political *koinonia* [society]’) (104). In other words, «*πασῶν κυριωτάτη ... ἡ κοινωνία ἡ πολιτική*» (the most important society is the political society’) (48]). The original meaning of the Greek *koinonia* (more accurately translated as ‘community’) has very little in common with the Roman *societas* (a misinterpretation of the former), indicating ‘alliance between people for a specific purpose, as when men organize in order to rule others or to commit a crime’ (Arendt 1998: 23). On the other hand, the Greek *koinonia* derives from the word *koinos*, “‘common to all’” (Arendt 2005: 14). In that sense, the *lekton* ‘political *koinonia*’ in Aristotle’s *Politics* describes a community whose rules and laws that shape and determine all aspects of common (*koinos*) life are the products of (political) *action*, of negotiations and open discussions. The modern understanding of *society* is an amalgam of the *oikos* and the *polis* (Arendt 1998: 28), or (to stress it more accurately) a *metharmōsis* of the *polis* to the bureaucratic/oligarchic, according to Castoriadis (Καστοριάδης 2008; 2011), Roman world, whose political structures resembled the monarchical and authoritarian rule of the Athenian household. The *social realm* extends the *private realm* in public life (Arendt 1998: 118), which during the antiquity existed as distinct entities.

The realm of *society* descends from ‘the “shadowy interior of household” into the public life’ (Benhabib 2000: 23) and ‘demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest’ (Arendt 199: 39). In short, the servility of the *private realm* has taken over the *political*. Since then, politics have become totally preoccupied with economics and with procedures of material supply. It is from here the term *political economy* derives, referring to the modern doctrine

of management of production and consumption of goods through political measures, plans and legislation, a ‘canonist doctrine’ deriving from Adam Smith, completely unknown during Antiquity as well as during the Middle Ages (Arendt 1998: 42, ff.35). The sweeping expansion of the *realm of society* during the age of modernity (and, more essentially, during and after the prevalence of the Industrial Revolution) led to the rise of mass culture (Benhabib 2000: 29), dominated by predictable everyday tasks (Klein 2014: 858). Mass society is ruled by unanimity, egocentricity, conformity (Canovan 1994: 117), uniformity and ‘homogenization of tastes, attitudes, manners, and lifestyles’ (Benhabib 2000: 28), by passivity and ‘herd mentality’, by a consumer-like *behaviour*.

## 2) The ‘social question’ further considered

As we see, Arendt’s explicit antithesis between *labour* and *action*, reflects the opposition of the *zōon politikon* with ‘the natural association experience in [the Athenian] household life’ (Arendt 1998: 27). Simply put, the sphere of necessity (labour) excludes *action* (Straume 2012: 7). For this reason Arendt argued against what one of the most radical leaders of the French Revolution, Jean-Paul Marat, had previously endorsed (Hampson 1983: 209), the liberation of ‘mankind from poverty by political means’, considering this move ‘obsolete’, ‘futile’ and ‘dangerous’ (Arendt 1990: 114). In *On Revolution* (1990) Arendt attributes the failure of the French Revolution to poverty, which ‘opened the political realm to the poor’, and converted this realm into ‘social’, overwhelmed ‘by the cares and worries which actually belong in the sphere of the household’ (91). But while mass poverty turned the *malheureux* into *enragés*, given that poverty and necessity themselves incites ‘primordial violence with which man pits himself against necessity’ (114), and sent the French Revolution to its nemesis, the American Revolution took place in a country whose laborious classes were not as (materially) exhausted as the French populace. Although poverty ‘was still very much present on the American scene and preoccupied the minds of the founders’, the poor were ‘not miserable’ (68). According to Tocqueville’s (1994), ‘in America, the most democratic of nations ... complaints against property in general, which are so frequent in Europe, are never heard, because in America there are no paupers’ (1: 245). ‘In the United States ... public officers [had] no class interests to promote’ (241), while the vast spending of the French monarchy ‘left the nation’s finances a shambles’ (Kloppenbergh 2016: 458). Kropotkin (1971) speaks

about the millions of beggars in French towns and villages where food was running short and famine had set its grip, becoming unbearable and almost chronic (16; 46; 435). As other historians suggest, in the Old Regime France ‘the poor made up over a third of the total population’ and without a good harvest the peasants were forced to live below the subsistence level (Scurr 2006: 63). It is not that economic deprivation in the United States was inexistence, considering ‘the abject and degrading misery was present everywhere in the form of slavery and Negro labour’ (Arendt 1990: 70). However, economic disputes were of minor political significance during the Revolution (72). Arendt acknowledges the Hungarian councils (during the Revolution of 1956) and the ‘prestigious’, according to Bryan (1995: 36), direct democratic political institution of the American Town Hall meetings, as legitimate offspring of the *polis*, a *genealogical henkfurt* of the ancient Athenian self-governed body politic in modernity. The council system has ‘always been primarily political, with social and economic claims playing a very minor role’ (Arendt 1990: 274).

However, the impossibility for ‘a collective spirit’ to emerge around political interactions concerning the laboring process, writes Benhabib (2000), ‘is fairly unsubstantiated anthropologically as well as historically’ (141-2). Returning to Arendt’s scepticism concerning the marriage of economics and politics, we have to consider Steven Klein’s ‘*Fit to Enter the World": Hannah Arendt on Politics, Economics and the Welfare*’ (2014). The author sets out ‘to recover the worldly dimension of economic activity’ (863) explaining that ‘institutional mediations’ do exist within a welfare state, capable of restoring ‘the stable worldly locations’ (864). Modern welfare states offer ‘worldly, institutional channels through which accumulation always flows’ (865). In his attempt to defend the welfare state on Arendtian grounds he misinterprets Arendt’s viewpoints: according to Klein (2014) the real danger (for Arendt) is not ‘the invasion of politics by economics but rather the reduction of economic matters to instrumental calculation’ introduced by capitalism and late modernity (857). Nonetheless, Arendt’s (1990) position is crystal clear when it comes to the engagement of politics with economics, which she deems ‘dangerous’ *tout court* (114). For Arendt (1990) necessity (deriving from *labour*) is primeval and, therefore, appeals to the ‘urgency of the life process’ (60). Necessity cannot be mastered through *logos*, especially when it reaches its most extreme level (poverty),

which reflects the condition of ‘acute misery whose ignominy consists in its dehumanizing force’ (ibid). Extreme poverty releases brute passions from the moment it subjects all human beings to the appetites of their bodies (60). It subordinates human beings to the dictatorship of their bodies, ‘that is, under the absolute dictate of necessity as all men know it from their most intimate experience and outside all speculations’ (ibid), inciting extreme violence in return (111). In simple terms, necessity urges immediate relief. The more intense this urgency for relief becomes, the more the chances for individuals to resort to pre-political forms of action (violence and/or physical aggression) increase. This assertion led Arendt to adopt the following position: the invasion of the *animal laborans* into the political realm undermines the latter, which relies not on violence and coercion but on persuasion, the *raison d’etre* of *logos* and rhetoric (Κοντογιώργης 2006: 400 [Contogeorgis 2006: 400]).

First, Arendt’s theory, with its tendency to exalt *action* (political participation) as opposed to *work* and *labour*, should not indirectly prompt us to neglect the importance of participation in the economic life of a city (or nation), in short, the value *work* and *labour per se* in the process of building up ‘anthropocentric’ communities, which emphasise common decency. Consider, for example, Contogeorgis’ observations concerning the spread of partnership-based (cooperative) economy after the decline of the Greek city-states, which (as he asserts) gradually led to the shrinking of economic dependency (slave labour) (Κοντογιώργης [Contogeorgis] 2006: 45; Κοντογιώργης [Contogeorgis] 2014: 115; 197; 670; 688), especially during the Byzantine age (Κοντογιώργης [Contogeorgis] 2014: 33; 200; 205; Κοντογιώργης [Contogeorgis] 2020: 50; 57; 74; 250; 371). The *worker* (or the *labourer*) instead of being a parcel of property of those who hold the means of production, could sign contracts with the latter and, thus, he/she could safeguard his/her personal freedom (Κοντογιώργης [Contogeorgis] 2020: 172-3). Although political participation (after the decline of the city-states) became less important (275), there existed an «εν δήμῳ δομημένη εταιρική οικονομία» (‘a partnership-based economy, rooted in the *demos*’) (621; *my translation*). In that way it would appear that economic participation and cooperation, by minimising economic exploitation, which, as the example of ancient Athens partially shows, can lead to political disenfranchisement, can safeguard democratic citizenship (*action*). Therefore, when we speak about the anthropocentric value of popular



*eucosmia*, apart from placing attention to the capacity of each *anthrōpos* to contribute to the ‘common good’ through his/her *logos* and ethical memory (*action*) exclusively, we must acclaim the value of economic involvement and cooperation.

Second, the total subordination of the political realm to the *animal laborans*, which, according to Arendt (1998), allows all forms of (‘pre-political’) violence to emerge and prevail, is one thing. However, the management of economic necessity *through* acts of popular participation, the supremacy of politics *upon* economics (to stress it differently), is another. With this in mind we could credit Klein (2014) for arguing in favour of resolving disputes concerning wealth distribution within the political realm itself. In order to be saved from its own flaws, Arendt’s theory must be re-examined and corrected, making space for the inclusion of economics. First, since acquisition of property in certain cases is driven by pathos, personified by the archetype of Satan (in Milton’s *PL*) who incites the passion of envy and struggle for possession of ‘as many temporal goods as possible’ in a ‘zero-sum game of politics’ where ‘one’s gain is the other’s loss’ (Quint 2014: 51), to leave pathos unrestricted puts the entire republic at stake. Instead, mutual collective agreements and political decisions concerning legal restrictions against theft and/or unlawful accumulation de-motivate these passions for rampant material gain. Second, by suggesting that issues concerning wealth distribution must be mastered politically, through debates and process of public deliberation, I do not share Klein’s (2014) view in support of the welfare state. First, the welfare state *cannot* function as a space of public mediation, as a political realm. It comprises methods of top-down administration and is restricted to a small caste of ‘experts’ (Fine 2014: 227).

The main ideology upon which the welfare state has been founded is that of compassion (Lasch 1995a: 105; Nussbaum 2013: 135), which constitutes ‘a subversion of civic life’ (Lasch a: 105). Compassion reduces the victim into an object of pity (ibid). The would-be-benefactor finds it easier to pity their victims ‘than to hold them up to impersonal standards, attainment of which would entitle them to respect’ (ibid). In addition, compassion shuns the ‘wearisome process of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise, which are the process of law and politics’ (Arendt 1990: 86-7). Compassion is an enunciation of the *fido amor*. It springs from our *deep emotions*, which (as opposed to *serene emotions*), reduce *thinking*, *judgment* and *logos* to sentiments, to the feeling of

suffering (for the destitute and the excluded). Therefore, compassion is ‘ignorant of the argumentative reasoning’ (*logos*) by which human beings escape evil (87). It is, in other words, ‘incapable of learning the arts of persuading and arguing’ (ibid). Persuasion through dialogue implies *judgment* and disagreement. In turn disagreement creates a gap between two or more expressed viewpoints<sup>32</sup>. Thus, compassion, by depriving *logos*, deprives disagreement, *judgment* and impartiality. Compassion ‘abolishes the distance, the in-between’ which always exists in political debates (Arendt 1990: 86). Thus, compassion undermines the political realm (175)<sup>33</sup>. More extensive discussions concerning the weaknesses of compassion (in relation to the *fido amor* and in juxtaposition to *eucosmia*) will take place in the next section. Let us return, at this point, to Arendt's scepticism concerning the marriage of politics and economics, relying on historical events.

Considering again the case of the French Revolution: economic inequality and, more importantly, high bread prices, played a significant role in triggering revolts and mass uprisings in France (Israel 2014: 7; Popkin 2019: 103-4; 132; 175). Nonetheless, ‘the vast upheavals’ do not directly derive ‘from class conflict or new economic forces’ (Israel 2012: 256). Israel (2014) considers the royal crisis as one of the main prime causes (9). Along with Chartier (2004), he recognises the incontestable influences of the ideas of a philosophical elite in the gradual formation of a revolutionary public attitude (Israel 2006: 21; 2019: 255; 261; 265). It is, therefore, necessary to examine these widely disseminated ideas, striving to establish whether they incorporate elements that contributed to the total demise of the revolution itself or not. For the same author, while ‘[p]hilosophy made the Revolution’, the populace itself, ‘in its ignorance, misled by demagogues and rendered ferocious by famine and civil war, made the Terror’ (Israel 2012: 931). In contrast, Chapter 6 will emphasize the reasons aspects of these philosophical ideas contributed in the Great Terror, partially due to their optimistic aspirations to erect worldly ‘crystal palaces’, that is, to shape a new utopian perfect world (Gray 2007: 36-7; Bianchi 2017). From a Christian

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32 Similar to Arendt's idea of the political realm as an ‘in-between’ space is Weil's (2002) notion of *metaxu* that will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

33 As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *fido amor* stands in the middle of the hierarchy of friendship, between idolatry and *eucosmia*. It relies on deep emotions, which paralyse *judgment* and impartiality. Serene emotions, on the other hand, can stimulate action for decency. For more in regards to the distinction between serene and deep emotions see the third section of this chapter.

perspective (as the previous section claimed, while reflecting on Milton), such moves may incubate conditions within which social chaos and destruction suppress common decency.

Furthermore, Arendt's negation of economic necessity as a political issue leads her to neglect cases where debates around the problem of unequal material distribution motivated genuine political action, inspiring the creation of political realms (Klein 2014: 856; Fine 2014: 228). For example, American Populism initially emerged as a response to severe economic difficulties. Inspired by Henry George (Goodwyn 1976: 102; McMath 1992: 100; 112-3), whose theories cultivated a belief in freedom as being tied to economic justice (Clanton 1991: xvi-xvii; Postel 2007: 231), the movement pushed forward demands for economic relief and wealth redistribution (McMath 1992: 10; 100). Later on, the Populists shifted 'beyond the subject of money' (Goodwyn 1976: 241), proposing instead democratic alternatives and political reforms (Müller 2016: 90). American Populism was a political and democratic grassroots endeavour against experts and self-serving elites, advocating popular control over common affairs (Canovan 1981: 58). This 'bloodless revolution' (Clanton 1991: 41), this 'breathtaking new hope' (Goodwyn 1976: 51), is a clear example of how *politics (action)* and economics (*labour*) can coexist, as long as the former dominates the latter, as long as issues related to wealth (re)distribution are put under the commands of *logos*.

In brief, the *vita civile*, which draws on Arendt's idea of *action* (without, however, discarding) is best exemplified by the agrarian American Populism. What, however, has American populism achieved? In spite of its failure to transform the American political system according to the principles of self-government (practiced by anonymous farmers and labourers), due to 'mistakes ... [and] tactical errors' of some of the prominent leaders of the People's Party (Goodwyn 1976: xiii), Populism 'fueled and animated the brooding social introspection that ... created a culture of hope and self-respect among the voiceless' (xxii). '[I]t 'injected into American political consciousness' a 'belief in possibility' in justice (xxiii; emphasis added). For others, political and economic reforms pushed forward by the agrarian cause 'found their way into the political mainstream, to be enacted during the progressive era by the major parties' (Lasch 1991a: 218). Or as Müller (2016) put it, 'some of the main demands of the Populists were realized during the heyday of

Progressivism' (Müller 2016: 90-1)<sup>34</sup>. Of course, the movement was not immune to white supremacy and Sinophobia that had saturated American life (McMath 1992: 11; 92; Postel 2007: viii; Müller 2016: 88), or to anti-Semitism, as Richard Hofstadter explains in *The Age of Reform* (1955). The persistence of white supremacy (mainly expressed by the Democratic Party) in the Old South, contributed to the demise of the Populist momentum by driving millions of supporters of the People's Party back to the Democratic Party<sup>35</sup>. On the other hand, Hofstadter and many other 'interpreters of American Populism', who 'sought to explain it' exclusively 'as an irrational phenomenon', swamped by nativism, and reactionary anti-modernism, produced by a variety of dark bucolic urges' (Canovan 1981: 18), do not base their conclusions upon direct references to the discourses published by those involved in the movement *per se* (Goodwyn 1976: 602; McMath 1992: 13). They pay little or no attention to the background events at the heart of the populist revolt. According to Müller (2016), the Populists 'respected the Constitution' and 'rarely ever claimed to be the people as such' (90). American Populism, he explains, has more in common with "Social Democracy" (ibid) than with types of populism that prone to authoritarianism and 'antipluralism' (36), distorting democracy (57) and repressing civil society (44)<sup>36</sup>. For Canovan (1981), '[a] closer look at the origins of the Populist movement' shows that the vast majority of the farmers were not irrational (18). They were, instead, '[m]embers of the sovereign [American] people' who saw their democratic freedoms threatened by large financial corporations (ibid). If the cooperative movement was 'a democratic phenomenon' (Clanton 1991: 125) and a populist triumph, it was because these degraded 'bucolic' farmers of 'the rural hinterlands' (127), of the impoverished and long forgotten provinces, became engaged with political *action* by creating open public-political spaces (cooperatives, as well as clubs and networks of mass communication), without relying on vanguard leaders, without even having any of the

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34 For more, concerning the Populist emphasis on self-government and direct democracy see Chapter 6.

35 For more on this matter see Chapter 7.

36 Here Müller (2016) refers to the 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' populism' of Hugo Chavez, Viktor Mihály Orbán and Donald Trump. For the same author all types of populism are 'illiberal' and 'undemocratic'. In his view, not all movements that denounce 'the elites', advocating political reforms in favour of the 'common people', fit in the category of 'populism'. In this respect, American Populism was not populism *per se* but a 'Social Democratic' movement (90).

necessary education and intellectual skills that would help them to grasp complex theories about democracy and republicanism.

### 3) The public and the political realm: *agonal* and *narrative action*

After calling into question Arendt's view on economic necessity (in relation to *action*), we will move ahead, enriching and correcting other aspects of her thought. Let us focus on the multidimensional nature of the public realm. More precisely, the *political realm* (the *polis*), often described by Arendt as 'the public-political', is a proper space of common appearance, where 'action ... goes on between *persons*' (Arendt 2005: 52) and everyone's words are *judged* in the presence of others (14). It should be made clear, however, that the political realm constitutes only one dimension of public life. Not all activities that involve *judgment* and common appearance are *political* (in the Arendtian sense of the term). Not all aspects of public life are related to government (Introduction; Chartier 2004: 30). Public spaces of common appearance, while not dealing with the process of political decision-making, offer chances for open dialogue through which conventional ideas are challenged and new perceptions are gradually shaped, shifting the direction of public opinion, influencing the whole direction of a collectivity and, finally, its stance on a series of political issues. They offer chances for individuals to be seen and to *judge* the words and deeds of others. Consider Benhabib's (2000) dichotomy between *agonal* and *narrative action*. Agonal action refers to persuasion (*πείθειν*) that 'works through a process of argumentation' (Arendt 1968a: 93). It presupposes a political space similar to that of the Athenian *polis* (Arendt 1990: 30). Narrative action (largely downplayed by Arendt) is 'immersed in everyday web or narratives', even in 'private-intimate' circles (Benhabib 2000: 127), including the family and gatherings of relatives. But it is more visible in conversations taking place within public realms/spaces that are not *political*, strictly speaking, 'in churches and parish meetings, in people's drawing rooms, in semi-public meetings of artists and intellectuals, in political cabarets' (128) and spaces where open ceremonies (including events of national celebrations) occur. These realms often become alternative spheres of (narrative) *action* (129), especially during totalitarian terror, whose aim is to annihilate the political realm (Arendt 1976). As Chapter 5 will stress (by reflecting on the Civil Rights Movement), these public (but not, strictly speaking, *political*) realms open up pathways for civil disobedience. They allow dissident voices to

emerge in the foreground of public life (more often, voices of abused and scorned social groups), voices that call into question commonly accepted indecent attitudes. The aim of this process is to awaken the dormant collective *nóēsis*, that is, to bring a collectivity into a dialogue with itself by inciting public debates. More specifically, public debates offer chances to such dissident voices to persuade portions of a population swamped by *hubris*, activating the collective ‘nil-will’, that is, the will to erect moral fences against the collective ‘I-will’ (pathos).

Cabarets, cafés, churches and salons, for instance, are such ‘public’ spaces. They allow people to make ‘use of their reason’ via informal political debates and conversations (Chartier 2004: 20). Pubs and coffee shops, ‘which at first appear to have nothing to do with politics or civic arts, make their contribution to the kind of wide-ranging, free-wheeling conversation on which democracy thrives’ (Lasch 1955: 117). As an example, salons in Paris, during the pre-Revolutionary era were ‘forum[s] for public opinion’ (Popkin 2019: 133). They brought together people from various literary circles, who ‘met to share pastimes such as gaming, conversation, reading, and the pleasure of the table’ (Chartier 2004: 155). Theaters served as spaces for the dissemination of political ideas (Popkin 2019: 56). Cafés, cabarets, and salons distributed republican pamphlets (Chartier 2004: 160; Israel 2014: 73; 2019: 256; 284; Popkin 2019: 48; 54), including journals ‘which devoted a large amount of space to aesthetic criticism’ (Chartier 2004: 157) and projects like the *Encyclopédie*, which propagated secular and pro-Enlightenment ideas (Popkin 2019: 48-50). Artistic criticism constitutes another form of public *judgment* as long as it promotes public dialogue (Chartier 2004: 162; Nussbaum 2013: 7-8), through which individuals learn ‘to *think* for themselves’ by evaluating ‘works and ideas freely’ (Chartier 2004: 162; *emphasis added*). Through this process public attitudes are evaluated and new perceptions are shaped (36) once readers construct ‘a common opinion from the clash of competing viewpoints’ (162). Furthermore, such non-political public spaces of narrative action are shaped and preserved by lore, oral tradition and religion, in short by elements previously incorporated within the *societas civilis*. They are not, however, *social spaces* (in the Arendtian sense of the word), *id est*, spaces that impose conformity and mass uniformity. Tradition (as the previous section stressed) is also associated with bonding cultural memory, which ancient civilizations acclaimed as among the most significant

aspects of common life. For example, the Athenian *agora* was not exclusively dedicated to procedures of self-government. It was the meeting point for artistic, athletic, religious activities, civic commemorations, celebrations (including celebrations and carnivals) and economic exchanges (Καστοριάδης 2010: 29 [Castoriadis 2010: 29]; 2017: 124), the space where people could come together, discussing and exchanging views.

To recapitulate: this section completed the process of re-evaluating Arendt's *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. It pursued a practical understanding of political *action* (the main antidote to hubris and moral transgression), practical in the sense of making active citizenship able to respond to immediate and real challenges (to the injustices of economic inequity and political disenfranchisement). As it has been already made clear, not all forms of populism advocate *action*. The next section will elucidate the main theoretical divergences between the *vita civile* and schools of thought that have proposed a type of populism which instead of focusing on grassroots' participation and active citizenship, seek solutions to the crisis of representation primarily through methods of top-down political administration. More importantly, I consider the works of post-structuralist thinkers (such as those of Ernesto Laclau). More precisely, Laclau's work *On Populist Reason (OPR)* (2005)—which continues the philosophical and political insight initiated in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1981/2001) (co-authored with Mouffe)—has left a great impression on scholars and academics. His thought is cited by many authors working in the field of populism (such as Stavrakakis, Arditti, *et al*).

### Top-down populism and the *vita civile*

#### 1) Theories of populism: a general review

According to Laclau (2005), the identity of 'the people' is constructed through the process of *discursive articulation*; every populist configuration is centred around the notion of *popular demands* (also called *signs*), or the 'heartland' as defined by Taggart (2002), referring to an aggregate of ideals that ascribe 'meaning to constructions and invocations of the people by the populists' (3). *Signs*, therefore, are *empty signifiers*. They are signifiers without a concrete signified. They are vague and imprecise inasmuch as every political discourse can capitalise on them. More importantly, their semantic emptiness allows the unfolding of an 'equivalential chain' (Laclau 2005: 73), which brings together different

sections and groups of a society. These groups see their demands as equivalent and realise the need to join forces for the common good. In order to fully understand the mechanism of constructing popular identities we need to consider the following hypothesis: in a country hit by poverty, a group of citizens (group A) who have seen their wages slashed organize protests, demanding drastic solutions. If their demands are not satisfied they may begin to perceive that they have something in common with another group (B), which is also affected by poverty. Thus, an *equivalential* relation exists between these two different groups. For Laclau (2005) what defines each political cause is the exact political rhetoric (*discourse*) that strives to express the demands (*empty signifiers*) of both A and B simultaneously.

The aim of a political discourse is to become hegemonic in the expression of these demands. It must become, in other words, a *principatum autem*, a force that represents all the differentiated groups that embrace such demands, striving to unify them against a 'common enemy', minimising at the same time all internal divergences. A hegemonic discourse transforms amorphous crowds into homogeneous collective entities by ascribing to them a popular identity. Hence, each popular identity is dependent on the exact discourse that occupies non-linguistic concepts (including popular demands) and converts them into a political project. *Empty signifiers*, therefore, can be *floating signifiers* as long as they are subjects of discursive antagonisms, of different political spaces seeking to express them, promoting a certain political agenda. Therefore, populism can be evil-intentioned only when demagogic discourses that form *equivalential chains*, in order to unify different groups express similar demands (*floating signifiers*), rely (let us say) on anti-Semitism (or other forms of hatred). Let us assume, for instance, that a society is divided into three groups (A, B and C). The discourse of a political leader, who mainly represents group A responds to a demand (eg. strengthening of national sovereignty) shared by the rest. The moment A has won over the B and C is the moment where a chain of equivalence has been successfully established. In addition, the primary objective of A's discourse is to become hegemonic, id est, to cancel all discursive antagonisms by persuading these groups a) about the rightfulness of his/her approach on the primary causes of loss of national sovereignty, and b) about the effectiveness of its proposed solutions. In addition, the leader must discursively highlight the existence of a set of cultural norms and values common for all



these groups, of a common heritage (in other words). If A's discourse incorporates anti-Semitic remarks then all these groups to some degree will attribute the loss of national sovereignty to some 'powerful Jewish elite'.

In short, attention must be paid to the exact discourse through which leaders strive to capitalise on popular demands (*signs*). 'A Fascist regime can absorb and articulate ... [popular] demands as much as a liberal one' (Laclau 2005: 125). To claim, however, that populism becomes threatening only when illiberal discourses absorb popular demands in order to establish *equivalential chains* obscures another weakness in Laclau's theory. Pro-establishment charismatic (even liberal) leaders often employ a quasi-populist rhetoric in order to express democratic demands pushed forward by grassroots anti-establishment movements (as we will see in Chapter 6, by reflecting on American Populism). Top-down appropriation undermines the political realm. The 'common people' instead of *acting* in concert, become passive. They bestow faith to party leaders who supposedly represent their demands but, in fact, put them in alliance with the same power-structures the movement had initially rejected and condemned as sources of political injustice and disenfranchisement. As, Andrew Arato (2013) claimed, in certain cases, plebiscitarian and quasi-Hobbesian leaders employ discourses (in order to unify heterogeneous crowds) that theologise 'non-theological concepts', such as the 'people' or the "sacred homeland" (143). But for Laclau (2005), 'the construction of a chain of equivalences out of a dispersion of fragmented demands, and their unification around popular positions operating as empty signifiers, is not [necessarily] totalitarian' and 'the very condition for the construction of a collective will which, in many cases, can be profoundly democratic' (166).

However, the threat of extreme authoritarianism, even in cases where political leaders attempt to construct *equivalential chains* by simply articulating democratic discourses, must not be downplayed. First, leaders rely on discourses that portray 'the people' as 'pure' and incorruptible, who deserve to be saved from the oppression of a powerful and self-serving elite that devours its dignity, prosperity and freedom. Inevitably, the same 'people' end up sanctified and hallowed (Arato 2013; Müller 2016). In fact, 'purity' is synonymous with perfection, which nobody is allowed to question. Once the 'pure' and 'incorruptible' people become a subject of identification with a strong leader,

the latter ends up ‘sanctified’. All critiques against the leader him/herself could be falsely regarded as acts that undermine the ‘purity’ of ‘the people’. This has been the case of Robespierre’s ‘authoritarian populism’ (Israel 2014: 249; 261; 2019: 259) (further examined in Chapter 6). Second, as with Kondylis (2007 [Κονδύλης 2007]), the ultimate purpose of ‘mass democracy’ is equality of conditions (240). Financially speaking, mass democracy regards the strict and quasi authoritarian work relationships counterproductive (ibid). In response, it shapes a new perception through which the worker and the boss instead of seeing each other as antagonists and hierarchical rivals consider themselves friends and vital allies (240; 243). Mass democracy hides profoundly hierarchical relationships under the guise of egalitarianism. Populist leaders take advantage of this universal demand for equity and articulate the appropriate discourses in order to gain popular traction. They denounce political disenfranchisement and accuse the elites of betraying the ‘the will of the people’ with whom they claim to be ‘flesh of its flesh’ (242). By projecting themselves as ‘friends of the common people’ populist leaders, effectively, conceal their actual role as a new ascending elite, not less remote from the ‘common citizen’ than the pro-establishment elites they so ardently denounce. Such as the worker who convinces him/herself that his/her boss is not a hierarchical rival but a partner, similarly the populist leader in the popular imagination is not a distant vanguard but a brother or sister, and a friend. In short, populist leaders hide their actual aspirations under the friendly mask of equality and ordinariness. To a degree, this explains the betrayal of the American cooperative movement (outlined in Chapter 6).

The populism of the *vita civile* acknowledges these objections. It values the significance of individualism (Chapter 7), democratic leadership and (as it has become clear) the role of grassroots interactions in the creation of popular demands (*signs*) and identities. These three elements make the relationship between the *vita civile* and top-down intervention/appropriation (or articulation) mutually exclusive. As Weil (2005) put it, ‘those who speak for the people and to them are incapable of understanding either their distress or what an overflowing good is almost within their reach’ (85). What, moreover, explains the impotence of top-down (discursive) articulation to produce solid popular identities is precisely the non-instrumental and relatively contingent way through which human collectivities (re)organise themselves. In other words, the construction of a popular

identity and the unification of heterogeneous crowds into one entity is not entirely subject to some top-down discursive articulation. Indeed, 'the people' is not a natural entity. It is an artificial construct. Such an entity, however, is never created at will, through planning and programming, as if it is a piece of furniture shaped out of raw wood by a *homo faber*. Making sense of this *rationale* requires further analysis of human wonder, on the *empirical* and the *underworld* mind (more precisely), in conjunction with Castoriadis' two modes of collective institutioning: the *ensemblist-identitary*, (the rational and/or instrumental mode) and the *magmatic* (non-rational/non-instrumental), as outlined (mainly) in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975/2005).

## 2) Spontaneity and unpredictability

For Castoriadis, the *ensemblist-identitary* mode is the primary mechanism that sets up a web of collective institution-building. In brief: 'a large part of the significations ... those that are, or can be made, explicit—are ... instituted, directly or indirectly, through its language' (Castoriadis 2005: 238). This theory suggests that the primary institutions of communal life rests in logic-ontology: 'its core is the *identitary* or *ensemblist* logic, and it is this logic that rules sovereignly and ineluctably over two institutions without which no social life can exist: the institution of the *legein*, the ineffaceable component of language and of social representation, and the institution of *teukhein*, the ineffaceable component of social-doing' (175). '[L]egein is the ensemblist-ensemblizing dimension of social representing/saying, just as *teukhein* (assembling-adjusting-making-constructing) is the ensemblist-ensemblizing dimension of social doing' (Castoriadis 2005: 238). *Legein* is the language-code dimension and it is not separated from the *langue*, from speaking just as the case of *teukhein* is not separated from making, from the social doing, from social activity *tout court* (248; 334; 360; 370).

Thus, on the one hand, we see that *legein* and *teukhein* are interdependent. They operate together, they are part of the same mechanism and, hence, they are inseparable. On the other, we understand *language* is a *code* which *signifies*. As Hobbes (2006) put it, words signify what we conceive, or think and also what we desire and fear (17). Language, according to Arendt (1978), is 'a 'meaningful sounding out' of words that in themselves are already 'significant sounds' that 'resemble' thoughts (1: 108). Hence, to bring *legein* and *teukhein* together would mean that *language* (discourse) with its ability to define the cause

of an effect, to transmit knowledge (*id est* to teach and counsel), and to reveal personal volitions and desires, determines the ‘making’ of (social) things. Language determines what should be done, what should be designed, what should be ‘made’. Eventually, the *ensemblist-identitary* mode is characterised by an implicit instrumentality. *Language* itself is not merely a means of expression but a tool that shapes order out of chaos, bringing into life a new social reality. *Logos* refers to the phonological expression of thoughts and *judgments* (an essential component of the *political animal*, of the public-political realm, ruled by spontaneous exchange of ideas). The *ensemblist-identitary* mode of collective institutioning converts *logos* into an instrument in the hands of a *homo faber*, who attempts to construct social realities simply by visualising an ideal community, and subsequently, by ordering and commanding his/her followers to implement certain policies that would bring this community into existence.

Castoriadis also spoke about the *magmatic* mode of collective ‘institutioning’. This perception formulates an understanding of community (or society) as a *magma*, as a web of plural, indefinite, contingent and unpredictable factors that intersect and gradually shape reality *per se*, as Caroline Williams (2010: 100) noted. It could be, therefore, argued that this process of shaping political realities may resist programming and rational planning so long as it is ruled by forces whose outcome is not always predictable. In Castoriadis’ (2005) thought *radical imagination*, the human drive for creation, the central function of the human psyche that ‘pre-exists ... every organization drive...’ (287), is ‘a permanent flux of representation’ and is not ‘subject to determinacy’ (Tovar-Restrepo 2012: 41). But it is important to note: as opposed to Castoriadis, I argue that wonder, the restless ‘Desire, to know why, and how’ (Hobbes 2006: 31) pre-exists imagination. Wonder motivates, energises and influences imagination *per se*. In addition, memory encompasses a ‘permanent flux’, a multiplicity of (faded) objects. Thus, imagination—which apart from creation, points to *re*-presentation, to the process through which our *thinking ego* dives into the storehouse of our memory in order to bring into the present memorised objects—is defined by a chimerical multiplicity of such concepts and ideas. Furthermore, the role of the imagination ‘appears in Freud by means of the central importance of *phantasy*<sup>37</sup> [italics

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37 This is the exact spelling of the word fantasy as it appears originally in Castoriadis texts.

added] in the psyche and the *relative* independence and autonomy of “phantasizing”. “Phantasizing” is discovered as an unexplungable [*sic*] component of deep psychic life' (Castoriadis 2005: 282). ‘Phantasizing’ derives from ‘the phantasma, the phantasy, the “image”’, which for Aristotle represents ‘a multiplicity of sensuous, generic representations’ (246). Castoriadis’ analysis allows us to understand that imagination is a product of ‘an unconscious combination of things experienced and of things heard’ (285). Phantasising (or imagining) is a combination of experiences ascribed to our memory. A product of phantasy is the *magma* (281), the mingling of memorised objects, of archetypes and representations.

Let us see, at this point, how Castoriadis’ viewpoints, in conjunction with Jung’s psychoanalytic theories, shed more light on the impasses of top-down populism. When our ability to control our unconscious is lost, the conscious is influenced by the former, even *without knowledge* (Jung 1960: 71; 79). An untamed unconscious mind orders from our *thinking ego* to dig up from the storehouse (of our memory) a *magma* of memorised objects. Since our *thinking ego* is not directed by our conscious mind, these objects are brought into the present abruptly, *without our knowledge*<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, our civilised age demands ‘conscious control of everything’ (Hayek 2007: 78). ‘Civilized life ... demands ... conscious functioning’ which entails detachment from the unconscious, to use Jung’s (1960: 71) terms. In addition, the more we detach ourselves from the unconscious ‘through direct functioning’ the more ‘a powerful counter-position’ can be built up there. The more explosive and uncontrollable the unconscious becomes (*ibid*). We can, therefore, assume the following: the attitude, the manners and the reactions of civilised individuals are not always predictable. They are exposed to the abrupt explosion of their own unconscious, which brings random memorised concepts and ideas (*magma*) into the foreground of individual or collective action. Since a civilised collectivity is made up by such individuals, by human beings whose modes of conduct cannot be programmed and pre-ordered, we could assume that the process of collective institution building is contingent and unpredictable. It follows, therefore, that collectivities (including nations) cannot be easily put under the demands (and commands) of (the instrumental) *legein*. They cannot be

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38 This restoration (of concepts and ideas) involves no *thinking ego*, as long as it occurs unconsciously.

shaped according to what a particular political discourse visualises and orders. Or, to use Arendt's terms, a collective reality is not simply the *work* of a *homo faber*. Peoples and nations are the contingent outcome 'of uncontrolled mobilization[s]', claims Canovan (2005: 54), which result to a synthesis of ideas and perceptions 'Peoples may come into existence not by being built ... but by being mobilized' (55). Peoples and nations emerge as a consequence. Such mobilisations are 'a much more open-ended business than "building"' (ibid).

Furthermore, detachment from the empirical world, as the first section of this chapter argued, increases the probability of the restless wonder to intrude into the underworld, approaching pathos, awakening *mēnis*. This could prompt individuals to interpret memorised events, occurrences and/or ideas (objects) from a standpoint that indulges their own pathos (I-will). In their mind the real meaning of these memorised objects is blurred and corrupted. Worst of all, these objects, misinterpreted and deprived of their actual meaning, are stored back into the reservoir of our memory. They become part of the *magma* of memorised representations which, once they are retrieved (even consciously) are reproduced in the present time. They are projected in public life as valid and influence members of the collectivity. Thus, pathos invades the empirical world. Furthermore, when corrupt objects are (consciously) retrieved by our *thinking ego*, they become subjects of evaluation (*nóēsis*). Through this process the *logismikon* identifies and removes fallible elements. The *logismikon* prevents the manifestation of such desires (*judgment*) in public life. But the effectiveness of our mind's capacity for *judgment* and purification is radically dependent on the *intensity* of such fallible elements that are *re-presented* when the same objects that have been corrupted are brought back into the present time. The higher the intensity becomes the more impotent ends up the *logismikon* against these elements. Consider again Jung's (1960) notion of 'conscious functioning', which effectively takes away all hindrances and controls against the unconscious mind that 'continually produces problematical situations' (72). As stated in the previous paragraphs, conscious functioning allows our *thinking ego* to be swayed by our unconscious mind. It brings such corrupt (by pathos) objects into the present. As long as the *logismikon* is too impotent to exercise control over these objects, the latter can be reproduced passively (almost habitually), *without our knowledge*. Conscious functioning 'may have disagreeable

consequences' (71). By removing hindrances that prevent the unconscious from influencing the conscious (and, more importantly, the *logismikon*/empirical), the same objects (reproduced as habits) are morally normalised. They become part of our daily experiences. One way to minimise the moral implications of the passive reproduction of such elements in our daily life is through the gradual awakening of the dormant public *nóēsis*, of the dormant 'nill-will', of the capacity for *judgment*. As the previous chapter made clear, public *judgment* (and *nóēsis*) is (potentially) stimulated through *logos* and public dialogue. Through (public) *judgment* (*logos*), through open conversations, indecent norms can become subject of dispute by the populace itself. They are *judged* by a public which, in return, acquires the capacity to increase its awareness of the vices a percentage of its members habitually (or behaviourally) reproduce.

So far, we have examined the reasons human collectivities are constantly invaded by pathos. At the same time, we have shed light on the *magmatic* mode of collective institution-building, characterised by contingency and unpredictability. In simple terms, the outcome of most interactions between individuals within such collectivities is not always predictable. Consequently, pathos can abruptly explode at any time *without our knowledge*. To a degree, one could assign to these collectivities elements of what Aristotle in the *Poetics* (2013) called 'tragedy'. Let us elaborate further on this term: in ancient tragedies the suffering actors are 'incapable of intervening on the scenario which has been already set before them' (Theodosiadis 2019: 107). They are hostages to circumstances where the pathos for power, fame and property, could lead to the prevalence of *hubris* (Aristotle 2013). In the same way, collectivities can be hostages to the unconscious infiltration of pathos, whose sudden detonation is not foreseeable and, therefore, controllable. To a degree, tragedy and 'vulnerability' (in Brown's terms) are interconnected. Human beings are 'tragic' as long as they are frail and vulnerable, capable of tearing each other's eyes (*vulnerare*), driven by passions and all sorts of raw emotions/desires (products of pathos). As mentioned earlier, the meliorism of the *vita civile*, due to its emphasis on *action*, soothes pathos and minimises the impacts of tragedy. In addition, *action* is prompted by *eucosmia*, which I consider to be the most advanced type of friendship (see the previous chapter). As it becomes clear, an in-depth analysis on *eucosmia* is required at this stage, in juxtaposition to the profound sentimentalism of



compassion (an ardent enunciation of the *fido amor*). This prompts us to move back to Arendt, acknowledging at the same time the religious/spiritual insights of Martin Luther King Jr. Eventually, we will have to move away from Laclau, Jung and Castoriadis for the time being.

### 3) Tragedy, vulnerability and *eucosmia*

We can compare the concept of tragedy with Machiavelli's (1970: 371) and Cicero's (1961: 345) notions of *fortuna*, represented by the archetype of a goddess symbolising unpredictability, namely the unforeseeable outcomes of human action. *Fortuna* controls 'half our actions, and yet leaves the control of the other half, of little less, to ourselves' (Machiavelli 1992: 66). She brings success or becomes the source of misery and disasters (Machiavelli 1970: 371). *Fortuna* makes human existence tragic and vulnerable. As Brown (2012) explains, vulnerability is synonymous with uncertainty, emotional exposure and risk (34; 45). Brown reckons the conscious recognition of our inherent vulnerability as an act of bravery, notwithstanding the unpleasant taste this experience may have (2; 33). Furthermore, for Machiavelli (1992), the haphazardness of *fortuna* brings disaster when 'there is neither barrier nor embankment to confine her', when there is no *virtù* (virtue) (66), or excellence (*arete*) according to the Greeks (Arendt 1998: 48; 153). For the *vita civile* the meaning of *virtù* is twofold: on the one hand, we could associate it with the fortitude and resilience one obtains in order to combat moral transgression, with what Brown (2012: 1) called 'daring greatly'<sup>39</sup>. On the other, it stands for love and friendship (*philia*), which (for the Greeks) was one of the most reliable safeguard against civil wars (Arendt 1990: 34): 'η γαρ τοῦ συζην προαίρεσις φιλία' ('the desire and necessity of living together is guaranteed by friendship') says Aristotle (1993a: 52 [Αριστοτέλης 1993α: 52]), implying the necessity of forming robust community connections, as the most effective means of protecting the city-state (the *polis*) from falling apart.

The love (*philia*) of *eucosmia* acknowledges the importance of commonality. It creates and sustains the appropriate conditions within which strong and lasting bonds

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<sup>39</sup> As I explain in the next chapter, in order to join the political realm, in order to take *action*, one requires fortitude and courage. Hence, *action* and *virtù* are intertwined concepts.



between citizens can be formed. In more concrete terms: consider the Christian notion of *agape*, the ‘animating ideals of modern democratic movements in the Atlantic world’, according to Kloppenberg (2016), implying unselfish ‘love for all humans because all are created in God’s image’ (16; *emphasis added*). Similar to the republican interpretation of the Christian *agape*, according to Georges Contogeorgis (Γιώργος Κοντογιώργης 2014: 592), is Aristotle’s (1993 [Αριστοτέλης 1993]) notion of «ἀγαπῶσι» (to be friend, or *philos*, with someone), which stands for «εὐνοεῖν ἀλλήλοις» (‘mutual well-being’) and rejects «χρήσιμος ἢ ἡδύς», *id est.*, the type of friendship from which one seeks only material gains, abundance and hedonism (20). Just as Aristotle’s ἀγαπῶσι advocates ‘charitable friendship’, in the same way King’s *agape* implies dutifulness towards the ‘common people’ (the *cosmos*) and unselfish devotion for the ‘common good’ expressed through the anthropocentric belief that every *anthrōpos* (human being) holds the means (*logos* and memory) of ‘salvation’, to use James’ (1978: 137) words again, the means to master pathos, the means to cut across corruption and selfishness, to serve the common *εὖ* (*eu*, the ‘good’). It borrows the central argument of King’s philosophy, his unquestionable respect ‘in the value of the human person on our common identity as children of God, made in God’s image and so worthy of respect’ (Raboteau 2017). Eventually, *agape* implies *eucosmia*. The reasons the love of *eucosmia* is considered less susceptible to deeply sentimental expressions that spring from the *fido amor*–like the intense sentimental expressions we often find in by the love of compassion, which in Arendt’s (1990) mind, obstruct reasoning and persuasion through *logos* (87; 89) (see also the previous section)–will be examined below.

According to Zembylas (2018), Arendt feared the consequences of sentimentalising politics, but at the same time, she made a case against heartlessness, being a ‘serious political pathology’ that undermines action and leads to apathy (7). According to Max Weber (1946), ‘politics is made with the head, but it is certainly not made with the head alone’ (127). Politics can be also made with the heart. Adam Smith in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759/2006) speaks in favour of the healing powers of the ‘consolation of sympathy’ as an antidote to the ‘bitter and painful emotions of grief and resentment’ (2006: 10). In the same way Nussbaum in *Political Emotions* (2013) emphasises the benefits of public emotions as ‘vital parts of an aspiration to justice’ (203) and proposes a form of

‘civic compassion’ (314) against hatred, envy and fear. Strong emotions ‘directed at the general welfare’ could inspire and support action for the common good ‘in ways that involve sacrifice’ (209). Nussbaum (2013) criticises those who focus exclusively on the pernicious effects of public emotions in politics. By attributing the rise of National Socialism, fascism and religious fundamentalism to the arousal of public sentiments, she writes, one misses out the positive confluence of the latter in ‘the abolition of slavery, [in] the civil rights movement’ as well as in ‘the cause of greater economic justice ... [and] the enfranchisement of women’ (213). Eventually, strong public emotions ‘can actually work, without removing and indeed while enhancing liberal freedom’ (203).

For Nussbaum (2013), sentiments like disgust towards disenfranchisement or exploitation and compassion for the underdog can stimulate action for justice (23; 125). Compassion, or empathy, as Fritz Breithaupt (2019) calls it, can motivate ‘humanitarian aid workers, donors, peacekeeping soldiers, and those who work for organizations like Doctors Without Borders’ (8). More often compassion makes us ‘sensitive to ... subtle forms of oppression and masked forms of violence’ (ibid). Compassion has been initially introduced in political theory by Paul-Henri Baron d'Holbach. For the same author, compassion is easily aroused in those who know destitution (Israel 2010: 101). Then it was Rousseau (Arendt 1990: 81), who insisted ‘that man should be primarily guided by moral instinct and “feeling”’ (Israel 2014: 21). Compassion is an ‘emotion that responds to the misfortunes of others’ (Nussbaum 2013: 261), ‘a painful emotion directed at the serious suffering of another creature or creatures’ (142), such as the poor, the excluded, the ‘unprivileged’, etc. Of course, Nussbaum (2013) was not unaware of the way sentimental reactions often lead to ‘emotional foundationalism’, to the complete reliance on emotions alone (as the only true incentives for justice), or (in my terms) to the absolute prevalence of deep emotions, to the domination of intense sentiments (intense love, fear or aversion, for instance), in the process of conscious thinking. Emotional foundationalism is as pernicious as the total neglect of the positive role of emotions (ibid). Thus, the sentiment of compassion ‘should never be an uncriticized foundation’, she concludes (317). Instead, ‘it should always be in dialogue with principles and general moral norms’ (318). As, however, the previous section argued, intense sentimental reactions and affectionate relationships, enunciations of raw/deep emotions, can deprive *nóēsis* and *judgment* (as I

will discuss more thoroughly in what follows).

Compassion, or empathy, in Breithaupt's (2019) words, 'plays a central part in a variety of highly problematic behaviors' (including political violence and terrorism) (1). More precisely, sympathy (the Greek equivalent to compassion) derives from *syn* (*συν*, implying 'with' or 'together') and *passion* (*πάσχειν*, 'to suffer') (Adam Smith 2006: 6). The etymological roots of the Latin word 'compassion' are quite similar: compassion derives from (*cum*) and (*passus*), implying the ability to acknowledge 'the suffering of the other' (Arendt 1990, p.81). The compassionate, in other words, '*coexperience[s]* ... another's situation' (Breithaupt 2019: 10; *emphasis added*). 'Coexperiencing means projecting oneself into another's situation emotionally and cognitively, typically with a clarity not available to the other' (16). Thus, '[t]he suffering of others is our suffering; their happiness can be ours as well' (8). For Breithaupt (2019), the negative side of empathy (and co-experiencing) is best described through the case of the Stockholm Syndrome, which results to a form of (let us call it) *pathological confluence* or *over-identification*: an innocent victim sees the world through the eyes of his/her predator, whose aggression is often considered to be a reaction to some social injustice the latter had experienced. Thus, for the victim the predator is also a victim, with whom he/she begins to sympathise (empathise). If this sympathy is too strong the innocent victim may bit-by-bit develop a form of emotional attachment with the predator/victim him/herself. The intensity and depth of such an emotional identification/attachment (this is a form of emotional foundationalism) may force the innocent victim to excuse and justify the behavior of the predator/victim (37; 59). For Breithaupt (2019), the first who described the *pathological confluence* between the empathetic victim and his/her predator was Nietzsche. In paragraph 207 of his work *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886/1967) Nietzsche speaks of the objective (the empathetic or the compassionate) man, being 'depersonalised' and, hence, 'an instrument' in the hands of others (140). The objective person is receptive (rather assertive) (Breithaupt 2019: 43). He/she is passive and '[t]his passivity ... proceeds from observation and perception. The person who perceives, according to Nietzsche, cannot *judge*' (ibid; *emphasis added*), he/she cannot make 'decisions between good and evil' (44) nor he/she can 'show strength, lead, act, or show passions' (43). 'The *habitus* of receptivity makes it impossible for people to take a stand for themselves. And without this ability, there is no

such thing as the self’ (ibid). Instead, empathy ‘allows them to recognize a strong self in others’ (46). The empathetic person transplants his/her own self onto the other (81), to the observed object (48). In this respect, Arendt (1990) was not entirely wrong to suggest that the justification and glorification of the violence of the French Revolution was due to compassion for the poor, that is, due to the justification of the violence to which the poor (the *animal laborans*) themselves resort as a consequence of material necessity<sup>40</sup>. In other words, this glorification of (revolutionary) violence was (to a degree) the consequence of *pathological confluence*, where observers *co-experience* the desperate poverty of those affected by it, and become emotionally attached with the poor themselves. The intensity of this emotional bond between the observer and the victim forces can lead to the deprivation of the former's ability to *judge*, that is, to understand when the actions of the latter should be rejected (rather than justified).

As an antidote to compassion Brown (2012) introduces the concept of empathy (not to be conflated with Breithaupt’s or Nietzsche’s empathy). For Brown (2012), empathy connects the actor ‘with the emotion that someone is experiencing’ (81). However, empathy means ‘listening, holding space, withholding *judgment*, emotionally connecting, and communicating that directly healing message of “You’re not alone”’ (81; *my emphasis*). Notice that (Brown’s) empathy is ‘conveyed without speaking a word’ (Brown 2012: 41). Thus, like compassion, empathy abolishes the ‘in-between ... distance’, to use Arendt’s (1990: 86) words again. As a substitute to compassion (and pity, its *ersatz* equivalent), Arendt (1990) speaks of ‘solidarity’, implying the active sacrifices that benefit ‘not only the multitude of a class or a nation or a people, but eventually all mankind’ (88). Nonetheless, solidarity (such as pity and compassion) is easily corrupted by extreme sentimentalism (Zembylas 2018: 7). Instead of compassion Lasch (1995a: 105) and Kloppenberg (2016: 26) stress the value of ‘mutual respect’ and reciprocity as the fundamental precondition of civic life. However agreeable it may sound, ‘respect’ seems too vague and imprecise. For Nussbaum (2013) only love ‘matters for justice’ (380), not however ‘[t]he love of parents for children, the love of comrades, and romantic love’, she considers ‘capable of inspiring a public culture in different ways’ (2013: 380-1), which

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40 Of course, this particular position lacks equilibrium and ignores other factors, as the previous section made clear.

confers a type of affectionate and emotive love (see *deep emotions* or the *fido amor*), but the *serene* love of *eucosmia*. Arendt (1998), of course, denies the practical value of love in politics (242). ‘Arendt’s insights about the emotions in politics are valuable because they remind us that emotions cannot be reduced to words or automatically “translate” into actions’ (Zembylas 2018: 7). For Arendt, love does not rely on reason. It is triggered by sentiments, by personal sympathies and strong emotional attachments. Hence, it undermines objectivity and deprives our ability to tell right from wrong (ibid). However, this type of love points to deeply romantic and sentimental types of love springing from the *fido amor*, inciting *pathological confluence* (as I explained earlier). As opposed to this *deeply* sentimental love, the love of *eucosmia* can stimulate public emotions in favour of *action*. This type of love is more capable of resisting emotional foundationalism than the love of compassion and/or (Brown’s) empathy. *Eucosmia* (as opposed to compassion) seems to be more in line with Nussbaum’s (2013) suggestion to allow emotional reactions (against social injustices) in politics to find expression whilst keeping them in moderation so that they will not eschew the surveillance of reason. *Eucosmia* recognises the positive contribution of emotions (in stimulating awareness for justice, for instance) but keeps such emotions *serene*. Unlike *deep* (or *raw*) *emotions*, *serene emotions* are flexible and dialectical; they can be kept under the supervision of the *logismikon*; they can be evaluated (*nóēsis*) and *judged*. Let us shed more light on the main reasons the love of *eucosmia* can keep emotional reactions calm and *serene*.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the love of *eucosmia* is linked with Martin Luther King Jr’s notion of *agape*, which values the ‘human unity’ and the *worth* of every individual (1986: 122). It shares Locke’s liberal/universalist position that ‘every human being as a ‘*thinking* intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places’ (Locke 1978: 188; *emphasis added*)<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, according to George Duke (2017), ‘the common good’ (or common decency, in my terms) offers ‘a reason for action’ (877). *Eucosmia* puts at the *center* of its mission, the unfaltering faith that every *anthrōpos* is a distinct *individual* who can serve the common good through his/her personal thinking, *judgment* and *logos* (through *action*)

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41 This emphasis on *thinking* aims to drive attention on the need to interpret this term from an Arendtian standpoint.

(Chapter 1). Hence, *eucosmia* is profoundly anthropocentric. First, the love of *eucosmia* so long as it focuses on the human potential for *nóēsis* and *judgment*, can improve our ability to recognise (that is, to *judge*) whether one's reactions and anger (including our own) against injustices are justifiable or not. When, for instance, our anger is so extreme and our enemy's worth as a human being (as a *zōon politikon*), capable of *acting* and *thinking*, is undermined (that is, when our anger encourages revenge and, in turn, revenge incites extermination or unlawful punishment and deprives someone's ability to contribute to the common good), the love of *eucosmia* prompts us to reckon this particular anger unjustifiable. In short, *eucosmia* reinforces the *logismikon*, which has the capacity to hold the 'I-will' and all sorts of emotional dispositions under its surveillance. Thus, emotions are neither exaggerated nor suppressed. Instead, they become open to 'politics with the head' (in terms borrowed by Weber). Second, *eucosmia* emphasises *action* and grassroots cooperation, self-government and participation, public dialogue and communication (as the case of American Populism exemplifies). Thus *eucosmia* is at odds with political projects advocating top-down identity construction. In short, *eucosmia* does not appear to be on the same page with Laclau's 'hegemonic' populism. It opposes political centralisation and authoritarianism<sup>42</sup> and values *individualism* (as mentioned earlier) rather mass behaviour, which, for several authors (Hayek 2007), constitutes one of the most significant incubators of totalitarianism<sup>43</sup>. Finally, *eucosmia* raises awareness concerning life's tragic dimensions. But, on the other hand, acclaims the potential of every human being to resist the arbitrariness of *fortuna* by serving the common *εὖ* ('good') out of truthfulness.

### Conclusion

By re-evaluating Arendt's philosophy and by bringing together viewpoints from Milton, Weil, James, Castoriadis, Jung, *et al.*, this chapter built up theoretical themes upon which the next chapters will rely in order to expand my analysis of populism and meliorism. Briefly, a melioristic *weltanschauung* refutes the 'optimism' and the 'romantic

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42 Of course, insights from religions other than Christianity (like, for example, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism and Sufism) could possibly offer an understanding concerning the human capacity for *action* that (to a degree) is similar to my notion of *eucosmia*'.

43 For more regarding individualism and action see Chapter 7.

overestimates of human virtue' (Niebuhr 1960: 78). It rejects the blind trust to man's moral resources as being (supposedly) sufficient to guarantee the emergence of a 'crystal palace', , 'in which there will be ... perfect peace and justice' (22) and 'civilization ... [will] continue to be infinitely perfectible' (Carroll 2010: 8) In this chapter, the 'belief that social institutions can be redesigned according to principles accessible to human reason' (Lasch 1997: 25) and that 'God has a plan for the world's gradual improvement' which will not be fulfilled through divine action but through 'the ordinary processes of nature and society', according to Wollestonecraft (Israel 2010: 3), has been called into question. Notwithstanding «ἀνθρωπεία φύσις, εἰωθυῖα καὶ παρὰ τοὺς νόμους ἀδίκηϊν» that ('human nature always rebels against justice'), as Thucydides (2011: 458 [Θουκυδίδης 2011: 458]) noted, political initiatives and movements inspired by the *vita civile* show that in the very depths of suffering and despair there is hope. There is redemption and salvation. By sharing unequivocally the necessity of 'embracing vulnerability' (Brown 2012: 12) the populism of the *vita civile* seeks to adjust Arendt's thought to the Laschian spirit of meliorism. By expanding political participation, opening up opportunities for the 'common people' to access the hierarchies, the *vita civile* creates conditions for justice to flourish, conditions 'in which coercion will be sufficiently non-violent', preventing the common world 'from issuing into complete disaster' (Niebuhr 1960: 22). The next chapter will advance discussions of this melioristic type of populism (*vita civile*), concentrating on the pedagogical nature of ethical memory.

## Chapter 3

### Pessimism, Optimism, Economic Liberalism and Ethical Memory

#### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is, a) to discuss the philosophical elements of pessimism in absolutism (as it is enunciated mainly through Hobbes's theories), b) to trace the existence of absolutist philosophical elements in economic liberalism through a genealogical analysis, and c) to explain the reasons the optimism of economic liberalism *per se* is founded upon the same anti-populist bias endorsed by the absolutist theories of Hobbes. The reasons the rational mastery of economic liberalism, the hallmark of the idea of progress, this 'forward march of [liberal] capitalism' (Bockmuehl 2012: 9), has not fulfilled its initial promise, to redeem societies from their intense insecurities, of delivering 'prosperity or peace or justice' (10), will be thoroughly discussed. This takes place in the third section which utilises the theory of *tragedy*, *magma* and *fortuna* (developed in the previous chapter).

In short, this chapter offers an initial taste concerning the role of hope through the *vita civile*. Simply put, the 'great Leviathan', the '*Mortall God*' to whom 'wee owe ... our peace and defense' (Hobbes 2006: 96), the political authority from which all political powers and decisions originate, is distributed to the 'common people' (see the third section). More precisely, the Biblical symbolism of Hobbes' Leviathan refers to the Nile River, to the source of life in ancient Egypt, according to Frye (1982: 189). Consider an allegory that appears in The Bible (Ezekiel 29:4-5): God put hooks into Leviathan's jaw and 'cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales', leaving finally Leviathan, and 'and all the fish of the rivers ... thrown into the wilderness'. Leviathan is given 'for meat to the beasts of the field and to the fowls of the heaven'. Therefore, the catching of the leviathan is 'followed by the fertilizing of the desert he is thrown into' (Frye 1982: 190). God 'didst break in pieces the heads of leviathan' and 'gavest him to be meat to those that people the desert' (The Bible, Psalm 74: 14) and to the common people of Israel (Frye 1982: 190). Such as God dispenses Leviathan to the inhabitants of the desert, similarly common decency (personified by 'God', by the 'laws of nature') requires the distribution of Leviathan, that is, the dispersal of political power, to the common people. The next



section focuses on Hobbes's and Filmer's pessimistic absolutism and anti-populism, deriving from their 'radical distrust of the moral capacities of human beings' (Michea 2009: 59). At the same time, it traces similar anti-populist perspectives in Plato, 'the best philosopher of the Greeks', according to Hobbes (2006: 381).

### 3.1 Pessimism, optimism and anti-populism: the absolutist model

Plato holds a prominent position in the *genealogy* of pessimism in Western thought. In fact, it was Plato who first denounced democracy as a regime that bases its principal foundations upon the rule of the uncultivated, ignorant multitude. While the laws of the *polis*, in Castoriadis' (1997) thought, always began with the famous preamble: *edoxe tē boulē kai tō dēmō* 'recognizing the decision of the collectivity of the *demos* (the 'people') as the only source of political power, Plato proclaimed the professionalisation of politics as the domain of *epistēmē* (science) or *technē* (skills), requiring specialised knowledge from all those who are involved with decision making (92). This particular axiom derives from the following assumptions commonly shared by all the participants of the dialogues in Plato's *Republic* (Πλάτων [2014]): the good judge obtains the capacity to understand what is (*ádiko*) *adiko* (unjust). He is an expert in prosecuting and punishing offenders; the good doctor is skillful in providing the right medicines; and similarly, the rightful hegemon has acquired the wisdom to impose policies that safeguard the city (Kloppenbergh 2016: 7). Hence, for Plato, governments are run by men 'who are only in *doxa*, and it was he who conferred the *politeia* and the conduct of its affairs to the possessors of "true" knowledge, the philosophers' (Castoriadis 1997: 92). In other words, Plato emphasised the necessity for experts, the so-called 'guardians', 'to be in charge of the government, because democracy easily degenerates into rule by the mob' (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013: 152). For Plato (2014 [Πλάτων 2014]) the multitude has no capacity to espouse philosophy and cannot emancipate itself from the dictates of passions over wisdom, law and justice (453). In Plato's (2014 [Πλάτων 2014]) thought, human beings are overwhelmed by rapacity (108), *id est*, by *bouleumata*, by the Faustian pathos—elsewhere called *pleonexia*, *πλεονεξία*, from the Greek *πλέον* (*pleon*) and *έχω* (*echo*)—to desire more than what they already have obtained, in Hobbes's (2006: 86) definition. As with Plato (Πλάτων 2014), «...τήν πλεονεξίαν ὃ πᾶσα φύσις πέφυκεν διώκειν» ('...rapacity confers to the natural

proclivity of every living being') (108]).

As a matter of fact, during the 'first period of his life (up to 1629)', the 'humanist period', according to Leo Strauss (1963: 31)<sup>44</sup>, Hobbes's main philosophical interests were centred around Homer's poetry and Aristotle's moral thought (32-3). Aristotle was (for Hobbes) 'the highest authority in philosophy' (33). Hobbes's break with humanism is evident in the *Leviathan*, as well as in *De Cive*, where he rejects Aristotle's claim concerning the primary objectives of the State to promote the so-called 'good life' (ibid), 'the life of the citizen' who had 'mastered the necessities of sheer life, by being freed from labor and work' in order to join the *realm* of the *polis* (Arendt 1998: 36-8). In Hobbes's post-humanist thought, the ultimate role of the State is protection from violent death (Strauss 1963: 33). More precisely, in the *Leviathan* Hobbes calls Plato 'the best Philosopher of the Greeks' (Hobbes 2006: 381). He shares Plato's concerns about the consequences of *pleonexia*, the 'perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power [that] ceaseth onely in Death', the 'generall inclination of all mankind' (55). In the anarchic condition of natural liberty, in the so called *State of Nature*, where no State and no organised commonwealth, no common power or other artificial body exists in order to coerce and bind human beings together, directing them towards the common benefit, everyone strives to fulfill his/her (innate) 'restlesse desire' (ibid), pathos ((in my terms), for possession and domination for power, riches, fame, prestige and honour (Hobbes 2006: 40; 55; Schmitt 1996: 361). In the state of nature, competition for property and power easily escalates into conflict as long as there is no authority to impose justice, repressing aggression (even through extreme coercion), ensuring that possession is acquired through peaceful means. In the state of nature, where 'every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body', the 'condition of Warre of every one against every one' becomes permanent (72). This war cannot be brought to an end since all forms of enmity are perpetual; neither victors (the strongest who survived the battle) can escape the possibility of losing their lives in a potentially forthcoming conflict (Hobbes 1998: 30).

Hence, in the state of nature, in the state of perfect *insecurity* where everyone is a

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44 Among scholasticism, aristocracy and Puritanism, humanism was the most decisive Hobbes's influence during his youth, claims Strauss (1963: 31). For the same author, this is evident through Hobbes' ardent emphasis on the importance 'of 'mathematical and scientific' reasoning (ibid).

potential enemy, human lives become ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’ (Hobbes 2006: 70). Individuals ‘as soon as they arrive to understanding of this hateful condition, do desire (even nature itself compelling them) to be freed from this misery’ (Gaskin 1994: xvii). In order to avoid violent death, they form alliances ‘so that if we must have *war*, it will not be a war against all men nor without aid’ (Hobbes 1998: 30). In exchange for security they seek to relinquish certain liberties and transfer them to an absolute sovereign power, a *de facto* ruler, contracting thus with each other and forming a state (Hobbes 1998: 50; Macpherson 1983: 20-21; Furedi 2013: 184; 187)<sup>45</sup>. Only under this process individuals free themselves from the insecurity of the state of nature, ‘whereof they may be compelled both to keep the peace amongst themselves’ (Hobbes 1994:106). The *laws of nature* are preserved only when the multitude appoints one man, or an assembly of men ‘to beare their Person; and every one owne, and acknowledge himselfe to be Author of whatsoever he that so beareth their Persons, shall Act, or Cause to be Acted, in those things which concerne the Common Peace and Safetie; and therein to submit their Will, and their Judgements, to his Judgment’ (Hobbes 2006: 93-94).

According to Hobbes’s *Social Contract*, all liberties are passed to the unquestionable statesman/Sovereign—to the only ‘sword’ and soul of the Commonwealth (Hobbes 2006: 122-123)—who undertakes the task of decision making (or for approving decisions made by his officials) and, in return, is *obliged* to take all necessary measures in order to defend public and individual well-being. And this is how the great Leviathan emerges, holding down Behemoth, another Biblical archetype used by Hobbes as a symbol of the proclivity of the revolutionary masses to cause havoc (Schmitt 1996: 21; Furedi 2013: 182). Thus, the body whose *Salus* is *Suprema Lex* is not the *Populus* but the *Rex* (the monarch), who makes all political legislation and asserts the knowledge of what is just for his/her subjects, preventing wrongdoing through force and coercion. Without ‘this gigantic mechanism in the service of ensuring the physical protection of those governed’ (Schmitt 1996: 35), human beings are exposed to a condition of self-perpetuating enmity where knowledge, arts and society disappear (Hobbes 2006: 70). The

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45 For Hobbes a mutual transferring of rights upon consideration of reciprocal benefit, according to which both parties perform what they have been agreed upon, is called a *contract* between individuals, from which a State has been created (1994: 84; 1998: 36; 2006: 74).

power of the Sovereign is, however, indisputable; his unchallenged authority safeguards ‘the conditions for commodious living...’ (Macpherson 1983: 71). To resist the Sovereign ‘in defense of another man, guilty or innocent, no man hath Liberty; because such Liberty, takes away from the Sovereign, the means of Protecting us’ (Hobbes 2006: 122).

For Hobbes and Filmer (1991), three common types of sovereignty exist. These are: a) *aristocracy* – ‘the government of “the better people”’ (Hobbes 1998: 92), of the better men chosen by the multitude itself, b) *democracy*, or Popular Common-Wealth, consisting of an assembly of ‘the people’ that must contract with themselves, bound to the decisions of the majority (Hobbes 1994: 119; 1998: 94; 117), and c) *monarchy*, the will of a single man, coming from the words ‘μόνος and ἀρχεῖν; ἀρχεῖν is *imperare*, to govern and rule; μόνος signifies one alone’ (Filmer 1991: 135). As Hobbes states in *De Cive* (1642/1998), monarchy is the most preferred type of commonwealth (115-126), converging thus with the Filmer (1991), who argues about the disastrous consequences of democracy, favouring at the same time a coercive and fatherly royal power, without which love for liberty would lead to anarchy (Sommerville 1991: xxii-xxiii). Moreover, since monarchy is the most coercive type of sovereignty, it has to be endorsed, especially from the moment the passions of the multitude, of the ‘common people’, can result in more violence than the passions of one man, as Hobbes states in *De Corpore Politico* (1655/1994). ‘The greatest inconvenience that can happen to a commonwealth, is the aptitude to dissolve into civil war; and to this are monarchies much less subject than any other governments’ (Hobbes 1994: 140). By denouncing democracy *tout court* as the incubator of the most savage tyranny, the tyranny of the multitude, according to Filmer (1991: 31), the absolutist *weltanschauung* showcases anti-populism, which exemplifies best what Contogeorgis (Κοντογιώργης 2014) has labeled as ‘despotic cosmosystem’, in juxtaposition to the ‘anthropocentric cosmosystem’<sup>46</sup>. If the anthropocentric worldview advocates freedom and, simultaneously, if the anthropocentric worldview appeals to the notion of *eucosmia*, bestowing ‘faith’ (a conditional and/or restrained ‘faith’, nevertheless) in the ‘average person’, based on the assertion that every human being through *action* can achieve good standards of common decency, the illiberal despot neglects the moral capacities of the

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46 In regards to the term ‘cosmosystem’ (attributed to Georges Contogeorgis) see the Glossary Chapter.

‘common people’ and their ability of passing sound judgment in order to bridle their proclivity towards self-deception, rugged self-interest, exaggeration and moral transgression. The ‘ordinary citizens’, according to Filmer (1991), ‘are not led by wisdom to judge of anything, but by violence and by rashness, nor put they any difference between things true and false. After the manner of cattle they follow the herd that goes before’ (28).

Furthermore, deliberations of large assemblies endanger public safety, since they are sources of factions; open assemblies can disclose policies of utmost importance to foreign enemies, policies that only a monarch could keep in absolute secrecy (Hobbes 1998: 123-124). The monarch can receive superior counsel, being surrounded by skillful executives. But above all, he/she cannot disagree with himself out of envy or greed (which are innate to all human beings), whilst ‘an Assembly may; and that to such a height, as may produce a Civil Warre’ (Hobbes 2006: 105). The monarch transforms mutual fear of violent death into fear of *punishment* ‘defined or prescribed by law, as it is laid down in explicit words: *he who does this will suffer this*, or may be defined in practice, as when a penalty [...] is discretionary at first, and then defined by the punishment of the first offender’ (Hobbes 1998: 151). Fear is the only way for the Sovereign to provide security and win the conformity of his subjects; fear subjects everyone to the laws that envisage retribution as a consequence of disobedience in the philosophy of Hobbes (Schmitt 1996: 19). Fear of punishment, for Hobbes (1994), is the most effective way to uproot once and for all revolutionary ideas from the popular mind; fear removes from the human conscience opinions that justify rebellious actions (176). This constitutes the highest priority of the Sovereign (ibid).

As we see, Hobbes’s philosophy emphasises ‘the need for some security of the individual, who feels himself menaced by all his fellow-men’ (Arendt 1976: 140). The individual, ‘[e]xcluded from participation in the management of public affairs that involve all citizens ... acquires a new and increased interest in his *private* life and his *personal* fate’ (141; *emphasis added*). Hobbes’s insistence on privatisation, *id est*, on the radical withdrawal from the *public-political realm* into our own individual (*private*) world (in the name of ‘security’ and ‘protection’ from social chaos and disarray), is probably one of the strongest indicators of anti-populism in his absolutist thought.. As a matter of fact, Hobbes ‘wanted most of all to protect private interests by pretending that, rightly understood, they

were the interest of the body politic as well’, claims Arendt (1976: 139, ff). Or to use his own (2006) words, the private and the public interest ‘are most closely united’ (104). In a monarchical state, however, which is Hobbes’s most preferred State, ‘the private interest is the same with the publique’ (ibid). If (according to Hobbes) the private interest benefits the public, the constant improvement of one’s personal affairs would also benefit the common good and the interests of the entire commonwealth. Hayek’s (1980) economic liberalism rests on a similar assertion: individuals by focusing on their own private affairs ‘contribute as much as possible to the needs of all others’ (13). Therefore, if, as Arendt (1976) stressed, ‘Hobbes was the true, though never fully recognized, philosopher of the bourgeoisie’ (146), this cannot be only attributed to his awareness concerning the ‘acquisition of wealth conceived as a never-ending process’ (ibid) but also to his insistence on individual improvement, which later on became the primary theoretical starting point for eighteenth century liberal economists, such as Adam Smith (2012), who championed the pursuit of private interest that (in his view) ‘frequently promotes [the interest] of the society’ (445). All these may indicate the existence of a *genealogy* between the (eighteenth-century Anglo-American) liberal emphasis, according to Deneen (2018), on the *res idiotica* (the private concerns) with Hobbes’s absolutist/despotic philosophy. Macpherson (1983) considers Hobbes’s insistence on private improvement (as opposed to political engagement) one of the main principles upon which aspects of Locke’s and Smith’s thought have built their foundations (as I will further explain in the next section). Hence, Arendt’s (1976) assertion that Hobbes himself was a philosopher who gave ‘an almost complete picture, not of Man but of the bourgeois man’ and that ‘[t]here is hardly a bourgeois moral standard which has not been anticipated by the unequaled magnificence of Hobbes’s logic’ (139), seems quite plausible. Furthermore, Hobbes’s emphasis on the *res idiotica*, according to Arendt (1976), deprives friendship and mutuality, encouraging harsh competition: ‘[d]eprived of political rights’, absorbed by his/her *private* concerns, the individual ‘loses his rightful place in society and his natural connection with his fellowmen’ (141). He/she judges his/her ‘individual private life only by comparing it with that of others’ while his/her relations with his/her fellow-men ‘inside society take the form of competition’ (ibid). Macpherson (1983), while reflecting on Hobbes’s thought, considers private competition another key element that signaled the rise of capitalism and

the so-called *possessive market society* (else called *possessive liberalism*). The social and political obligations of ‘market men’, he writes, are based on ‘a full appreciation’ of what is ‘most to their own interest, most consistent with their true nature as competitive men’ (105). In sum, economic (possessive) liberalism and absolutism share principles and ideas that justify anti-populism, namely, the marginalisation of the *political realm* and the removal of the ‘common people’ from the process of political decision-making. However, before going over outlining the reasons active citizenship could lead to higher standards of common decency than absolutism and/or *possessive liberalism*, it would be necessary to shed more light on the *genealogical* links between these (ostensibly opposite) trends. More accurately, it would be vital to lay emphasis on existing convergences between *possessive liberalism* and Hobbes's despotic *weltanschauung*, explaining how the former has subverted the latter's pessimism into a manifest optimism. Such a process requires rigorous analysis of Locke's thought, which has been regarded the most practical and humane alternative to Hobbes' absolutism, according to Neocleous 2008).

### Liberal optimism and possessive individualism

#### 1) Locke *contra* Hobbes and the liberal *genealogy*

Locke's (1988) anti-absolutist philosophy derives from his understanding of the state of nature as the state of perfect freedom, equality and independence (rather than enmity and aggression) (291; 330). For Locke (1988) ‘force *without* Right, *upon Man's Person*’, that is, force without a real purpose, ‘*makes a State of War*’ (281). Since men in their default position are capable of making rational calculations, extreme and arbitrary force and coercion (that is, *force without right* and consent) lacks substantial purpose and justification. In fact, no one can be ‘subjected to the Political Power of another, without his own *Consent*’ (330). To make a long story short, government by consent and majority rule are for Locke (as opposed to Hobbes and Filmer) the key elements upon which his Social Contract has been founded (Macpherson 1983: 194). ‘The Liberty of Man, in Society, is to be under no other Legislative Power, but that established, by consent, in the Commonwealth, nor under the Dominion of any Will’ (Locke 1988: 283). In the same fashion, Montesquieu, who views the State as the highest of all authorities, acknowledges its power as being always measured according to civil Constitutions and laws, institutions that allow

the public to impose its own will, rather than forcing individuals to obey uncontrollable despots. Every legislative act that suppresses public and private liberty violates the Social Contract; such acts must be encountered even through the use of physical force (popular rebellions and civil uprisings), claims Locke (1988: 370-410). Thus, 'it is for the people only to decide whether or when their government trustees have acted contrary to their trust, or their legislative has been changed, and for the people as a whole to act as umpire in any dispute between the governors and a part of their body' (Laslett 1988: 109).

Although (in Locke's mind) human beings in their default position are capable of making rational decisions, at the same time, they are liable to error and deceit. As mentioned earlier, in the anarchic state of nature, in the state of absolute liberty, no organised commonwealth exists; no executive power, no official body, can implement policies in defence of civil peace. Thus, natural liberty leaves everyone exposed to the consequences of the vices of the misjudgments of others and, subsequently, to all forms of aggression. For this reason human beings should 'enter into Society to make one People, one Body Politik under one Supreme Government' aiming to preserve their lives and property mutually (325). Through these passages we find Locke's anti-Hobbesian position (concerning the state of nature as the state of perfect freedom and independence) suddenly overturned. Here Locke, for good or ill, seems to have accepted Hobbes's realism in part, as he associates natural liberty with insecurity, which leaves everyone unprotected from harm and violence. In other words, Locke's *Second Treatise* has always been viewed as a milestone in the development of the theory of popular sovereignty, taken to be the consent of the majority (Canovan 2005: 24). As Macpherson (1983) argued, Locke shares Hobbes's main fear concerning the state of nature as the state where violent death lurks like a venomous snake hidden in the bushes (1983: 241; 247). According to Laslett (1988) pointed out, Locke's thought did not fully escaped 'the shadow of the *Leviathan*' (72). Other liberal thinkers, such as James Mill and the anti-egalitarian Jeremy Bentham, share more profoundly the Hobbesian viewpoint: human beings are power-hungry machines; they strive to maximise their own pleasure without acknowledging moral limits (23-43). For Locke the primary focus of a (liberal) government is civil peace and security of property (Macpherson 1977: 27; 30; Macpherson 1983: 247; Laslett 1988: 102; Israel 2017: 90). Property is alienable since competition for the same object, claims James Mill



(2015), ‘implies the desire of the power necessary to accomplish the object’ (17). This desire ‘of that power which is necessary to render the persons and properties of human beings subservient to our pleasures is a grand governing law of human nature [...] Power ... therefore, means security for the conformity between the will of one man and the acts of other men’ (ibid).

The most advanced form of security exercised by the State (the Sovereign) is that of *prerogative*; according to Locke (1988), *prerogative* assumes ‘nothing, but the Peoples permitting their Rulers, to do several things of their own free choice, where the Law was silent, and sometimes too against the direct Letter of the Law, for publick good’ (377). This stance conflicts with his notion of *political virtue*, *mutual trust* and *friendship*, the highest ideals that safeguard the body politic by holding human beings together (Laslett 1988: 88; 111; 115). Evidently, Locke returns to the Hobbesian position, especially when in the second volume of the *Treatises* resorts to the usage of the term ‘Leviathan’ (Neocleous 2008: 17). As also Fukuyama (1992) argues, ‘Locke agreed with Hobbes that self-preservation was the most fundamental passion’, Indeed, Locke appears closer ‘to adopting some of Hobbes’s claims and categories rather than refuting them, and we are reminded that in the early 1690s many people suspected Locke of leaning in a Hobbesian direction’ (Neocleous 2008: 17). Of course, Locke rejected absolutism arguing that ‘absolute monarchs could violate man’s right to self-preservation, as when a king arbitrarily stripped a subject of his possessions and life’ (Fukuyama 1992: 158). In short, Lockean liberalism encompasses, on the one hand, the notion liberty and consent while stressing the need for emergency measures (that limit liberty itself) to be implemented by governments once deemed necessary.. Such measures, argues Neocleous (2008), could open the back door for the acceptance of all sorts of authoritarian laws, killing off once and for all the same liberty Locke’s theory championed (against despotism) (12).

Unlike Hobbes’s and Filmer’s justification of absolute rule as a permanent refuge against the war of all against all, Locke’s authoritarian’ *prerogative* points to all *temporary* emergency measures, imposed by governments, *only* under exceptional circumstances. Notwithstanding Locke’s prerogative justifies the use of illiberal means, it is not arbitrary and/or tyrannical. It is exercised (always as a last resort) strictly within the framework of a constitutional order, which serves and protects the rule of law, ‘the legal embodiment of

freedom' (Hayek 2007: 85). In brief, the rule of law determines how the coercive powers of a state can be used in given circumstances (Hayek 2007: 75; 86, ff.1). It prevents governments 'from stultifying individual efforts by *ad hoc* action' and preserves liberty of each individual to pursue his/her 'personal ends and desires' (76). In this respect, coercion (under the state of *prerogative*) 'can be foreseen how it will be used' (87) and it must become fully evident such emergency measures are clearly in the interest of people's liberty and property. Its ultimate objective is a) the effective removal of threats posited by unlawful rebellions, which strive to violently overthrow a government that fully respects the rule of law, and b) the defense of personal safety and security from rampant aggression (large scale crime, terrorism, *etc.*) (Locke 1998: 377; Macpherson 1983: 104; 247; 255)<sup>47</sup>. A government that takes advantage of prerogative, acting contrary to the rule of law, that is, doing 'what it thinks fit to do' (Hayek 2007: 86, ff.1), is arbitrary and, therefore, illegitimate; in Locke's *weltanschauung*, such a government would have violated the Social Contract. In fact, '[t]he end of Law is not to abolish or restrain but to enlarge Freedom: For in all the states of created beings capable of Laws, where there is no Law, there is no Freedom' (306). Absolute rule will not guarantee protection from man's inherited tendencies towards self-destruction. Absolutism is synonymous with oppression, which fuels civil unrest and drags humanity back to the *state of war*. To a degree, Locke's liberalism is a synthesis of Hobbes' pessimistic essentialism and democratic republicanism. It places emphasis on private property, security and coercion (*prerogative*) on the one hand, while stressing the value of tolerance, popular consent and the right to rebel, on the other. Hence, Locke's theory does not seem to posit a challenge to the anti-populism absolutism of Hobbes. This is not simply due to his insistence on *prerogative* but, more importantly, because limited government, constitutionalism, the rule of law and popular consent alone do not entail active citizenship and direct involvement in decision-making.

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<sup>47</sup> According to the Lockean viewpoint, we may consider as unlawful unrest (or rebellion) every act that does not aim at overthrowing an absolutist force, which is deemed arbitrary, coercive, and, consequently, illegal. Unlawful rebellions undermine political regimes founded upon the consent of the majority, protecting privacy and liberty. Such rebellions 'bring back again the state of War', since they take away the decisive power of the Legislative, a decisive power appointed by the people under whose consent is obliged to act (Locke 1988: 416).

Consider, at this stage, the distinction between *liberty* and *freedom*. Liberty is '[t]he deepest commitment of liberalism' (Deneen 2018: 21). It points to 'the liberty of the individual in possession to do what he liked with himself and with his own' (Keynes 2009: 16). Liberty signifies non-interference; '[w]hen a person is free in the sense of negative liberty they are exempt from interference in the things they do— exempt from intentional coercion or obstruction' (Pettit 1997: 25). Liberty has been 'won as a result for liberation' (Arendt 1990: 33) a) from cultural norms that erect fences against personal ambition (Deneen 2018: 101), from the restrictions against individual self-expression imposed by the moral/cultural codes (*ethimikon*) of the *societas civilis* (Κονδύλης 2007: 216 [Kondylis 2007: 216]), or b) from absolutism and arbitrary rule (Deneen 2018: 27). It is understood 'in terms of the opposition between *liber* and *servus*, citizen and slave' and 'is explicated as the status of someone who, unlike the slave, is not subject to the arbitrary power of another' (Pettit 1997: 31). Hence, liberty points to the Lockean notion of minimum government (limited by consent). Liberty, according to Arendt (1990), 'do[es] not tell the whole story of freedom' (33), which is equivalent to active citizenship (Pettit 1997: 36-7), being coextensive to the political realm (Arendt 1968a: 149). Freedom, or in Deneen's (2018) words, 'the ancient conception of liberty', the (classical) republican liberty, points to the 'self-governance of both city and soul, drawing closely together the individual cultivation and practice of virtue and the shared activities of self-legislation' (37). '*Eleutheros*, Greek for "free," derives from the Indo-European *\*leudh-*, meaning "belonging to the people." (De Dijn 2020: 6). For Arendt (1968a), freedom refers to the capacity of *moving*, of getting away from the private sphere and going out into the world, 'meet[ing] other people in deed and word' (148). A person is free not when he/she compels a government of experts to make decisions that do not violate his/her individual rights but only when the same person is an active member in government. Freedom is the *raison d'être* of active citizenship (146; 151). It points to *action*; 'for to *be* free and to act are the same' (153).

According to De Dijn (2020), '[t]his democratic conception of freedom', initially developed in ancient Greeks, 'was revived in modern times by Renaissance humanists and their pupils, such as Niccolò Machiavelli, Etienne de la Boétie, and Algernon Sidney' that 'inspired the American, Dutch, Polish, and French revolutionaries of the late eighteenth

century (2). The shift to a new understanding of freedom (as liberty) was the consequence of such revolutions that influenced the course of political liberalism (6), particularly in the Anglophone world (10). Thus, eighteenth-century (Anglo-American) liberalism, and (more importantly) Lockean liberalism (with its utilitarian overtones), conflated liberty (government limited by consent) with freedom (active citizenship). As, for example, when John Stuart Mill (2008) claimed, '[t]he struggle between Liberty and Authority' was central in ancient Greece (5). Nonetheless, by the term liberty he implies 'protection against the tyranny of the political rulers' while the rulers themselves 'were conceived (except in some of the popular governments of Greece) as in a necessarily antagonistic position to the people whom they ruled' (ibid). Liberty and freedom originate in the *popular governments* of the Greek *polis* and the Roman *civitas* (Arendt 1990: 30). However, the *polis* was not solely the body of protection against usurpation and/or arbitrary rule. It was the center of *action* (as aforementioned), the sphere of *freedom*, which—for Arendt (1968a)—is a fact of everyday life in the political realm (p.146)<sup>48</sup>. Classical liberal theorists (as well as late liberals), anchored to the Lockean tradition of 'limited government' and to the Smithian quasi utilitarian *weltanschauung*, emphasised the need for government to preserve order and liberty, without allowing government to end up a 'Frankenstein force' that devours liberty *per se* (Friedman 2002: 2; 1980: 22). They understood freedom solely as 'absence of coercion of a man by his fellow man' (Friedman 2002: 15). Liberalism, in the words of Hayek (1980), 'does not deny the necessity of coercive power but wishes to limit it—to limit it to those fields where it is indispensable to prevent coercion by others and in order to reduce the total coercion to a minimum' (16). In the same way Joseph Townsend argues that although human beings are 'beasts', they need no despots but only a minimum of government (mentioned in Polanyi 2001: 119).

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48 When Arendt (1990: 32-33) juxtaposed liberty with freedom, she mainly refers to Locke's liberalism with its emphasis on 'liberation' from absolutism, with its insistence on government limited by consent (and, finally, on the 'sacredness' of private property) rather (for instance) on Rousseau's liberalism (with its emphasis on positive liberty). This 'Lockean' liberalism had partially inspired the men of the great revolutions of the eighteenth century (Arendt 1990: 32-3; Fukuyama 1992: 186) and, according to Contogeorgis (Κοντογιώργης 2012) contributed to the consolidation of so-called 'representative democracy' (as opposed to direct democracy, or to *action*, in Arendt's terms).

Since, however, in the liberal mind a) Hobbes' fear of *perpetual war* (which springs from our innate tendencies toward rapacity and unlimited possession) is widely echoed, b) *prerogative* is only a temporary measure (and, thereby, no permanent coercive Sovereign exists in order to repress moves that alienate someone's life and property), and c) the 'common people' are not allowed to join forces in order to decide (by means of memory and *logos*) which laws could better preserve decency over *hubris* and rapacity, what could safeguard human beings from destruction? The main response of eighteenth century economic liberalism to this impasse was the idea of economic progress (or productivism), the constant satisfaction of the insatiable human desire for possession through the unlimited production of goods (as property to be bought) and the constant increase of their availability in the capitalist market. '[E]ighteenth-century moralists like Bernard Mandeville, David Hume, and Adam Smith', writes Lasch (1991a), broke decisively 'with older ways of thinking', which assumed the limitation of pathos for boundless possession one of the main causes of war and conflict (52). For Hayek (1980), eighteenth century economic liberals acclaimed 'man's "self-love," or even his "selfish interests,"' as the ultimate '"universal mover", and ... by these terms they were referring primarily to a moral attitude, which they thought to be widely prevalent' (13). They considered the constant increase of production (in order to gratify these so-called 'selfish' desires) and the 'supply of material comforts', necessary means for the improvement of the general standards of living (Lasch 1991a: 52). According to Mandeville, '[e]nvy, pride and ambition made human beings want more than they needed, but these "private vices" became "public virtues" by stimulating industry and invention' (quoted by Lasch 1991a: 53). Smith and Hume endorsed the principle that 'a growing desire for material comforts, wrongly taken by republicans as a sign of decadence and impending social collapse' could generate 'new wealth' and 'a constantly rising level of productivity' (ibid). As I will stress in what follows, economic progress, which the eighteenth century Anglo-American liberal/utilitarian philosophy (profoundly inspired by Locke's theories) treats as its bedrock value, has threatened the active citizenship with the pain of disappearance.

## 2) Optimism and economic progress: the decline of *public time*

If, according to eighteenth-century economic liberalism, the insatiable pathos for possession is an inherent characteristic of human nature (Lasch 1991a: 14; 52-3), , it

follows that once the desire for a certain amount of an object (X) is gratified, a renewed desire for a larger quantity of the same (or a similar) object/property is going to emerge. Yet, those who manage to secure a larger quantity (X2) of the same object through the market, may soon desire an even larger (X3). The expansion of production and, subsequently, the increase of the supply of goods (to be purchased) in the market guarantees the availability of X3 (or of X4, X5, *etc.*). Eventually, our Faustian desires (pathos = rapacity =  $\infty$ ) are satisfied through the increase *ad infinitum* of the availability of goods for possession. Thus, a) through the constant (and peaceful) gratification of the pathos for acquisition of property, and b) through the endless improvement of the purchasing power of every consumer (for the purpose of acquiring what the same consumer desires), the fear of *perpetual war* and destruction (due to scarcity), which so intensively haunted (eighteenth-century) economic liberals, is halted. More precisely, if as Goodwyn (1976) argued, in the capitalist world ‘an unconscious presumption’ has been ‘settled into place that the present is “better” than the past and that the future will bring still more betterment’ (vii), this can be partially attributed to the prevalent, according to Lasch (1991a: 41), belief in ‘progress’, in the constant and steady expansion of production, whose primary objective (according to eighteenth-century economic liberalism) is the immediate gratification of the increasing desire for possession (13), and, therefore, to the annihilation of the fear of *perpetual war* caused by material scarcity. The more the human pathos for possession is fulfilled the more the fear of *perpetual war* dwindles. As Chapter 1 argued, hope does not imply complete annihilation of fear. Instead, it considers fear the *sine qua non* of human existence itself. In this respect, economic (possessive) liberalism, with its linear approach on history (Lasch 1991c) towards endless progressive improvement with very little possibility of retrogression (Goodwyn 1976: vii; Lasch 1991a: 48), so long as it results in the progressive reduction of the fear of conflict and destruction (caused by scarcity), acquires an optimistic outlook. One could assume that while economic liberalism never ‘rested ... on the promise of an ideal society’, (Lasch 1991a: 48), its emphasis on the endless ‘pursuit of wealth’, which ‘fills the vacuum at the heart of Lockean liberalism’ (Fukuyama 1992: 160), and its pretension for constant and gradual betterment through productivism, proposes the erection of a ‘crystal palace’, in Dostoevsky’s (2009) metaphorical terms, as if history is moving into a steady direction towards the emergence

of a brand new age,, emancipated from the specter of scarcity and, hence, from the dread of war (ibid)<sup>49</sup>. ‘In a global free market’, writes Gray (2007), ‘war and tyranny will disappear. Humanity will advance to unprecedented heights’ (120).

The gradual increase of the demand for production presupposes extensive devotion to *labouring* and, therefore, excessive devotion to *personal time*. Consider, for example, the following *decreasing functions*:

- A. *labour* = personal - common/public time (political and/or public). In short, from a fixed amount of a given daily time, the more one dedicates in *work* and *labour* the more the potential availability of his/her time (to be dedicated in other activities) decreases. Let us assume, for instance, that the total amount of one’s waking hours is 15 (17 hours and 2 hour of intermediate breaks are excluded). In the event one decides to dedicate 8 hours in activities involving *work* or *labour*, seemingly he has 7 hours available to spend with his/her fellows in the *public-political* sphere. The increase of *private time* (for *work* and *labour*) to 9 hours leads to the shrinkage of *public-political time* from 7 to 6 hours. To avoid misunderstandings: apart from *work* and *labour*, *private time* may also refer to activities revolving around family (children) and to all sort of activities shielded within the walls of one’s private household. Thus, if one decides to dedicate 8 hours in activities involving *work* or *labour*, he has 6 hours to spend not only on *public-political* activities but also on

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49 From a different angle: of course, Locke’s philosophical relevance to perfectibilism must not escape our attention. While (as the mentioned in the beginning of this section as well as in the previous chapter) passages of Locke’s *Second Treatise* (1689/1998) echo Hobbes’s *realist* view on human nature, in his *Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693/1968), one of the main assertions pushed forward in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689/1978), namely his view of human mind as a *tabula rasa*, an empty room to be furnished by educators (Passmore 2000: 246), is pushed forward. Young children, writes Locke, are ‘white paper, or wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases’ (Locke 1968: 325). In addition, ‘few of Adam’s children ... are so happy, as not to be born with some bias in their natural temper, which it is the business of education either to take off, or counterbalance’ (244). In short, men and women ‘can be morally improved to an unlimited degree by education’ but also through ‘other forms of social action’ (250). Notice that Locke rejects the doctrine of original sin, assuming (implicitly) that ‘bias’ is ‘always of a kind which education ‘can (and must) eradicate (Passmore 2000: 243). In this respect, this particular aspect of Locke’s liberalism, so long as it denies man’s inherited and deep-seated ‘bias’, can offer some ground for optimism, assuming that human corruption is corrigible and, hence, the idea of earthly perfection considerable.

other personal activities. Likewise, the decrease of the available time to be dedicated in *work* and *labour* does not immediately imply ‘more’ *public-political time*. Consider, for example, Lasch’s (1991a; 1991b; 1995a: 95; 1995b) critique of the ‘professionalisation’ of life in postwar urbanised/industrialised America: Lasch sheds light on the process whereby the equitation of ‘opportunity with upward mobility’ (1995a: 50) and the ‘illusory hope of individual advancement’ (through corporate/professional *work*) (53), abridged the contact between children and parents. Careerism, the desire for individual advancement, forced men and women to adjust their standards and living patterns, to expand their focus on work ventures, at the expense of their personal (family) time or even *public* time as well (1991a: 1995b). In general terms, the shrinkage of our *public-political time* often comes as a consequence of the increase of *working* and *labouring* day.

- B. *action* = public - personal time. The more time one consumes dealing with issues afflicting the public life the more he/she reduces his/her availability for *private time* and, more importantly, for *work* and *labor*.

To make a long story short, the *homo economicus*, who withdraws into his/her *private* sphere, who becomes a cog in the machine of unlimited economic progress and expansion, reduces his/her availability to interact with his/her peers in the *public-political realm*. In ‘societies of laborers and jobholders’ (Arendt 1998: 46), *labour* (or *work*) ‘has assumed an all-pervading role in modern life’, claims Jacques Ellul (1965: 140). ‘[M]an works much more nowadays than, for example, in the [early] eighteenth century’, before the Industrial Revolution, (ibid), which led to the expansion of the working day, according to Arendt (1998: 132). Of course ‘[t]hanks to [technology and] automation, the nature of labor and work has fundamentally changed’, and work has become ‘more productive or more efficient, to evoke an economic mantra’ (Alonso 2013: 123), without constantly demanding expansion of the working day. ‘Wealth accumulates because different technologies either make the usual resources more productive or they create new avenues for the extracting of value’ (ibid)<sup>50</sup>. But, despite the decrease of working hours during the

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50 ‘At the same time, financial benefit is not the only motivator for work. For many engineers, programmers, and media artists the main purpose is to produce exciting new artifacts or to put imagination in motion (Alonso 2013: 123).



nineteenth century, claims Ellul (1965), the ‘omnipresence of the duties of ... work’ and its intensity ‘make it weigh much more heavily on men today than on men in the past’ (140). Ellul’s assertion, that modern men and women work ‘more than the slave of long ago’ (141) could incite controversies<sup>51</sup>. Nonetheless, kernels of truth probably exist in his claim that ‘the slave worked only because he was forced to’ whilst modern men and women who believe ‘in freedom and dignity’ invent ‘*justifications* to make [themselves] work’ (ibid; *emphasis added*). Let us recall Lasch’s (1995a) position concerning the pursuit of upward mobility, sold as the ultimate escape from poverty, misery and inequality (50; 53). Hence, was not the ‘illusion’ (Lasch 1991a: 53) of upward mobility a ‘*justification*’ that made ‘men and women to work more’, in Ellul’s (1965: 141) terms, dedicating most of their time and energy in *work* and *labour*?

The weaponisation of *labour* and *work* for and the subsequent removal of the ‘common citizen’ from the institutions of political life is not merely a characteristic of modernity. Aristotle was well aware of the way *labour* and material abundance (*personal time*) erect barriers against *public time*, against *political action*. In *Αθηναίων Πολιτεία* (2008) [*The Athenian Republic* (2008)] he discusses Peisistratus’ tyrannical rule and its implications for Athenian public and private life. A quick note: for the Greeks, tyranny was not synonymous with According to Locke (2008), ‘tyranny is ‘the exercise of Power beyond Right’ (Locke 1998: 398) that ‘we cannot ... be obliged’ to follow by ‘any government to which we have not given some sign of consent’ (Laslett 1988: 111), or with ‘what contravenes basic morality and justice’, according to the definition given by the radical thinkers of the eighteenth century (Israel 2010: 91). It ‘was a form of government in which the ruler ... had monopolized for himself the right of action’ and ‘banished citizens from the public realm into the privacy of their households’ (Arendt 1990: 130). ‘A state ... in which there is no communication between the citizens and where each man thinks only his own thoughts is by definition a tyranny’ (Arendt 1968a: 164). When Peisistratus came to power, argues Aristotle (2008 [Αριστοτέλης 2008]), impoverished yeomen received financial aid and land. Effectively, their standards of living improved. Gradually they became absorbed by their private *labour* (farming and agriculture). In effect, their available

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51 ‘Even the children in a modern nation’, adds Ellul (1965), ‘do an amount of work at school which no child was ever asked to do before the beginning of the nineteenth century’ (141).

time for the public affairs [ἐπιμελείσθαι τῶν κοινῶν] effectively decreased (94-6).

### 3) Optimism and liberal anti-populism: the ‘invisible hand’

To recapitulate: unlike the Hobbesian paradigm, which constitutes the domain of politics exclusively the task of one man, the *possessive market society* eliminates *action* by expanding *private time*, emphasising *labour* and considering economic progress as ‘the alpha and omega of men’s political salvation’ (Michea 2009: 68). ‘If the rate of [economic] growth declines’ argues Michea (2009), if the supply of product is reduced, ‘the pacification of the social bonds will be threatened in its very foundation’ (67). As the markets expand, ‘the sources of human conflict are reduced’ (Gray 2007: 120).

As Carroll (2010) pointed out, the belief in progress did not only depend on the economic expansion and the unlimited expansion of production through science and technology. It also rested on ‘a confidence in the resources of the individual, on the assumption that he would flourish in a ‘liberal’ society in which there was a minimum of legislative constraint—that he would progress and take the society as a whole with him’ (10). For Hayek (1980), individualism begins with ‘John Locke, and particularly with Bernard Mandeville and David Hume, and achieved full stature for the first time in the work of Josiah Tucker, Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith’ (4), ‘to whom nobody will deny the title of individualist,’ (5). ‘[T]he belief that individualism approves and encourages human selfishness is one of the main reasons why so many people dislike it’ (13)<sup>52</sup>.

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52 Hayek (1980)’s view of individualism is contrasted with the ‘pseudo-individualism’ (10), or else ‘social contract individualism’ (10), offered by French and other Continental writers, such as Descartes, Rousseau and the thinkers of the French Revolution. This ‘rationalistic individualism always tends to develop into the opposite of individualism, namely, socialism or collectivism’ (4). It suggests that every social design should follow the will and reason of one single individual (10). Instead, Hayek’s individualism derives from the English tradition and ‘regards man not as a highly rational and intelligent but as a very irrational and fallible being’ (8). It assumes that ‘the existence of isolated or self-contained individuals’, acting independently from society (6), could ‘achieve more than individual human reason could design or foresee’ (11). Hayek considers the conflation of this individualism with ‘the bogey of the “economic man”’, with selfishness and *possessive individualism*, to use Macpherson’s (1983) terms, a common ‘misconception’ spread by the philosophers of continental rationalism (Hayek 1980: 11). However, as Arendt’s (1976) argued (see also the previous section), when human beings are cut off from their community and act independently from society, they (potentially) develop a ‘new increased interest’ in possession and end up judging their individual private life ‘by comparing it with that of others’ and their relations

Although Locke's theory of *possessive individualism* considers capital accumulation 'morally and expediently rational *per se*' (Macpherson' 183: 235). it does not encourage selfishness, boundless material abundance, claims Kuttner (2019: 36). Locke's thought, from its outset, insisted on thrift (ibid). Locke was 'by no means a consistent utilitarian' (Passmore 2000: 250) and knew very well that unlimited individual possession and consumption could produce scarcity due to over accumulation of goods in the hands of a minority (Kuttner 2019: 292). Unlike his predecessors (Mandeville and Hume, for instance), Locke emphasised *possessive individualism* and unlimited accumulation of land and capital not in order to justify greed and lavishness at the expense of friendship, charity and mutual aid. 'Locke was no theorist of individual license' (37). As Fukuyama (1992) put it, Locke's first man strives to 'open up the possibility of obtaining more without limit' (159), not, however, in order to support a theory of individual abundance. The unlimited appropriation and cultivation of land could produce and, hence, supply an increasing number of products in the market, making possession easier even to those who are left without sufficient land (Macpherson 1983: 204). In addition, the unlimited accumulation of money, as a reward for man's *labour*, allows unlimited access to property for those who have no land to cultivate for themselves (Locke 1988: 391; Fukuyama 1992: 204; Gronow 2016: 228). Money 'would take in exchange for truly useful, but perishable Supports of Life' (Locke 1988: 301). It would save labour 'from its manifest disgrace of producing only "things of short duration"' (Arendt 1998: 102), things that will spoil and perish if they are accumulated but not immediately consumed (Locke 1988: 300).

Of course, economic liberalism *per se*, as it has been articulated by Adam Smith and (later on by Milton Friedman), does not exclusively flow from Locke's theory. Spencer and Hayek carried the idea of *possessive individualism* to new extremes. Both considered a global free market a historical terminus (Gray 2007: 105). Spencer's 'rational utilitarian' theory (Gray 1989: 109) proposed 'a future society based on *laissez-faire* industrialism' (Gray 2007: 83). Spencer (1978) embraced the hedonistic value of 'ethical theories' that must lead 'the ultimately supreme end, [private] happiness special and general' (204). His 'equal-freedom principle ... that each and every man should possess the greatest right to

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with their fellow-men 'inside society take the form of competition (141).

freedom consistent with every other man possessing that same right' (Gray 1989: 112), that every man 'is free to do that which he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man' (Spencer 1978: 62), is understood in relatedness to personal pleasure. Individual liberty (whose primary aim is private happiness) requires limitation of State interference (Gray 1989: 104) and boundless maximisation of (private) happiness (108), even at the expense of political participation. The role of the State is to ensure that this maximisation of happiness does not interfere with the happiness of others (Spencer 1978: 62). William Howard Taft (during the American Gilded Age), for example, who was inspired by Spencer, argued that 'freedom was all about the protection of individual rights—above all, the right to property. Democracy had to be curtailed to the extent that it threatened these rights' (De Dijn 2020: 327). William Graham Sumner, a professor in Yale University, 'rejected the idea that freedom was to be equated with democratic self-government' (5). Instead, he argued that 'liberty needed protection from democracy' and restriction of universal suffrage (310). He insisted in the doctrine of "*laissez faire*," or, in blunt English, "mind your own business" (5), that is, on the doctrine of endless personal gain, individual felicity (or pleasure) and unrestrained property accumulation as the only antidote to social chaos. From a contextualist point of view, one could claim that Spencer lived and wrote within an age profoundly influenced by economic liberal (or proto-liberal/proto-utilitarian) views, like the ones we have already spotted in Locke's theories. As a matter of fact, Locke's justification for boundless accumulation of money and capital, as a means to overcome the spoilage limitation, is explicitly thought by Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776/2012). '[C]onsumable commodities ... are soon destroyed; whereas gold and silver are of a more durable nature, and were it not for this continual exportation, might be accumulated for ages together...', claims Adam Smith (2012: 429). The introduction of money as 'the instrument of commerce and as the measure of value' (Adam Smith 2012: 419) could 'provide both the opportunity and the reason (which could not have existed previously) for a man 'to enlarge his Possessions beyond the use of his Family, and plentiful to supply to its Consumption, either in what their own Industry produced, or they could barter for like perishable, useful Commodities, with others' claims Macpherson (1983: 205), while reflecting on Locke's *Second Treatise*. It should not be neglected that '[i]n Smith's opinion ... the continuously growing wealth of a nation' guarantees 'a decent

living even for the lower ranks of people’ (Gronow 2016: 235).

Furthermore in the state of nature (claims Locke) what prevented human beings from acting rationally was primarily ‘the absence of money and markets’ (Macpherson 1983: 205). Hence, apart from serving and protecting the rule of law, ‘limiting abuses of public and private power’ (Kuttner 2019: 37), a liberal state must create social environments within which competitive markets can thrive and prosper (Friedman 2002: 2; Macpherson 1983: 53). Apart from exceptional circumstances, where coercive means (prerogative) must be used (by the state), in most cases government intervention has to remain as limited as possible (Keynes 2009: 20-1). The aim is to allow economic competition to ‘run “free and undistorted”’ (Michea 2009: 68). As a matter of fact, it was initially Locke who considered ‘the process of growing wealth as a natural process, automatically following its own laws and beyond willful decisions and purposes’ (Arendt 1998: 111). Put otherwise, the capitalist markets constitute an autonomous, rational, self-regulated and impersonal mechanism (Hayek 1980: 21; Adam Smith 2012: 425) that ‘runs according to immutable laws of its own...’ (Lasch 1977: 7). The self-regulated market, the laissez-faire system, is an economy exclusively directed by market prices and demand (Polanyi 2001: 45; Adam Smith 2012: 425). It is a system ‘capable of organizing the whole of economic life without outside help or interference...’ (Polanyi 2001: 45), expanding production and increasing the distribution of goods in the market (71). It is ‘the central institution of a liberal society’ (Lasch 1995a: 95); it supervises and dictates all political decisions. This ‘invisible hand’ harmonises the chaos of selfish acts of individuals without the need of coercion (Κονδύλης 2007: 81 [Kondylis 2007: 81]; Adam Smith 2012: 445). Notwithstanding sentiments of rapacity and selfishness are stronger in wealthy men, whose sole end is the satisfaction of their own convenience, which they obtain ‘from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ’, argues Adam Smith (2006), this invisible hand reduces inequalities by distributing ‘the necessities of life which would have been made had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants’ (182). It always identifies the most useful and stable solution for society, a solution that requires no administrative measures nevertheless (Κονδύλης 2007: 219 [Kondylis 2007: 219]). Thus, the invisible hand requires no ‘human reason’ (Gray 2007: 122), no *doxa*, no disagreement or political consultation, from the moment it (supposedly) has the capacity to automatically

create the exact conditions within which well-being and material abundance for everyone are safeguarded. Smith's conception of the 'invisible hand' was spelt out 'in theistic terms' (Gray 2007: 122). The invisible hand was literally the hand of the divine providence, working for the common benefit (Adam Smith 2006: 182). It is true that Smith (2006; 2012) never looked forward to the so-called perfectibility of *anthrōpos*, assuming that economic liberalism was 'a utopia suited for imperfect creatures' nevertheless, summarises Griswold (1999), one could easily take this 'divine' characteristics of the 'invisible hand' for granted as guarantors for optimism, assuming that the expansion of the market will naturally (and almost inevitably) lead to future perfection. As Polanyi (2001) argues, the whole social philosophy of economic liberalism was hinged on the conception that it constitutes 'a natural development...' (148).

Furthermore, economic liberalism by associating private well-being with the common good, led not only to the demise of *political* time but also to the annihilation of all *public time* in general, of the time one could spend with his/her peers in religious gatherings and/or cultural activities. It wiped out the 'routine phases of social interaction', which according Whitehead (2009), sustains (cultural) memory and 'binds people together', demonstrating 'the ways in which periods of apparent inactivity are filled with a variety of ritual and ceremonial acts of commemoration that are not only help the recall of particular events but also serve to hold the community together' (128). Industrialisation and innovation wiped away old folkways, eroded customs, annihilated the communal sense of the old village life (Laslett 1965: 61; Kloppenberg 2016: 13) and 'created a mass society' (Laslett 1965: 18) of 'fluid social arrangements' (Kloppenber 2016: 13), dominated by brutal economic exploitation and moral degradation (Thompson 1993: 9; Polanyi 2001: 41). Marx and Engels—who sympathised with the idea of progress—in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848/2013) celebrated the disappearance of the aristocratic ideals and the destruction of the extended patriarchal family, the milestone of the *societas civilis* (Κονδύλης 2007: 214; 236 [Kondylis 2007: 214; 236]), by the capitalist order, dominated by 'naked self-interest' and 'callous "cash payment"' (Marx and Engels 2013: 61). As with Fukuyama (1992), economic modernisation requires 'traditional forms of social organization like tribe, sect, and family' to be replaced by 'economically rational ones based on function and efficiency' (xv). In other words, economic liberalism contributed to

the gradual marginalisation of cultural institutions ‘responsible for containing ... erstwhile vices (such as greed)’ considered ‘as enemies of economic dynamism’ (Deneen 2018: 69)<sup>53</sup>.

In Arendt’s (1998) thought, when objects (pieces of art, more importantly) privately produced, come out in the capitalist marketplace, they are measured according to the relativity of value-exchange (167). The process of public mediation (public time), where cultural objects become subjects to public debates for reasons other than money-value, brings individuals closer to one another; through common appearance, open debates and conversations, and lasting collective bonds are gradually formed (Arendt 1998: 167; Klein 2014: 859). In contrast, (‘Lockean’) liberalism (economic) ‘teaches a people to ... adopt flexible relationships and bonds’ and ‘encourages loose connections’ (Deneen 2018: 34), which are incapable of preserving worldliness. But in spite of its impotence to preserve permanence, in spite of its hostility for the past, stimulated by a deep seated faith in a better future (Hale 2011: 92; Deneen 2018: 74), the ‘Lockean’ model never went as far as to obliterate memory *tout court*, as has been the case of post-scarcity (or post-war) liberal capitalism. Post-scarcity capitalism, instead, and the consolidation of mass society replaced old-fashioned norms (Lasch 1991b: 73; 232; Frank 1997: 235; Κονδύλης 2007: 249; 255 [Kondylis 2007: 249; 255]) with hedonism and moral indifference (Κονδύλης 2007: 249 [Kondylis 2007: 249]). It cultivated a ‘collective consumer *mentality*’ (Baudrillard 2016: 49), bringing the Western world ‘at the point where consumption is laying hold of the

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53 To avoid misunderstandings: Patrick J. Deneen’s work *Why Liberalism Failed* (2018) offers some valuable insights concerning the way liberalism, with its emphasis on voluntarism and individualism, attacks community and culture. Nonetheless, in an article published by Robert Kuttner for *The New York Review* (2018), Deneen is accused of generalising. Deneen blames liberalism as a whole (argues Kuttner) for legitimising personal gain at the expense of identity and community. By blaming liberalism as a whole, Deneen throws the baby out with the bathwater: the contribution of liberalism itself to the destruction of absolutism, to universal suffrage (Kuttner 2018) and the insistence of several liberal thinkers (including Locke, Montesquie and Tocqueville) on thrift (as mentioned earlier) is downplayed. Deneen’s assertions, that liberalism has eradicated culture and tradition, are valid for specific liberal variants, and (more precisely) for ideologies that draw on eighteenth-century economic liberalism, which legitimises personal gain and possession, projecting the market as the sole arbiter of all collective life. Henceforth, when referring to Deneen’s ‘liberalism’ I use adjectives (like, for instance, economic liberalism, or ‘Lockean’ liberalism).



whole life' (46). Thus, as opposed to Hayek (1960), who believed that a successful capitalist society would still be 'in large measure a tradition-bond society', so long as the free market does not simply respects tradition but also relies on it (157), indications prompt us to treat the constant and rapid expansion of consumerism (one of the main features of liberal capitalism itself) with scepticism when it comes to its impact on deeply rooted folkways.

Discussions concerning the implications of *permissive liberalism*, its impacts on memory due to its excessive optimism and nihilism, must be postponed until the next chapter. In the next section, further theoretical analysis—coupled with empirical data from historical case-studies (mainly from the eighteenth century England as well as from the late nineteenth century American South)—will shed light on the practical impacts of liberal optimism. Far from fulfilling its promise, to re-model the world in such a way where the endless expansion of the market forces will lead to 'continuous betterment', as Goodwyn (1976: vii) believed, or to the so-called *telos* of history, as others (Fukuyama 1982; Gray 2007) have argue. In several cases economic progress and modernisation intensified existing injustices, as Henry George (2006) noted, causing political disenfranchisement. Instead, the brightest beam of hope for economic justice and common decency was and is populism and *action* (the *vita civile*). As I will explain in what follows, ethical memory boosts resilience and fortitude against pathos, shaping an ethic of self-limitation.

### Dispensing with the Leviathan

#### 1) Optimism and economic progress: facts and case-studies

According to Canovan (1998), 'modernization has turned out to be extraordinarily good at increasing production, consumption, and procreation, giving rise to a vastly expanded human race which is producing and consuming more than ever before' (xiv). Modernisation, according to Inglehart and Baker (2000), by achieving high levels of security, produced a shift 'from absolute norms' (19) 'toward secular values ... [of] tolerance, trust, subjective well-being' (42) values 'that are increasingly rational, tolerant, trusting, and participatory' (19). Free markets enhanced 'political freedom around the globe' (Fukuyama 1992: xiv); economic progress 'during the past two centuries' and free enterprise have significantly reduced poverty, elevating the standards of living in the



Western world (Friedman 2002: 190). In Fukuyama's (1992) words, free markets 'have succeeded in producing unprecedented levels of material prosperity, both in industrially developed countries and in countries that had been ... impoverished' (Fukuyama 1992: xiii). Free trade has become a means of linking nations together 'peacefully and democratically' (5).

Right at the beginning of the eighteenth century, claims Hill (1992) 'more than one in five of the population was receiving poor relief' but wages began to rise 'for all the poorest' (258). Statistics reveal that the national income and the average wage rates 'went up after 1789' (260). As Emma Griffin (2013) argued, '[i]ndustrial growth' during the eighteenth century 'provided the labouring poor with a degree of personal freedom' (19); industrial growth increased the prospect of better wages and privacy, especially for navvies, notwithstanding their harsh and insecure employment conditions (45-6). The author challenges the conventional view, that the industrial expansion 'heralded the advent ... of a yet 'darker period'' (20). Instead, industrialisation signified the 'dawn of liberty' (ibid), the 'era of rising wealth' (31), the era of overt optimism. Other authors highlight the negative impacts of economic progress (especially in the countryside) for men, women, as well as children, who were forced to *labour* on a daily basis with no rest (Hill 1992: 270; 272). The Industrial Revolution converted metropolises, like London, into 'new places of desolation' (Polanyi's 2001: 41), that had been converted into pools of unemployment and many workers were under-employed, or forced to labour long hours for low wages, without collective bargaining or health protection (Hill 1992: 263; Polanyi 2001: 42; Griffin 2013: 32; 34). 'From the age of seven children in factories had to work twelve to fifteen hours a day (or night), six days a week, "at best in monotonous toil, at worst in a hell of human cruelty"' (Hill 1992: 264). While industrialisation resulted to the 'decline of the apprenticeship system', it 'created new opportunities for learning a skilled trade' (Griffin 2013: 35); the rapid economic expansion that took place between 1750 and 1850, led to an increase of the demand for these new skills those with skills (ibid). While life was difficult, claims the same author, at the same time 'life was changing' (ibid). However, no substantial evidence indicates the dawning of a new peaceful and prosperous era: at the beginning of the twentieth century a quarter of the population in Britain was still in poverty; families were still incapable of maintaining their physical efficiency (Laslett

1965: 246; 254). Paupers had lower living expectancy than the whole population during the Stuart times (253). Income tax figures reveal that only one in twenty-five persons could enjoy middle class living standards, and millions were only aspiring ‘to live as only a few hundred thousand of people could in fact afford to live’ (260).

In Weil’s (1987a) terms, ‘[t]he economic liberalism of the nineteenth century’ relies entirely on the assumption that ‘force’ must enter ‘into the sphere of human relations’ in order to become ‘an automatic producer of justice’, a force that ‘must take the form of money’ (*labour*), inasmuch as ‘all use either of arms or of political power’ become superfluous (231) (see also the previous section). This assertion leads us to the following conclusion: if the optimism of economic progress, which relies on the rule of money (as *force*), has led to the increase of the living standards for certain portions of the British population, but generated economic injustices for others, it is because *force* itself constitutes ‘a blind mechanism which produces indiscriminately and impartially just or unjust results, but by all the laws of probability, nearly always unjust ones’ (232). More importantly, since economic liberalism employs money as *force* and if money as a *force* excludes political *action*, it precludes all sorts of human intervention from issues of economic distribution, effectively throws off *virtù* and abandons society to the appetites of *fortuna* (Chapter 2), of the ‘mistress’ that either brings success or becomes the source of misery and disasters, indiscriminately and arbitrarily (Machiavelli 1970: 371; 1992: 66). In order to crystallise this point let us return one more time to the analysis concerning the *magmatic* aspect of collective institutioning: since human collectivities resist rational planning, they cannot be made to order according to the demands of the ‘invisible hand’, which (supposedly) knows what is good for all societies by simply making rational calculations<sup>54</sup>. This, in conjunction with the exclusion of human involvement from politics (mainly from issues dealing with economic distribution) leaves the society ungoverned, deprived of its *virtù* and, hence, at the mercy of *fortuna*.

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54 The paradox of economic liberalism rests in its fierce opposition to economic planning, which—as, for instance, Hayek (2007) stated, is prone to lead to authoritarian forms of collectivism (76-79)—but, as Polanyi (2001) asserted, even the self-regulated market pattern requires the state to create the appropriate conditions ‘which make the market the only organizing power in the economic sphere’ (72). The state must set up plans that will tame and shape a society, enabling its members to become rational producers and consumers, shaping their attitudes according to the standards of the self-regulated markets.

In addition, the theory of *laissez-faire*, according to Keynes (2009), neglects ‘actual facts’ and relies on hypothetical scenarios concerning the possible outcomes of the so-called ‘organic’ (or self-regulated) ‘process of production and consumption’ (31). In my view, these ‘actual facts’ are not mere economic factors, like (for instance) ‘internal economies’ that ‘tend to the aggregation of production’ or ‘monopolies and combinations’ which ‘interfere with equality in bargaining’ to name a few (32) but the outcomes of human vulnerability, of the pathos for unlimited (and often illegitimate) acquisition. Thus, to leave a society ungoverned (at the mercy of *fortuna*) without taking *action*, without allowing ‘the common people’ to impose measures through which this pathos for illegitimate wealth accumulation is constrained, allows certain social groups to take advantage of this anarchic condition, imposing their own order in favour of their own pathos and greed (of their own self-interest). Consequently, if force (as money) produces ‘nearly always unjust’ results (Weil 1987a: 232), this is owed to the fact that the market pattern, instead of being detached from the state of society operates through its institutions. It is, therefore, susceptible to the pathos for domination, to the greed of certain groups that escape public control (especially since there is no popular body politic to allow ‘the common people’ exercise control over them) and, hence, find themselves in a position to corrupt, suppress and expand their monopoly through capital accumulation. We will return to this claim later on.

Let us consider again one of the main points made in the previous chapter whilst reflecting on Castoriadis and Jung (especially in second half of the third section). Two modes of collective institutioning, the rational (*legein* and *teuchein*) and the *magmatic*, have been identified, leading us to the following conclusion: the forces (pathos) that determine the identity of a collectivity, as well as the reality within which members of a collectivity live in, cannot be always put under the control of human consciousness. Therefore, if human collectivities (often) defy rational planning and cannot be put under the dictates of the ‘invisible hand’, and if the social anarchy of economic liberalism permits self-interested groups to ascend into power (as long as there is no popular body politic to oppose and resist their objectives), these groups in order to bring a society in line with the standards of the market pattern that has been put under the sway of their own pathos for unlimited acquisition, must have its own spontaneity limited. This requires government planning, coercion and increased surveillance (even at the expense of opposition and

dissent). Perhaps this explains the abyss between the way economic liberalism is perceived in theory, as a ‘natural’ and self-evolving mechanism that opposes central planning as a system that would constitute unleash the human potential for progress, constituting coercion and authoritarianism unnecessary, superfluous and obsolete (Hayek 2007: 76-9), with the fact that the same socio-economic model, as Polanyi (2001) observed, always needed the iron fist of the state (145). As he asserts, ‘the road to the free market was opened and kept open by enormous increase in continuous, centrally organized and controlled interventionism’ (146). ‘[F]ree markets could never come into being merely by allowing things to take their course’ without ‘enormous increase in the administrative functions of the state’ endowed ‘with a central bureaucracy able to fulfill the tasks set by the adherents of liberalism’ (145). Put otherwise, since political decisions precede markets, a strong state capable of supporting and defending the (rational) capitalist plan is always required. Furthermore, the modern capitalist enterprise in order to come into existence, presupposes ‘a judiciary and administration’, a legislative power capable of acting ‘more or less overtly as a regulator of the market’ and as a subsidiser of the market itself (Scott 2006: 177). However, if (as mentioned in the previous section) the capitalist state (the one prefigured by the ‘Lockean’/utilitarian worldview) restricts mass political involvement (*action*) and in absence of popular involvement and control opens up pathways for powerful groups to hijack the body politic, imposing their own order, we could assume that the bureaucratic administration, which according to Polanyi (2001), sought to remodel societies according to the principles of the free market/capitalist economy (unlimited accumulation of capital through boundless expansion) was carried out by such groups, whose primary aim was the pursuit of their own self-interested goals. Below we elaborate on historical examples where greed and rampant self-interest, exercised by such powerful groups (in the name of economic liberalisation) led to mass pauperisation.

The story ‘of enclosure and industrial revolution’, claims Hill (1992), revealed the paradoxes of economic optimism and rationality ‘the eighteenth century had inherited from John Locke’, which on the one hand created work and (ostensibly) increased the living conditions and, on the other, forced the poor to work harder ‘in unfree circumstances’ (273). More importantly, it failed to deliver the promise of material abundance, suggesting that ‘all human problems could be resolved given an unlimited amount of material

commodities’ (Polanyi 2001: 42). In the countryside, when small owners were bought out by large property sellers in order to facilitate the enclosure of commons, pauperisation rapidly increased (Hill 1992: 271). Simultaneously, the ‘small’ and ‘intimate’ parochial institutions of self-government in villages that traditionally ‘had considerable autonomy’ (Magnusson 2015: 35) disappeared, once the entire economic and social life of the village passed into the hands of rich landowners (Hill 1992: 271). A ‘rural democracy’ ceased to exist as “‘the yeomen farmers were declining in numbers’”, being forced to move to industrial metropolises in order to labour in factories (ibid). While economic modernisation improved literacy levels (as it is commonly believed), high illiteracy in the English countryside during the pre-industrial era had not been an obstacle for the average villager (Laslett 1965: 229-31), who—while living an ‘entirely oral life’ (245)—could ‘take part in [local] governance at one remove’ (234). What the destruction of the autonomy of the English village indicates is that the triumph of liberal optimism, of industrialisation and modernisation, was the equivalent of the triumph of *freedom* and democracy. Liberal optimism conforms to a mode of being that, in certain cases, becomes a ticket to elitism, political disenfranchisement (or anti-populism) and economic hardship.

In the same way, during the American Reconstruction era, economic reforms tied to the doctrine of ‘laissez faire individualism’, ‘the most dynamic and seemingly irrepressible force’, premised on the idea ‘that an unrestrained market economy was the only safe road to prosperity and future happiness’ (Clanton 1991: 5), led to the deterioration of economic injustice, widening at the same time the gap between political representatives (the elites) and ‘the common people’ (Goodwyn 1976). The main objectives of such reforms was economic progress through the demonetising of silver, which suited the country’s financial leaders and many Wall Street bankers (Canovan 1981: 24; Postel 2007: vii-viii). Such reforms caused ‘contraction in the money supply’ (Canovan 1981: 23) that benefited the banking-creditors (Argersinger 1974: 5; Goodwyn 1976: 14) who ‘had little or no regard for the democratic creed’ (Clanton 1991: 6). It led to a rapid increase in unemployment, massive reduction in food prices, depression in businesses activity and inflicted cruel hardships upon debtors (mainly the nation’s farmers) (Canovan 1981: 23) and most of all, to political disenfranchisement (Argersinger 1974: 6). Contraction, which resulted in the increase of the value of the dollar and forced the prices down (Canovan

1981: 23), caused indebtedness, which was ‘felt most severely in the agrarian South and West’ (Clanton 1991: 12). In turn, the farmer’s debt ‘was worth more to his creditors’ (Canovan 1981: 23). Consequently, the farmers ended up ‘paying the interest on it required more and more bushels of wheat or bales of cotton’ (ibid). Simultaneously, the increasing influence of the banking system, resulted in the rapid growth of gigantic railroad corporations, upon which sections of independent producers relied in order to access the West of the country (19). But the farmers ‘needed cheap credit and transportation to get their produce to the East’ (Müller 2016: 87) while ‘[w]estern freight charges were sometimes four times as high as the rate for the same distance in the East’ (Canovan 1981: 19). Hence, they felt at the mercy ‘of banks and railroad owners’ (Müller 2016: 87) Others had to borrow in order to ‘get in on the boom in Western lands’ (Canovan 1981: 20). Seeking to bypass the credit system, the farmers set up cooperatives, small production units of production (Lasch 1991a: 219-20), ending ‘their reliance on the Eastern banking and railroad establishments’ (Taggart 2002: 27). They set up public assemblies and discovered new technologies in order to build up networks of democratic communication (Lasch 1991a: 219-20) and ‘disciplined a lecturing system designed to mobilize grass-roots support for political insurgency’ (McMath 1992: 143).

As the campaigner John Grant Otis stated, the cooperative movement emerged ‘from an age of intense individualism, supreme selfishness, and ungodly greed to a period of co-operative effort’ (quoted by Clanton 1991: 47); it was ‘a moment of democratic promise’ (Goodwyn 1976: 542) through which a new language emerged, ‘fashioned out of [an] old heritage’ (xi), echoing the Jacksonian principles of universal suffrage and active citizenship, reflecting on certain variants of the liberal anti-absolutism in conjunction with republican elements of an old Anglo-American political tradition (Lasch 1991a: 219; 223; McMath 1992: 52). As opposed to the optimism of economic liberalism, whose only remedy to the problem of mass poverty is excessive reliance on large scale production and ‘innovative industrialism’ (Lasch 1991a: 217), the cooperative movement echoed Jefferson’s hostility towards elitism, excessive wealth and large proprietorship, who (like the farmers) praised small proprietorship as the necessary foundation of all civic virtue (Nelson 2006: 204-5). Such an ardent defense of small business organisation and small (private) property ownership is not an indicator of economic dominance over politics. The

Populists (partially inspired by classical republicanism) considered small property ownership and personal independence an essential prerequisite of (active) citizenship (Lasch 1995a: 92; 1991a: 219; 223)<sup>55</sup>.

The movement was not exclusively concerned with issues revolving around the need for equal wealth (re)distribution. To focus only on the economic demands of the farmers, claims Argersinger (1974), downplays the most essential aspect of their grievances, namely ‘the charge of the misuse of public power and the exclusion of agrarian representation’ (5). For Clanton (1991), the Populists sought to enact ‘new laws based on the natural rights of men’ (167); they pushed forward political reforms, including women’s suffrage and the secret ballot (Clanton 1991: 83; 129; 131; McMath 1992: 125; 127).

The *vita civile* is best exemplified by the cooperative movement, a historical case-study that stresses the explicit interrelation of economic justice and *action* in the pursuit of common decency<sup>56</sup>. Unlike economic liberalism, which subordinates public life to the never-ending process of individual production and consumption (*labour/private time*), acclaiming productivism as the only valid response to material scarcity, for the *vita civile* all forms of injustices (including economic deprivation) presuppose, first and foremost, the equal distribution of political power to the ‘common people’ (and not just the random distribution of material goods). More importantly, the intense anti-populism of productivism not only impede economic justice but also obstruct the growth of political experience, *id est*, of ethical memory, through which moral transgressions are discouraged. Let us take this issue further by bringing to the discussion additional theoretical and philosophical perspectives.

## 2) The *vita civile*: ethical memory and meliorism

As Polanyi (2001) put it, ‘[e]conomic liberalism misread the history of the Industrial Revolution because it insisted on judging social events from the economic

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55 For more regarding the insistence of the *weltanschauung* of classical republicanism to small proprietorship—as opposed to the idealisation of unlimited acquisition, advocated by the ‘Lockean’ mode—see Chapter 7.

56 For more concerning American Populism and active citizenship (*agonal* or *narrative action*) see Chapter 6, where extensive discussion about the cooperative and participatory commonwealths set up by the farmers themselves takes place.

viewpoint' (35-6). By insisting on viewing 'social events' and concepts as consequences of economic moves and money relations, exclusively revolving around the issue of property acquisition, financial security, competition and scarcity, economic liberalism construed absolutism and freedom, arbitrary rule and free will, from a standpoint confined within the narrow prism of materialism. Consequently, when economic liberals aspired to defeat absolutism once and for all, instead of associating the Leviathan, the serpent of fertility and life, according to Frye (1982: 189), first and foremost with *political* power (as Hobbes had initially done) that was ought to be dispensed from the monarchs and the aristocratic classes to the 'common people' (according to the principles of classical republicanism), they conceived it as a mere source of material supply, which was ought to be dispensed to the plebs, through the market pattern and through the unlimited expansion of heavy industry. In contrast, the *vita civile*, drawing on classical republicanism, prioritises distribution of political power. Consider again the following quote: '[t]hou [God] didst break in pieces the heads of leviathan, thou gavest him to be meat to those that people the desert' (*The Bible*, Psalm 74:14). We should treat the word 'meat' as a metaphor; it does not imply actual meat, a source of food through which human life is maintained (*labour*); instead, it points to government and lawmaking, to political power, the source (the 'food') whereby the life of the political realm is sustained. Far from being a mere material force, the Leviathan symbolises the ability and potential of initiating, speaking, influencing and obliging others by means of persuasion, while acting prudently in the pursuit of common decency.

The political realm, by liberating human beings from 'the futility of individual life' (Arendt 1968a: 56), while leaving them exposed to the potentially destructive upshots of their own decisions and mis-judgments, equips them with the necessary knowledge and self-awareness (moral memory), concerning their capability for evil. In fact, the *polis* was 'an educational institution of men' («πόλις ἄνδρα διδάσκει») claims Simonides of Ceos (quoted by Castoriadis 2011: 68 [Καστοριάδης 2011: 68]). The town meetings in New England were 'the school[s] of democracy' (Bryan 1995: 36), the "schools of the people" according to Emerson (quoted by Fine 2014: 226); according to Tocqueville (1994), they were to freedom 'what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people's reach, they teach men how to use and enjoy it' (1: 61). Public realms emerge as civic spaces



of self-education, providing the chance for ‘the common people’ to develop preventive skills through participation and experience. Recall, at this stage, Tocqueville’s (1994) assertions that ‘the people in America obey the law ... because it is their own work’ and the same law ‘may be changed if it is harmful’ (1: 248). Experiencing the pernicious consequences of a law could prompt members of the same body politic that have decided for its implementation (through open decision-making) to change it. More importantly, such a negative experience becomes part of the *sensus communis*, of the common knowledge and wisdom stored in the collective memory (Deneen 2018: 81), of the moral capital that effectively discourages repetition of similar fallible decisions.

In addition, consider the following axiom: ‘the Greek word *aletheia* [αλήθεια], “truth” ... combines the negative prefix “a-” with the component “-lethe”, which also occurs in the name of Lethe, the river of forgetting’ (Whitehead 2009: 14). Hence, *aletheia* (truth) and remembrance are part of the same parcel. Truth is pragmatic and empirical; it is conceivable only in relation to its effects and in relation to their practical importance for us (James 1978: 98). The true ‘is only the expedient in the way of our *thinking*, just as “the right” is only the expedient in the way of our behaving’ (106; *emphasis added*). That means, ‘the true’ in order to be understood as such must become an event (or a past object) sensed and lodged in the storehouse of our memory. The same event is retrieved by our *thinking ego*. Thereupon *judgment* takes place; the effects of this event are evaluated and, finally, recurrence is prevented. In certain cases such events end up part of the common history of a collectivity<sup>57</sup>. Furthermore, ethical memory gets into the institutions of civil life (educational curriculums, canons, *et al.*); wisdom (deriving from experience) is ‘embodied in institutions’ and incites fear of repetition, adds Pocock (1989b: 159) while elaborating on Burke. Concurrently, the ‘Supreme Authority’, which inspires ‘feare of punishment’, in order to relieve human beings from the fear of violent death, the ‘perpetuall feare’ that ‘alwayes accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes, as it were in Dark’ (Hobbes 2006: 60), is not anymore the punitive absolute government but the fear of memory, which stimulates awareness concerning the need of self-limitation. This sum of memories (moral capital) gained through political engagement contributes to the realisation

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<sup>57</sup> See my analysis on the Peloponnesian war and the Melian massacre in Chapter 5.

of our capacity for *hubris*, of the potentially destructive consequences our own decisions and moves.

Political experience (through participation) promotes betterment by leaving as its residue the intelligence of handling impasses. Psychical, moral and political evil, as Wollstonecraft (1993) put it, can be lessened by ‘the accumulation of experimental facts’ (380). Nonetheless, this amelioration is not linear; it must not be conflated with scientific intelligence and research, which lead into ‘the curious "better and better," "truer and truer," that is, into the boundlessness of progress’ (Arendt 1978, 1: 54) towards an end-point, towards a conclusion (perfection). Unlike Fukuyama’s (1992) ‘last man at the end of history’, whose moral knowledge would (ostensibly) prevent him/her from joining a new pointless war (307), the *vita civile* does not promise absolute decency due to the constant increase of moral capital.

As Kloppenberg (2016) pointed out, in a democracy a collective decision, adopted as a solution to a problem, could generate new problems unexpectedly that could ‘plunge us into new conflicts with unforeseeable and sometimes tragic consequences’ (18). Consider, for example, the case of human unpredictability in the following hypothesis: a collective decision (A) is not motivated by sinful intentions; it takes into account the moral lessons from past (or historical) transgressions (ethical memory). However, when the same decision is materialised within the real world, several different groups (B and C, for instance) develop a type of relationship which, along the way, becomes unstable, creating further tensions (D), undermining the smooth functioning of the collectivity. This equation  $A = B + C = D$ , points to the existence of a newborn reality (see diagram below) emerging unpredictably (and unintentionally). Within the same reality group B is stimulated to act in a manner that inevitably causes negative reactions to C (or the other way around). Such a newborn reality can create conditions within which pathos and *mēnis* explode; because this reality is ‘new’ and has never been experienced before, there exists no known method of prevention. It turns out that collective decisions are to a degree experimental and enigmatic; their outcome, in certain cases, is concealed. It is publicly revealed only after their final implementation.

‘[M]eliorism is properly understood as hope held in full recognition of the factors that make this world a vulnerable and tragic place’ (Kahn 2009: 37). It is this awareness

concerning the destructive ‘vicissitudes of Fortune’, to use Machiavelli’s (1992: 67) words, what prompts resistance against wretchedness through political *action*. *Fortuna* ‘displays her might where there is no organized strength to resist her’ (66), when there is no organised commonwealth whose members find the necessary courage in order to confront this ‘mistress’ of destruction by means of political engagement and participation (as opposed to consent). The fearful pessimist, who withdraws from the public sphere and bestows all of his/her political freedoms to a closed circle of experts or to an unquestionable leader, lacks the valour and patience through which he/she could minimise the destructiveness of *fortuna*. As Aristotle (1890) argues, «ὁ δὲ τῷ φοβεῖσθαι ὑπερβάλλον δειλός» [‘weak and timid is the one who exceeds in fear’] because «πάντα γὰρ φοβεῖται. ὁ δ’ ἀνδρεῖος ἐναντίως· τὸ γὰρ θαρρεῖν εὐέλπιδος» (‘he/she fears everything. On the contrary, the courageous person is hopeful’) (34). The pessimist is deficient in courage and fortitude; he/she lacks the *virtù*, the necessary fortitude and resilience to challenge their fate. In the same way, the optimist, having expelled any sense of tragic vision from his/her mind, namely the idea that ‘in this world danger [and destruction] is ever-present’ (Weil 1987a: 157), having neglected his/her frailty and vulnerability, bestows his/her faith to excessively ambitious plans, without being much aware of the existing possibilities for these plans to ‘go wrong’.

According to Aristotle, «εὐέλπιδες ὄντες ἀνδρεῖοι· διὰ γὰρ τὸ πολλάκις καὶ πολλοὺς νενικηκέναι θαρροῦσιν ἐν τοῖς κινδύνοις» (‘those who are hopeful are confident because they have overcome numerous threats’) (58). Thus, «παρόμοιοι δέ, ὅτι ἄμφω θαρραλέοι» (‘the hopeful resemble the courageous share the same confidence’). But while «οἱ μὲν ἀνδρεῖοι διὰ τὰ πρότερον εἰρημένα θαρραλέοι, οἳ δὲ διὰ τὸ οἶσθαι κράτιστοι εἶναι καὶ μηθὲν ἂν παθεῖν» (‘the courageous are confident for the exact reasons explained above, the hopeful because they assume that they are indestructible, shielded from every harm’) (ibid). From Aristotle’s assertion one understands that hope and optimism (especially optimistic populism) could be easily conflated. As a matter of fact, hope is profoundly anthropocentric. It rejects withdrawal and passivity and embraces courage for *action*, a type of *action* that promises no ‘crystal palaces’, nevertheless. Thus, to revise Aristotle, the optimists are certain because they assume that they are indestructible, whilst the courageous are *εὐέλπιδες* (hopeful), because they know how to overcome the challenges of

fate through their knowledge and experience (ethical memory). They do not, however, assume they are perfectly shielded from the appetites of *fortuna*. The hopeful know that corruption, greed, lust and selfishness are too deep-seated in men and women to be entirely eradicated. ‘Such experience’, writes Lasch (1991a), ‘leaves as its residue the unshakable conviction, not that the past was better than the present, but that trust is never completely misplaced, even though it is never completely justified either and therefore destined inevitably to disappointments’ (81). The hopeful understands that ‘courage is indispensable for political action’, so long as it ‘stands in the sharpest possible contrast to our private domain, where, in the protection of family and home everything serves and must serve the security of the life process’ (Arendt 1968a: 156). No ‘reckless optimism’—the ‘superstition’ of progress (Arendt 1976: vii), the utopian vision for a new society that stands in absolute perfection—but knowledge concerning the fragility and vulnerability of the human world stands as the most important *virtù* of the *vita civile*. In short, the *virtù* of courage to ‘leave the protective security’ of our private realm (Arendt 1968a: 156), to let ourselves be seen, to ‘dare greatly’ (Brown 2012: 1), ‘is demanded of us by the very nature of the public realm ... because in politics not life but the world is at stake’ (Arendt 1976: 156). In the end, hope (*ἐλπίς*) does not prevent us ‘from expecting the worst’ (Lasch 1993: 14) since ‘the worst is always what the hopeful are prepared for’ (ibid).

The time has come to sum up. This section began with a discussion revolving around the feebleness of economic (possessive) liberalism, around its impotence to effectively suppress the pathos for domination, *id est*, the greed and lust for possession. One way to tame pathos is through (political) *action*, through participation, through the dispensation of the Leviathan (political power) to the ‘common people’, who must obtain the courage and fortitude in order to join the *political realm*. This section shed light on one of the main ingredients of *action*, on ethical memory. Notice that ethical memory alone does not provide lasting immunity to *hubris*; as Chapter 1 clearly pointed out, memory and experience are subjects to interpretation (Mill 1998: 23). How one fashions the process whereby past experiences are interpreted in such a way that conclusions in line with the basic principles of common decency are produced, will be discussed extensively in Chapter 5.

## Conclusion

The *genealogical* analysis conducted in this chapter has highlighted conceptual connections between pessimism and optimism: both are concerned with the human pathos for endless possession and as a solution to the ‘condition of Warre of every one against every one’, in which ‘every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body’ (Hobbes 2006: 72) propose anti-populism. Both systems emphasise *private well-being* (as being the ultimate purpose of human happiness), proposing the handing over of all political freedoms to a central authority. This authority should either be a coercive Sovereign (most preferably a monarch, according to Hobbes and Filmer) or the (supposedly) autonomous (independent of human action) rational and self-regulated market system, capable of guaranteeing economic progress, based on the widely accepted (during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) perception that unlimited growth would provide ‘insurance of law and order, at minimum cost’ (Polanyi 2001: 122). Nonetheless, extensive emphasis on the increase of the number of private opportunities offered to the individual, deprioritise and marginalise the *res publica* (Pocock 1989a: 89-90). By devoting themselves to their private affairs, citizens would reduce their need for political participation (Lasch 1995a: 94).

To avoid misunderstandings: this should not be seen as a polemic against economic liberalism. In fact, evidence suggesting that economic optimism, with its emphasis on the (*ad infinitum*) gratification of self-interest, has contributed to the amelioration of our living standards, must not be discounted. Consider, for instance, the gradual reduction of the levels of illiteracy in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Griffin 2013: 165-168). On the other hand, ‘[i]t is *not* a correct deduction from the Principles of Economics that enlightened self-interest always operates in the public interest’ (Keynes 2009: 36). To a degree, the rise of our living standards could be attributed to the spread of populist political movements during the past few centuries, movements that pushed forward plans for top-down wealth redistribution. For example, the Chartist movement, according to Mill, put pressure on the upper classes, on those who had ““the physical force on their side”” and ““wanted the organization, which they were rapidly acquiring, to convert their physical power into a moral and social one ... that something must be done to render the multitude more content with the existing state of things”” (quoted by Macpherson 1977: 46). In addition, ‘[t]he passing of the People’s Party in America left the way clear in the

South for the achievement of political hegemony by businessmen', writes Goodwyn (1976: 610). But on the other hand, the Populists had already paved the way for serious structural reforms in society (537). Despite their failure to implement their radical economic and political program, a great deal of their popular demands had been partly satisfied by Roosevelt's New Deal (Goodwyn 1976: 550-1; Taggart 2002: 37). 'The populists served as markers of coming change' (Taggart 2002: 37).

At the same time, it may seem plausible to contend that economic liberalism in order to protect producers and manufacturers from a possible financial devastation must first and foremost implement measures through which the propensity of the production to endlessly expand is not disproportionate with the purchasing capacity of the consumer. Ways must be found in order to ensure the masses can access the ever-increasing supply before the latter spoils and perishes. Populist movements (like the American cooperative movement) by challenging economic exclusion pushed up the wages of low-paid workers and, gradually, improved their purchasing capacity. In this respect, populism (to a degree) strengthened economic liberalism. Populism 'democratised' economic liberalism as long as it opened pathways for the underdogs to access the market supply. Of course, this assertion does not refute my initial claim, that the primary objective of American Populism was paradigm shift, from economic liberalism to a model of economic and political democracy based on active and cooperative citizenship. However, due to its defeat only some of *popular demands* (pushed further by farmers and workers) have been satisfied, such as the improvement of their standards of living, which (paradoxically) made economic liberalism more sustainable.

Seventeenth and eighteenth century liberal thinkers were (partially, at least) right to share the *realist* approach of human nature, the view of 'man not as a highly rational and intelligent but as a very irrational and fallible being', to use Hayek's (1980: 8) words again. However, their response to the problem of *perpetual war* (the consequences of our endless pathos for possession) stimulates objections and controversies. More precisely, they considered our insatiable appetite for possession as a 'powerful stimulus for economic development' (Lasch 1991a: 13) and set out to put all human societies under a mechanism which constantly satisfies these desires, through the unlimited production and availability of goods (as the Lockean system of economic progress proposed). As the second section

of this chapter argued, the market forces must never be left on their own, unrestrained and uncontrolled. They should be put under the control not simply of the state, as Keynes (2009) suggested, but of the citizenry, of the ‘common people’. Second, this chapter highlighted the reasons the optimism of economic (possessive) liberalism, with its rational social programming, instead of removing predicaments that supposedly obstruct the pathway towards endless betterment, in certain cases has generate conditions where all sorts of injustices had been effectively legitimised. This has been partially attributed to the dominance of pathos, to the prevalence of greed and self-interest over common decency, as the historical examples of the enclosures and the late nineteenth-century America made clear<sup>58</sup>. It is time to move to the next step, where the evolution of the optimism of possessive liberalism liberal optimism into what I have already called *permissive liberalism* will be examined. Briefly, by converting objects into fast-exchange commodities, *permissive liberalism* promotes a culture of rampant consumerism. This culture has led to dependency of the same idols (consumable goods) produced constantly in order to be consumed as fast as possible. Thus, permissive liberalism embraces the ‘idolatrous cult of economic growth and scientific technological progress’ (Genovese 1994: 34), promoting a vision of the world reduced to promiscuity, anonymity, self-indulgence, extravagant hedonism and pleasure (Lasch 1991b: 69). Permissive liberalism embodied the ‘belief that a human community can function in a coherent and efficient fashion without drawing the least support ... from shared moral and cultural values’ (Michea 2009: 48). It emerged during the past century as a means of pseudo-liberation from ‘puritanical’ mores that had placed restrictions on individual self-actualisation and self-expression, favouring the community and the nation. In the following chapter, the rapid rise of right-wing populism during the past few decades will be viewed as a direct consequence of this cultural crisis generated by permissive liberalism itself.

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58 More importantly, anti-populist solutions prevent the strengthening of ethical memory, whereby human beings learn to combat the excesses of their own self-interest (pathos).

## Chapter 4

### The ‘Death of God’: From Optimism to Right-Wing Populism

#### Introduction

This chapter employs multiple theoretical perspectives in order to analyse cultural trends that contributed to the rise of *permissive liberalism*. The first section sheds light on social trends emerging due to cultural permissiveness. At the same time, it outlines the reasons such phenomena fueled social nostalgia. The second section digs into the nostalgic cast of mind, the ‘heartland’ of right-wing populism (to use Taggart’s terms). These cultural trends are products a) of the evolution of the ‘Lockean’ model of economic progress, b) of the consolidation of ‘mass culture’ and c) of the rapid spread of counter-cultural movements emerging during the 1960s and the 1970s (see the first section of this chapter). As opposed to the productivist ethos of possessive individualism, *permissive liberalism* exalts hedonism, unrestrained pleasure and rampant consumption (Lasch 1991b: 179); it is predicated on a culture within which all moral prohibitions are effectively removed (ibid), where everything is *permitted*, inasmuch as everyone can constantly gratify his/her fantasies of ‘exquisite comfort and sensual refinement’ (181). As opposed to the optimism of the ‘Lockean’ model, permissive liberalism is overwhelmed by a deep sense of pessimism, which should not to be confused with the political pessimism of absolutism. Instead, I am referring to an overwhelming feeling of sadness caused by consumerism and the loss of memory. As a matter of fact, studies (Bauer, Wilkie, Kim, and Bodenhausen 2012) have revealed strong links between consumerism and poor mental health in individuals. Those who are in a consumer-cue condition (addiction) report high levels of negative emotions (including sadness and melancholy), as well as selfishness and competitiveness.

The consumerist and hedonistic ethos encourages isolation, undermining the public realm and the communal ties among individuals, the human interactions that impact on the steady and meaningful growth of human personality. According to Bauman (2000), rampant consumerism has *liquidified* culture and tradition; it has converted all common gestures, norms and ideas into ephemeral commodities, capable to be quickly produced, sold and consumed, instead of being means that provide vital attachments (Κονδύλης 2007:



264 [Kondylis 2007: 264]). *Liquid* values have limited durability (Bauman 2000); they are impermanent and imprecise (Κονδύλης 2007: 65 [Kondylis 2007: 65]). In addition, the modern consumer prefers temporary enjoyment rather than possession of durable goods in a society surrounded by an infinite number of consumable objects (256). In this world of radical impermanence the human self ends up an empty vessel (ibid). As a consequence of this depersonalisation, there gradually develops a ‘narcissistic’ culture, to use Lasch’s (1991b) terms. Meaningful objects are eradicated from memory; our daily experiences are less and less shaped and defined by cultural and/or political interactions. Instead, they are influenced by the existence of consumable idols, which become objects of love, objects of lust and hedonism. This inevitably leads to the ‘cultural devaluation of the past’ (Lasch 1991a: xvii) The ‘new experience of time as a pastless present’ (Deneen 2018: 66) and the loss of the sense of historical continuity (130), of belonging ‘to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching in the future’ (Lasch 1991a: 5) go hand in hand with the loss of (mainly religious) concepts capable of binding individuals together, shaping their collective and personal identity by offering positive aspirations and meaning.

Consider, for example, Nietzsche’s (2001) statement about the death of God and the ‘divine decomposition’ (120). From a contextualist point of view, this statement mirrors the social and cultural climate of Nietzsche’s age, the rapid disappearance (under the absolute dominance of industrial liberalism/capitalism) of the Christian (Biblical) archetypes that once shepherded Western nations, offering a sense of unity and common purpose (Frye 1992: xiii). Of course, Nietzsche considered metaphysical beliefs ‘not essential to human nature or well-being’ and he ‘settled into the conviction that we suffer nihilism’ (Taffel 2006: xii) due to the steady decline of religion and the absence of new moral principles to replace it (Fukuyama 1992: 304; Williams 2001: xii; xx). ‘Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions?’ (Nietzsche 2001: 120). Notwithstanding Nietzsche was an ardent sympathiser of the aristocracy, at the same time he believed that it was the aristocracy itself which had produced its own grave diggers due to its flirtation with Christianity. ‘The downfall of Christianity’, writes Nietzsche (2006: 3), was the outcome of the will to truth, of ‘the will *not to deceive*’, which (in fact) was the central principle of Christianity *per se* (Nietzsche 2001: 200), a principle that gradually led for ‘God himself’

to ‘turn out to be our longest lie’ (201). More importantly, Christian norms spread the seeds that led to the growth of liberal revolutions across Europe, resulting in the collapse of the aristocratic order, followed by the rise of liberalism, which (in his thought) represents nothing but mere self-interest, lack of excellence, moral decay and social decadence (Fukuyama 1992: xxii; Cristi 2014: 191). In fact, it is irrelevant whether Nietzsche’s assertion—that Christianity, with its emphasis on truthfulness and ‘herd mentality’ led to the destruction of the aristocratic order—is valid or not. What concerns us here is the *practical value*, to use James’ (1978) terms, of Nietzsche’s approach. More precisely, belief systems (like Christianity, according to Nietzsche’s observations) may incorporate elements that gradually annihilate the same social reality they attempt to defend. Therefore, if ‘[economic] [l]iberalism has failed because ... [it] has succeeded’, as Deneen (2018: 179) argued, this is due to the same values economic liberalism itself encompasses, values that gradually put on pain of extinction the same foundations upon which the world it envisaged was predicated. In fact, economic liberalism incorporates elements that generated waves of social nihilism, leading to cultural decomposition.

The Lockean model (as the previous chapter argued) laid the foundations of a society based on profit and individual gain as ultimate goals. This emphasis on profit and individual possession triggered nihilism and gradually wiped out the same foundations. As Williams (2001) argues, ‘melancholy’ (in Nietzsche’s works) constitutes a social pathology emerging as a direct consequence of ‘the collapse of traditional illusions’ (ii). In the same way, the increase in the supply of consumer goods gradually shaped social conditions that approximate the vision of Marquis de Sade, predicated on ‘unlimited self-indulgence’ (Lasch 1991b: 69). As with Kondylis (2007 [Κονδύλης 2007]), mass culture/society is fast-changing and liquid; within mass societies differentiations are imprecise and the constant distribution of new roles knows no boundaries (Κονδύλης 2007: 64; 267 [Kondylis 2007: 64; 267]). The liberal counter-cultures of the sixties and the seventies further intensified this tendency of mass culture; they boosted consumerism and accelerated the process of cultural decomposition. Mass consumerism annihilated all the interactions through which lasting bonding memories are created (as we will see in the first section of this chapter). As Bauman (2000) puts it, “‘community’ is these days the relic of the old-time utopias of the good society. It stands for whatever has been left of the dreams

of a better life shared with better neighborhoods all following better rules of cohabitation' (92). This is similar to Weil's (1987) concept of 'uprootedness', which means the destruction of all connections with one's cultural past. In our case it will be used in order to describe the consequences of nihilism, of the 'death of God', of the unravelling of memory, and the subsequent 'loss of any sense of depth or significance to life' (Williams 2001: xiii). We will see how the reactionary paralysis of the populist right, which seeks to 'provide a clear vision of how society should change, namely returning to how it used to be before the social changes that have occurred in recent decades' according to Steenvoorden and Hartevelt (2018: 29)<sup>59</sup>, has capitalised on this pessimism, which instigated nostalgia for a past (32) where life is seen as being 'in any important way better than life today' (Lasch 1991b: xvii). This 'life of the past' corresponds to the decline of tradition and religion, to the *de-composition* of the national collectivity from which persons are 'uprooted'. The nation ceased to function as a common world within which the same persons can interact. The nostalgic presumptions of the populist right, and more importantly, the propensity of the latter to 'sanctify' and idealise—in Arato's (2013) terms—the past while disparaging the present, constitutes the ideological twin, the 'mirror image' of liberal optimism and progressivism (Lasch 1991a: 82-3).

#### Permissiveness: the birth of Mephistophelian man

1) Cultural revolution and its *metharmōsis* to American capitalism: from possessive individualism to permissive liberalism

Mass democracy (or mass culture, in my terms) opened up pathways in higher education for a large number of excluded people. In effect, this led to the rapid increase of the number of students and shaped the appropriate conditions for the emergence of mass youth countercultural trends (Κονδύλης 2007: 272-3 [Kondylis 272-3]), triggering the birth and spread of the so-called Cultural Revolution. These movements altered the socio-political landscape of a number of Western countries; it fertilised the soil for the further expansion of consumerism (276). Some counter-cultural trends drew on heritage and lore; they saw tradition (and more importantly the folk music of several isolated social groups)

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<sup>59</sup> My initial definition of nostalgia is given in the Introduction.

as a cultural/political weapon against racial segregation (Hale 2011: 105). They saw the past as a reservoir of inspiration and considered the loss of history as something that should be mourned rather than celebrated (96). But most socially liberal youth-led bohemian countercultures favoured cultural relativism, despised conformism, social discipline, tradition, historical continuance and the Protestant values of the old bourgeoisie (Lasch 1991a: 507; Frank 1997: 15; 21; Brooks 2001: 33; 50-77; 226-43; Κονδύλης 2007: 272; 279 [Kondylis 2007: 272; 279]). They despised the ‘detriment of traditional values’ of the white-working class ‘petty-bourgeois’, the work ethic, more precisely (Malliaris 2017a). The bohemian movements, as Brooks (2001) says, unleashed emancipatory forces, such as sexual freedom, which once was considered sinful and subversive (138; 191; 193; 226; 260). They aspired not simply to emancipate the individual from structure and institution they deemed ‘oppressive’ (Μάλλιαρης 2017b: 189 [Malliaris 2017b: 189]) but to debunk the very idea of social hierarchy as an obstacle in the emergence of ‘free spaces’ within which spontaneity and creativity (aiming at individual self-actualisation) could take place (Κονδύλης 2007: 274 [Kondylis 2007: 274]). The bohemians, according to Hale (2011) and Goodman (1969), considered themselves ‘alienated’, estranged ‘outsiders’, deprived of any connection with the goals and aspirations of the American society. They ‘cut themselves free of their own social origins and their own histories’ (Hale 2011: 3); they opposed the ‘conventions and norms imagined as central to American life’ (16) and created their own common world ‘within which they could feel included’, a world that locates ‘the outsider in a specific place and time, a pre-modern, pre-capitalist historical moment when people made music for the pleasure of expression rather than for cash’ (87).

Although the bohemians posited themselves as enemies of the bourgeoisie (Κονδύλης 2007: 269 [Kondylis 2007: 269]), expressing hostility towards the ‘puritanical conformity’ of the 1950s mass corporate culture (Frank 1997: 7), they received a warm welcome from the American business world (8). During the late 1950s and early 1960s advertisers and management thinkers developed critiques against their own industries, which ‘had much in common with the critique of mass society which gave rise to the counterculture’ (9). Individuals in advanced positions of the American business world (especially of the art industry and the show-business) shared the frustration of the young ‘outsiders’; they questioned social conformity and encouraged resistance to hierarchy and

technocracy (9; 20). Hence, they viewed the quasi-carnavalesque appeal of these youth-led movements not as an enemy to ‘consumer culture but as a hopeful sign, a symbolic ally’ in their ‘struggles to revitalize American business and the consumer order generally’ (9). They followed the new values—diffused to a broad audience by these movements—and co-opted the gestures, discourses and fashions of the young insurgents (Lasch 1991b: 67; Frank 1997: 6-7; 55; Brooks 2001: 50), forming what Frank (1997) calls ‘hip capitalism’ (26). ‘[T]he relativist world of Madison Avenue’ (36) identified in the cultural relativism of the bohemians a common enemy: the Protestant virtues and the strict prohibitions of the old social order, which effectively ceased to ‘excite enthusiasm’ (Lasch 1991b: 53). They were deemed obsolete and unsuited to conditions of increasing abundance and economic progress. As a matter of fact, ‘[t]he demands of the mass-consumption economy’ writes Lasch (1991b), ‘have made the work ethic obsolete even for workers’ (73).

As the previous chapter claimed, tradition and memory matter naught for capitalism (or economic liberalism); tradition and identity have always been deemed great obstacles to liberal economic principles (Fukuyama 1992: 325; Deneen 2018: 16-7; 30; 73) and, more importantly, to the desire for self-actualisation and immediate personal gratification (Κονδύλης 2007: 219 [Kondylis 2007: 219]; Deneen 2018: 39). One of the many definitions of liberty (given in the previous chapter) is the following: emancipation from cultural norms and traditions. The liberty of permissive liberalism advocates emancipation from all cultural norms that could effectively function as moral prohibitions against the pathos for self-actualisation. For the ancients, writes Deneen (2018), this liberty was synonymous with ‘misuse and excess’, with our natural proclivity ‘to use freedom badly’ as according to ‘the oldest stories in our tradition’, including the story of the Fall from Eden (115). Permissive liberty is an ardent enunciation of our pathos to transgress moral prohibitions, striving towards personal (and temporary) enjoyment (in my terms). Economic liberalism and consumer capitalism, which thrive ‘on the doctrine of liberation and continual transgression’ (Frank 1997: 6), fulfill this desire for unlimited self-actualisation and hedonism (without moral prohibitions) through the unlimited availability of consumer goods. Hence, the countercultures emancipated capitalism itself from cultural weights (namely traditionalism and parochialism), seen as barriers against the tendency of the market forces to transform the entire Western world into a mass of independent

consumers, capable of satisfying most of their desires and tastes through unlimited possession of goods (Μάλλιαρης 2017b: 190 [Malliaris 2017b: 190]; Κονδύλης 2007: 276 [Kondylis 2007: 276]). Let us take as an example, the abolition of sexual taboos (in the name of liberation from the puritanical ‘hypocrisy’ of the Protestant *weltanschauung*). They permitted a myriad of sexual fantasies that consumer capitalism sought to gratify. Thus emerged the culture of permissiveness, ‘organized around the pleasures of consumption’ (Lasch 1991b: 178), extending ‘largely to expression of libidinal instincts’ (179).

Thus, permissive liberalism emerged as a *metharmōsis* of the cultural revolution to the demands of capitalism. Unlike the old bourgeois ‘Lockean’ model, permissive liberalism identifies ‘not with the work ethic and responsibilities of wealth’, with the work ethic (labour), ‘but with an ethic of leisure, hedonism and self-fulfillment’ (Lasch 1991b: 221). Put otherwise, one of the characteristics of the changes in the structure of society, according to Lasch (1991b) is ‘the shifting emphasis from capitalist production to consumption’ (63). The bourgeois exaltation of self-interest, identified with the rational pursuit of profit and property accumulation, has been replaced by the unlimited pursuit for pleasure (69). The old Protestant values of ‘self-reliance’, ‘self-respect’ and ‘versatility’ (133) have given way to celebrity worship (86) and sexual promiscuity (188; 200).

In my terms, while the *possessive market society* exalts *private time* (*work* and *labour*) as the best solution to conflicts (Chapter 3), the present reality places essential emphasis on *social time*, which (as I outline in what follows) radically stimulates a desire for individual self-fulfillment through mass consumerism. According to Kondylis (2007 [Κονδύλης 2007]), the old-fashioned bourgeois morality glorified individual gain. It acknowledged the pursuit for individual possession as the primary driving force for success and glamour (245). The present reality (framed by the rapid expansion of ‘mass culture’) values not the ‘lonely individualist’ but the effective ‘team worker’; it places emphasis on the ‘collective spirit’ (ibid), on collective efforts taking place within *social* (in the Arendtian sense of the term), rather than public, spaces and networks. Making sense of this *rationale* requires emphasis on Arendt’s distinction between *isolation* and *loneliness*. ‘I can be isolated—that is in a situation in which I cannot act, because there is nobody who will act with me—without being lonely’ (Arendt 1976: 474). In other words, loneliness

‘concerns human life as a whole’ while isolation is concerned a) with the political realm (475), defined by *action*, through speech, hearing, dissent and disagreement, but also b) with other (non-political) aspects of the public realm. Thus, when someone is isolated without being lonely (474) he/she cannot *act*; he/she does not join a body politic as a *citizen*, arguing, *judging* and speaking within a group. In addition, he/she does not form robust and lasting relationships with others.

While it is common to associate the age of affluence exclusively with *loneliness* and *privatisation* (Castoriadis 1997: 39; 2007: 69; 107), with the condition where everyone is totally absorbed by his/her private affairs, ‘surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by objects’ (Baudrillard 2016: 43), by elaborating on Arendt (1976) the present chapter claims the opposite: the modern narcissus is *isolated*. He/she is free to join networks and clubs, interacting with others. However, such networks do not promote interactions that revolve around political dissent or issues related to active citizenship and self-government. For example, shopping malls and (most) corporate work offices are not formally designed in order to incite political disagreements. They are indifferent to the civic arts. As Lasch (1991b) points out, in metropolitan districts, large shopping malls and fast-food chains have undermined public spaces like coffee shops, pubs and neighborhood hangouts, within which open conversations ‘on which democracy thrives’ take place (Lasch 1995a: 117-8). A fast-paced life has ‘neither time nor ... places for good talk’ (118). According to Michea (2009), the ‘magic mechanism’ of the market enables millions of *isolated* individuals to flock around common spaces, coming ““together on a daily basis without any need to love one another, or even to speak to one another”” (54). Most interactions taking place within such spaces promote imitation and uniformity of manners. These *social* spaces are ruled by *behaviour* (rather than *action*). While the political realm, claims Arendt (1998), is characterised by togetherness, individuality and contestation (41), the *social* tends ‘to “normalise” its members’, making them *behave*, ‘excluding spontaneous action or outstanding achievement’ at the same time (40). In other words, the aim of these *social* networks is to shape an attitude of conformity with the standards of mass society and mass consumerism, with the illusion that all new fashions, tastes, novel innovations and newly produced ephemeral goods (disseminated through mass advertising within such networks) can gratify the individual pathos for self-



actualisation and self-expression.

The isolated modern narcissus is a drop in the ocean of a mass that blindly and passively follows the consumerist tide; he/she only sees holograms of millions of ‘sleepwalkers’, of ‘[u]nthinking men’, as defined by Arendt (1978), who have lost their capacity to *judge*, passively following the flow (1: 191). The life of the ‘sleepwalker’ has no meaning and essence (ibid). In a *liquid* world with no solid values capable of stimulating public interactions through which memorable concepts are created and with no open body politic to keep the ‘common people’ in *action*, memory ends up an empty vessel. In other words, the loss of *public* interactions and the disappearance of the empirical world deprives personality and self-identification. Eventually, if ‘the public world came to be seen as a mirror of the self’ (Lasch 1991b: 28), it is because the *social* world, this *pseudo-public* world, is dominated by a myriad of consumable idols with which the ‘sleepwalker’ (or the narcissus), deprived of memory, meaning, and, therefore, of self-identity and personality, seeks identification.

## 2) Idolatry, consumerism and hopelessness

The implications of consumer capitalism can be grasped only by shedding light on patterns of psychical addiction by which it strives to substitute the loss of public happiness with hedonism and possession. This presupposes further analysis on friendship (with emphasis on idolatry). Both the *fido amor* (which stands in the middle of the hierarchy of friendship and points to the deeply sentimental or affectionate love) and the *serene love* towards the ‘common person’ (*eucosmia*) are directed towards living objects. Instead, idolatry signifies exaggerated love (lust) toward non-living (inorganic) objects, which are confined to the material world but offer no contemplative or ethical value. Etymologically speaking, idolatry derives from the Greek *ειδωλο* (idol)—‘[e]idolon, a thing seen, a symbol’ (Carlyle 2007: 77)—and *λατρεία* (*latreia*, translated as ‘extreme love’). The classical Christian perspective sees idolatry as ‘the worshipping of [such] dead Idols as the Divinity’ (ibid). For Weil (1987a) idolatry points to the *latreia* towards such inorganic objects (idols) which gratify our endless pathos for pleasure (122). Making sense of this *rationale* presupposes further analysis of friendship, coupled with the notion of wonder.

First, as Aristotle (1993b [Αριστοτέλης 1993β]) argued, «φιλία δ’ οὐκ ἔστι πρὸς τὰ ἄχρυσά οὐδὲ δίκαιον» (‘towards lifeless objects, no friendship or justice exists’); friendship



needs mutuality, founded upon justice, companionship and agreement (61). Mutuality and justice cannot exist between a man and a lifeless object (idol). In turn, justice requires interactions; it requires *thinking* and *judgment*, expressed through *logos*. Through *judgment* (as Chapter 2 claimed) one distinguishes between decency and injustice. Since idols are mute, incapable of *speaking* and *thinking*, Aristotle's (ibid) assertion, that *philia* (friendship) is possible only between human beings, between speaking animals, leads us to the following assumption: idolatry is an *ersatz* friendship. Second, in Milton's *PL*, according to Lasch's (1991a) interpretation, God is a life-giving force that emanates vitality (15; 234; 276). As the medieval monk (Hildegard von Bingen) wrote, God is a 'vital force' that emanates life to the human flesh (Hildegard 1987: 145). He stated, 'everything God does is life because it is alive in the nature it has from God (*vitale in natura sua*)' (134). 'Jesus said ... "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep ... I have come *that they may have life*, and have it to the full' (*The Bible*, John 10: 7-10; *emphasis added*). In what follows, namely the exact reasons such a theological claim could be taken at face value in our analysis concerning idolatry and consumerism, will be explained.

First, as David James Stewart (2014) argued (in reference to Jung), myths about the origin of man are always metaphors that describe the origins of human consciousness (512). More or less, this is what Hildegard von Bingen (1987) (discussing the *Book of Genesis*) conveys in the following statement: 'Adam was fiery in nature, full of *understanding* and *vital*' (144; *emphasis added*). Hildegard's notion of 'understanding', namely, of the ability to consciously discriminate between good and evil, according to the same author (2001: 7), is synonymous with *judgment*. If *judgment presupposes thinking*, and if *thinking* is identical to consciousness (see Chapter 2), it turns out that vitality (which is associated with *judgment*) and consciousness are inseparable. Furthermore, if consciousness is associated with *thinking* (as Chapter 2 argued) and vitality, and if *thinking* is (to a degree) associated with free will, we understand that this theological myth about the origin of consciousness is also a myth about the birth of free will in human beings. Put otherwise, free will is intertwined with *thinking* and *judging*, with the ability to choose whether to act consciously by weighting (*judging*) the possible outcomes of each move/choice or (instead) to seek pleasure in his/her own rampant desire (pathos) for pleasure. As Lasch (1991a) argues (while elaborating on Arendt), *action* is 'the product of

judgment, choice and free will' as opposed to *behaviour* which is unconscious, 'automatic and reflexive' (133). Thus, free will and consciousness (for Lasch) are intertwined: in order to be able to *judge* and decide, one must a) be aware of and responsive to the available choices and challenges and b) be capable of experiencing the consequence of his/her final decisions. Second, if free will is also inscribed to all human beings who are defined by vitality, it obviously follows that free will and vitality go hand in hand. In addition, idols (and all lifeless objects), as long as they lack free will (and consciousness), are incapable of *thinking* and *judging*. Hence, they are incapable of friendship with human beings.

In chapter 2, by relying on Quint's (2014) analysis of Milton's *PL* I have argued that absolutism, deriving from Satan's envy towards God's kingdom, reflects our pathos to erect earthly kingdoms, placing ourselves permanently at the top of a social hierarchy (as a replica of God's absolute rule in heaven) (130). We have seen that envy derives from our Faustian pathos to reign supreme, acting (on Earth) as God does in Heaven. Thus, the narcissus pretends that he/she can imitate God, the life giving force, emanating vitality (that is, consciousness) to non-living objects, to consumable goods (idols) in our case<sup>60</sup>. This vitality ostensibly constitutes such an object capable of offering affection. Seemingly, a sense of friendship (love) is developed between the narcissus and the idol. We call, nonetheless, this type of vitalisation *imagined* from the moment it does not occur in reality. It exists exclusively in the imagination of the narcissus. More precisely, consider Milton's (2004) emphasis on the notion of free will: Adam was 'Left to his own free will, his will though free' (152). As opposed to Eve, who was possessed by Satan's speech even 'without her noticing it' (Frye 2005: 87), and falls into the fatal temptation by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam consciously, and 'Against his better knowledge, not deceived' (Milton 2004: 297), decides to eat from the same fruit.

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60 Since the mind of the narcissus creates illusions, by the same token, would not a materialist, who sees no practical value in metaphysics and religious myths, argue that the birth of the human race in the Garden of Eden is also an 'imagined' story, an 'illusion', invented by the Christian narcissus him/herself? As a matter of fact, the myth of human creation in the Genesis can be interpreted from different standpoints: of course, it could be regarded as an invention of the imagination of the Western/Christian narcissus, as an illusion that (supposedly) responds to unanswerable existential questions (the meaning and purpose of living). Or (as the previous paragraph explained) it simply constitutes an archetypal story whose practical value rests in its capacity to illuminate aspects of the human consciousness.

Furthermore, in Milton's *PL*, argues Frye (2005), idolatry is 'specifically associated with the forbidden tree' and the forbidden tree with illusion (86). It is an illusion in which the devils are involved too 'and we are told that every so often, in hell, they are compelled to climb up the branches of a tree ... and eat the fruit of that tree, fruit which, like the apples of Sodom, is fair outside but dust and ashes inside' (ibid). In the same way the myriads of consumable objects (idols) create the illusion that because they look 'fair outside' are precious and valuable but, in truth, they are 'dust and ashes inside' (to use Frye's words again), that is, empty and soulless (lifeless). They provide no companionship and/or mental affection. In fact, since idols cannot transcend lifelessness, since idols cannot obtain free will and consciousness that would allow them to interact with human beings, they cannot offer strong affections and vivid reflections of our own (disappeared) self.

These consumable idols create an illusory trap: They become means through which one senses snappy reflections of his/her disappeared self. As Freud (1937: 222) pointed out, each individual ego can be reflected through different objects. In sum, we have seen that idolatry leads a) to the creation of attachments with inorganic objects and, b) to fantasy, namely to the condition where individuals deceive themselves that through such lifeless objects their appetite for affection and self-fulfillment can be satisfied. But more importantly, it is the overt illusion of self-recognition that idolatry seeks to satisfy. The contemporary narcissist feels his/her own Self is reflected through idols<sup>61</sup>. This problematic relationship he/she develops with the consumable idol impairs him/her from seeing the real image of the latter (as a lifeless object). Instead, his/her mind senses in the idol reflections of his/her own lost identity. Notwithstanding such objects are lifeless, as long as they (ostensibly) mirror our own Self, they end up 'vitalised'. The mind conceives them as organic and conscious entities, capable to offer affection. Hence, when the consumer realises that none of these idols in his/her possession accurately mirrors his/her own Self, immediately seeks new ones, which (however) will soon be deemed as valueless as their precedent. In other words, the consumer's desire for pleasure can only be temporarily satisfied through the possession of idols; when pleasure languishes, the same desire re-

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61 As Lasch (1991b) explained, '[t]he narcissist cannot identify with someone else without seeing the other as an extension of himself' (86). Incapable of identifying with parents (and other authority figures) (ibid), he/she sees his/her own self reflected through the myriad of consuming idols.

appears. A sense of sadness and pessimism is produced once the same person realises that he/she has fallen into a pitfall from where there is no escape. His/her psychical need for companionship and his/her pathos for self-fulfillment and self-actualisation can never be truly (and permanently) satisfied. Faust's words, in Goethe's (2007) play, that every time he struggles to satisfy his 'desire with pleasure, then / In pleasure languish for desire again' (103), point to this never ending circle of appetite and pursuit for affection (through idols) that leads to despair. In this work, Faust, who is attracted to a young woman called Margaret (also known as Gretchen), asks Mephistopheles to bewitch her mind in love with him. Just as Satan in Milton's *PL* invades Eve's mind and deprives her of judgment (Frye 2005: 87), similarly in Goethe's work Faust converts Margaret into an idol; Gretchen falls into 'a love that was too blind' (Goethe 2007: 144) (and too passive). Simply put, Gretchen has lost her vitality, her independence of *thinking*. She has no free will (or agency); she is forced to take Faust as a lover without being able to pass *judgment*, expressing with clarity and honesty whether she truly approves of him or not. Gretchen's acceptance of Faust is not an expression of her own real feelings and desires. This leaves Faust's personality and identity invalidated. Not being able to see his own self reflected through this woman-idol, allows emptiness and melancholy to overwhelm every aspect of his existence.

So much for the rise of permissive liberalism (supported, mainly, by mass consumerism and narcissism). It is time to shed more light on the way the idolatry of consumerism itself has contributed to the intensification of nihilism and cultural decomposition (or uprootedness), which gradually shaped conditions within which right-wing currents find suitable ground to spread in society. More emphasis will be paid on the process whereby permissiveness and consumerism intensified nihilism and cultural decomposition (or uprootedness). This will allow us to move into the next section, where the solutions right-wing populists are proposing (against the impasses of uprootedness) will be rigorously examined and evaluated.

### 3) Nihilism, uprootedness and the destruction of the past

In order to shed light on the reasons consumerism boosts nihilism, it would be necessary to elaborate further on the concept of idolatry. Let us consider the second stage of idolatry itself, where the *willing ego* (pathos) instead of granting to an idol the characteristics that would supposedly convert it into a living object (vitalisation), the same

idol gradually absorbs, digests and, finally, *de-vitalises* the human mind itself. More precisely, the mind is dominated by the excessive desire to possess idols: and, subsequently, loses its free will, its ability to choose (its vitality). First, as Weil (1987a) put it, vitality is synonymous with remembrance: the treasures from the past are stored up in our memory and they are ‘digested, assimilated and created afresh by us’ (49). To put it in my terms, valuable cultural objects are memorised but they are *retrieved* by our *thinking ego*, as Chapter 2 made clear. When the *thinking ego* dives into the reservoir of our memory, these objects are brought back into the present time (see Chapter 2 again). Simultaneously, our *thinking ego* ‘digests’ them (to use Weil’s terms), that is, it casts a critical eye upon them in order to produce value judgment, that is, a concrete understanding concerning the worth and meaningfulness each of these objects acquires. But the consumerist ethos places less emphasis on the conservation of cultural objects capable of generating meaning. In this respect, the idolatry of mass consumerism is conducive to cultural oblivion. Let us elucidate further this assertion. As Baudrillard (2016) observes, ‘[i]n a small group, needs, like competition, can doubtless stabilize. There is less of an escalation in the signifiers of status and the stuff of distinction. We can see this in traditional societies or micro-groups’ (65). To use a more vernacular language, in small traditional, robust and culturally coherent societies, the need for each individual member to distinguish him/herself from all other members, the need for self-actualisation (against assimilation) and the pursuit of a ‘personal status’, are less intense in comparison to large urbanised and impersonal consumerist societies. In comparison to traditional societies, urbanised cities are less coherent and their denizens seem to be more alienated and *privatized*. Thus, ‘in a society of industrial and urban concentration such as our own, where people are crowded together at much greater levels of density, the demand for differentiation grows even more quickly than material productivity’ (65-6). As Chapter 3 argued, while elaborating on Arendt (1976), isolated individuals, absorbed by their private concerns, lose their ‘natural connection with his fellowmen’ and judge their ‘individual private life only by comparing it with that of others’ and, consequently, their personal relations with their fellowmen ‘take the form of competition’ (141).

Furthermore, if *cultural memory* requires *public* interactions (as Chapter 2 argued) and from the moment most interactions in urbanised (consumerist) cities are *social* (as

mentioned earlier) and competitive (rather than *public*), centered around the pursuit of private improvement, around the need to endlessly gratify our pathos for self-actualisation and self-identity through the myriad of consumable idols available, we end up at the following conclusion: consumer capitalism intensifies cultural oblivion. Consumer capitalism unleashes dynamics that effectively slow down the process whereby cultural objects are either created or even preserved in memory, so long as they are not abandoned to vanish into oblivion and, instead, become frequently *re*-trieved by our *thinking ego*. It could be, therefore, argued that consumerism promotes social nihilism (cultural decomposition). Thus, it constitutes wonder incapable to reflect upon ‘meaningful treasures’, ‘digesting’ and ‘assimilating’ them, to use Weil’s (1987a: 47) terms again. If the destruction of memory renders *thinking* superfluous (so long as there exists nothing of real value to be retrieved from the storehouse by our *thinking ego*), and if *judgment* is a by-product of *thinking* (Chapter 2), oblivion deprives *judgment*. In addition, if *judgment* is connected with free will (as I mentioned earlier) and if free will and vitality are one and the same, the deprivation of our ability to *judge* entails de-vitalisation. In Goethe (2017), Mephistopheles addresses Dr. Faust’s anger and disillusionment (due to his inability to obtain solace and happiness through idols) using the following words: ‘You’re quite a devil now – but mind / You keep your nerve; for there / Is nothing more deplorable, I find, / Than a devil who’s been driven to despair’ (107). As Faust resembles more and more Mephistopheles, in the same way the Faustian consumer-like type of being, blinded by the unlimited pursuit for and luxury through the ‘the various idols of the Heathen world’ to use Milton’s (2004: 23) words, through Mephistopheles (in other words), becomes one and the same with such idols (with Mephistopheles himself). Etymologically speaking, the word Mephistopheles is a compound of the following three Greek words: *φως* (*phos*, that is light) before the negation *μή* (me) and *philos* (the friend, the lover) (Black, Conolly, Flint, *et al.*, 2016: 423). As it turns out, consumer capitalism and its tendency to de-vitalise the self, while idealising the unlimited possession of idols as the only step toward self-fulfillment, can trigger the emergence of the Mephistophelian man/woman (the lover of the *darkness*). The Mephistophelian *anthrōpos* is absorbed by his/her own lust for temporary pleasure. To avoid misunderstandings, such a lust does not simply manifest itself through the consumerist culture of *liquid modernity*. Other modes of living can also excite wantonness

and promiscuity.

Finally, Nietzsche's (2001) warning against the consequences of '[d]ivine decomposition' (120) raises concerns about the current tide of narcissism, idolatry and nihilism, followed by full-blown pessimism, the consequences of the *liquid modernity*, where most meaningful concepts and common ideas holding individuals and societies together seem to be vanishing<sup>62</sup>. When [t]he holiest and the mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives' (Nietzsche 2001: 120), when bonding memories disappear, in the Mephistophelian age of permissiveness, where temporary *private* pleasure sways over other public happiness, '[a]re we not continually falling?' (ibid). As long as 'thought begins with remembrance' (Arendt 1990: 220), as long as *thinking* and memory are almost one and the same, the destruction of the latter implies the loss of our ability to *think* and *judge*. In other words, a life without a past (which, as mentioned earlier, is the type of *liquid* life encouraged by consumerism with its emphasis on ephemeral pleasure) is 'a life without thinking', a life that 'fails to develop its own essence', a life 'not merely meaningless' but 'not fully alive' (Arendt 1978, 1: 191). As Jung (1977) claimed, '[m]an cannot stand a meaningless life', that is, a life plunged into existential uncertainty, struggling against 'complete atomization' and 'nothingness' (439). According to Tocqueville (1994), when 'the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity' (2: 331). Thus, the loss of historical continuity, a 'supreme tragedy', according to Weil (1987a: 114), and one of 'the greatest of all crimes' (49), signifies the eclipse of the empirical world (bonding and ethical memory) that creates a shelter against the forces of the underworld (pathos). As Chapter 2 stressed, the mechanism of wonder is restless; wonder constantly seeks objects in order to reflect upon. The destruction of the past, that is, the gradual loss of an empirical world of common (mainly cultural) memories and, subsequently, the process of cultural decomposition, that is, the disappearance of such memories (cultural objects) which have the capacity to keep wonder preoccupied, increases the chances for the latter, due to its constant pursuit for objects, to resort to the underworld mind, approaching pathos. To avoid

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62 Consider, for example, the loss of religiosity and spirituality, and (more importantly) the dramatic decline of church attendance in Europe and North America from 1970 and onwards (Kaufmann 2010: 7).



misunderstandings: such an empirical world is not fully sealed from the invasion of pathos itself (as the third section of Chapter 2 made clear). In short, pathos corrupts objects the mind stores in memory and, subsequently, *re*-trieves and reproduces. Hence, a common past, a common heritage, can incorporate ‘indecent’ elements, as chapter 6 will also explain, while reflecting on the case of racism in the American South and, simultaneity, on Martin Luther King Jr’s campaign. Therefore, the conservation of the past and the prevention of nihilism (or ‘uprootedness’) are surely valuable assets in every struggle against the *hubris* of pathos. But on the other hand, to acclaim the existence of the same past as the one and only remedy against the menacing forces of the underworld, a perfect recipe against pathos itself, would certainly be a critical error. The next section sheds more light on the implications of uprootedness, of the breaking of ‘the whole chain’ of historical ‘continuity’ inasmuch as ‘[n]o one generation could link the other’, making human beings a ‘little better than the flies of a summer’ (Burke 1968: 193). Uprootedness (or cultural decomposition) has cultivated the soil for the rise of nostalgia, which has been capitalised on by right-wing populist orators.

#### Pessimism, nostalgia and right-wing populism

This section acknowledges Weil’s (1987a) position on obligation, with the most notable being the obligation to be rooted (41), referring to the necessity of preserving the existence of a shared common empirical world, capable of generating meaning and a sense of common purpose. For Weil (1987a) the acknowledgment of the existence of human obligations is unquestionable; obligations are unconditional and eternal (3). They ‘stem, without exception, from the vital needs of the human being’ (7). They are connected with the impersonal realm, ‘situated above this world’ (4). Obligations, therefore, stem from God; they are part of the laws of nature, which cannot be transgressed. Since the destruction of the past and the loss of bonding memory, that is, the disappearance of an empirical world capable of ascribing meaning and orientation by constantly generating and reproducing memorable objects, lifts up all hindrances against any potential involuntary fall into the abyss of the underworld, we deem the existence of such a world as an unquestionable obligation (or necessity). In what follows I will examine the way the collapse of bonding memory and the gradual disappearance of such a common world (due to nihilism and



cultural decomposition) leave human beings at the mercy of pathos. More precisely, nostalgia and *mēnis*, which are motivated by pathos itself, incite transgression and self-deception, as exemplified by certain cases of right-wing populism.

#### 1) The soul's yearning for roots

Weil (1987a) identifies a series of physical obligations, such as the need for food and shelter. We can connect these obligations with the condition of *labour*. But at the same time, psychical needs (the needs of the soul) exist (9). These are, the need for order, the need for freedom of opinion, liberty, equality and risk, but also the need for security, obedience, hierarchism, the need for responsibility, honour, private and collective property, *et al.* The most important among these needs is the need to be rooted (41). For Weil, these obligations are 'not founded in the earthly world' (Kinsella 2014: 189). 'They belong to a realm situated above all conditions, because it is situated above this world' (Weil 1987a: 4). The need for order, the 'first need of all' (Weil 1987a: 11), protects us from social chaos and 'spiritual violence' (10). Obedience (not to be mistaken with servility or despotism) (13), honour (19-20) and hierarchism (18) inspire devotion to higher ideals and prevent social nihilism. A good balance of liberty and equality promote fairness and justice (12-13; 150-18). As we see, Weil acclaims these 'obligations' as indisputable truths, given once and for all. According to Kinsella (2014), *The Need for Roots*, was a work left unfinished (184) while most Weil's works are 'intimately rooted in her own experiences' (189) of the loss of shared values and principles taken as benchmarks for measuring human achievements. Perhaps, this explains her emphasis on the need for order and hierarchism, that is to say, on the need for a stable world of meaning and common purpose (Weil 1987a: 9-10) as well as on the need for 'devotion towards superiors' (Weil 1987a: 18), towards a set of common values deriving from realms situated above the human world and, for this reason, are considered objective. To a degree, Weil stresses what Nietzsche (2001), from a totally different angle, argued in his passages about the death of God, about the 'empty space breathing at us' (120), about a directionless world, swamped by nihilism. This has led Weil (1987a) to acknowledge the need to be rooted as 'the most important and least recognized need of the human soul' (41). A few centuries ago Rousseau (2005) had already argued that without roots, without an empirical world capable of influencing and sheltering the mind (to use my terms), human beings are 'nothing' (179). They are 'worse than dead'

(ibid). For Weil (1987a), uprootedness is one of 'the most dangerous malady to which human societies are exposed' (41). From a contextualist point of view, Weil's '[e]nigmatic and elliptical' writings reflect 'the fears of her time' (190), the mass terror of totalitarianism and the cruelty of the Second World War. So does Arendt's (1976) understanding of 'rootlessness', as one of the main incubators of totalitarianism (converging, thus, with Weil's understanding). 'The totalitarian movements', argues Arendt (1976), aimed 'at and succeed in organizing masses - not classes' (308). 'The masses emerged from the breakdown of the bourgeois-dominated class society' (314) The '[m]asses are not held together by a consciousness of common interest and they lack that specific class articulateness which is expressed in determined, limited, and obtainable goals' (311). They 'grew out of the fragments of a highly atomized society whose competitive structure and concomitant loneliness of the individual had been held in check only through membership in a class' (317). Arendt's analysis of uprootedness, namely, on the transformation of classes (or groups in general) into undifferentiated masses offers a more substantial (than that of Weil) view concerning the particular reasons uprootedness itself *can* be a dangerous (let us not assume it is *the most* dangerous) malady. The time has come to shed more light on the reasons uprootedness can incite nostalgia and *mēnis*.

First and foremost uprootedness occurs 'wherever there is a military conquest' (42). Persons can be also deprived of their roots even without war; money-power, economic domination and the cosmopolitan nature of wealth may cause uprootedness (42; 47). Since Weil's (1987: 6) list of psychical obligations are unquestionable and take the form of *necessity* (6), they can be placed in parallel with Arendt's view on physical necessity, with poverty and hunger, which (if left unappeased) could fuel violence and enmity<sup>63</sup>. In the same way «[τ]οῦ διψῶντος ἄρα ἡ ψυχὴ, καθ' ὅσον διψῇ, οὐκ ἄλλο τι βούλεται ἢ πλεῖν, καὶ τούτου ὀρέγεται καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦτο ὀρμᾷ» ('the soul of a human being, as long as it remains thirsty, has no other desire but to drink') (Πλάτων 2014: 314 [Plato 2014: 314]). This leads us to the following assumption: the soul of the uprooted knows no other appetite but to retrieve his/her lost roots. Of course, this *rationale* seems too 'categorical'. In short, one could cast serious doubts on the validity of the assertion concerning the so-called desire to

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63 See also Chapter 2

rediscover the lost roots as the only appetite the soul of the uprooted knows. Is there no possibility to withdraw in apathy or even to react with indifference? Does uprootedness drain all other appetites, including the appetite to learn and discover? Arguably, a) to assume that uprootedness does not unavoidably lead to the deprivation of all other psychological drives and b) to acknowledge the possible retreat into apathy and conformity does not automatically imply that uprootedness *per se*, that is, the loss of a common past, *cannot* incite a feeling of urgency to retrieve (or rediscover) the old lost common world and/or that this urgency (as Arendt and Weil supported) does not incubate demonic impulses (as I will further explain later on). Thus, by acknowledging Weil's thought we can assume that anger *can* be fueled when this psychological need is left unsatisfied<sup>64</sup>, when «βιάζονται τινά παρά τον λογισμόν ἐπιθυμίαι» ('the [judgemental] *logismikon* is shattered due to the dominance of such [unfulfilled] desires') (Πλάτων 2014: 318 [Plato 2014: 318]) and *thymos* (*mēnis*, in my view) abruptly explodes (320). Uprootedness (or cultural decomposition/nihilism), by removing all valuable objects from memory, upon which wonder reflects and by opening up pathways to the underworld, instigates *mēnis*—the most irrational aspect of *thymos* (Chapter 2)—depriving *judgment*, eroding the boundaries that discreetly separate falsehood from truth.

For Weil (2004), every void (this could also refer to the cultural void of cultural nihilism, insignificance or uprootedness) 'produces hatred, sourness, bitterness, spite' (16). Hatred, according to the same author, is usually directed against any source that provokes psychological (or physical) pain, and is accompanied by anger (49). Populist discourses strive to capitalise on generalised public frustration, discontent, resentment and anger (Müller 2016). Anger is usually accompanied by denunciations of injustice against the '*status quo*', which (in the populist imagination) constitutes the main source of political and economic inequality. Very often populist reactions are advocates of hope in fairness and decency coming through political reforms, through the replacement of the existing office holders with political leaders whose main objectives are centred on the defence of the interests and

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64 Two results are the possible consequences of uprootedness for Weil (1987a): the one is 'to fall into a spiritual lethargy resembling death, like the majority of the slaves in the days of the Roman Empire, or to hurl themselves into some form of activity necessarily designed to uproot, often by the most violent methods, those who are not yet uprooted, or only partly so' (45).

liberties of the ‘common people’. Populist anger can be also directed against the causes of uprootedness (or nihilism and cultural *decomposition*). Consider, for example, the attacks right-wing populists wage against globalisation and cosmopolitanism (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 5; 15) and, more precisely, against consumer capitalism and social liberalism, conceived responsible for robbing traditional values (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 5; 15). As Müller (2016) writes, right-wing populists (in the US) capitalise on the growing discontent and anger against a fast-changing cultural change in society, which ‘to a certain percentage of American citizens’ is deemed ‘deeply objectionable’ (91). ‘[T]here is the increasing influence of, broadly speaking, social-sexual liberal values (same-sex marriage, etc.) and also concerns about the United States becoming a “majority-minority country” in which traditional images of the “real people”—white Protestants, that is—have less and less purchase on social reality’ (92).. Let us return to Fukuyama’s (1992) definition of *thymos*, referring to the pursuit of worthiness: ‘people believe that they have a certain worth, and when other people treat them as though they are worth less than that, they experience the emotion of *anger*’ (xvii). In other words, worthiness is synonymous with high self-esteem, whose deprivation triggers anger. When deprivation of worthiness and self-esteem comes as a consequence of our inability to *identify* with a set of concepts and ideas that shape a common world within which individuals see themselves included, anger becomes *mēnis* (see Chapter 2). In turn, *mēnis* incites self-deception (fantasy, as I will explain in what follows). Thus, in line with Weil and Arendt, one could safely claim that populist discourses, which often profit from the *mēnis* (instigated by uprootedness), often take on a menacing form. As Maier (2013) claims, in reference to Weil, ‘in a condition of uprootedness’ men and women are ‘susceptible to revolutionary and totalitarian ideologies’ (229). In my terms, men and women in a condition of uprootedness often end up gullible to political discourses, which notwithstanding do not necessarily advocate totalitarianism, capitalise on public anger (in the form of *mēnis*), ‘promis[ing] *meaning* but deliver[ing] only incoherent, frenzied activity’ (ibid; *emphasis added*).

First of all, psychological studies have revealed the existence of ‘strong linkages between the development of self-esteem and identity’, whilst ‘high self-esteem is linked with “high” identity status (achievement and moratorium) and low self-esteem with “low” identity status’ (Ryeng, Kroger and Martinussen 2013: 201). Nonetheless, human

beings in order to obtain a (high) identity status must first and foremost *identify* themselves with the norms of a certain collectivity; these norms must become part of their daily routine. In other words, an identity is established when persons are rooted in a community; persons in order to be *(self)recognized* as A or B must associate themselves with the great variety of cultural (*ethimika*) objects that define the character *and* the temperament of the A or B community in which they feel rooted and integrated. These objects become *attachments*; they constitute 'the reality of the self which we transfer into things' says Weil (2002: 14). What the author conveys here is that human beings *define* themselves by associating their 'self' with numerous attachments (in our case, with the cultural objects of their community). Oblivion and cultural *decomposition* signify the breaking of such attachments. Hence, the self also passes into *uncertainty* and consequently, definition and (self)recognition becomes an impossible task. In short, the inability of self-recognition denotes absence of identity. Low self-esteem and absence of identity incites sharp psychological pain, which (in turn) provokes anger against the source considered responsible for causing uprootedness/decomposition or nihilism. This rise of extreme anger could be also explained from a different theoretical angle: as Chapter 2 argued, wonder is restless and constantly strives to obtain new objects. Cultural decomposition, the *liquidation* of the empirical (common) world, in other words, and the gradual disappearance of such objects, allows wonder itself to intrude into the underworld, approaching pathos. In turn, pathos awakes *mēnis*, a dreadful and catastrophic type of *thymos* (as mentioned earlier). *Mēnis* interprets the symbols and archetypes associated with the same lost world in a way that could indulge its irrational momentum. In short, just as destitution creates a feeling of urgency to fulfill certain bodily needs, in the same way the pessimism and affliction of nostalgia, when accompanied by sharp psychological pain and by an urgency to retrieve the old familiar and meaningful world (that has disappeared from our daily experiences) can lead to self-deception, delivering 'incoherent [and] frenzied [political] activity', to use words Maier's (2013: 229) again, I will further expand on this train of thought, in what follows.

## 2) Nostalgia and the idolisation of the past

From a different point of view; concepts and 'ideas in the mind quickly fade, and often vanish quite out of the understanding, leaving no more footsteps or remaining

characters of themselves, than shadows do flying over fields of corn' (Locke 1978: 81). Therefore, if they are not repeatedly exercised and refreshed through real life interactions they will quickly wear out, as both Locke (1978: 81) and Arendt (1990: 220) explained. The longer a memory remains exposed to conditions that trigger forgetfulness, left idle without being regularly exercised, the more chances to lapse into the state of oblivion increase. When oblivion prevails, when the empirical world gradually fades and the mind becomes void of meaningful representations, the subsequent feeling of emptiness that (potentially) emerges is often exploited by pathos. Pathos, *mēnis* and nostalgia construct an imaginary world, by inventing archetypal images, capable of indulging this urgency to escape from the present state of hopelessness and melancholy. Such images usually depict a pastoral landscape 'with its praise of simple country pleasures' (Lasch 1991a: 83), with its familiar community settled 'amongst a body of men and women who had known one another for a long time, from birth perhaps', in Laslett's (1965: 75) words. Far from representing the real motifs of country life, this pastoral charm incites a feeling of 'childlike simplicity and security', of 'lost innocence', of a dream world 'free from toil, tasks and obligations' (Lasch 1991a: 83). In fact, these feelings correspond to an exaggerated and, to an extent, corrupted version of the authentic modes of life that have disappeared. The nostalgic mind, writes Brown (2012), creates images of a past that has never actually existed (26). This imagined past is converted into a 'political religion', in Arato's (2013) terms, attributing an undisputed meaning to the past itself whose restoration is seen as a means of *salvation* (implying, liberation from the current cultural impasses, which represent the realm of *damnation*, the realm of absolute moral degradation). The urgency to restore this idyllic lost world sets in motion the uprooted masses. This can be seen in the case of Trump's slogan 'Making America Great Again', in its quasi nostalgic appeal (common among right-wing subcultures) to an imagined (but idealised) past idyllic world, resembling the 'mythical Old South' (Hale 2010: 55), where social corruption was unknown and modesty was prevalent in all aspects of social life (including sexual relations). Idealisation of the past implies that the past itself becomes sanctified, and it is converted into a *love object*, which, in Freud's (1955) words, enjoys 'a certain amount of freedom from criticism' (112); it is converted into an *idol*, into an object of absolute value, capable of presenting a collection of archetypal images that depict an age of lost innocence

and a blissful, untroubled and unspoiled way of life.

To romanticise the past, however, to conceive it as a *love object* (idol) entails that the same past to an extent is idealised. As Freud (1955) observed, the tendency of '*idealization*' and '*falsifies judgment*' (112). 'Under this condition the object is treated in the same way as our own ego' (ibid), as our own *self* (in other words). Nostalgia allows the past to become an object of delight, which simultaneously is understood as an extension of our ego. In short, this identification between the object and the ego (or self) entails that the latter passes into a stage of perfection; 'everything that the object does and asks for is right and blameless' (222). To convert the past into an object that fits the desire to obtain a high identity status, so that persons can reestablish their sense of worthiness (*thymos*), an exaggerated worthiness, nonetheless, product of pathos (*mēnis*), corresponds to what Arendt (1976: 352) calls as the tendency of the uprooted masses to revolt against reality. This revolt against reality and the tendency to reduce reality into our desires/pathos could also explain the rhetoric of many think tanks and information networks created by many supporters of right-wing populist doctrines (including a portion of Trump's voters), which revolves around the perversion of real facts and the promotion of conspiracy theories (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 5; Singh 2017: 6; 19). When this occurs the masses end up gullible to propaganda that conjures up a lying world in absolute consistency with their *mēnis* and nostalgic longing, a world 'in which, through sheer imagination, uprooted masses can feel at home and are spared the never-ending shocks which real life and real experiences deal to human beings and their expectations' (ibid). It should be made clear that the pessimism of nostalgia, as Lasch (1991a) pointed out, should not be confused with the 'reassuring memory of happy times' (82). This appeal to happy memories, which 'link the present to the past' (ibid), provides a sense of *continuity* and does not view the past itself as an entity that 'stands outside time, frozen in unchanging perfection' (83). Continuity indicates that a specific (X) moment in history is subject to *genealogical* evolution, that is, to consecutive influences of other predeceasing events (A, B, C, *et al.*). The influences of these events are visible not only in the X but also in the present world. *Genealogy* also prompts us to examine whether the influences of the X moment (which could be a product of either the A or B or C, or both) are visible in the present. A past 'frozen' in 'images of timeless, childlike innocence' is usually approached as a 'static'

moment in history (118), as a ‘lifeless’ and non-evolving object. The ‘lifelessness of the past’ denotes that the nostalgic imagination has conceived this idealised moment (X) as an entity more or less incapable of exerting influences beyond its time, that is, of incubating the conditions which will permit X itself to gradually evolve into a different social reality in the future. Consider against Trump’s slogan , ‘Make America Great Again’, which (as noted earlier) points to a moment in history ‘frozen’ in unchanging direction. It ‘appeals nostalgically to a mythical “golden past”’ (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 16). This past is usually isolated from the present; the ‘nostalgic reaction’ that seeks a ‘bulwark against long-term processes of value change’ of ‘the “silent revolution”’, the cultural revolution (more precisely), ‘which has transformed Western cultures’ (13), often neglects the existence of the exact elements that influenced such cultural transformations in the same romanticised past world (as I will explain further below).

Attempts that spot an existing *genealogy* between the present and the past, attempts that treat the present as a legitimate offspring (*henkfurt*) of the world we have lost, perceive the same world not as a ‘static’ and ‘frozen’ moment in history but as a *living* object, as an organic and self-evolving entity, characterised by bonding memories which alter themselves through time, by concepts and ideas that contribute to the gradual synthesis of a new reality. But when the mind, consumed by its own weaknesses (pathos) regards the past itself as a ‘frozen’ moment in time, entirely unlinked to the present, when the mind conceives a past social reality as a static entity, cast in stone, an entity that never evolves or alters itself (as all organic objects do), producing new realities, the vitality and liveliness of the same reality disappears. When this inorganic reality becomes a *love object*, an object of absolute value that stands in absolute perfection, it is *loved* as an idol. The idolisation and idealisation of the past, ardently expressed through the sentiment of nostalgia, undermines our ability ‘to make *intelligent* use’ of it (Lasch 1991a: 82; *emphasis added*). An intelligent use of the past employs *judgment*; by considering a given reality to be an organic, and hence, an evolving entity, one could identify within the same reality elements that cultivated the exact conditions which, in turn, contributed to the moral degradation of the present. In contrast, by identifying no *genealogy*, no connection between the past and the present and, more importantly, by projecting an idealised and idolised ‘static’ past reality as a solution to the cultural and social impasses of the present, one projects all these



fallible concepts of the same past—which are, in fact, the primary causes of the present reality, plumbed by such impasses—as remedies.

Let us take as an example again Trump’s ‘nostalgic slogan ‘Make America Great Again’, whose only motive is to attract ‘societally pessimistic voters’, as Steenvoorden and Harteveld (2018: 29) put it. To a degree, right-wing populists accuse the cultural revolution of the sixties and seventies and its liberal values that diffused in the American society for being exclusively responsible for eroding this ‘greatness’, for annihilating this unspoiled idyllic image of the ‘old America’ and forcing the old system of value-structure that used to guarantee a sense of identity and self-recognition to disappear (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 5; 16; Singh 2017: 5; Steenvoorden and Harteveld 2018: 31). It can be true that certain trends emerging from the Cultural Revolution are responsible for accelerating the nihilistic Mephistophelian culture of permissiveness that caused uprootedness (as the previous section argued). Nonetheless, by idolising the pre-60s social order, right-wing populists attempt to square the circle; they blatantly overlook that within the same order they have so ardently idealised, which is the order they aspire to bring into existence, the exact forces considered partially responsible for uprootedness, for degrading of all relations that produce meaning and purpose, exalting private happiness at the expense of friendship and community, were also prevalent. As the previous chapter proved, the spirit of progress, which cultivated the soil for the emergence of the appropriate conditions within which cultural *decomposition* was made possible, was prevalent long before the normalisation of the standards the Cultural Revolution promoted.

Lasch (1984) documents in the United States the spread of consumer culture in the twenties (28). For Kondylis (2015 [Kovδύλης 2015]), right-wing conservatives have many times backed reforms in favour of the expansion of material abundance, which (in their eyes) represents the advantages of the ‘free world’ against the totalitarian-run world of mass control, repression and indigence (40). Such has been the case of the Golden Era; a wide range of government measures (including the Employment Act of 1946) that made possible the spread of consumerism had been welcomed by conservative-minded voters and public intellectuals, who acclaimed widespread abundance was the most effective remedy against the spread of communism in society (Snyder-Hall 2012: 405-6). According to Kondylis (2007 [Kovδύλης 2007]), mass consumerism begun to spread around 1900,

just when mass culture consolidated its dominance; it came a consequence of the rapid technological expansion in mass production (225; 280).

From a different angle, Arendt (1990) and Fine (2014) identify the first major turning point during the emergence of the United States as a sovereign nation, and more importantly in the creation of the American Constitution: the Bill of Rights by defending individual liberties defended the private sphere (Fine 2014: 225). While individual liberties, according to Arendt (1990), are important, since they impose necessary constraints upon government (135), ‘they are the results of liberation’ and ‘by no means [make up] the actual content of freedom’, which (as previously mentioned) is synonymous ‘with participation in public affairs, or admission to the public realm’ (32). The makers of the Constitution failed to incorporate the political spaces (like the town-halls) into it (237); instead, they adopted the concept of representation as an alternative to direct participation (Arendt 1990: 237; Deneen 2018: 163) and did not provide to the people more space of public action, to make their voices heard, apart from the ballot box (Arendt 1990: 253). According to Fukuyama (1992), the American Founding Fathers placed immense emphasis on the notion of right, considered (to a great extent) a ‘means of preserving a *private* sphere where men can enrich themselves and satisfy the desiring parts of their soul’ (xviii; *emphasis added*). If, as Arendt (1990) claimed, ‘[f]ree enterprise ... only in America ... has been an unmixed blessing’ (217), to some degree this could be attributed to the victory of liberalism against republicanism, according to Pettit (1997: (12), to the excessive emphasis on individual liberty (as opposed to *freedom*), on the emancipation of ‘the individual from interpersonal bonds and obligations, including those entailed by active democratic citizenship’ (Deneen 2018: 172). In addition, the expansion of the free market in America and the substitution of ‘public happiness’ with *private* happiness could be also attributed to the influence of powerful financial elites that took advantage the absence of controls, which popular sovereignty could impose upon rampant economic individual self-interest, pushing forward reforms in favour of free enterprise, through which they could maximise their personal gains<sup>65</sup>. Nor we should neglect the excitement with which the

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65 As I explain right at the end of the second section of chapter 6, the marginalisation of popular sovereignty coincided with the rapid expansion of banking profits in America, firing up political revolts (like, for instance, the Populist revolt during the late nineteenth century).

deeply-seated myth of the so-called ‘self-made man’ was and remains revered in America (perhaps due to the lasting influences of Puritanism)<sup>66</sup>. According to this myth, so ardently cherished by the Founders (Kloppenber 2016: 394), a person is virtuous when he/she exploits the opportunities a capitalist economy creates, opportunities that lead to material prosperity and abundance (*private happiness*). However, according to Jefferson, no individual can be truly happy ‘without his share in public happiness ... without participating, and having a share, in public power’ (Arendt 1990: 255); nobody is truly free ‘without his experience in public freedom’ (ibid). In his own words, the ancestors of the American republic left the British shores while seeking a ‘new habitation’, and established ‘new societies’ in the New World, capable of preserving laws and legislation that would most likely ‘promote public happiness’ (Jefferson 1998: 65). To sum up: the ‘rapid and constant economic growth’, in other words, led to the rapid ‘expansion of the private realm’ (252), to the idealisation of private enjoyment at the expense of political and public time, family life and tradition. The countercultural movements of the 1960s and the 1970s (as the previous section explained) only accelerated this process of uprootedness and cultural decomposition.

### 3) Right-wing populism; nostalgia politicised

In general terms, we have arrived at the following preliminary conclusions: first, nostalgia, capitalised by the populist right, approaches the world through a pessimistic prism—as long as it disparages the present, which offers no sense of delight and/or happiness (Lasch 1991a: 82-3)—and (more importantly) is marked by intense incoherence. Right-wing populism strives to preserve structures that superimpose principles and bonding memories within which one finds elements of religion and tradition, elements that create and preserve robust and permanent cultural bonds, coexisting side by side with elements that promote rugged individualism, which—as Genovese (1994: 8) pointed out—

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66 As with Kloppenber (2016), ‘[t]he Puritans have remained central players in the frequently retold drama of the rise of capitalism’ (80). The Puritan/Protestant ‘ethic and the spirit of productivity, if not capitalism’ contributed to ‘the patriot’s cause’ (769), that is, to the gradual formation of the ideology behind the American Revolution. For more concerning the way the English Puritans influenced the American social imaginary from the sixteenth century and onward see Chapter 7.

are a solvent to traditional communal bounds. Second (and more importantly), right-wing populism, by considering nostalgia as a response to the impasses of the present and, consequently, by idolising and idealising the past as a whole, degrades our ability to critically analyse the past itself and the way it influences the present and the future (Lasch 1991a: 118). Nostalgia, by appealing to *mēnis*, deprives the *logismikon*, our ability of *judging*, of impartially approaching our individual and collective history; it prevents us from spotting and rejecting (in the same past it idealises) the exact elements that create nihilism and lead to uprootedness.

Moreover, this romanticised past, this idyllic utopian world, conceived as blissful Eden, supposedly free from the sway that slowly set the ground for the ‘death of God’, ends up an ideal ‘model’ for implementation, a model that prefigures an unblemished society. The bringing of such a fanciful reality into existence is met with a fundamental prerequisite: the same (falsified) reality must be initially visualised collectively and must be converted into an ideal-object (idol). What could, however, enhance this visualisation is *discourse*; *legein* must construct the image of such a society. Discourse projects this idealised utopia as the *common desire* of the ‘pure people’ against the ‘corrupt elites’, expressed by the strong figure of a ‘father-leader’, with whom the masses can identify.

As Weil (2013) argues, ‘[r]eason perceives and chooses what is just and innocently useful, whereas every crime is motivated by passion’ (5). Interpreting it on my own terms, *judgment* is ‘the “promised synthesis” or “solution” to an “impasse”’ (Fine 2007: 117), the ability to discriminate between good and evil, as opposed to pathos (whose by-products are *mēnis*, nostalgia and the reactionary paralysis). Political parties (as well as populist leaders) are machines that generate, whip up, or even capitalise on collective passions (Weil 2013: 11). Top-down *discursive articulation*—employed by parties and leaders—becomes an instrument of unification, as I explained in Chapter 2; in our case, all nostalgic sentiments—products of the collective pathos—are considered *signs* (or *popular demands*), to use Laclau’s (2005) terms, which are appropriated by populist discourses in order to form *equivalential chains*. These discourses strive to capture the imagination of social groups which desire to reverse the emptiness, hopelessness and despair of uprootedness. Through this process they aspire to bring these groups together, under a common banner. In other words, nostalgia creates a common desire (to restore the ‘old uprooted world’) by utilising

fading bonding memories. This visualised 'lost world' will (supposedly) come into existence through central planning; hence, a *homo faber* (the 'father leader') must play the role of the 'silent creator' (Kalyvas 2008: 226). But while the discourse of the leader attempts to capitalise on fading memories, forming *equivalential chains*, aspiring to bring into existence a visualised reality, the non-rational (and unpredictable) aspect of collective institutioning—which renders all forms of planning and designing, according to an ideal vision of society, futile (if not utopian)—constitutes the implementation of this reality a difficult task.

The impossibility of bringing into existence such an ideal reality social through top-down measures resembling the quasi Arcadian life of the disappeared past is also highlighted in Lord Byron's (1970) verses (taken from his poem *Stanzas for Music*): 'Nor can we be what we recall, / Nor dare we think on what we are' (100). In short, the past is unrecoverable; once it is 'destroyed never returns', claims Weil (1987a: 49). Nostalgia, for Byron (1970), is nothing but a 'delusion', considering that '[t]he future cheats us from afar' (100), that the outcome of human affairs is never predictable and, hence, collective realities cannot be made to order. Additionally, if we integrate Byron's (1970) verse '[n]or dare we think on what we are' (100) to the concept of the *vita contemplativa*, if we interpret the verb 'think' as *think*, referring to the 'liberating effect' of the mind that produces *judgment* (Fine 2007, p.119), we may end up with the following conclusion: nostalgia, the pathos to retrieve the old lost world, is a 'delusion', to use Byron's (1970: 100) words, that deprives our ability 'to stop and think' (Arendt 1978, 1, p.4) and subsequently to *judge*, that is, to identify and evaluate 'what we are' (Byron 1970: 100) and who we are. In fact, 'we are' nothing but the legitimate offspring of a world that produced its own grave diggers, of a world that created the exact conditions that caused uprootedness, undermining its own existence.

### Conclusion

This chapter examined the case of (Mephistophelian) permissiveness as a *genealogical* evolution of the old Faustian model of economic liberalism which had idealised progress, the 'secular utopia' that would (ostensibly) 'bring history to a happy ending' by promising 'steady improvement with no foreseeable ending at all' (Lasch

1991a: 47). As the previous chapter argued, economic liberalism encouraged men and women to obtain meaning in social mobility. The original plausibility of the eighteenth century idea of progress, was ironically ‘derived from the more specific assumption that insatiable appetites, formerly condemned as a source of social instability and personal unhappiness’ (52). The destructiveness that ‘manifests itself in Will’s obsession with the future’ (Arendt 1978, 2: 178), in the pathos for unlimited possession, forces ‘men into oblivion. In order to will the future in the sense of being the future’s masters, men must forget and finally destroy the past’ (ibid). Permissive liberalism attacked memory and historical continuity without, however, emphasising the future; instead, it encouraged *liquidity*, to use Bauman’s (2000) terms, and accelerated the disappearance of attachments associated with the past. If, therefore, ‘Hobbes was right, though for the wrong reasons’ (Castoriadis 1997c: 146), that ‘continuall feare, and danger of violent death’ (Hobbes 2006: 70) ‘is indeed the mainstream institution’, it is not ‘the fear of being killed by the next man but the justified fear that everything, even meaning, will dissolve’ (Castoriadis 1997c: 136), that all common memories will gradually disappear. As Weil (1987a) argued, the need for order is ‘the first need of all’ and it ‘stands above all needs’ (11). It refers to the ‘texture of social relationships such that no one is compelled to violate’ (9). Such relations create interactions and shape a common empirical world, which protects us from ‘spiritual violence’ (10), from the vices of the underworld. Eventually, the need for order and the need for roots are interrelated; the existence of bonding (civil or cultural) memory, of a common empirical world, creates a sense of order, a sense of solidity and stability, as opposed to the chaotic *liquid* world of nihilism and uprootedness.

Lack of order, meaning and common purpose has allowed pessimism and nostalgia to shape the current political *zeitgeist*. In turn, nostalgia incited urgency for retrieving all the disappeared attachments of the lost old meaningful world. This urgency is synonymous with the pursuit for self-recognition, with a pervasive *thymos* (*mēnis*), in other words, associated with low self-esteem and worthlessness. *Mēnis*, the feeding nest of fantasy, falsifies and idolises the past. We have noted the parallels between *mēnis* with the condition of pauperisation and increasing misery. Going back to Arendt’s analysis of necessity, analogous to *labour*, which represents the most animalistic aspects of human condition, is pathos and its by-products (including *mēnis*). Pathos, *mēnis* and nostalgia represent the

bestial aspects of the human soul (pathos), emerging from the deepest strata of the underworld, putting constraints on the *logismikon*, on our capacity to *think* and *judge* impartially. We have already seen that right-wing populists exploit collective passions by capitalising on nostalgia, taking advantage of the rising tide of *mēnis*, of sentiments common among individuals who are members of collectivities experiencing uprootedness, promoting the construction of a social reality (in other words) that directly appeals to their nostalgic attitudes. Moreover, right-wing populist leaders show no desire of expanding democratic participation, despite their intense denunciations of the repression of popular sovereignty by the ‘corrupt elites’. Instead, they transfer all political powers to a centralised bureaucracy, which strives to shape this desired and visualised social reality (product of *mēnis*) into existence through a top-down process, through discourse and rhetoric. They see popular identities as top-down processes, within which the people themselves instead of being agents remain passive and silent<sup>67</sup>.

*Logos* and narrative or agonal *action* create and shape a community by allowing personal viewpoints to be brought into the public sphere, instead of being suppressed by the process of homogenisation (through top-down *discursive articulation*). ‘To speak to someone’ adds Goodman (1970) ‘not only communicates but creates community’ (112). To speak to someone, as a political animal, to dispute, challenge and *judge* publicly ideas and perceptions, is to participate in a bottom-up process of identity shaping. Through this process, which leads to a synthesis of viewpoints and ideas, new collective identities and realities are shaped. Therefore, to suggest that pathos, nostalgia and *mēnis* entail the deactivation of the *logismikon* denotes that the same term (*logismikon*) has acquired a near different meaning from that originally given by Plato: *logos* constitutes the etymological root of the word *logismikon*. Moreover, *logos* (interpreted as speech) is not only synonymous with the Latin understanding of man as *animal rationale* (Arendt 1998: 47) but also with its capacity of reckoning ‘with consequences’ (172). Consequently, to suggest that nostalgia deactivates the *logismikon* is to assert that nostalgia diminishes *logos*; thus, it

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67 According to the standards of the *vita civile*, which associates true populism with *action*, right-wing populism, due to its emphasis on top-down construction, is inherently anti-populist. Its insistence on planning encourages passivity rather than active citizenship. Thus, it deprives the chances for the ‘common people’ to join forces, acting as *political animals* (in the political realm).

lessens narrative and (mainly) agonal *action*. From a different angle, nostalgia is a deep emotion and, like all deep emotions (see Chapter 2), hinders *judgment*, which is dialectical, deriving from ‘argumentative reasoning’ to use Arendt’s (1990: 87) terms, from dialogue and open contention (*logos*). The next chapter addresses the practical benefits of *logos* and *public judgment* for common decency.



## Chapter 5

### From *logos* and deliberative democracy to civil disobedience

#### Introduction

The first section of this chapter focuses on *logos*, public reasoning, public *judgment* and *agonal action* in the political realm. Thus, '[t]he *mental* and *moral*, like the muscular powers' writes John Stuart Mill (2008), are improved only by being used' (59; *emphasis added*). Chapter 3 outlined the reasons political realms test and improve these 'moral muscular powers' through open participation, by allowing persons to amass moral capital (experience or ethical memory)<sup>68</sup>. However, there is no indication that experience alone is the perfect remedy for common decency. As Mill (2008) stressed, '[v]ery few facts are able to tell their own story, without comments to bring out their meaning' (23). Hence, '[t]here must be discussion' which 'show[s] how experience is to be interpreted' (ibid). To explain further, through public discussion, through *logos* and public *judgment*, individuals strive to grasp the actual moral lessons of a particular event (or experience). On the other hand, I have already explained the process through which pathos, emerging from the underground to the empirical world, creates fantasy, deception and (more seriously) desire for arbitrary domination. In certain cases, hubris and fantasy affect large sections of a collectivity. The fragility of the empirical world (due to its constant exposure to the forces of the underworld) discourages anyone from acknowledging popular attitudes (*id est*, the views of the majority) as unconditional proofs of truth, beauty and justice. Eventually, *logos* and/or ethical memory cannot always substantiate conditions capable of sustaining high standards of common decency. In such cases, a populace becomes too licentious and *action* instead of safeguarding truth and justice, intensifies *hubris* (injustice and cruelty). The *hubris* of the *demos* can be denounced through civil disobedience<sup>69</sup>. The second and third sections of this chapter are exclusively dedicated to the practical benefits of civil disobedience and *narrative action* (in relation to religion and spirituality).

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68 While criticizing the anti-populism of economic liberalism, Chapter 3 emphasised the significance of ethical memory. It spoke of the resilience, of the ability to '*dare greatly*' (Brown 2012: 1) against the haphazardness of *fortuna*, against our inherent vulnerability.

69 For a more accurate definition of *hubris* (as opposed to common decency) see the Glossary.

According to Machiavelli (1970), ‘if account be taken of all disorders due to populaces and of all those due to princes ... and of all the glories won by populaces and all those won by princes, it will be found that alike in goodness and in glory the populace is far superior’ (256). When, however, the populace throws off restraint, the same populace becomes a tyrant (257). Albeit more virtue and fewer errors can be found in a populace that has thrown off prudence than in ungrateful kings (254) the hubris the former expresses can be equally terrifying with that of the latter. Once the insanity of hubris takes over, everybody is constantly harassed ‘and kept on edge by the interference of extraneous wills while the soul is left in cold and desolate Misery’ (Weil 2005: 79). But according to Machiavelli (1970), ‘a licentious and turbulent populace ... can easily be brought to behave itself’ by a ‘good man’ (256)<sup>70</sup> (or woman, in our age), who at the same time *must* be a ‘good citizen’. As Arendt (1969b) clarified, the ‘good citizen’ (as opposed to the ‘good man’) does not disobey unjust laws simply out of conscience (65); he/she enters the public realm and projects his conscience as truth, challenging established perceptions and deeply rooted false appraisals (ibid). The ‘good citizen’, the civil disobedient (in other words), challenges established ideas and practices (ibid); his/her *logos* is diffused in the public realm (newspapers, broadcasts, marketplace, *et al.*) in order to incite intense debates (narrative action).

Furthermore, instead of being a vanguard pioneer who exerts pressure upon the minds of those he/she aspires to influence and simply tells them what to do, this ‘good citizen’, this eloquent and trusted populist orator/leader, encourages his/her followers to take responsibility for themselves, as self-reliant, self-respecting and independent citizens. Such was Martin Luther King Jr’s case (Lasch 1995a: 83; Phillips 1998: 42), who sought to persuade large sections of the American society, striving to eradicate the hubris of racism, especially in the Old South. In the second section of this chapter King’s philosophy and ideas are further discussed in relation to the impersonal realm, to the notion of *impersonality* (and *self-purification*). If King’s leadership changed the attitude of many Americans, awakening their conscience to the evils of racial segregation (Colaiaco 1988:

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70 As with Milton (2004), the woes and sorrows that follow ‘man’s first disobedience’ which ‘Brought death into the world’ will cease ‘till one greater Man / Restore us, and regain the blissful seat’ (10).

1; Phillips 1998: 1), it was ‘largely because he was able to dramatize [these evils] before the court of world opinion’ (Colaiaco 1988: 2). Driving the public’s attention to the suffering of African Americans, King sought to challenge rigid and fallible social norms and perceptions (Benhabib 2018), reactivating public *judgment*, inspiring hope that someday justice ‘will roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream’ (King 1986: 219). Nonetheless, the animating spirit was King’s Christian *agape*, his unshakeable faith in the ‘common people’, which derives from his unconditional recognition of the sacredness and worth of human life, expressed through his deep seated belief in the capacity of each human being to contribute to the common good by transcending his/her proclivity for hubris and, above all, by repenting and rectifying his/her stance. In King’s case this intense belief served as a beacon of psychical enlightenment; it opened up pathways through which one connects him/herself with spheres of deep spiritual contemplation, capable of stimulating self-reflection, promoting clarity of thought, encouragement and vigour, in short, with the ‘anonymous’ ‘realm of the sacred’, to use Weil’s (2005: 75) terms, with the purifying *impersonal realm*.

As mentioned earlier, this belief in the human potential for good (*eucosmia*) apart from being associated with *impersonality*, is also related to *action*; hence, it is coextensive to *logos* and *public judgment*, through which the ‘ordinary people’ can make common decency a real possibility. *Logos* and (*agonal*) *action* imply constant tug-of-war debate between opposite viewpoints. Through this process the *mental muscular powers* are re-improved and public intelligence is made possible. Intelligence, as defined by Weil (1987a) stands for the ability of achieving and maintaining high standards of moral objectivity through free dialogue (22), protecting common decency against hubris and self-deception. Along with the ability to choose, for Weil intelligence implies also efficiency in working with technical problems. Intelligence can also ‘operate alone, separately from the other faculties, in a purely theoretical speculation where all questions of action have been provisionally set aside’ (ibid). Thus, intelligence is related to *judgment*; it is ‘practical intelligence and political good sense of the Americans’ attributed to ‘the long use which they have made of the jury in civil causes’ (Tocqueville 1994, 1: 285), a ‘political

institution’ *par excellence* and ‘one of the forms of popular sovereignty’ (280)<sup>71</sup>. While reflecting on Weil, Arendt and Mill, the next section sheds light on the exact process through which *logos*, *judgment* and public appearance can make intelligence (and, hence, common decency) a real possibility.

### Agonal action and logos

As with Weil (1987a), complete and ‘unlimited freedom of expression for every sort of opinion, without the least restriction or reserve, is an absolute need on the part of the *intelligence*’, of the ability to sense the consequences of a choice lying ‘before the will concerning the path to be followed’ (22; *emphasis added*). Public intelligence is correlated with the political realm, where a wide diversity of viewpoints are expressed (through *logos*), compared and juxtaposed. In the political realm, individuals can learn to evaluate ideas freely and no domain of (expressed) thought escapes examination. *Logos* (speech and hearing) and plurality of words, that is, of viewpoints and ideas, are the *sine qua non* of all political *action* (Arendt 1990: 175; 1998: 202; 220). Put otherwise, plurality of opinions, the diversity of perspectives, which is ‘inherent in *freedom of thought and speech*’ constitutes the essence of the political realm itself (Arendt 1990: 245; *emphasis added*). For Arendt (1990), this was the main characteristic of the Greek *polis*, of the ‘man-made space of appearances where human deeds and words were exposed’ and, subsequently, testified ‘and judged’ by the public (103). This process of public intelligence and *judgment* aims at what the ancient Athenians used to call as *philokaloumen* («φιλοκαλοῦμέν») and *philosophoumen* (φιλοσοφοῦμεν). *Philo-kalo* implies the love (*philia*) of beauty (*kalo*) (Arendt 1968a: 213) or (from a different translation) the love of ‘goodness’. *Kalo* (καλό) is also translated as ‘the good’, which (in the classical republican tradition) is synonymous with the public (or common) good: According to Pocock (1975), civic virtue consists in ‘placing the common good ... above one’s personal profit’ (464), above one’s personal good (in other words). *Philo-sopho* stands for the love with *sophia*, with wisdom, with the

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71 In contrast, technological knowledge and theoretical contemplation in isolation do not require a plurality of opinions. They can function even in the most extreme forms of seclusion. Thus, they point to the intellect, to *epistēmē* and *technē* (see Chapter 3), whose contribution to politics (as opposed to that of intelligence) is limited.

active pursuit of (moral) knowledge (Arendt 1968a: 213; Καστοριάδης 2008: 245 [Castoriadis 2008: 245]). To a degree, *philo-kalia* and *philo-sophia* are equivalent to common decency. These terms appear in Pericles's Funeral Oration, as reported by Thucydides (2011 [Θουκυδίδης 2011]): «[φ]ιλοκαλοῦμέν τε γὰρ μετ' εὐτελείας καὶ φιλοσοφοῦμεν ἄνευ μαλακίας» (262), '[w]e love the *beauty* within the limits of *political judgment*, and we philosophize without the barbarian vice of effeminacy [or cowardice]', according to Arendt's (1968a: 214; *emphasis added*) translation. It was the *polis* and 'politics' that provided the means to love wisdom and to *actively* seek the truth by means of *logos* and dialogue, by means of public mediation (ibid). In another account, the word μετ' εὐτελείας points to the 'absence of exaggeration' (or *hubris*) (Καστοριάδης 2008: 245 [Castoriadis 2008: 245]). Hence, Pericles' phrase expresses what according to Castoriadis was central in Greek democratic thought, a modest (or prudent) love for truth and beauty, and a sense of μέτρον (*metron*). *Metron*, according to Pythagoras, is usually translated in modern Greek as μετριο-πάθεια, from the word (*metriazo*), that is, minimise, reduce, decrease the πάθος (*pathos*/passion). As opposed to the *politis* (πολίτης), the free-man of the *polis* (more precisely), who knew how to persuade others through his *logos*, the *barbarian* (according to the Greeks) was 'ruled by violence' and labour, which require no speech to be effective (Arendt 1968a: 23). The barbarians were ἄνευ λόγου [*aneu logou*]: 'they did not live with each other primarily by means of speech' (ibid). In what follows, the practical contribution of *logos* and public reasoning to common decency, to *philo-kalia* (love for goodness or beauty) or *philo-sophia* (love for *judgment*, or intelligence), will be further examined, in juxtaposition to private reasoning (*thinking* in isolation). The former's impotence to inhibit extreme forms of moral transgression will be also discussed. The limits of active citizenship will be outlined, in the course of reflecting on historical case-studies. After identifying the impasses of *logos* and active citizenship in general, we will move onto the next step, where the practical benefits of civil disobedience, by combating extreme forms of *hubris*, are thoroughly evaluated.

### 1) *Logos*, public reasoning and *judgment*

According to Arendt (1976), not all manifestations of the mind require interactions and common appearance; *thinking* is possible in isolation since the mind 'needs neither the self nor the other nor the world in order to function safely' (477). Mathematical reasoning,

for example, (or intellect) and the basic rules ‘of cogent evidence, the truism that two and two equals four cannot be perverted even under the conditions of absolute loneliness’ (ibid). ‘[R]ational or mathematical truth’ argues Arendt (1978), like ‘the proposition that two and two make four’, presents itself ‘as self-evident to everyone endowed with the same brain power’ (1: 59). In contrast, factual truths ‘can never be witnessed by everyone who may want to know about it’ (ibid). Truths of a fact ‘are compelling only to those who are witnessing them with their own eyes’ and they cannot ‘reach those who, not having been witnesses, have to rely on the testimony of others, whom one may or may not believe’ (ibid).

Consider, at this stage, the following hypothesis: certain aspects (say A, B, C) of an event (X) are taken as factual truths. But an individual has not witnessed A or B in order to understand what they are about. Unless he/she obtains some objective knowledge, his/her attempt to extract concrete conclusions based on these factual truths has no *telos*. Unable to conceive what actually occurred, his/her unstoppable tendency (of wonder) to reflect upon memorable objects, concepts or ideas may (even unintentionally) force his/her imagination to gamble on hypothetical scenarios, constructing conclusions based on them, conclusions that may have no substantial grounding in reality. In short his/her interpretation of A and B may have little to do with what these aspects (of the X event) truly stand for. In more serious circumstances, forces of the underworld (pathos) could prompt the observer to cherry-pick testimonies that buttress a desired conclusion (as we have partially seen with the case of nostalgia). Consider also the role of ‘belief bias’ in shaping fallible conclusions. According to Calvillo, Swan and Rutchick (2019), ‘belief bias occurs when individuals are more willing to accept conclusions that are consistent with their beliefs than conclusions that are inconsistent’ (1). In other words, belief bias occurs when persons whose worldviews are rigid and inflexible often seek out testimonies from sources (newspapers, magazines, *et, al.*) that suit the exact ideology (or belief system) that has shaped their world-view. Moreover, studies reveal that most individuals ‘take longer to process information inconsistent with their [already shaped] beliefs’ (3)<sup>72</sup>. Thus, one in

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72 These studies mentioned by Calvillo, Swan and Rutchick (2019) measure responses on ‘policy issues such as affirmative action and gun control (3). It is revealed that most ‘participants show confirmation bias by seeking out evidence consistent with their beliefs and they show

order to construct valid conclusions through ‘mathematical’ reasoning must first and foremost ensure that the *premises* (A, B and C for instance) are not products of ‘belief bias’<sup>73</sup>..

As Carlyle (2007) asserted, ‘the nature of man’ is ‘to reckon his own insight as final, and goes upon it as such’ (77). However, empirical studies that have shed light on this propensity towards ‘belief bias’, which (as they reveal) tends to be more evident in syllogisms revolving around political issues (Calvillo, Swan and Rutchick 2019: 3; 5; 9-10), do not specify whether such a proclivity derives from human nature or not. By asserting that pathos does have the capacity to force us into the fallible conclusions, we partially end up in agreement with Carlyle’s assertion. Nonetheless, apart from human nature we have to consider the ‘nature of isolation’ within which intellectualism and rational (or mathematical) *thinking* are allowed to function. *Thinking* in isolation often leads to conclusions that could be easily (and, most of all, falsely) taken as logical and *self-evident*<sup>74</sup>. When fallible premises and conclusions are taken as *self-evident* truths and become productive, they gradually create their ‘own lines of “thought”’ (Arendt 1976: 477; emphasis *added*). When these ostensibly ‘self-evident’ truths remain unchallenged and start to create their own ‘lines of “thought”’, the mind builds upon them theories and worldviews. This solitary activity of what we can call *narrowed thinking*, in extreme cases may justify criminal acts (Fine 2007: 121). For example, Castoriadis (2007a), while discussing Euripides’ *Antigone*, mentions the phrase «φρονεῖν μόνος» (*phronein monos*), ‘to be the only one who “thinks right”’ (13). However, in Euripides’ work the «φρονεῖν μόνος» is followed by the word «δοκεῖ» (*dokei*) from *dokō* and *doxa*, that is to have an opinion (Castoriadis 1997: 92); «ὅστις γὰρ αὐτὸς ἢ φρονεῖν μόνος δοκεῖ», ‘[f]or whoever believes he alone is capable of judgment’ (quoted and translated by Castoriadis 2007c: 13).

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disconfirmation bias by seeking counterarguments to evidence that is inconsistent with their beliefs’ (ibid).

73 Premises are arguments that once we put them together we end up with a logical conclusion. For more see Chapter 1 (section methodology; logicism/syllogism).

74 As also Calvillo, Swan and Rutchick’s (2019) studies claim, ‘in the context of syllogistic reasoning’ we may often take ‘ideologically-consistent conclusions as valid more frequently than ideologically-inconsistent conclusions’ and this invalid conclusion is often ‘taken as evidence for motivated reasoning’ (3).

Castoriadis has not paid significant attention on the term *dokei*. As a matter of fact, Creon has been ‘inhabited by *hubris*’ since he insisted a) ‘on being *monos phronein*’, on considering only himself capable of passing *judgments* and making valid assumptions, scorning (therefore) the opinions of others instead of being ‘*isos phronein*’ or ‘*hypsipolis*’, that is, ‘high within one’s city’, from the word *ὕψος* (*hypsos*), implying height (14), and b) on being *monos dokei*, on being *apolis* (the opposite of *hypsipolis*), the idiot who is indifferent to the common affairs, for the *polis*, and spends his/her life in (*idion*), ‘outside the world of the common’ (Arendt 1998: 38). The *apolis* who *monos dokei* relies on these assumptions in order to reach a conclusion. Creon, by acknowledging incorrect assumptions as self-evident truths made serious *misjudgments*. His insisted in *phronein monos* made him susceptible to *hubris* and allowed ‘the *mē kalon*, the opposite of beautiful/good to inhabit him’ (Castoriadis 2007c: 12). Creon could have rejected such conclusions if he had opened up his mind to viewpoints offered by others.

Arendt (1968b) criticizes Heidegger whose withdrawal from the common everyday world led to devastating misjudgments (ix), ‘if not evil’ due to ‘his engagement with National Socialism’ (Fine 2007: 121). Orwell’s (2001) hostility toward the intellectual of his age—whom he likens not with real Socialism but, instead, with fascism, the ‘plausible travesty of Socialism’ (197)—exhibits similar scepticism concerning the limits of *thinking* in isolation (*monos phronein* and *dokein*). Having lost contact with reality, with the suffering that afflicts the world of humanity, the intellectual is totally consumed by his/her own trails of thoughts. Perhaps, one reason such intellectuals are inclined to conclusions built upon optimistic philosophical abstractions that predict a new dawn for humanity, a world emancipated from suffering and conflict, is their withdrawal from the public sphere (their insistence in *monoi phronein* and *dokein*). Being unable to conceive the imperfectness of the world from which they have cut themselves off, they end up absorbed by their own Faustian pathos for perfection. As Orwell (2001) asserts, ‘with their eyes glued to economic facts they [the intellectuals] have proceeded on the assumption that man has no soul, and explicitly or implicitly ... have set up the goal of a materialistic Utopia’ (199).

Public reasoning, in contrast, instead of being mathematical is deliberative and interactive. It throws light on events, popular perceptions, ideas and standpoints by means



of dialogue and conversation. Public dialogue involves *understanding*, namely, the taking 'into consideration the viewpoints of others' (Fine 2006: 128), as well as their interpretations concerning existing testimonies of events. The more the availability of expressed (through speech) interpretations increases, the more the chances for aspects of the same event to be illuminated are multiplied. Subsequently, the possibilities for error and self-deception (the potential outcome of isolated *thinking*) decreases. Unlike the isolated individual, who is free to choose what to read (articles from newspapers, as an example, that match his/her already constructed views, articles that interpret testimonies from a perspective he/she approves), in a public-political realm the same individual is exposed to all the available (and potentially dissimilar) viewpoints and witnesses. Eventually, the probabilities to see his/her viewpoints challenged increase. At the same time, in the political realm opinions, viewpoints and interpretations are constantly *judged* by others and scrutinised. Individuals are constantly exposed to different viewpoints and arguments in real life. Through this process *thinking* is saved from the 'Phantasms of the braine' (Hobbes 2006: 346) and cemented (and potentially fallible) worldviews are shattered. As Mill (2008) put it, there is hope 'when people are forced to listen to both sides' (53), when they let themselves rise 'out of the mire of private interest to the contemplation of virtue, and put a hand to the removal of "this evil from under the sun"' (Harrington 1992: 17), the evil that exaggerates 'into falsehood' if it is left unchallenged (Mill 2008: 53).

Let us recall, at this stage, Machiavelli's (1970) republican ideas regarding the benefits of popular governments. '[I]f account be taken of all the disorders due to populates and of all those due to princes, it will be found that alike in goodness and in glory the populace is far superior' (256). For the same author, a well-ordered populace in power is stable, 'prudent and grateful, in much the same way, or in a better way, than is a prince, however wise to be thought' (ibid). On the other hand, 'a prince who condemns the laws, will be more ungrateful, fickle and imprudent than is the populace' (ibid). As opposed to the public-political realm of action, where *individual* opinions are contested with each other, the *doxa* of the one man (be it a prince who makes decisions on behalf of his/her subjects or a small group of experts) escapes public *judgment*. While a monarch cannot disagree with himself out of envy or greed (Hobbes 2006: 105), his/her views and plans

are not subject to public scrutiny and mediation; a monarch who *monos phronei* and *monos dokei*, has no political opponents who, out of dissent, could raise objections against his/her potentially fallible (proposed or already imposed) laws. Recall again Mill's (2008) position against any prohibition of opinions considered false and pernicious: to forbid the propagation of false opinions would not result in banishment of error itself. In fact, '[j]udgment is given to men that they may be use it' (23); it comes through discussion, through *logos* and public appearance. Therefore, if 'practitioners of face-to-face democracy become better citizens', as Bryan (1995) noted by observing town meetings (in North America) 'where decision making takes place in the context of communal interdependence' (40), it is because discussion enables public intelligence; it activates *nóēsis* and *judgement*, through which, according to Mill (2008), erroneous ideas are aborted (23). Speech and hearing increase the chances for fallible conclusions (such as false interpretations of experiences based on falsified information, as previously mentioned) to be rejected. As a matter of fact, Mill's philosophy was profoundly influenced by the democratic Town Hall meetings of New England (Magnusson 2015: 36). As Bryan (1995) observed (a few decades later), the people who attend public assemblies (in Town Hall meetings) 'with some regularity ... learn a fundamental respect for the rule of law' (40).

To recapitulate: a 'plurality of viewpoints between people, dissent and disagreements constitute productive tensions' (Straume 2012: 379); *logos* magnifies the probabilities for *judgment* and public intelligence to triumph, improving the chances for fallible ideas to be aborted. As Bryan (1955) argued, practitioners of direct democracy have more chances to 'learn about minority rights' (40); they have more chances to strengthen their *mental* and *moral* muscular powers, to develop intelligence and common decency through dialogue and experience. However, to acknowledge *logos* and ethical memory as absolute remedies for common decency would be contrary to the basic principles of melioristic thinking, which reject optimistic pursuits, as utopian and unattainable. In fact, there is no assurance that the *demos* will always pick up the most truthful proposition (or interpretation of an event) brought up in the assembly, or that the assembly itself will always decide well. Consider, the Siege of Melos Island, which tells the story of one of the greatest monstrosities perpetrated by the Athenians during the Peloponnesian War. The Athenian assembly was convinced to vote in favour of a military strike against the defiant

men of Melos through the use of raw military force (Καστοριάδης 2011: 211 [Castoriadis 2011: 211]). As Thucydides (2011 [Θουκυδίδης 2011]) recounts, the victory of Athens is followed by an orgy of massacres and mass enslavement of women and children (793). Such cases of demagogic manipulation and explicit moral transgression encourages further debates concerning the tragic nature of democracy *per se*, being always exposed to trickery, error, fantasy and hubris (Castoriadis 1997: 93; 2007c: 123), to the evil pursuits of a majority that has thrown off prudence.

*Logos*, public *judgment* and intelligence are not fully shielded from demagogic infiltrations. Misleading discourses can ‘distort public debate and derail established procedures’ (Gustafson 2011: 152). For Weil (2005), ‘the power of words stands also for the power of illusion and error’ (96), for the power of demagoguery, deception and hubris. In the *polis*, writes Arendt (1990), ‘treachery and deceit and lying were possible, as though men, instead of “appearing” and exposing themselves, created phantoms and apparitions with which to fool others’ (103). Moreover, ‘[a] legally unrestricted majority rule, that is, a democracy without a constitution’, a democracy without a minimum of institutional of protection from unrighteous legislation imposed by a populace that has thrown off prudence, ‘can be formidable in the suppression of the rights of minorities and very effective in the suffocation of dissent without any use of violence’ (Arendt 1969b: 42). ‘A legally unrestricted majority rule’ for example, ‘that is, a democracy without a constitution can be formidable in the suppression of the rights of minorities and very effective in the suffocation of dissent without any use of violence’ (Ibid). Before moving to next argument, before discussing in depth the way civil disobedience and *narrative action* respond to these impasses, let us focus on case-studies of democratic political bodies (such as that of the Athenian *polis*) that had many times imposed strict legislation and measures in order to protect individuals and minorities from imprudent majorities, and thus discouraging demagogues from deceiving and manipulating the citizenry. This analysis would serve as a reminder that the *vita civile* values moderation and self-restraint; as opposed to optimistic types of populism, the former’s melioristic outlook is at odds with political initiatives favouring uncontrolled popular sovereignty.

## 2) Self-limitation: institutions and tradition

Consider, for example, the institution of *paranómōn graphē* (γραφὴ παρανόμων)<sup>75</sup>. According to Castoriadis, the *paranómōn graphē* allowed Athenian citizens to prosecute those who had repeatedly attempted to manipulate the *ekklesia*, proposing laws deemed illegitimate, laws that could violate the well-being and safety of individuals or even the interests of the entire city-state (Castoriadis 1997: 93; Καστοριάδης 2007α: 92 [Castoriadis 2007a: 92]); 2008: 201 [2008: 201]). The *ἀπάτην τοῦ δήμου* (*apatin tou dimou*, that is, ‘corruption’ or ‘manipulation’ against the *demos*) was another similar law; it allowed citizens to legally prosecute those who had attempted to deceive the *ekklesia* (2008: 206). Unlike ancient Athens, no legal institution was set up during the Revolutionary Era in America capable of limiting the ‘despotism of the majority’, to use Tocqueville’s (1994 1: 271) words. Although the Revolution introduced freedom of expression (even in religious matters) and freedom of the press (Kloppenbergh 2016: 492; Israel 2017: 7; Popkin 2019: 158), Tocqueville (1994) mentions several cases where licentious majorities raised formidable barriers against free speech (1: 264-5). The only available means to put reasonable constraints against its arbitrariness was tradition and the so-called ‘notion of right’ (244). Consider the case of the American jury, a ‘pre-eminently ... political institution’, according to the same author (1: 283). Just as the ancient Athenian jury (Αριστοτέλης 2008: 252 [Aristotle 2008: 252]), the American jury system involved open participation with citizens being chosen by lot ‘and invested with a temporary right of judging’ (Tocqueville 1994 1: 282). The jury, and more particularly, the civic jury, could ‘communicate the spirit of the judges to the minds of all citizens’ (1: 284). This ‘public school’ as Tocqueville calls it, contributed ‘powerfully to form the judgment and to increase the natural intelligence of a people’ (1: 285) and taught the people not only how to rule but, more importantly, ‘how to rule well’ (1: 287). It made all citizens feel dutiful toward society and compelled them to ‘force their attention to other affairs than their own’, decreasing ‘private selfishness’ (1: 285). It inspired respect for ‘the thing being judged’ and for ‘the notion of *right*’, without which the freedom to act is consumed by all sorts of destructive passions (1: 284; *emphasis added*).

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<sup>75</sup> A close translation would be: indictment against moves contrary to the laws.

However, as Weil (1987a) explained, rights are ineffectual by themselves, without being joined to the obligations to which they correspond (3). As stated in the Introduction, the notion of rights is subordinate to the notion of obligations. Thus, when Tocqueville talks about ‘respect’ for the ‘notion of right’ he indirectly points to obligation, to the virtue and duty of exercising tolerance towards those who are judged, of recognising and respecting (in other words) their own inalienable freedoms. ‘Obligations are only binding on human beings’ and those who seek to escape from them are ‘guilty of crime’ (Weil 1987a: 4). Weil’s assertion highlights the moral consequences of neglecting our obligation to acknowledge responsibility towards others, the responsibility to repress our pathos and self-interest, which not simply can undermine someone’s rights, liberties and well-being but, at the same time, deprives our ability to recognise ‘what is needed for life and the means to satisfy’ others (Andrew 1986: 83). In other words, unrestrained pathos may lead to *hubris*. Tocqueville’s (1994) view on this matter was quite similar: when passions ‘are excited ... the authority of virtue is paralyzed’ (1: 246). In this respect, we could assert that in the New World, a strong ethos of obligation (in Weil’s sense of the term) inspired self-limitation and taught every man of the jury to avoid absolute power. In America, claims Tocqueville (1994), this attitude of obligation and responsibility derived straight from the tradition and heritage, from ‘the manners of the country’ (1: 262), as well as from ‘the public role of religion’, argues Kidd (2012: 245), whilst reflecting on Tocqueville. Religion teaches ‘the obligation of love toward God and man’ and holds ‘the possibility of engendering a benevolent republic in which the public good remained a serious priority in competition with private gain’ (247). Transcendent values were, therefore, a useful companion to freedom, in ‘all its battles and its triumphs’ (Tocqueville 1994, 2: 44).

It goes without saying that the existence of institutions of self-limitation (like the *paranómōn graphē*) may not always guarantee protection from the possible unjust decisions of an imprudent majority. But on the other hand, the catastrophic consequences of the impasses of *action* and the limitations of institutional safeguards against demagoguery or against the hubris of an imprudent *demos*, by no means signify that absolutism (anti-populism) is a pragmatic and realistic antidote. According to Machiavelli (1992), no Earthly prince can prevent a degenerate and turbulent populace from transforming its common world into complete wretchedness; in order to govern securely

‘some Princes have ... built fortresses, others have dismantled and destroyed them (58). The Prince who is afraid of his subjects must build fortresses’. However, ‘I shall applaud him who builds fortresses and him who does not; but I shall blame him who, trusting in them, reckons it a light thing to be held in hatred by his people’ (ibid). To use a more vernacular language: a prince, irrespective of how coercive, absolutist, or even self-protective he is, cannot save himself from the anger and hatred of his subjects. ‘A Prince [authoritarian or otherwise] ‘should inspire fear in such a fashion that if he does not win love he may escape hate’; he must never instigate condemnation and hatred (Machiavelli 1992: 47). By suggesting that princes cannot effectively resist the *mēnis* of their subjects, indirectly Machiavelli makes a good case against absolutism and anti-populism. In fact, even extreme repression and coercion cannot protect individuals from a licentious populace, from the latter's slip towards insanity, fantasy and self-deception. Nothing can stop a public that has thrown off prudence from rebelling against the most draconian laws imposed in favour of vulnerable groups, minorities and individuals. Only a ‘good citizen’, in Machiavelli’s terms, a civil disobedient, who draws moral strength from the *light* of his/her *inner self*, can acquire the necessary clarity and objectivity in order to stand up against licentious publics, reversing conditions of extreme entropy and mass confusion, as we will see in the next section by reflecting on the life of Martin Luther King Jr.

According to Arendt (1969b), ‘even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination, and that such illumination may well come ... from the uncertain, flickering, and often weak light that some men and women, in their lives and their works, will kindle under almost all circumstances...’ (viii). This uncertain, flickering, and weak light is the *light* of the ‘inner world of conscience, which is in constant rebellion against the outer world of nature’ (Niebuhr 1960: 52) is often discovered through religious practices, through mysticism and/or introspection. The ‘introspective character’ of religion (59) can lead to *psychical enlightenment* and, as Niebuhr (1960) pointed out, to the contrition of egoism and the encouragement of love (60). The next section, by reflecting on King’s campaign, will shed more light on the way religious (Christian) resources and, more precisely, the inner light of *agape* encourages civil disobedience, altering public

attitudes (collective *self-purification*), inspiring common decency and civic friendship<sup>76</sup>. Of course, it is important to note (as Chapter 1 stressed) that non-Christian religions can also open up pathways for *psychical enlightenment*. More importantly, self-purification often comes from non-religious sources, including art and theater. Hence, in what follows extensive analysis of Weil's, Jung's and King's philosophies will take place, with references to Mahatma Gandhi's principle of *satyagraha*, 'a process of self-purification' (Gandhi 2018: 706), self-sacrifice (426), self-restrain (511), reconciliation and non-violence (717), 'the guiding light' of King's 'technique of nonviolent social change' (King 1986: 23). For Ashcroft (2018), 'Gandhi's influence can be seen both in King's methods of organisation as well as his justification for civil disobedience, his uncompromising demand for nonviolent action' (469). Emphasis will also be paid on the process whereby ancient Greek drama and poetry can encourage civil disobedience and collective self-purification as well. Thus, we will have to set aside classical republican literature and ideas for the time being.

#### Civil disobedience, *eucosmia* and collective self-purification

This section begins with an in-depth analysis of King's understanding of the Christian love (*agape*), constituting a radical exponent of the anthropocentric *weltanschauung* of popular *eucosmia* (as Chapter 1 argued). Additionally, in works of ancient Greek drama one finds common moral injunctions with modes of being profoundly inspired by Christianity (as I will further explain by reflecting on Jung's theories). As also Weil (1987b) claimed, in several pre-Christian works of Greek drama and poetry one sees 'intimations' of Christianity. The pagan world of ancient Greece prefigures the Christian morality of love and forgiveness, a morality that remains anchored to the idea of human frailty and vulnerability nevertheless. Ancient Greek literature, to put it differently, promotes a worldview that (to a degree) constitutes an early allusion of the *weltanschauung* promoted by Christianity, especially when it comes to the latter's emphasis on the devastating consequences of human sin (or *hubris*). It goes without saying that this particular *weltanschauung* (the *realist* approach on human nature, as I call it), has been one

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76 Let us not forget, at the end of the day, that in King's personality and philosophy, one can identify the finest virtues that democratic populist leaders must adopt.

of the main ideological hallmarks of despotic *cosmosystems*. As, however, this section will argue, in King's philosophy (as well as in works of Greek drama), this emphasis on the innate human proclivity towards *hubris*, has also fashioned an anthropocentric morality of tolerance, forbearance and reconciliation, a morality of common decency<sup>77</sup>. Or to stress it differently, in classical works of ancient Greek drama and poetry (consider, for instance, Aeschylus *Trojan Women* or Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*), one can identify the same elements of *eucosmia* we have already spotted in King's *agape*. As a matter of fact, these classical works during the Greek antiquity were used as means of public dialogue, inciting *public judgment* (Καστοριάδης 2008: 211 [Castoriadis 2008: 211]), encouraging publics to abort *hubris*, embracing common decency (in return). In what follows, more light will be shed on the quite similar procedures ancient drama and King's politics of civil disobedience (through *agape*) follow in order to inspire *collective self-purification*. Let us begin this journey by elaborating on King's case.

#### 1) Christian *agape* versus resentment

Right after his university graduation (in the middle of 1950s) King (1986) began to question the 'superficial optimism' and quasi 'sentimental' liberal view of human nature, which overlooks the human inclination towards error and sin (36). This optimism had 'pervaded not only Rauschenbusch's social gospel but indeed all of the evangelical liberalism that George [Washington] Davis had suffused him with' (Garrow 1986: 42). King's encounter with Niebuhr's ideas, 'a prime influence upon his life' (Branch 1988: 87) made him aware 'of the complexity of human motives and the reality of sin on every level of man's existence' (King 1986: 36), of the innate human selfishness that Niebuhr considered to be one of greatest barriers to social justice (Garrow 1986: 42; Branch 1988: 81; Lasch 1991a: 389). King shared the Christian *weltanschauung*, which considers error, sin, vulnerability and *hubris* deeply inscribed within humanity. According to the Christian Bible, 'there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not' (Ecclesiastes 7:20). 'The attitude of a group of Southern whites', for example, 'who lynch a [N]egro on the report that he has raped a white woman before they investigate the truth

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<sup>77</sup> For more in regards to the contradistinction between the anthropocentric and the despotic *cosmosystem* (in Contogeorgis' thought) see the Glossary.



of the assertion is a bestial exaggeration of [this] very natural human tendency' (Mumford 1959: 255) towards evil, of this 'natural propensity' to dominate and exploit, of the pathos to reign supreme (even by oppressing others). But for King (1986) 'the person who does the evil deed' is an object of God's love like every sinner, *id est.*, like like every man and woman (13) . Instead, he/she requires no vengeful punishment but rather *agape* and forgiveness (ibid). On the face of it, one could fairly raise objections against such a proposition, considering absurd (if not morally repugnant) any expression of sympathy toward individuals who consciously commit evil. But as King (1986) clarifies, 'what Jesus meant when he said "love your enemies"' was not to 'like your enemies, because it is pretty difficult to like ... someone bombing your home' (47). 'When we love on the *agape* level we love men [and women] not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but because God loves them. Here we rise to the position of loving the person who does the evil deed while hating and despising the deed he does' (8-9). Instead of 'ston[ing] one of our brothers because he has made a mistake ... we in the spirit of Christ, follow the example of the loving and forgiving father' (454), seeking to persuade the evil doer with words or deeds (103; 149). More to the point: for King, forgiveness, nonviolence and forbearance are means through which we respect 'the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the person' (Raboteau 2017). Hence, they are the basis of his (anthropocentric) love (or *philia*) of *agape*, of his deep respect and faith in the capacities of the *κόσμος* (of the 'simple *anthrōpos*', of the 'ordinary person'), that is, of every potential sinner to rectify his/her stance, embracing the *εὖ* (the *eu*, that is, the 'good'). Forgiveness could open up pathways for justice and racial reconciliation. . Thus, resentment, pathos for revenge, the outcomes of brutal racial injustices, had to be transmuted into a constructive energy that seeks to redeem the white segregationists (King 2000: 32).

King (1986) criticised the worldviews of 'armchair revolutionaries who insist on the political and psychological need for violence' and 'elaborately scorn the process of dialogue in favour of "tactics of confrontation"', glorifying 'guerrilla movement[s]' while equating 'revolutionary consciousness with the readiness to shed blood' (642-3). He opposed the actions of many Southern blacks who had slipped into a mentality of revenge and found 'solace and security' in 'self-destructive' black nationalist ideologies (King 2000: 101). Notwithstanding they 'had every reason to sink into cynicism and despair' and

to throw ‘themselves into a politics of resentment’ (Lasch 1991a: 387), for King (1986) vengefulness and hatred could not result in racial equality, cooperation and reconciliation. He feared that revenge and violence would escalate ‘a frightening racial nightmare’ (297). Resentment and violence could end up with a right-wing revenge and, consequently, ‘with a kind of right-wing takeover in the cities and a Fascist development, which will be terribly injurious to the whole nation’ (69). For King (1986), violence adds ‘deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars’ and ‘[d]arkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that’ (594). Or as Tolstoy pointed out, ‘Satan can never be driven out by Satan. Error can never be corrected by error, and evil cannot be vanquished by evil’ (16). ‘True non-resistance’, that is, non-violent resistance, ‘is the only real resistance to evil’ so long as it ‘extirpates the evil feeling’ (ibid). According to Niebuhr, nonviolent coercion and ‘the spiritual discipline against resentment’ is the best way to break the endless cycle of political violence, of the endless cycle of revenge and counter-revenge, which perpetuates social injustices *ad infinitum* (summarised by Lasch 1991a: 378). King drew on Niebuhr, who also praise Gandhi’s *satyagraha*, his religious and ethical methods of peaceful resistance (Niebuhr 1960: 244). As King himself (1986) stated, ‘Christ furnished the spirit and motivation [of civil disobedience] while Gandhi furnished the method’ (38), to ‘never to resort to violence’ (Gandhi 2018: 659). In a more specific fashion, during his trip to India (in Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay), King noticed Gandhi’s spirit of peaceful resistance being ‘very much alive’ in ‘almost every aspect of life’ (25). In India, writes King, ‘[t]he aftermath of hatred and bitterness that usually follows a violent campaign’ was replaced by ‘a mutual friendship based on complete equality ... between the Indian and British people within the Commonwealth’ (ibid). In addition, King looked at the way non-violent (Gandhian) cooperative movements for land reform (in India) succeeded in *persuading* large landowners to give up ‘millions of acres of land to cooperative management by small farmers’ (29). But King’s methods of persuasion (through *agape*) also aimed at the *dramatisation* of the injustices the policies of racial segregation had generated. In what follows I will explain how *agape*, ‘the love of God operating in the human heart’ (9), this serene emotion that springs from the *impersonal realm*, carries out ‘the demands of justice’ (247).

In Weil’s thought, God is ‘secretly present in all acts’ that arise ‘from unselfish *love*

of neighbor' (summarised by Doering 2010: 186; *my emphasis*). *Agape* encourages deep concern for our peers, and the willingness to redeem them from all sorts of indecent drives. It is not 'a sentimental' or an 'affectionate sort of thing' (King 1986: 13). It does not refer to sentimental types of friendship but to the simple common sense assumption that 'a daybreak of freedom and justice' (9) requires genuine devotion to humanity (*eucosmia*) and conscious understanding that '[t]he aftermath of violence is bitterness [while] [t]he aftermath of non-violence is reconciliation and the creation of a beloved community' (12). *Agape*, which operates 'through the Gandhian method of nonviolence', the method of *satyagraha*, and constitutes 'one of the most potent weapons available to the Negro in his struggle for freedom' (16), activates the corrective and 'redemptive good will' (19). It advocates faith that wrong perceptions can be made right through persistent efforts, eloquence, and constant exposure of indecent beliefs that cause suffering, awakening what Protagoras (Πλάτων, Πρωταγόρας 2001: 94 [Plato's Protagoras 2001: 94]) used to call «αἰδῶ τε καὶ δίκην». The term αἰδῶς (*aidōs*) stands for moral culpability; in turn, δίκη (*diki*) does not imply 'punishment' or 'trial', as the Oxford Dictionary holds (Watts 2008: 55). Here Protagoras refers to the profound awareness of the importance of restoring justice and common decency, of living in accordance with the laws of nature. Far from referring to acts of humiliation, *aidōs* seeks the amity and understanding of the opponent. According to Protagoras (2001 [Πλάτων, Πρωταγόρας 2001]), Zeus asks Hermes «ἄγοντα εἰς ἀνθρώπους αἰδῶ τε καὶ δίκην ἵν' εἴεν πόλεων κόσμοι τε καὶ δεσμοὶ φιλίας συναγωγοί» ('to bring a sense of shame among men and women in order to make bonds of friendship, through which they can protect their cities') from enmity and conflict (94). This understanding of shame (or moral culpability), instead of referring to abasement and humiliation, is associated with the conscious understanding of the reasons friendship constitutes one of the main safeguards against war and destruction (as also Aristotle believed), highlighting the need for prudence and self-limitation, inasmuch as pathos is effectively restrained and the vices of *hubris* are kept under the supervision of moral decency. In the same way, for King (1986) the ultimate objective of moral culpability is not the humiliation of the white community (12; 87) since 'the tension is not between races, but against the 'forces of evil' that some individuals [of the white community] are trapped in' (Ashcroft 2018: 470). Moral culpability aspires to redeem (King 1986: 18) and persuade

all those ‘who had perpetrated this system [of racial inequality] in the past’ (12). Taken in their fullest sense, *agape*, *aidōs* and *dikin* are interrelated and interconnected. They are anthropocentric and stimulate *eucosmia*, so long as they highlight our unconditional obligation to acknowledge the reasons attitudes that scorn and deprive the *worth* and value of other human beings (irrespective of colour or religious creed) are moral transgressions and, for this reason, should be called into question.

The process whereby *eucosmia* (either expressed through the Christian love, or *agape*, or through secular philosophical systems and worldviews) incites *aidōs*, *dikin* and collective self-purification, leading to common decency, will have to be further examined. In what follows we will focus on classical works of ancient Greek drama, theater and mythology. In the spirit of Iris Murdoch (1970), love (which is promoted through art, including theater), is capable of destroying our ‘biased self’ (85). Eventually, when art (ancient drama, in our case) is used as a means of political critique and disobedience, the artist after approaching an *impersonal* dimension, purifying his/her ‘I’ (to use Weil’s terms), becomes capable of depicting the reasons human groups throw off prudence. As we see, both the Christian and the secular morality of ancient Greek literature and drama could incite *aidōs* and *dikin*; both can incite self-purification, allowing us to discover links with the *impersonal realm*. Let us not disregard references made by Christian African Americans—from Frederick Douglass (1991) and David Walker (1993) to King (1986)—to ancient Greek philosophers, historians and dramatists.

## 2) Love, purification and ‘re-selfing’ in ancient drama

Spengler (1961), in reference to Aristotle, identifies three effects of ancient drama: first comes the ruling impression of terror (*φόβος*), the violent disruption of spectator’s feelings concerning abrupt outcomes of *fortuna* (or pathos) in the life of one or more protagonists, followed by *ἐλεός* (pity), and *katharsis* (*καθάρσις*) (psychical purification) (174). To avoid confusion: the modern understanding of pity points to all the human sentiments that incite sympathy (or compassion) (Καστοριάδης 2008: 267 [Castoriadis 2008: 267]). However, as Chapter 2 mentioned, compassion springs from the *fido amor* and uses a language which ‘consists in gestures and [sentimental] expressions of countenance’ (Arendt 1990: 86). But in ancient drama, a political institution according to the ancient Greeks (Castoriadis 2007a: 63 [Καστοριάδης 2007α: 63]), pity (or *ἐλεός*, or

*οἴκτος*) does not promote moral awakening by appealing to emotions (2008: 266). More precisely, compassion and pity were unknown to the ancients; the ‘worthlessness of pity’, writes Nietzsche (2003), ‘the most sinister symptom of our modern civilization ... is quite a new phenomenon’ (5). Pity constitutes a degenerate empathy (Breithaupt 2019: 54) where the misery and the resentment of a guiltless victim are transplanted to a passive observer. The latter loses his/her own her ability to judge, to examine impartially the real causes of the former’s suffering. The passive observer, incapable of judging and evaluating, gradually (and almost unconsciously) absorbs (and habitually reproduces) as ‘standards’ the resentment of the victim with whom he/she feels emotionally attached (*pathological confluence*)<sup>78</sup>. For Arendt (1998) this view of pity has been introduced ‘into political theory’ by Rousseau (81) and has been utilised in order to mobilise vast numbers of people in support of the destitute and the oppressed. However, ancient drama has no need of emotional foundationalism in its struggle to inform and persuade spectators. More to the point: the aim of ancient drama is not to construct emotional bonds between victims and spectators (observers) but to ‘*dramatise*’ human suffering, that is, to incite pity (understood as *ἐλεός*) and fear (*φόβος*) by raising awareness concerning the devastating outcomes of the human propensity towards envy, lust for power and domination. Above all, the Ancient’s pity incites *katharsis* (Καστοριάδης 2007β: 151; 155 [Castoriadis 2007b: 151; 155])<sup>79</sup>, through which individuals restore prudence, rejecting negative impulses. The main purpose of dramatisation, suggests Castoriadis (2007c) (while discussing Sophocles’ *Antigone*), was to raise awareness concerning the vulnerability and the ‘terrifying formidableness (*deinotēs*) [*δεινότης*] of *anthrōpos* [human being]’, of his/her capacity to provoke ‘awe, fear, terror ... which reaches its summit and self-destruction in *hubris*’ (14).

The primary objective of the poet or the dramatist is to project in the public a purified version of its collective self in juxtaposition with the already adopted (collective self), flawed by all sorts of vices. He/she must be capable to *judge*, that is, to address and expose all the ‘impure’ elements the same self has adopted, elements that instigate moral transgression (or *hubris*), leaving humans exposed to enmity. Homer’s *Iliad*, according to

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78 For more concerning the process whereby compassion or pity leads to the so-called over-identification (*pathological confluence*), see Chapter 2 (see the third section).

79 *Katharsis* derives from the Greek adjective *καθαρός-katharos* (meaning ‘clean’ or ‘pure’).

Weil's interpretation, offers a good example of collective self-purification through dramatisation. As Vetö (1994) stresses (discussing Weil), in *The Iliad* Homer manages to translate 'the tragic truth of human condition into the matchless songs of his great poem' (103). In order to recognise the *terrors* of the Trojan War, Homer pays *attention* to the evils of war *per se* and 'the greatest of griefs that can come among men; the destruction of a city' (Weil 1987b: 49). Thereupon he detaches himself, his own 'I' (Vetö 1994: 103); he rises to *impersonal* dimensions and discharges his own 'self' from biases; subsequently, he adopts 'a universal perspective from which he sees the suffering of others 'as his own' (ibid). Further on the poet implants this affliction in the mind of his reader; he brings his reader 'at the center of a truth ... in all its nakedness' (Weil 1987a: 65). Here the poet strives towards 'a direct understanding of the human condition revealed in the tortured existence' of the victim (Vetö 1994: 103). In turn, the reader seeks pity but not in order to comfort his/her (implanted) anguish. The poet offers 'no misleading consolation' but represents 'horror as it is and in this way makes acceptance of universal necessity possible for the reader' (ibid). Emotional reactions play an important role here. However, they remain austere and serene; they are not elevated above the *logismikon*, above the human capacity for *thinking* and *nóēsis*. The pity (ἐλεός and οἶκτος) incited here causes intense dismay and incites fear towards the consequences of human formidableness. Οἶκτος encourages the abandonment of all thoughts or raw sentiments (or *bouleumata*) that encourage human beings to embrace the hubris of war (Καστοριάδης 2007β: 151 [Castoriadis 2007b: 151]).

We should also consider Euripides' *Trojan Women*, which (like most ancient drama plays) 'promotes an experience' that informs the audience—the Athenian *demos*—about the moral consequences of 'future choices' (Nussbaum 2013: 261). It depicts the *demos* as a dreadful monster, carried away by its own *hubris*, incapable of setting any limit to its deeds (Castoriadis 2007c: 123). From a contextualist point of view, *The Trojan Women* was written one year after the slaughter of the Melians (Καστοριάδης 2008: 211 [Castoriadis 2008: 211]). Given that the attack against the Melians was democratically decided, Euripides in his work raises awareness concerning the potential catastrophic effects of the unrestrained human pathos; he highlights the necessity of human beings to embrace prudence before joining the political realm. The dramatist in *The Trojan Women*

[*Τρωάδες*] criticises the hubris of the Hellenes, who after the fall of Troy engaged themselves in an orgy of cruelty. Euripides (1992 [Ευριπίδης 1992]) depicts a city vanishing like smoke in the sky due to wretchedness (139), and scenes of temples ‘run red with blood’ (32), where ‘corpses of dead men lie naked beneath the temple of Pallas’ (80), ‘multitudes of children cry in front of the Gates’ (121), and young adults are precipitated from the city-walls (123) while women and children are sold as slaves (139). Just like Homer, Euripides aims at *katharsis*, by exposing the hubris committed by the Athenian *demos* itself.

As with Weil (1987a), ‘[i]n several Greek tragedies we observe a curse born of a sin transmitted from generation to generation until it strikes a guileless person who suffers all the bitterness of it. Then the curse is ended’ (Weil 1987b: 10). First, when the forces of the underworld infiltrate the empirical world, they create conditions inciting moral transgressions, leading to all sorts of injustices (as we already know). Second, once the same conditions that led to such transgressions are gradually adopted as normal, they become sublimated. Thereupon, they begin to propagate themselves unconsciously; they become *curses* (to use Weil’s terms), transmitted ‘from generation to generation’ without ever being challenged. When, however, works of drama depict the suffering of a ‘guiltless person’ in a way to incite pity (*ἐλεός*), a *katabasis*, a descent to the underworld, begins<sup>80</sup>. Or consider Ulysses’ *katabasis* to Hades, a hard place ‘for those that live to behold these realms’ according to Ulysses’ mother (Homer 1966: 397). In this lurid underworld Ulysses seeks Tiresias, the ‘soothsaying of the spirit of Theban’ (399). Tiresias advises him to resist temptation and *deceit*, in short to avoid eating the ‘goodly flocks of Helios’ (393), which was the main *cause* of his death. Here we can use Ulysses’ example symbolically; like Ulysses learns from Tiresias (who dwells in the underworld) the *cause* of the latter’s death, similarly (in drama) the *katabasis* of the spectator to his/her underworld allows the latter to identify in his/her mind the *causes* of suffering, namely the psychical forces (*pathos*) dwelling in this part of his/her mind that *deceives* human beings in order to commit injustices, fueling destruction and violent death. In other words, when pity (*ἐλεός*) incites *katabasis*, through this symbolic descent, the spectators, the *demos*, or part of the *demos*

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80 For a more concrete definition of *katabasis* see Chapter 2.



(like Ulysses), come into contact with pathos *per se*, with what has incited the hubris and suffering the guiltless victim has highlighted. By identifying which psychical forces *caused* this suffering and, therefore, should be repressed, the chances of the spectators to purify themselves and rectify their stance increase. The *demos* (as a spectator) understands the need to ‘*re-self*’, to adopt a new collective self, emancipated from *bouleumata*, from the hubris of pathos. Thus, dramatisation reveals the *totality* of human personality. More precisely, the spectator understands that human personality is not only shaped by the empirical order (*logismikon*), the order of knowledge, reason and memory, but simultaneously (and sometimes unconsciously) it is influenced by the forces of the underworld (pathos), the ultimate instigators of human formidableness (*deinotēs*).

### 3) Love and self-purification in King’s Christian appeal

King’s *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, the ‘manifesto of the civil rights movement’ as Colaiaco (1988: 94) calls it, *dramatises* racial segregation inasmuch as ‘it can no longer be ignored’ (King 1986: 291). More to the point: King’s suffering and humiliation ‘inflicted by membership in a persecuted minority’ (Lasch 1991a: 391, ff.) and by ‘the full impact of [racial] segregation’, testified ‘his capacity for spiritual growth’ (393). According to Murdoch (1970), ‘[r]eligion provides devices for the purification of states of mind’ and prayers can ‘actually induce a better quality of consciousness’, providing ‘an energy for good action’ (81). The Christian notion of *agape*, the love that ‘stands at the center of the cosmos’ but rests ‘deep inside us’, right in the deepest strata of our ‘inner self’ (King 1986: 11), was for King a fountain of psychical awakening that made possible the transformation of his inexorable suffering ‘into a creative force’ (41), into an ‘energy for good action’ (in Murdoch’s terms). The light of *agape* dilutes the darkness of resentment and *purifies* the mind. Saint John’s *Dark Night* (1991) offers a similar insight: ‘darkness and concealment’ depict the inexorable hardships the soul must confront upon its purification, upon its contact with the light of God, the light of love that ‘burned in my heart’ and guided ‘more surely than the light of noon’ (51). Jung (1960) compares the transformation of psychical emotions and energies with ‘the steam-engine conversion’, which transforms heat into pressure and, subsequently, ‘the pressure of steam’ into ‘the energy of motion’ (41). Thus, ‘psychical intensities or values’ are transformed ‘from one content to another’ (ibid). Likewise, ‘the energy of certain psychological phenomena’, that



is, the negative psychical energies, are converted ‘by suitable means into other dynamisms’ (ibid). They are transformed into positive forces when one senses schisms of light (of our ‘inner light’, more precisely) through which connection with the *impersonal realm* is established. The fiery dynamism of this light leads to *impersonality*, a condition where all negative psychical energies, all sorts of *bouleumata* (products of pathos)—like (for instance) the passion for revenge—are purged from the ‘I’. They are transformed into a positive force, into a deep yearning for brotherhood and common decency. ‘In the midst of outer dangers’, writes King (1986), ‘I have felt an inner calm’ that only ‘known resources of God could give’ (40). This inner calm is the light that leads us to the *impersonal realm*, to a high moral ideal (God). As King (1986) continues, ‘God has been profoundly clear to me’, God’s power transformed ‘the fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope’ (ibid).

If *agape* can open up pathways to *impersonality* and if *impersonality per se* creates in the mind of the actor a purified and prudent populace, in turn, by projecting this imagined collectivity—emancipated by its own hubris—to the corrupt populace, the actor him/herself multiplies the probabilities for all spectators (individual members of the same populace) to eliminate petrified and unconsciously reproduced life patterns (products of pathos) that have led to the dispossession of those who were seen as predicaments to their own ideal, given, ‘closed [and] homogenous [social] totality’ (Žižek 1989: 127). In Jungian terms, ‘[t]he secret participation of the unconscious is everywhere present without our having to search for it’ (Jung 1960: 79). It follows, therefore, that if the collective unconscious incorporates negative *possibilities*, ‘characteristics of an entire group’ that are never totally conscious in individuals (Odajnyk 2007: 14), if (to use a different language) the collective unconscious is dominated by perceptions, among which some are products of pathos, and, finally, if these perceptions are indulged without being brought into the conscious in order to be evaluated and *judged*, they participate secretly in public life. Modes of being created in order to gratify these perceptions are passively reproduced. I have already explained that the *social realm* homogenises tastes and manners, grouping every individual member into an undifferentiated aggregate. In addition, the *social realm* is closely linked with ‘the concept of behaviour ... [and it] is distinguished from the political by the absence of conscious determination’ and thinking (Lasch 1991a: 133). Through the *social* domain commonly accepted norms and customs that indulge these

negative perceptions (or *possibilities*) are normalised and become ‘habits’, in Nietzsche’s (2003) terms. Their origins, however, are entirely ‘*forgotten*’ (10). They are ignored or untraceable and the same acts are repeated instinctively (ibid). Societies ‘that set a high value’ on habits and customs ‘take little interest in their own origins’, claims Lasch (1991a: 131). In the *social* (behavioural) *realm* of customs, fallible patterns and “‘already made up ... preconceived ideas’”, to use King’s words (quoted by Garrow 1986: 30), (like racial superiority) are reproduced ritualistically (Chapter 2). They are adopted passively and unconsciously due to sheer *thoughtlessness* or ‘non-knowledge on the part of the subject’, as Žižek (1989: 21) would have put it.

When dramatisation incites (*φόβος*) *terror*, in our case the *terror* of injustice and suffering of African Americans, members of the same collectivity begin to sense the matrix of this injustice in the underworld that exists in all human beings and perverts their deeds. Thereupon, a *katabasis* begins and the same individuals find themselves exposed to pathos. They recognise that racial injustice is a form of moral transgression, incited by pathos itself, not totally by their own pathos (or *bouleumata*), but (more severely) by the pathos of men and women of preceding generations, which at some historical moment consciously caused great suffering. I am, obviously, referring to the moral transgression of slavery (especially in the American South), to the issue of racial injustice that has ‘been with us since our earliest beginnings as a nation’ and has ‘bred fears, myths, and violence over centuries’, according to Rustin (2020: 187). It is ‘deeper and sharper than the other points of contention’ and a ‘source of dark and dangerous irrationality ... running through our history and dimming our brighter achievements’ (ibid). In Homer’s *Odyssey* Tiresias indirectly unveils to Ulysses the secret of his death, in the same way Agamemnon recounts how he ‘died by a most pitiful death’ (415) by the ‘guileful Clytemnestra’ (417), and round about him ‘the rest of ... [his] comrades were slain unceasingly’ (415). Agamemnon is dead due to Clytemnestra’s viciousness (pathos). Thus, in order to learn about the real causes of his death one has to visit him in the underworld of Hades (the world of the dead) where he dwells. The allegorical interpretation of this myth prompts us to avoid looking for the real causes of an injustice solely in the empirical/material world. Instead, it encourages us to dive into the darkest pathways of the human mind, from where lies the real causes of most injustices derive: the viciousness of the pathos for domination, the

‘formidability’ of human nature, to use Castoriadis’ terms.

The sin of such injustices and the conditions of suffering are preserved since the same sin has been transmitted ‘from generation to generation’, in Weil’s (1987b: 10) terms, and has been embraced unconsciously as a ‘habit’ through the realm of society. *Katabasis* awakes the dormant collective *thinking* and *nóēsis*. First, the civil disobedient, by dramatising ignored injustices incites *aidōs* and *dikin*. Second, by projecting a new collective self (juxtaposed to the existing corrupt collective self, as mentioned earlier) public debates (narrative action) concerning how the same collectivity should be re-instituted in order to abide with the standards of common decency, begin. Through such a process the chances for members of the populace to rectify its moral stance, by throwing off (*katharsis*) habitually reproduced biases (products of pathos), effectively increase. More importantly, through *katabasis* the same members understand that a human being can be *δεινός*—formidable, (or sinner)—as long as he/she has passions that force him/her to commit atrocities. Consider, finally, James Baldwin’s comments during his interview with Niebuhr on a New York television program (Sept. 22, 1963) (mentioned by Branch 1988: 895): ‘[t]he suffering made Negroes [is] “the only hope this country has,” not because of their race inherent possesses virtue but because only in extremity do people “discover what they really live by”’ (ibid). In short the suffering of the African Americans raised awareness about what human beings ‘really live by’, what (in other words) human life is about: nothing but a constant struggle against our inherent *deinotēs* (formidability), whose consequences (hubris) in cases of extremity (and through dramatisation) emerge in the surface of collective life, inasmuch as it can be sensed (and condemned) by everyone.

#### Leadership, narrative action and *logos*

After examining the process through which Christian *agape* connects us with the impersonal realm, leading to individual and collective *katharsis* in return, we will continue reflecting on the practical contribution of civil disobedience to common decency from a slightly different angle. Instead of resorting to psychoanalysis, we will examine the impacts of *agape* and forgiveness in making *narrative action* possible by minimising violence and, subsequently, by unleashing the power of *logos* from a phenomenological point of view. As with King (1986), *agape* seeks ‘to preserve and create community. It is insistence on

community even when one seeks to break it. *Agape* is a willingness to go to any length to restore community ... It is a willingness to *forgive*, not seven times but seventy times to restore community' (20; *emphasis added*). The discoverer of forgiveness, claims Arendt (1998), 'in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth' (238), the creator of Christianity. The freedom of forgiveness (according to Jesus' teachings) was precisely 'the freedom from vengeance' (241), from what inspires the 'victim with an intractable desire for vengeance, causing the spiral of violence to spin out of control' (Doering 2010: 67) and puts both the victim and the predator into a relentless process, 'which by itself need never come to an end' (Arendt 1998: 241). Forgiveness breaks the chain of revenge. Through forgiveness, argues Lasch (1991a) (while elaborating on Arendt), *action* 'finds its fullest expression' (376). Speech and hearing become the most prominently available means, allowing individuals to come together acting in concert (Arendt 1998: 224). This conviction was, for the ancient Greeks the main foundation of 'living together in a polis, [which] conducted their affairs by means of speech, through persuasion (*πείθειν*), and not by means of violence, through mute coercion' (Arendt 1968a: 45). Demosthenes the orator knew very well that violence and coercion were means that suited only oligarchic governments. Republics, on the other hand, rested on the power of *logos*, that is, on the power of speech and persuasion (Πλούταρχος 1992: 40 [Plutarch 1992: 40]).

As mentioned earlier, King's leadership was not vanguardist or top-down. Instead, it was characterised by the 'the art of listening', according to Phillips (1998), and the 'desire for lifelong learning' (43). Effective listeners 'take in everything they hear' from the public, 'analyze it within the context of the environment' (ibid) and return it back to the public (or political) sphere in order to be further discussed. Effective listeners pay *attention* (in Weil's terms) to popular demands in order to analyse them. Having exposed themselves to a high moral ideal, having *purified* themselves from biases and all sorts of resentments, they become able to *judge*, to distinguish right from wrong; they, more precisely, understand which among these expressed demands and, more importantly, which among the proposed means that have to be employed (in order these demands could be met) are acceptable. Thus, during the Montgomery bus boycotts King by entrusting his "'inner voice" telling him what to do' encouraged his audience to resist the evils of segregation through the use of non-violent means of civil disobedience (Branch 1988: 162). In fact, violence erects

fences in any attempt seeking to create open spaces of public contestation, spaces of open meetings in churches and public squares (194), which were held frequently '[i]n order to keep the citizens informed and up-to-date' (Phillips 1998: 39). King was not wrong in his belief that oratory could lead to enlightenment (Branch 1988: 206). Eloquent speech was a necessary means of *narrative action*, through which the issue of racial exclusion and the *hubris* of segregation could be dramatised and exposed. Violence, on the other hand, undermines public reasoning as long as it substitutes *logos* and persuasion with coercion and, inevitably, blocks communication through speech and dialogue. When violence rules absolutely, as for instance in the concentration camps of totalitarian regimes, not only laws ... but everything and everybody must fall silent' (Arendt 1969a: 18). For Weil (2005), 'the nature of force' converts 'a man 'into a thing' (204) and leaves 'no room for thought ... no room either for justice or prudence' (1987b: 34). '

In other words, 'violence appears where [*political*] power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance' (56). Power (which in Arendt's thought) 'arises out of joint action and joint deliberation' (Arendt 1990: 269), is always destroyed by violence (Arendt 1969a: 53; 56; 1998: 202-3), for 'out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience' (Arendt 1969a: 53). Power is never the property of an individual. It belongs to groups, unions and peoples and 'remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together' (44). '[W]hat is a union of rational and intelligent beings who are held together only by bond of force?' asks Tocqueville (1994 1: 245). A union of intelligent (that is, capable of argumentative reasoning) beings preserved by brute force is not a political union at all. In contrast, political unions and groups are preserved by power which 'comes into being only if and when men join themselves together for the purpose of action' (Arendt 1990: 175). King's emphasis on forbearance and non-violence, opened up pathways for political engagement, where the power of speech (rather than force) dominates. Non-violence, as he held, creates 'room for everyone ... to join up' a movement that sees 'no color distinction' (King 2000: 5), while political violence 'scorn[s] the process of dialogue' (King 1986: 642), the process of *πείθειν* (persuasion).

In general terms, both Arendt's republicanism and King's Christian humanism emphasise the importance 'of provoking one's opponent to consideration', valuing the

‘agonistic discourse in politics’ (Ashcroft 2018: 470) and the substitution of brute force with plurality and *logos*. King insisted on the benefits of being exposed to a wide range of opinions; the wider the range ‘of opinions you hear, the better chance you have of extracting the truth’ (Phillips 1998: 193). Hence, if King’s ‘leadership transformed a degraded people into active, self-respecting citizens, who achieved a new dignity in the course of defending their constitutional rights’, to use Lasch’s (1995a: 83) words again, this is owed to endeavours aiming at the creation of the appropriate conditions within which African Americans could act ‘in concert with fellow Negroes’ aiming at asserting themselves a citizens (King 2000: 30), becoming *political beings*, that is free human beings ‘endowed with the power of speech’ (Arendt 1990: 19). In the end, if ‘King’s leadership transformed a degraded people into active, self-respecting citizens, who achieved a new dignity in the course of defending their constitutional rights’ (Lasch 1995a: 83) this could be attributed to his insistence on non-violence as well as in the anthropocentric (and transcendent) morality of the Christian *agape* (King 1986: 20), which is directed towards both enemies and friends (19), indicating faith and trust in every single human being who (in spite of his/her natural inclination towards sin and *hubris*), holds the means of both celestial and worldly redemption and salvation. Of course *eucosmia* and common decency do not derive from Christian sources alone. One can draw anthropocentric ideas from other religions or from secular art too, as this chapter made clear by mentioning King’s influences from Gandhi’s *satyagraha* and by reflecting on ancient Greek drama and literature.

In general terms, we have seen that non-violence, forgiveness and forbearance may be effective methods of civil disobedience, in struggles attempting to bridge (racially) divided communities. As, however, Rustin (2020) pointed out, social divisions are not always ‘the result of bad sentiment’ and, hence, will not be healed by the ‘[t]alk of brotherhood and “tolerance”’ (191). They are ‘reflections of vast and growing inequalities in our socioeconomic system—inequalities of wealth, of status, of education, of access to political power’ that ‘breed resentment and deep discontent’ (ibid). Here Rustin (2020) speaks of the ‘systematic exclusion of the Negro from the economic mainstream’ (191). As I explained in Chapter 2, by criticising Arendt’s view on *action* (contrasted with necessity and *labour*), and by reflecting on Contogeorgis’ observations, anthropocentric

ideas, a genuine *eucosmia* (in other words), should be concerned both with political and economic participation. Rustin (2020) brings to the foreground aspects of King's campaign that highlight the problem of economic exclusion of the African-Americans (191-3). In short, our emphasis on King's *agape*, non-violence and forbearance must not give the impression that economic demands (economic justice and participation) in the Civil Rights Movement played a very minor role. King 'was never indifferent to the importance of economic equality' (Lasch 1991a: 401). King concluded that the only hope for American society would be 'a radical improvement in the Negro's socioeconomic position' (Rustin 2020: 192), to end political disenfranchisement as well as economic exclusion. As he claimed, '[o]ur needs are identical with labor's needs—decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing, old age security, health and welfare measures, conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children and respect in the community' (King, quoted by Rustin 2020: 192). Thus, his activities moved to the North (Lasch 1991a: 400), into urban centers plagued by black poverty. 'It moved from public accommodations to employment, welfare, housing, education—to find a host of problems the nation had let fester for a generation' (Rustin 2020: 192). In the 'ghetto-trapped Negroes' (190) of the North, King no longer addressed the importance of family and the 'healing power of *agape*' (Lasch 1991a: 400). He 'tended to make poverty, not slavery, the central issue' of his campaign, according to G. D. H. Cole (quoted by Lasch 1991a: 404).

The Civil Rights Movement did not appeal exclusively to the South. In order to spread in the North its leaders had to recognise 'the importance on "public relations," in King's words' (Lasch 1991a: 397), the importance of cooperation and open dialogue, of *narrative action* (in other words), that is, of public debates taking place within mediums of mass communication (such as press), where racial (as well as economic) injustices could be dramatised to the nation (ibid). The Civil Rights Movement 'depended on public opinion' (ibid). As King wrote in 1961, '[w]ithout the presence of the press ... there might have been untold massacres in the South' (quoted by Lasch 1991a: 397). 'A "dramatization to the nation of what segregation was like"' presupposed the presence of national news media, 'to get across the nation the evils of racial discrimination' (ibid). Through methods of mass communication, believed King, the *hubris* of segregation, the suffering of racial exploitation and economic exclusion could be gradually brought to the



attention of the American public (Branch 1988: 227), stimulating collective *nóēsis*, *judgment* and *katharsis* (see the previous section).

### Conclusion

While *agonal action* offers no absolute protection from fantasy and *hubris* (as the first section of this chapter argued), it can contribute towards *public judgment* and, hence, towards common decency. The pessimistic anti-populist theories (mainly those of Hobbes and Le Bon), which regard every group action susceptible to the irrationality that hypnotises its members, allowing unconscious and resentful (instinctual) impulses to generate intolerance and violence (Le Bon 2002; Freud 1991: 98-109), ignore that these phenomena take place (mainly) within passive groups. When collective engagement is not accompanied by *speech* and *hearing*, the members of a group instead of interacting, communicating and exchanging ideas, are converted into a mute and compliant mass. They end up a homogenous and uniform crowd, a submissive herd, acting as if they are in isolation. Under such circumstances indecent ideas can easily spread from one person to another unconsciously. On the other hand, the *vita civile* with its emphasis on common appearance and communication opens up pathways for truth (without which no justice or beauty can ever exist). According to Jefferson (1999), truth ‘is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate’ (391). In James’ (1978) words, ‘we must *talk* consistently just as we must *think* consistently’ (102-3), for plurality of opinion and diversity of viewpoints allows us to recognise ‘all aspects of the truth’ (Mill 2008: 57). Dialogue and public reasoning, ‘collision of adverse opinions’ (53), improves the *mental* muscular powers by constituting past events subjects to continuous public mediation; thus, it prevents pernicious thoughts to be acknowledged as self-evident. Errors cease being ‘dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them’ (Jefferson 1999: 391).

While ‘[d]emocracy provides channels for resolving conflict’ (Kloppenbergh 2016: 315), for dissolving negative prejudices and fallible norms, while intelligence is more common in ‘the ordinary people’ than in experts and technocrats, the possibilities for the former to err, adopting among the plurality of the expressed *doxas* wrong perceptions as



valid and true (deception), is always possible. In short, democracy could also engender conflict, hubris and self-deception (ibid). However, as the second section of this chapter argued, an imprudent *demos* can emancipate itself from the *hubris* of pathos through acts of civil disobedience, through acts that inspire «*αἰδῶ τε καὶ δίκην*» (*aidō* and *dikin*). A ‘good’ citizen, with ‘superior abilities’, who is part of the populace itself (Jefferson 1999: 156),, who draws on (anthropocentric) ideas anchored to the notion of popular *eucosmia*, can sow the seeds of common decency, empowering a populace to drive away the ‘darkness’ of *hubris* from itself. In the second section of this chapter, by focusing on works of art and ancient drama we have seen how the purification of the self (*katharsis*) reveals to ‘us the world, our world and not another one, with clarity...’ (Murdoch 1970: 63), enabling individuals to inspire a populace that has thrown off restraint. We have examined King’s case (the ‘good’ citizen) who draws hope from the belief that justice itself stems from ‘the love of God operating in the human heart’ (King 1986: 9) in order to challenge deeply rooted obscene public perceptions and customs.

Finally, as Colaiaco (1988) stresses, it was the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) headed by King, which used the African American churches as alternative public spaces, where African Americans could hold protest meetings, discussing their grievances, praying and singing inspirational hymns (7). Let us be reminded again that meliorism stimulates action in order to eliminate evil, in order to increase human welfare by augmenting the probability for practical improvement, without offering assurances or guarantees. The melioristic mind takes issue with any idea or concept (including that of leadership) that aspires to redeem humanity from all sorts of falsehoods and moral transgressions once and for all. This impels us to abandon any ‘hagiographic’ approach to King; it prompts us, as much as evidence permits, to identify negative aspects in his campaign and leadership. As Colaiaco (1988) explains, between 1961 and 1963 not everyone ‘welcomed King in Albany’ (42) where ‘blacks engaged in massive nonviolent protests that rocked the community, disturbing civil order for almost a year’ (40). King ‘draws most of the publicity, and wins most of the credit’. According to SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] members: “‘We plant the seed. Dr. King reaps the harvest’” (42). Although such accusations cannot refute the positive effects of King’s efforts *in toto*, at the same time they may be used as warnings, suggesting that

even the most good-intentioned form of leadership carries the risks of abuse of power and manipulation. Although self-purification restores prudence by removing biases that hinder one's capacity to *think* and *judge*, at the same time this process does not promise absolute protection from all temptations in every moment of life. Put starkly: justice, truth and beauty 'are the image in our world of this impersonal and divine order of the universe', claims Weil (2005: 98). A human being (a leader of civil disobedience, for example) can sense perfect justice by connecting him/herself with the *impersonal realm*. This assumption could easily push us to an acceptance of the quasi optimistic worldview that 'constantly recurs in Christian thinking', in mystical Christianity, more precisely, or in the philosophy of several Gnostic sects, according to Passmore (2000: 223), which believed that 'Christians could perfect themselves, if once they were prepared to withdraw from the world' in order to cut themselves off 'from whatever material ... to mortify the body, and ... to soar above the flesh' (ibid), in short, to liberate 'from the human body and the material world' (Gray 2007: 15). This, of course, is disputed by several leading figures of Christianity: Martin Luther, for instance, believed that even if human beings 'had succeeded in freeing themselves from the lusts of the flesh, they would still not be perfect' (Passmore 2000: 135). For Thomas Aquinas, human beings can achieve only 'some perfection' (153), whilst 'absolute perfection lies in the vision of God' and 'no man can achieve perfection in this life, however hard he tries and however much God helps him. The most man can do is to achieve that lower, "evangelical" perfection, which consists in loving God before all else and being free of all mortal sin' (152). According to Gnosticism (see Manicheanism, Catharism and the Brotherhood of the Free Spirit) (123), material life is evil 'and that, in consequence, men could perfect themselves by cutting themselves free from whatever is material' (123). John Cassian, the semi-pelagian (145) 'denies that men can be sinless' (184) but, as he asserts, 'perfect life and perfect virtue' are 'rooted in the contemplation of eternal goodness and in a fervor of love' (John the Cassian 1985: 110). Perfection comes through monastic life (81), through the complete abandonment of the worldly (material) affairs, plagued by all sorts of temptations and lust (pathos) for possession. Moreover, the 'civil disobedient' writes Arendt (1969b) 'never exists as a single individual' and he/she 'can function and survive only as a member of a group' (55). In other words, the civil disobedient leader needs to be in contact with the world he/she

aspires to influence. Irrespective of how deeply his/her mind in the state of *impersonality* is purified from selfish biases and negative prejudices, his/her purified self can be still corrupted. Upon re-entering the secular world, which is always influenced by pathos (Chapter 2), he/she finds him/herself exposed to all sorts of egoistic inducements, incited by his/her social environment. But though an eloquent leader (like King) is not entirely shielded from the vices of human pathos, his/her persistence, resilience, eloquence and moral sobriety, cultivate and fertilise the soil from which the exact conditions for democratic hope are effectively proliferated. The concept of leadership (in relation to populism) is further advanced in the next chapter, which discusses the French and the American Revolutions, as well as on the American cooperative movement which led to the formation of the People's Party.

## Chapter 6

### Meliorism, *Eucosmia* and Leadership

#### Introduction

This chapter is preoccupied a) with the French and the American Revolution, b) with the American cooperative movement (the People's Party), and finally c) with the issue of slavery in the American South. By examining these complex historical events, I have identified a common problem. This problem revolves around the notion of *eucosmia*, which (as I explained in Chapter 1), is central to the idea of meliorism and, hence, to the project of the *vita civile*. More precisely, the first section discusses the main ideological trends behind the French Revolution and juxtaposes the optimistic aspirations of its leadership with the relatively 'moderate', according to Israel (2019: 258), claims of the American Founding Fathers. The main objective here is a) to shed light on the devastating consequences of optimistic populism when it seduces leaders and actors, and b) to emphasise the necessity for cultivating a melioristic populist ethic, anchored to the idea of human vulnerability. It will be also explain that the moderate (and relatively melioristic) expectations of the American revolutionaries derive from their deep concern 'about human frailty' (Kuttner 2019: 37), which (in turn) is partially owed to their mild secularism; unlike the French revolutionaries, the American Founding Fathers had not expelled religious beliefs and transcendent ideas from their thinking. As Nash Marshall (2003) put it, it was faith and belief in God, 'in the inviolability and sacredness of humankind' what saved America from 'the excesses of the French Revolution' (139). Parts of the first section are preoccupied with discussions revolving around this issue.

The second section digs into the rise and fall of the cooperative movement (the Populists), which (to a degree) revived concepts of classical democratic/republican ideas (initially endorsed by the Revolution itself). Top-down appropriation, nevertheless, sent the movement to its doom. The aim here is to elaborate on the reasons leadership undermines democratic political initiatives when it appropriates populist discourses initially generated by 'the people' at the grassroots. Finally, the issue of slavery is outlined in the third section. In both three cases we confront a common problem, which in order to be fully grasped by our readers we will have to resort to Contogeorgis' (2014; 2020)

observations for one more time. The author traces the seeds of the anthropocentric *cosmosystem*<sup>81</sup> in the *homo hellenicus*, that is, in types of being that incarnate aspects of the Greek antiquity (the democratic *polis*) as well as elements of the Hellenistic and Byzantine age (economic and democratic political participation)<sup>82</sup>. However, the disappearance of the *homo hellenicus* with the end of the Byzantine age signaled the disappearance of the anthropocentric *weltanschauung* (Κοντογιώργης 2020 [Contogeorgis 2020]: 86). Anthropocentric ideas were partly revived during the Renaissance and the age of the Enlightenment. But for the same author (Κοντογιώργης [Contogeorgis] 2006; 2012), the Enlightenment has not fully challenged the imaginary of despotism, precisely due to its emphasis on political representation/centralisation, as opposed to direct democracy (or *action*)<sup>83</sup>. In other words, the Enlightenment was a result of a *metharmōsis* of the anthropocentric ideas of the *polis* to the Western European political environment, of the *metakénosis* of the latter to societies struggling to liberate themselves from the yoke of despotism. As Arendt (1990) pointed out, ‘liberation may be the condition of freedom but by no means leads automatically to it’ (29). ‘[E]ven the intention of liberating is not identical with the desire for freedom’ (ibid), that is, for *action*. In simple terms, liberation from absolutism/despotism may be a crucial step towards the revival of the anthropocentric democratic *acquis* of the Greek *polis* but does not automatically lead to it. The desire for limited government (as Chapter 3 argued) is not the desire for *action*. It could be, therefore, argued that the society envisaged by prominent Enlightenment thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century (such as Locke, Montesquieu, Mill, Rousseau and Paine), who insisted on the idea of limited government and political representation/centralisation, are ‘proto-anthropocentric’ societies (Κοντογιώργης [Contogeorgis] 2020: 49)). They understood democracy primarily in terms of popular consent (as opposed to direct participation). At this stage one might ask: how could the ancient Greek (Hellenic) world, in which slave labour and the exclusion of women from politics were considered (at least

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81 In regards to the term *cosmosystem* see the Glossary.

82 For more concerning the anthropocentric character of economic participation see Chapter 2 (second section).

83 Discussions about the reasons some of the most influential figures of the Enlightenment proposed political centralisation (or representation) rather direct democracy will take place in the first section of this chapter.

by many ancient Greek thinkers) *sine qua non* of the human existence (Αριστοτέλης [Aristotle] 1993: 50), could be called anthropocentric? First, Contogeorgis does not call the *homo hellenicus* ‘anthropocentric’ because of the way the entire Greek world was instituted but simply because he identifies in most of ancient Greek civilisations elements of ‘freedom’ (Κοντογιώργης [Contogeorgis] 2006: 31]). More precisely, Contogeorgis’ (2021) method of *gnoseology* (γνωσιολογία) is concerned with the way civilisations incarnate a set of knowledge, that is, a set of beliefs and ideas that gradually allow them to evolve. This freedom he identifies in the *homo hellenicus* is (to a degree) the freedom of (direct) democracy, the freedom to dispute, to call into question given norms and ideas<sup>84</sup>. In my view, this freedom (and knowledge) is best materialised through the ability of every *anthrōpos* to use his/her *logos* and *judgment* in order to master his/her own *hubris* or the *hubris* of others. Hence, anthropocentrism is expressed through the notion *eucosmia*.

If the (melioristic)<sup>85</sup> friendship of *eucosmia* is anthropocentric and stands for *action* and if eighteenth-century liberalism has not fully incarnated the classical Greek and the Hellenistic anthropocentric *weltanschauung*, we can assume that liberal leaders (populist or otherwise) who remain anchored to the political paradigm shaped by the ‘proto-anthropocentric’ ideas of certain variants of the Enlightenment lack the *eucosmia*, that is, the faith that the simple *κόσμος* (*cosmos*), the ‘common people’, who is a *zōon politikon*, as a *zōon lōgon ekhon* ‘a living being capable of speech’, in Arendt’s (1998: 27) translation, and/or a living being capable of *thinking*. Thus, the collapse of the People’s Party in America can be attributed to the absence of *eucosmia* on the behalf not simply of its populist leadership but of the American republican worldview that also characterises certain aspects of the philosophy of the Founding Fathers (as the first section will stress). The persistence of slavery (see the third section) also characterises the absence of *eucosmia* from the American mind. Let us not ignore Jefferson’s ambiguous stance on the institution

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84 Let us not neglect (as chapter 2 argued) that Contogeorgis ([Κοντογιώργης] 2006) considers not the paradigm of the Greek city-states but the Hellenistic and the Byzantine (cosmopolitan) age as more representative examples of anthropocentrism (50-1) precisely due to the superseding of slave labour by free trade.

85 *Eucosmia* is melioristic so long as it focuses on the capacities of every *anthrōpos* to overcome his/her proclivity towards *hubris* through *action* and self-purification. The existence of this proclivity prevents perfection (as the first section of this chapter will argue).

of slavery. Initially Jefferson stood for equality by creation (as indicated in the Declaration of Independence), which (of course) implies the end of slavery (Kidd 2012: 146; Israel 2012: 457; 2017: 58). In proposals he submitted to the Virginia legislature (1776) he called for the gradual abolition of chattel slavery (Kloppenber 2016: 403; De Dijn 2020: 194-5), which (as he later on complained) had fallen on deaf ears (309). Nonetheless, his finances and means of living were utterly dependent on slave labour (Kidd 2012: 131; Israel 2012: 457; 2019: 282; Breen 2019: 9). During the mid-1780s he began ‘to scale back the broad implications of the Declaration’ arguing that blacks and whites are fundamentally different races, have different capacities; the latter fit for liberty and the former not (Kidd 2012: 146; Israel 2017: 147).

More to the point, as Chapter 4 mentioned, the men who framed the American Constitution had not incorporated the townships, the ‘elementary republics’ (Arendt 1990: 250), where ‘the voice of the whole people would be fairly, fully, and peaceably expressed, discussed, and decided by the common reason of all citizens’ (Jefferson 1999: 217). As Kloppenber (2016) points out, the Revolutionary leadership were sceptical of direct democracy and open participation. Instead, it saw political representation as the only substitute (322-6; 334). Thus, the loss of public happiness due to the absence of *eucosmia*, due to the absence of faith in the ‘common people’ to become constituents, to gain the upper hand in the process of political decision-making (*action*), allowed the forces of the private sphere, the spirit of *possessive individualism* (more precisely), to dominate in the American national life (Chapter 4). Thus, Hartz (1955) was not wrong to assume that the ‘Lockean’ philosophy, namely the philosophy of possessive individualism (see Chapter 3), ‘dominates American political thought’ like no other political philosophy has ever dominated ‘the political thought of a nation’ (140). Let us see, at this stage, how this Faustian possessiveness can also tolerate radical forms of *hubris*, such as slavery. If the slave is a parcel of property (Hartz 1955: 170; Breen 2019: 52)<sup>86</sup>, and if the right to property is prioritised over other rights, *eucosmia* is expelled as long as the slave him/herself instead of being treated as a ‘citizen of the republic’ (Breen 2019: 52), as a *thinking* being, to use Locke’s (1978: 188) vocabulary again, or as a *zōon politikon*, capable of *acting*, *thinking*

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86 As David Walker, an African American abolitionist, in his *Appeal* (1830/1993) stresses, ‘[t]hey [the white slaveholders] keep us miserable now, and call us their property’ (81).

and *judging*, is considered a *thing* (in Weil's terms), a living being destined to obey commands, capable only of satisfying his/her own biological needs (*labour*) as well as those of his/her master<sup>87</sup>. It is time to move ahead, digging deeper into the notion of *eucosmia* and meliorism. Initially, we will examine the French and the American revolutions. While the former issues a reminder to be chary of any form of ideological optimism (as mentioned earlier), the latter stresses the value of moderation and, simultaneously, allows us to establish a clear view concerning the need for *eucosmia*.

### Revolution and leadership: France and the New World (a comparative study)

#### 1) France: the case of optimistic populism

As Tocqueville (2011) noted, the French Revolution was the outcome of 'the culmination of a long labor ... to which ten generations had contributed' (Tocqueville 2011: 27). The so-called "“leaders of public opinion”" (Chartier 2004: 12), the leaders of the 'revolution of the mind', according to Diderot (Israel 2010: 228; Popkin 2019: 47), an all-powerful philosophical aristocracy (the *philosophes*) (Chartier 2004: 12) carried out the political education of the French people, shaping the French 'temperament and disposition' (Tocqueville 2011: 134). Their work was disseminated in theaters, salons and cabarets by literary circles through printed books, pamphlets, almanacs and clandestine literature (Chartier 2004: 68; 70; 77). 'If the French of the late eighteenth century fashioned the Revolution, it is because they have in turn been fashioned by books', claims Chartier (2004: 68). Through published books and pamphlets the 'men of letters' took a leading role in the spread of social and cultural trends that caused rapid changes in viewpoints and perceptions (Chartier 2004: 11; Israel 2006: 21; 2010: 224) by 'reworking the principles of morality and politics' (Israel 2014: 924). To avoid misunderstandings: the *philosophes* (with Rousseau being a notable exception) were not 'optimists' (let alone 'populists').

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87 To avoid misunderstandings: by attributing the justification of slavery in the New World to the 'Lockean' prioritisation of right of property over other rights does not imply that all forms of slavery rely on ideologies that exalt and glorify the pathos for possession. For example, as Castoriadis ([Καστοριάδης] 2008) has many times stressed, slavery during the Greek antiquity was an institution passively accepted as a norm. We find no ancient Greek text offering moral justification to slavery (says the same author) apart from Aristotle, who in the *Politics* argues that slaves and women are made inferior to free men by nature (Αριστοτέλης [Aristotle] 1993: 50).



Nonetheless, aspects of their thought had incorporated elements that contributed to the spread of revolutionary ideas predicated upon optimism (as I will explain in what follows).

First, the ‘men of letters’ drew on Helvétius, Diderot, Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Locke, and other notable thinkers of the Enlightenment (Chartier 2004: 89; Israel 2010: 56; 225; 2014: 18-9; 279). These ‘leaders of public opinion’ undermined ‘religion and government’ by injecting their ideas everywhere ‘via clandestine printed literature’ (Israel 2010: 103). They assailed religion and preached equality and secular democracy (Israel 2012: 924; Popkin 2019: 368). But even if this gestational period had not taken place, even if the *philosophes* had not contributed in the rapid dissemination of political ideas—which the leaders of the Revolution (and more importantly Marat, Robespierre, Saint-Just and Brissot) adopted and put into practice—the collapse of the old regime was inevitable. Perhaps, it would have not been torn down ‘with such a brutal suddenness’ and, instead, ‘would have continued to collapse piece by piece’ (Tocqueville 2011: 27).

As it seems, Burke’s (1968) rejection of the French Revolution as a series of tragic episodes, where bands ‘of ruffians and assassins’ (164) worked ‘with low instruments and for low ends’ (136), and Le Bon’s and Taine’s remarks about ‘[s]ocial outcasts’ (smugglers and dealers, prisoners and criminals, the rabble of the cities), about forces that ‘escape every kind of social rationality’ (quoted by Laclau 2005: 32) joined the howling mobs, resulting in a bloodbath (31; 34; 61), tell only part of the story. The populist orator Jean-Paul Marat, claims Popkin (2019), the so-called ‘friend of the people’ (260; 301), was not an ‘assassin’, a bandit or a smuggler; he ‘was not at all bloodthirsty’ (Kropotkin 1971: 450); Robespierre was “‘incorruptible”” (Scurr 2006: 6) and from his very early involvement in politics (55-69) until his final moments in the guillotine (288-325) no evidence indicates that he was indeed a madman or a bandit. As studies revealed, extremists and political terrorists ‘[i]n spite of this hateful calculus and the brutality of their deeds ... are rarely coolly calculating agents of hate or mindless’ (Breithaupt 2019: 115). In the same way Robespierre is described as a modest looking man (Scurr 2006: 9), with no evidence that he was a sadist or a “‘bloodthirsty charlatan”” (6). Instead, his main ‘vice’ was his passive devotion to a cause inspired by profoundly optimistic philosophical doctrines, and, more importantly, from Rousseau’s optimistic philosophy, the most influential in all

Revolutionary intellectual and literary circles and factions (Israel 2014: 21; Popkin 2019: 97), disseminated through this powerful intellectual aristocracy during the past few decades. As Scurr (2006) stresses, Robespierre was ‘hopelessly utopian’ and ‘politically misguided’ (5). He ‘justified the Terror as ... a necessary step on the path to the ideal society’ (ibid).

According to Chartier (2004), Rousseau’s thought ‘provided reading matter’ for plebeians, aristocrats’ as well as for members ‘of the commercial middle class, who took him for their *maître à penser*’ (84). Israel (2014) claims, “every part of the Revolution made some claim on the heritage of Rousseau” (Israel 2014: 20). Mirabeau, like most radical Revolutionaries, rejected Montesquieu and celebrated Rousseau for his central role in the making of the Revolution (Israel 2012: 932; 2014: 21). In the Pantheon, ‘a secular monument to the memory of “great men” who had served the nation’ (Popkin 2019: 228), ‘Voltaire and Rousseau—were glorified as *grands hommes*’ (Chartier 2004: 88). In the beginning of the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1754/2004) Rousseau attacks Hobbes’s pessimistic theory. As he states, the most natural human sentiment is pity, ‘which the most dissolute manners have as yet found it so difficult to extinguish’ (2004: 20). Pity and compassion moderate ‘in every individual the activity of self-love’ (21), inciting mutual respect (22). ‘[T]he first movements of nature are always right’ and there is ‘no original perversity in the human heart’ (Rousseau 2007: 170). In the state of nature, in ‘the real youth of the [human] world’ (Rousseau 2004: 33), wants are moderate. Human beings do not covet more knowledge than the one required to survive (11) and there is no substantial knowledge concerning ‘what is to be good; for it is neither the development of the understanding, nor the curb of the law, but the calmness of their passions and their ignorance of vice that hinders them from doing ill’ (20). For Rousseau, in the state of nature there is only benevolence, reason and free will, claims Macadam (1989: 118). In their default position men and women are neither licentious nor virtuous (Rousseau 2004: 18). Licentious attitudes, the pathos for unlimited possession—which (for Rousseau) led to corruption and, subsequently, to rampant inequality and enslavement—do not ‘arise ... from innate defects of human nature’ (Israel 2014: 19); instead, they are the real consequences of the constant deterioration of this original benevolence; corruption, wars, murders, misfortunes are brought forward *by means of society* and civilization (Rousseau

1979: 85; 2004: 27).

Human beings in their default position ‘live in peace’, claimed Saint-Just, inspired by Rousseau (quoted in Hampson 1983: 254). ‘Man is born for happiness and liberty and everywhere he is wretched and enslaved’, to use Robespierre’s words (quoted in Hampson 1983: 232). Here Robespierre paraphrases Rousseau—while addressing the Convention on the constitution (Hampson 1983: 232). For Rousseau (2004), desire has corrupted reason and free will. Since human beings have exited the state of nature and joined the state of society, selfishness and egocentricity replaced compassion and benevolence (27). The state of society ‘is “contrary to the nature of man” and the wisest course is to renounce [it] altogether’ (summarised by Israel 2010: 57). In other words, society has forced us to neglect ‘that the fruits of the earth belong equally to us all, and the earth itself to nobody’ (Rousseau 2004: 27). ‘The example of the savages ... seems to confirm that mankind was formed ever to remain’ in the state of nature (33). ‘[A]ll ulterior improvements have been so many steps, in appearance towards the perfection of individuals, but in fact towards the decrepitness of the species’ (ibid). Hence, for Rousseau, lust and self-perfection, which in the state of nature remain dormant, are awakened by civilisation, summarises Macadan (1989: 118). ‘[V]anity, avarice, envy, ambition, jealousy, shame, contempt, and misery are not innate but are characteristic of certain kinds of social relationships’ (116). In *Emile or On Education* (1762/1979), for example, Rousseau states the following: ‘[c]hildren raised in clean houses where no spiders are tolerated are afraid of spiders, and this fear often stays with them when grown. I have never seen a peasant, man, woman, or child, afraid of spiders’ (63).

At this stage, let us examine how Rousseau’s notion of natural benevolence influenced Robespierre, Marat and other leaders). To a degree, Rousseau’s theory set the foundations of what Israel repeatedly calls ‘authoritarian populism’ (Israel 2014: 162; 198; 249; 261; 375; 2019: 259), *id est*, the process whereby one leader or a group of revolutionaries) theologise (in Arato’s terms) the ‘pure’, ‘innocent’ and ‘incorruptible common people’, as if they are the only ones who understand what the populace itself desires, but go as far as to ‘repress political foes’ (Israel 2014: 217), following the logic of the despots whom revolutions aspire to depose (Müller 2016: 28). To avoid misunderstandings, through this analysis, which suggests that Rousseau’s natural

benevolence has contributed to widespread political violence and despotism, and that such an optimistic view of human nature can sometimes play a central part in a variety of highly problematic political attitudes (that range from native idealism to political extremism), I have no intention to encourage categorical assumptions, that (for instance) Rousseau's natural benevolence will always, and without exception, empower individuals to commit political atrocities. Consider, for example, the moderate Girondins, led by Brissot, who were also influenced by the ethical philosophy of Rousseau (Hampson 1983: 84; 86-8; De Luna 2003: 163; 165), were among 'the first to envisage tackling economic inequality'. Brissot (the leader of the Girondins), championed freedom of expression (Israel 2014: 712), condemned black slavery, fought for black liberation (De Luna 2003: 173; 177; Israel 2017: 108; 134; 147; 150-3), despising antisemitism (De Luna 2003: 169). He 'attempt[ed] to create a fairer society by constitutional, legal, and nonviolent means' (Israel 2014: 478) while insisting on mass education (Israel 2017: 97), following Rousseau's precepts, that 'children were made to read too much' (Hampson 1983: 88). More importantly, the Girondins stood against the terrorism justified and glorified by the Montagnards (by Robespierre and Marat, more precisely) (Popkin 2019: 290-1). Nevertheless, their overall stance on political violence has not been always clear. Others questioned their loyalty to the ideals of Revolution (Kropotkin 1971: 106; 446; Burrows 2014: 857). Brissot was often accused of being a revolutionist only in name, an opportunist, a 'police spy' (Burrows 2014: 844) and a royalist collaborator, whose condemnations of political violence were simply pretexts in favour of restoring the despotic *ancien régime* (De Luna 2003: 161-2; 178). Others assume that such indictments were simply unprovable pretexts invented by his rivals (the radical and bloody-minded Montagnards) in order to justify their political terrorism against dissidents (181). It could be also that Brissot himself, a passionate Rousseauian, was too optimistic or 'idealistic' (Burrows 2014: 843) and put too much trust in the goodness and benevolence of men and women, *id est*, in the good intentions of his revolutionist compatriots (Robespierre, Dantone and Marat, more precisely), underestimating the possible slip of men and women to *hubris*, conflict and enmity, as well as their pathos for domination (at the expense of moderation and common decency)<sup>88</sup>.

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88 On the one hand the Girondins (led by Brissot) voted to send Louis XVI to the guillotine, but on the other they did everything possible to save him (Israel 2017: 92). For this reason the

Like Brissot, Marat, was inspired by Rousseau's natural benevolence and envisaged a quasi 'primitive society, in which a sound constitution' would be maintained by the *virtù* of the citizens, claims Hampson (1983: 110). Deviation from this primitive condition created the conditions which gradually devoured human beings in luxury, commerce and industry, leading to 'competition, rivalry, or rather enmity' (Rousseau 2004: 48). Inspired by Rousseau, Marat believed that everything in the state of nature was legitimate (including cannibalism), claims Hampson (1983: 126) Instead, '[s]ociety was the product not of a contract but of force' (ibid). According to Pettit (1997), 'Rousseau is ... responsible for having given currency to ... a populist view' (30), an optimistic populist view, nevertheless. However, Rousseau himself had unflinchingly rejected populism and direct democracy, expressing doubts concerning the intelligence of the 'common people', *id est*, of their capacity to judge impartially (Kloppenbergh 2016: 208; 232-3). Democracy was nothing but a regime appropriate only for angels (226). His followers ignored all these reservations and took the natural benevolence of man as a justification for a perfect egalitarian democracy, for a society emancipated from every kind of corruption and/or absolutist oppression. In fact, as Robespierre argued, the 'fundamental terms' of Rousseau's *SC* were 'written in heaven' (Hampson 1983: 140). The *SC* envisioned a society 'only suitable for gods' (Camus 200: 81). His followers 'took at his word and tried to establish the divinity of man' (ibid), re-forming 'the immortal chain that should link man to God ... by destroying all the sources of oppression and tyranny' (Hampson 1983: 141).

By considering the concept of the original/ancestral sin a tool of oppression, a 'fable' that cripples human happiness, freedom, and 'dignity of character' (Wollstonecraft's 1993: 306-7)<sup>89</sup>, by subverting original/ancestral sin itself, considering

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Robespierriest, Dantonistes, Hébertistes and Enragés accused Brissot of opportunism and corruption (De Luna 2003: 160) of 'counterrevolutionary activity' (178) as well as of treason and 'conspiracy' against the people (De Luna 2003: 177; Israel 2014: 423, 449; 458). The Girondins (they asserted) defended "some of the vices of the *ancien régime* in the new body politic" (448), supporting the rich against the poor (433; 438). They were not as faithful as they should be to the cause of the principles of the Revolution. They moved against the dictates of the General Will, which (as Rousseau believed), is embodied in the people (I will shed more light on this later on). .

89 As the same author continues, '[w]e must get entirely clear of all the notions drawn from the wild traditions of original sin ... on which priests have erected their tremendous structures of imposition, to persuade us, that we are naturally inclined to evil' (Wollstonecraft 1993: 306), in

all human beings benevolent and compassionate as their default position, the French Revolutionaries, especially the ‘revolutionary vanguard beneath Robespierre and Danton’—which had orchestrated coordinated attacks against Catholicism and the Christian religion in general (Israel 2014: 483)—envisaged a society capable of unleashing this natural (and almost perfect) benevolence (Hampson 1983: 250; Scurr 2006: 51). By drawing on Rousseau, the leaders of the French Revolution pursued ‘the final liquidation of the principle of divinity’ (Camus 2000: 83), under the supposition that the world could be remodeled in a way that man’s angelic goodness would become a living reality, where “‘the tyranny and injustice of men shall have banished from the earth’” (according to Robespierre, quoted by Hampson 1983: 144) and ‘all men would live as brothers’ (263). Thus, they ‘turned the revolution into a Second Coming’ (234), striving to establish a secular society that would ostensibly resemble the standards of divine perfection, pulling ‘the Christian heaven down to earth’ (Hartz 1955: 41).

Second, the idea of original/ancestral sin halts the desire for perfection (Kloppenbergh 2016: 44). According to the Christian *weltanschauung*, sin refers to the inability of living according to God’s standards of absolute purity and perfect goodness. Due to ‘man’s first disobedience’ (Milton 2004: 10) that led to the invasion of evil into the human mind, no individual on Earth can become righteous enough to avoid error and sin (The Bible, Ecclesiastes 7:20). In other words, every man and woman is imperfect, vulnerable and susceptible to wrongdoing. As, for instance, ‘Christian [Augustinian] theologians argue, ‘unless man can be sinless he cannot be perfect’ (Passmore 2000: 17). For Calvinists, corruption in men and women is too deep-seated in order to achieve perfection (155-7). Of course, a utopian vision can incorporate an awareness of human error and imperceptibility. Although the mainstream Christian thought is anchored to the idea of original or the ancestral sin, assuming that ‘no human institution can claim to embody good’ (Gray 2007: 48), several ‘perfectibilist heresies’ (Passmore 2000: 214) (partially mentioned in the previous chapter) sought to put to sleep and mortify the human pathos for possession and domination through monasticism and asceticism. Many of these heresies, however, through this process instead of striving for terrestrial perfection, aspired

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order to “‘keep us under their yoke”, according to Jean-Baptiste Harmand, who directed church closures ‘and established the “festival of reason”’ (quoted by Israel 2014: 493).

towards celestial perfectibility (27), absolute salvation ‘was promised only in the life hereafter’ (Gray 2007: 39). But others related individual (psychical/spiritual) perfection to social perfection (Passmore 2000: 220). Spiritual knowledge (in their view) is ‘*thnatos āgan*’, to use Aeschylus’s (1992: 72) terms, that is, excessive and capable to allow every mortal (human being) to overcome conflict once and for all, making earthly life quite similar to heavenly life<sup>90</sup>. Consider, for example, George Fox (Quakers), for whom human beings are corrupt and sinful by nature but, as he believed, can be reborn; they can acquire a *new* nature in order to achieve immaculate perfection (Passmore 2000: 204-7). Presumably, the *realistic* approach of human nature, anchored to the belief in ancestral sin, by raising awareness of our natural proclivity towards error, *can* allow a perception that deems utopian aspirations as unrealistic and dangerous to be settled into place more easily than Rousseau’s notion of original benevolence (notwithstanding it cannot always guarantee rejection of perfectibilism). By ignoring this tragic aspect of human existence, it might be concluded, the mind becomes more gullible to seductive utopian world-views, which appeal to the pathos for social perfection (discussed in Chapter 2), for the erection of a ‘crystal palace’, of a brand new society entirely emancipated from suffering. Consider, for example, the Cult of Reason and the worshipping of human intelligence by the supporters of the French Revolution; for them reason was simply ‘[t]he image of God implanted’ in human nature (Wollstonecraft 1993: 307); reason begun to spread ‘rapidly ... promising to shelter all mankind’ (ibid).

The abandonment of original sin and its replacement by the notion of perfect goodness, which (for Rousseau) is always corrupted *by means of society*, could lead us to the following assertion: the society organized by the *ancien régime* is the seed of corruption. ‘Influenced by Rousseau’s belief in innate human goodness’, writes Gray (2007), the Jacobins believed men and women had become corrupt by the repressive *ancien régime* (36). Consider, Saint-Just’s assertion, that ‘man [is] naturally good’ and ‘contemporary political institutions were a denial of men’s true nature’ (mentioned by Hampson 1983: 249). He had a settled conviction that French society ‘had been corrupted by centuries of unnatural government’ (253). In contrast, a natural society (for Saint-Just)

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90 For the exact translation of this term see Chapter 2.



should be fully egalitarian, free from crime and injustices (250). Robespierre at the Jacobin Club explicitly invoked Rousseau, ‘insisting that “only the people are good, just and generous,” and “corruption and tyranny are the monopoly of those who hold them in disdain”’ (Kloppenbergh 2016: 512). “[A]ny institution” claimed Robespierre “that does not postulate that the people is good ... is vicious”’ (quoted by Popkin 2019: 332). As also Rousseau (2004) believed, monarchy and/or aristocracy, being arbitrary forms of rule, have emerged out of the state of society, where eminent and rich individuals utilise their fame and wealth in order to topple the rest (46). To claim, however, that the institutions of the *ancien régime* corrupt and deprive man’s perfect goodness, inevitably allows someone to consider the defenders of the aristocracy—and even worse, those who were wrongly accused of siding with the aristocracy, as (for instance) the moderate liberal Girondin group (Israel 2014: 448)—not simply political opponents whose political objectives that brought exploitation and suffering should be called into question, not even ‘conspirators’ and “traitors” who mislead ‘the *citoyens*’ (453), but also ‘enemies of the human species (*hostis generis humani*) to use Jacobin terminology’ who have to be exterminated through brute force (Fine 2014: 220). Supporters of the old order of the *ancien régime* (real or imaginary) were not simply defenders of despotism and enemies of a more equal and fair (but imperfect, nevertheless) society, but foes of the human progress towards perfection, enemies of the absolute benevolence human beings could unleash, bringing prosperity and perfect brotherhood on Earth. For Robespierre, claims Gray (2007), ‘[a] higher form of human of human life was within reach – even a higher of human being’, but this required purification even by means of extreme violence (37).

To avoid misunderstandings: by suggesting that the spread and the justification of violence is attributed to the ideological optimism of some influential ‘men of letters’ (or of the prominent leaders of the French Revolution) should not automatically exhort to neglect the contribution of other trends and factors. Consider, for example, the intolerance of a great percentage of the French clergy, their continuous efforts to obstruct popular liberal reforms (Israel 2010: 25; 2014: 182; Breen 2019: 59) or the ruthlessness of the French aristocracy in igniting public discontent, fueling popular resentment. In fact, while ‘one million one hundred thousand persons were officially declared to be beggars’ (Kropotkin 1971: 16) the nobles and the clergy were living in luxury, and thrived out of the poor



peasants' toil (Scurr 2006: 56). As Kropotkin (1971) stressed, the misery 'in the country districts went on increasing year by year' (30) and food scarcity in Paris (as well as in other big towns) had reached unbearable levels (149). Church tithes caused mass indignation in the countryside (39), where the peasants sought 'to regain possession of the land and to free it from the feudal obligations which burdened it' (97). In addition, protests were often repressed by force, followed by arrests, hangings and torture (Scurr 2006: 29). However, the aim of this section is to shed light on the way optimism fueled resentment and mass violence. To this we could also add the notion of compassion (or empathy) and the phenomenon of *pathological confluence*. Chapter 2 (see the third part of the third section) briefly discussed the process whereby compassion with the poor led to the justification of the violence of the latter. More precisely, compassion (or empathy) often 'feeds into resentment', claims Breithaupt (2019: 55). Extreme emotional identification with the victim fuels anger towards the (hypothetical or real) source of injustice and often leads to the obstruction of *judgment*, of the ability for the observer to identify whether the anger of the victim (against the predator) must end or not. Thus, the extreme sufferings of the poor, of the *sans culottes*, of the impoverished farmers (as a consequence of the despotism of the *ancien régime* itself) converted the latter into victims of 'unfair' or 'unjust' rule and, hence, into figures of empathy (or compassion) with whom an observer can identify. Thus, compassion could be taken as one factor that led to the justification of the violence of the poor. This justification was also strengthened by another factor: the optimistic and quasi 'millenarian' according to Gray (2007: 20) trends behind the French Revolution, which assumed that men and women (as I have claimed in the previous paragraph), so long as they are benevolent by nature, are capable of perfection, of erecting 'crystal palaces', of transforming social relations in such a way that a perfect new world will be erected. The task of such a radical transformation, claims Bianchi (2017), had to be carried out by most of the revolutionary projects pushed forward by the Montagnards. In their mind, this brand-new world of perfect brotherhood the *ancien régime* had sought to prevent from coming into existence while striving to protect and perpetuate its own despotic rule. We could, therefore, assert that *pathological confluence*, which leads to the blind justification of the extreme violence of the victim (the poor, in our case) with whom the observer over-identifies, was (on the one hand) due to their compassion for their suffering and (on the

other) due to the impression that behind such major social upheavals, behind this rampant violence and ruthlessness there are good intentions and, of course, a promise for a brand new just and fair world (optimism).

Furthermore, '[t]he reaction' writes Kropotkin (1970), 'was able to destroy ... the political work of the Revolution; but its economic work' (430-1), namely the abolition of serfdom, royal absolutism, and most of all, the abolition of the feudal rights, the redistribution land (Kropotkin 1971: 96; 457; 478 493; 577; Israel 2014: 72; 184; 2019: 258; 288; Popkin 2019: 154; 156) and the end of Church tithes (Scurr 2006: 92; Popkin 2019: 156; 187) survived altogether, even when the forces of reaction took the upper hand (Kropotkin 1971: 431). It would be more accurate to assume that reaction only gave the final blow to the political institutions created by the Revolution; instead the political realm was initially destroyed from within. First, it was the centralisation of power to the hands of a revolutionary government, it was (in other words) Robespierre himself who during the summer of 1793 seized power (Israel 2014: 420-49; 503; 2019: 259), obliterating the popular clubs that had been brought forward by the Revolution itself, clubs and public spaces within which people could read, talk, listen and make decisions as distinct individuals (Arendt 1990: 240-1; Disch 2011: 360-1; Israel 2014: 455; Popkin 2019: 172). Robespierre and the Montagnards suspended the Constitution (Israel 2014, p.506; De Dijn 2020: 238), suppressing dissent (Israel 2010: 232; 2014: 459; 475; 510; 513); 'By late 1793, Robespierre wielded increasingly dictatorial power' (503), striving to eliminate every opposition; summary executions of political opponents took place (Israel 2010: 232; 2014: 503; 511-2). The Brissonites were 'the Terror's primary targets' (Israel 2014: 699). In addition, intellectuals were incarcerated (530-1) including Paine, who was living in Paris during the height of the Great Terror (Israel 2010: 232; 2014: 535-6; 2019: 272). Robespierre's putsch effectively ended the virtually complete freedom of expression introduced by the Revolution itself (Israel 2012: 908; 2014: 429; 2019: 272). Second, and more importantly: consider again Rousseau's view that goodness is always corrupted *by means of society*, an assertion effectively leading to the delegitimisation of the *ancien régime* as the source of corruption, of serfdom and mortification; nothing else could come out of it; no positive aspirations or meaningful convictions could inspire, tie and preserve 'the people' in common faith and destiny. At the same time '[t]he entire complex of

institutions that had existed up to 1789 was ... stigmatized as the *ancien régime* ... with the implication that every aspect of the past had been unjust and irrational' and, therefore, deserved to be destroyed, claims Popkin (2019: 155). '[T]he term *ancien régime*' according to the same author, 'was a powerful weapon that could be wielded against individuals, institutions, and even patterns of behavior' that belonged to pre-1789 France (155).

Nonetheless, as Chapter 2 argued (see the first section), tradition (the existence of an empirical world) prevents the restless human wonder from approaching the underworld, awaking pathos. In the event, wonder becomes absorbed by pathos, anger is converted into *mēnis* and passion for revenge (see the second section of Chapter 2). . If as Nussbaum (2013) claimed, 'institutions themselves embody the insight of emotions' while 'laws embody the insights of experiences of personal resentment, distilled by reflection and extended by sympathy to all' (135), we could assert that the emotion of hatred, the feeling of resentment and the pathos for revenge (*mēnis*) unleashed by the Revolution, were embodied in the institutions and laws of the new regime. Thus, *mēnis* invaded the structures of the new regime and found representation in Robespierre's rule (I will shed more light on this later on). Eventually, the political realm was initially eroded from within, from the Revolution itself.

Finally, let us take into account Rousseau's (1994) *general will*, 'so widespread in eighteenth-century French political thought' (Popkin 2019: 163). The general will is the expression of 'what is best for all' (Hampson 1983: 32); it is always for the common good (Rousseau 1994: 8); it 'is always in the right' (66) those who follow it never err (Hampson 1983: 187). Hence, an ideal commonwealth is the one whose Sovereign conforms with the general will (63), which puts 'the general interest ahead' of every particular individual above all selfish desires (Popkin 2019: 54)<sup>91</sup>. Nonetheless, Rousseau (1994) was clear from

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91 In that sense, the general will is closer to my definition of common decency. As, however, Rousseau (1994) points out, when 'the general will no longer the will of all ... contradiction and argument arise, and the best opinion is not accepted without dispute' (135). In contrast, for the *vita civile* contradiction and argument (*logos*) and experience is necessary for common decency, which is not always not to us *a-priori*. Rousseau's General Will does not derive from dialogue and consultation. Hence, Israel's assertion that the General Will *per se* could justify extreme particularism and intolerance (Israel 2012: 633), maximising collective instincts 'for group security' (639) against individual expression, seems valid to a degree.

the beginning: the general will ‘cannot be represented’ (127). Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès ‘called this “an unfortunate phrase” and asked “why not”?’ (Israel 2012: 644). To take the optimistic belief in human benevolence and perfectibility for granted, to replace original/ancestral sin with Original Harmony, is to acknowledge the General Will as being embodied in ‘the people’; it requires, however, the appropriate conditions to set up institutions within which it will be unleashed<sup>92</sup>. If the General Will makes no error, and if the General Will itself is embodied in ‘the people’, represented by one the leader, the latter could easily end up ‘theologised’. Those who attempt to despise the leader are immediately deemed traitors to the nation (Müller 2016: 57), who should be led not by Reason but by terror (according to Robespierre, quoted by Hampson 1983: 238). By ‘invoking the nation’s general will’ he effectively ‘silence[d] everyone he declared counterrevolutionary and tied to aristocratic plots’ (Kloppenber 2016: 708), in short, everyone who attempted to call into question his goals and aspirations.

Of course, the French Revolution should not be only seen through the year-long period of Robespierre’s authoritarian populism. Earlier I mentioned the abolition of serfdom, the expansion of freedom of speech, in short, the spread of some proto-anthropocentric values carried out by the Revolution itself. Let us not ignore that ‘in the midst of the French Revolution’ the ‘common (French) people’ went on to experiment with direct democracy, and (consequently) ‘one of the earliest nationwide referendums, in 1793’ took place, ‘when over 90 percent of French voters approved a new republican constitution (Matusaka 2020: 82). Notice also how in Kropotkin’s (1971) writings the ‘common Frenchmen and women’ who supported the revolution were not presented as a bloodthirsty mob and were not particularly keen for Robespierre’s and Marat’s ideological optimism. They seemed be relatively moderate in their aspirations. They set out to defeat despotism in the name justice (not, however, of some ‘perfect justice’) and were not hostile to religion *per se*, (ibid). It goes without saying that the anti-Christian zeal of the Montagnards and the Hébertistes (to a degree) found justification by sections of the French populace, given the way the Catholic Church was deeply embedded into (hence complicit with) the socio-

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92 For the *vita civile*, instead, common decency is not embodied in the people; it is not an inherited temperamental trait. It is acquired through knowledge, through deliberate acts that enhance *judgment* and/or through spiritual/religious experiences.

economic, political and ideological structure of the illiberal Old Regime. However, according to Kropotkin's (1971) view, the populace was more 'inclined to free thought' than to atheism or to some secular religion (like The Cult of Reason or the Cult of the Supreme Being) and the masses 'by no means disliked the Catholic form of religion' as such (7). 'What they detested most was the Church' as an institution (ibid). As also Israel (2014) confirms, the majority of the French condemned Robespierre's authoritarian populism (Israel 2014: 452-3; 505) and opposed the policies of dechristianisation (497) carried out (mainly) by the Hébersistes (Israel 2014: 497)<sup>93</sup>. Hence, during the events of 1793 it was the 'common Frenchmen and Frenchwomen' who understood the need for prudence and moderation. Consider, finally, Disch's (2011) critique on Arendt, accused of neglecting the way the Girondins supported 'critical discourse – the "dialogic method" together with "polite conversation" and epistolary exchange' (361). As opposed to those who accuse Brissot of suppressing the popular councils, for being exclusively a defender of 'modern representative democracy' (rather than a classical republican) (Israel 2014: 478), for Disch (2011) the Girondins 'turned to political representation' only in order to strengthen 'popular empowerment' and not for the purpose of thwarting it 'just as Arendt maintained it should be' (366). Brissot designed a pyramidal federal government assigning to the revolutionary assemblies the primary role in legislating, then 'moving to the Communal Assembly (a legislative body of three hundred)' and finally 'to the Town Council, a subset of the Assembly that would exercise executive power' (362). The revolutionary assemblies could 'supervise and comment' on the policies of the Assembly, 'debat[ing] freely any concerns' (363). It could be also argued that Brissot, from his long stay in north America (Israel 2017: 74-6), was inspired by the quasi moderate and relatively

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<sup>93</sup> Robespierre and Saint-Just opposed the radical dechristianization of France (Israel 2014: 498; Popkin 2019: 383) as 'ill-advised and wrongly conceived in principle' (Israel 2014: 498). Clearly inspired by 'Rousseau's concept of civil religion that could bind society together', he repudiated both the '*fanatisme* (fanaticism) of radical atheists' as well as the "'priest-made religions'" (Popkin 2019: 404). A 'true disciple of Rousseau', Robespierre saw religion as 'the pedestal of the social contract' (Israel 2014: 498). As an antidote he proposed the secular religion of the Cult of the Supreme Being who 'watches over oppressed innocence and punishes crime' (499), who punishes "'tyrants and traitors'" assisting "'the unfortunate'" and defends "'the oppressed'" (Popkin 2019: 404). His main aim was to invent a secular religion in accordance with the Rousseauian notion of original benevolence.

more melioristic *weltanschauung* of the American Founders (at least in comparison to that of Robespierre, Saint Just and Marat). Let us shed more light on the moderate republicanism of the American Revolution.

## 2) Meliorism, moderation; active citizenship and proto-anthropocentric liberalism

In the political realm, claims Arendt (1998), each person can ‘distinguish himself from all others’, demonstrating his/her ‘unique deeds or achievements’ (41). A democratic system, to put it another way, allows the people to *freely* ‘express their views on any problem of public life’ (Weil 2013: 10). This *freedom* inspired the leaders of the American Revolution, who ‘remained men of action from beginning to end, from the Declaration to the framing of the Constitution’ (Arendt 1990: 95). According to Wood (2003), the local committees and popular governments that begun to spread in the New World (as a response to the Parliament’s Coercive Acts of 1774) called for bottom up new political organization (47) and spoke in the name of the ‘common people’ (49), advocating the expansion of participation and control ‘of the elective assemblies’ (50). Hence, the revolutionary slogan ‘all power springs from the people’ became synonymous with political power (in the Arendtian sense of the term) ‘embodied in all institutions of self-governance throughout the country’ (Arendt 1990: 167). Let us discuss further this particular understanding of (political) power.

According to the dominant political perception shaped in the New World during the pre-Revolutionary age, power is not synonymous with physical force but with the monstrous passion to dominate over others (Bailyn 1976: 56). For the Americans, power was compared to a ‘great river’ capable of bringing destruction when ‘it overflows its banks’ (57, ff.3). Power was the gravest enemy of liberty (58). In turn, liberty was associated with the “natural power of doing or not doing whatever we have a mind” so long as that doing was “consistent with the rules of virtue and the established laws of the society which we belong” (77). This (natural) power was an indication of acting according ‘to the laws which are made and enacted by the consent of the PEOPLE’ (77). As Arendt (1990) explained, ‘only “power arrests power”” destroying it, without putting impotence in the place of power’ (151). Liberty was, therefore, this (natural or good) power which ‘arrests’ the monstrous power, the power of absolutism and oppression. An important note: one should not conflate this ‘consent of the PEOPLE’ with Locke’s support for limited

government based on a minimum of popular consent. Instead, it points to ‘continuous consent’ (Bailyn 1976: 173), which presupposes *public judgment*, that is, *active* popular approbation of disapproval of public measures (imposed by a central government). This procedure involves continuous dissent, namely, constant discussion, disagreement and exchange of ideas. As Arendt (1969a) put it, the most ‘extreme form of [the good] power is All against One’ and the most extreme form of violence ‘is One against All’ (42). The monopolisation of power by a small caste of experts, representatives or even monarchs and princes is, in fact, a form of violence (Arendt 1990: 151); it points to the monstrous power as opposed to the ‘good’ and ‘natural’ power, the power of liberty that springs from ‘the people’ who join forces (B. J. Smith 1985: 256), belongs to the same ‘people’ and remains in existence only so long as the same ‘people’ (as a group) keeps together (Arendt 1969a: 44).

In other words, the ‘good power’ springs from the political realm and remains in existence so long the political realm remains potent. It is the power of active citizenship, of ‘the human ability not just to act but to act in concert’ (ibid), widely practiced in the New World before and during the Revolution. In that sense, when the Americans revolutionaries spoke about liberty they indirectly conveyed not just ‘liberation’ but *freedom*. Government limited by (minimal and *passive*) consent, does not involve direct participation, as Chapter 3 explained. Minimal consent points to the legitimised power of ‘few’, in short, to the legitimisation of their violence against the ‘many’ (Arendt 1990: 151). Passive consent refers to legal frameworks that effectively prevent this ‘legitimised violence’ of representative governments to become arbitrary, inasmuch as property and individual liberty are never trespassed. *Active* (and continuous) consent, as we have seen, is synonymous with popular approbation through deliberative means (*logos* and dissent).

The democratic republicanism of the American revolutionaries, according to Disch (2011), was both representative and participatory (352): each political representative had to maintain close connections with his local electors, with the ‘common people’ (in other words) (Wood 2003: 41). In addition, representatives should be residents of the localities and the people (of the localities) have the right to instruct them (ibid). This increased public scrutiny and, potentially, the chances for impeachment. Hence, the power of the representatives, instead of becoming arbitrary, undermining liberty was ‘arrested’ by the

(good) power of ‘continuous consent’ (Bailyn’s 1976: 173). But the American revolutionaries, instead of firmly anchoring themselves to the Lockean idea of consent<sup>94</sup>, accountability and limited government, went one step further: the ‘common people’ (they believed) should enjoy sufficient levels of autonomy in the process of decision making (Bailyn 1976: 173; Gustafson 2011: 45). They should have the *freedom* and the *power* to create their own laws, ‘step by step and point by point ... acting in the conduct of public affairs’ (Bailyn 1976: 173). Consequently, power became synonymous with deliberative processes, in short, with *action* and *freedom* (not just with liberty)<sup>95</sup>. The driving force behind the Revolution, claims Breen (2019), was the idea that ‘ordinary Americans’ could ‘negotiate power with other ordinary Americans, people who insisted that they were as good as any other member of civil society’ (13). In contrast, the leaders of the French Revolution conflated power with force: when Robespierre, the ‘friend of the common people’ (Popkin 2019: 322), insisted that all power derives from the *citoyen*, he confused power with some “‘natural” force’ which ‘in its very violence had been released by the revolution and like a hurricane had swept away all institutions of the *ancien régime*’ (Arendt 1990: 181). But in the New World, by making power synonymous with *action*, the ‘common people’, the citizens, set up political associations, constituent bodies, federated units, the so called ‘elementary republics’, independent from the higher orders. Within these bodies, they could act as distinct individuals, by shaping public opinions and by making public *judgments* (Arendt 1990: 267; Disch 2011: 352). As Gustafson (2011) claims, during the Revolution, deliberative bodies were set up in the State House of Massachusetts, where the Congress opened ‘many of its proceedings soon after it was founded’, drawing large audiences in debates before the Supreme Court (21-2). The spread of such deliberative bodies, accessible by everyone, men, women as well as foreign visitors, transformed the chamber floor of the Capitol Hall ‘into a unique type of stage where real-life political dramas were enacted’ (Gustafson 2011: 22). Finally, ‘[t]hose who

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94 The idea of government limited by laws had been disseminated to Americans through Locke’s writings, writes Miller (1959: 170). The Americans took Locke’s ideas presented in the *Second Treatise* (through which Locke himself sought to justify the English Revolution, glorifying the supremacy of the Parliament against the Crown), and applied this doctrine to the dispute between Britain and the colonies (ibid).

95 For more in regards to the distinction between freedom and liberty, see Chapter 3.



received the power to constitute, to frame constitutions’, writes Arendt (1990), ‘were duly elected delegates of constituted bodies and ‘received their authority from below’ (166).

Let us return, at this stage, to the assertion concerning power as being partially synonymous with aggressiveness (according to the pre-Revolutionary Anglo-American school of thought, power). Although power was the primary cause of evil (Bailyn 1976: 58), it was not the nature of power itself as much as ‘the *nature of man*—his susceptibility to corruption and his lust for self-aggrandizement’ what turns ‘power into a malignant force’ (59; *emphasis added*). As we see, Anglo-American republicanism in comparison to French republicanism, seems much less optimistic and more moderate in character. Even Jefferson (1999), located in the most optimistic wing of the American revolutionary thought, who at times blindly bestows faith in the moral capacities of human beings to expel all injustices from the Earth (590), stressing at the same time that man’s natural harmony and benevolence would constitute governmental authority and coercion superfluous (Wood 2003: 95; 105-6), elsewhere questions the overt enthusiasm of those who believe in the endless advancement of the human condition, which (in their view) could one day approach the state of absolute perfection, inasmuch as there will ‘no longer be pain or vice in the world’ (Jefferson 1999: 293). In the wake of the havoc caused by the French Revolution he explicitly admitted ‘that the people are capable of horrible excesses’ (Kloppenberg 2016: 7). But on the other hand, he always remained faithful to the unshakable belief in ‘improvement’ on all matters of ‘government and religion’ (Jefferson 1999: 293). As Arendt (1990) observed, the idea that the American political thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth century developed an insight premised on ‘the perfectibility of man’ rests on a series of grave misunderstandings (174). John Adams’s ‘commitment to popular sovereignty’, according to Kloppenberg (2016), was accompanied by a steadfast ‘awareness of human fallibility’ (385). This, to a degree, is owed to the persistence of Protestant Christianity, which rendered American political thought relatively immune to the extravagances of optimism. According to Bailyn (1976), the American Revolutionary movement ‘is comprehensible only in terms of the continuing [Christian] belief in *original sin* and the need for grace’ (vii; *emphasis added*). The American revolutionaries, writes Hartz (1955), were not ‘secular prophets like Robespierre’ (39); they had rejected the idea that ‘man, whom Christianity had held to be sinful and corrupt in his nature, might still be

revealed to be an angel' (Arendt 1990: 95).

On the other hand, by refuting Arendt's (as well as Kloppenberg's) interpretations, Israel (2017: 15-6) sees the American Revolution as a secular event, hostile to religion and spirituality. Israel's deep appreciation for Spinoza is evident in his *Radical Enlightenment* (2006) as well as in the *Democratic Enlightenment* (2012). The author acknowledges Spinoza's secularism as the basis of the entire European Enlightenment project. In the *Revolutionary Ideas* (2014), in *The Expanding Blaze* (2017) as well as in *The Enlightenment That Failed* (2019)—works constantly cited in this chapter—he interprets major historical events (including the French and the American Revolution) from this highly secular point of view; at times, he neglects the positive contribution of religion (as I will reveal in what follows). As he explains, the revolution weakened ecclesiastical authority and challenged obsolete science, rooted in scholasticism and Platonism (1; 9; 71); it ended ecclesiastical supervision in education (95) and grounded the Republic's constitutional laws on reason and philosophy (70). Jefferson, more importantly, curtailed theology and replaced the latter with a system based on science and republican principles (99). His aim was to secure freedom of religion (86) and to protect personal liberty, particularly from the 'enforced Sunday observance' (89). Furthermore, the American Constitution was finalised without making references to God, separating church and state and disempowering 'the religious test or oath for holding office in the government of the United States' (85). However, Israel's heavy emphasis on the secular aspect of the American Revolution downplays the religious influences behind the philosophy that led to the uprising of 1776. According to Kidd (2012), in the New World religion played a pivotal role in precipitating a revolutionary spirit, supplying spiritual propulsions to the Patriot movement (59; 94). Furthermore, as the *Declaration* writes, human beings 'are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights' (US 1776; *emphasis added*). Consider also James Madison's thought which, as Kloppenberg (2016) points out, 'saw no contradiction between reason and religion' (377); as Madison asserted in his *Memorial*, "[b]efore any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe" (quoted by Kloppenberg 2016: 378).

Eventually, the main objective of the American Revolutionaries was not the eradication of Christianity. Their attempts to secularise most civic institutions were aiming

to prevent a potential slip towards theocracy, protecting the political realm from the usurping tendencies and influences of a number of Christian churches and organisations. In other words, they only sought to erect barriers against a possible return to religious absolutism (or theocracy). As Nash-Marshall (2003) explained, theocratic regimes violate the basic principles of Christian morality (47). Simply put, theocracy is a form of arbitrary rule and requires absolute obedience to worldly kings. Hence, it constitutes a form of transgression (see Chapter 2). More importantly, theocratic regimes indirectly assume that human beings can obtain the omniscience that would allow them to set up commonwealths in absolute consistency with God's will, in short with the standards of some (divine) perfection (46-7). Thus, theocracy goes against the most central point of the Christian world-view, that sin, error, frailty and vulnerability are essential aspects of human nature, constituting earthly perfection unattainable. Furthermore, if theocracy is sacrilegious (47), contrary to genuine Christianity, we can assert that the secular reforms of the Revolutionary leadership and their willingness to curb the influence of certain religious institutions in politics, protected the Christian religion itself from becoming a means of political expropriation, serving particular interests.

While the French sought to replace Christianity with the Cult of Reason, in the New World the 'proportion of Americans claiming to be members of a church ... rose steadily after independence' (Kaufmann 2010: 9). Great Awakenings, taking place during 1725-50 and 1800-1840 played a crucial role (ibid). They brought forward new forms of spirituality, which (along with classical liberalism and republicanism) contributed to the expansion of religious freedom, breaking up inflexible belief structures and developed new egalitarian models of church community (Gustafson 2011: 88-9; Kidd 2012: 33; 39). The American Revolutionaries did not strive to de-Christianise the populace as their French counterparts—and more importantly the Hébersistes (Israel 2014: 497)—did by uprooting religious traditions with zeal and 'fanaticism', suppressing freedom of worship (Popkin 2019: 367), attacking and destroying churches, even by means of group vandalism (Israel 2014: 485-492; 495), or by inventing secular religions (as substitutes to Christianity). Of course, in the New World (unlike in France) neither the Catholic Church nor the Protestant and Anglican churches had ever acquired the upper hand in most aspects of political and economic life. This gave to the American Revolutionists no explicit incentive to embrace

(and ideologically justify) the hatred towards Christianity in general their French counterparts would have espoused a few decades later. The views of the American Founding Fathers were not as ‘anti-theological ... and anti-Christian’ as Israel (2019: 268) believed. ‘[T]heir thinking was not secular’ (Breen 2019: 55). To a degree, they were themselves unorthodox, undogmatic and probably non-denominational Christians/deists (Kloppenber 2016: 16). They had ‘adopted what were regarded at the time as enlightened ... views on religion’ (Breen 2019: 55) and refused to embrace the ‘unlimited humanism’ of the French Enlightenment (Hartz 1955: 39). Benjamin Franklin, for instance, valued reverence and humility: ‘[t]o Franklin humility meant trying to “follow Jesus and Socrates,”’ but not in a literal sense, *id est*, towards ‘sacrificial death’, writes Kloppenber (2016: 258), while making references to his *Autobiography*. Instead, he refers to Christ’s ability of *daring greatly*, in Brown’s (2012) terms, to his courage of standing up for truth and justice. John Adams’s speeches in support of popular government make constant references to the “indefeasible laws of God and nature” (Kloppenber 2016: 292). For Adams, ‘atheism was incompatible with popular government’ (471). In addition, ‘[t]he laws of nations’ he believed, are ‘grounded in God’s will [and they] authorize people to defend themselves against tyranny’ (304). Jefferson, who had strong reservations about Christianity and rejected the divinity of Christ, the miracles of the Bible and the Holy Trinity, kept these beliefs to himself (Kidd 2012: 233). His supporters defended his religious convictions, assuming that Jefferson was ‘the candidate of religious freedom and was not an enemy to religious establishments’ or to Christianity generally (237). In fact, Jefferson (1999) viewed Christianity as ‘the most sublime and benevolent, but most perverted system that ever shone on man’ (Jefferson 1999: 571). Although he had never invoked Jesus publicly, his constant references to God signals ‘the religious sensibility he shared with those who would read the Declaration and embrace it’ (Kloppenber 2016: 339). As Arendt (1990) claims, the American Founding Fathers could afford to ignore ‘the French revolutionary proposition ... that man is good outside society, in some fictitious original state’ and remained faithful to the Christian belief that all human collectivities are ‘composed of “sinners”’ (174)<sup>96</sup>. As a matter of fact, John Adams ‘never had an optimistic

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96 Furthermore, what has gone missing from Israel’s (2017; 2019) analysis, which deems the American Revolution as a secular event *tout court*, is the beliefs and ideas of the majority of

view of human nature’, claims Wood (2017). But instead of retreating to absolutism, justifying arbitrary rule under the pretext of security from the threats of rapacity incited by the so-called ‘sinful’ nature of man, the American revolutionaries, echoing Paine and Milton, considered absolutism and centralisation the most vivid manifestations of original sin (Kidd 2012: 7). Their rejection of the idea of human perfectibility had not halted their belief in ‘improvement, and most of all, in matters of government and religion’ since ‘the diffusion of knowledge among the people is to be the instrument by which it is to be effected’, to use Jefferson’s (1999: 293) words. As Miller (1959) claims, the American Revolutionaries rebelled against mercantilism, established churches and all the heavy goods of European absolutism (xvii), which in Paine’s major works are constantly despised as demonic and treacherous. Consider, for example, his iconoclastic pamphlet *Common Sense* (1775/1995), one of the most influential treatises of the entire revolutionary era (Bailyn 1976: 286; Wood 2003: 55; Israel 2012: 471; 2017: 47-50; 2019: 260; 264; Kloppenberg 2015: 321) and the ‘hottest blast of patriot propaganda’ (Miller 1959: 468). In this work, as well as in *The Letter Addressed to the Addressers on the Late Proclamation* (1792/1995), Paine makes references to I Samuel 8 and 9, where God orders from the Israelites to distrust kings for being envious, abusive and self-interested.

Apart from Paine’s revolutionary pamphlets so intensively quoted today, more influential was the role of a number of American priests in broadcasting political discourses that justified popular government on biblical grounds (Breen 2019: 59-60; 72-3). Their calls for armed rebellion against Britain echoed the stories of the Old Testament, which spoke a language the ordinary American could understand (14; 71). The clergy achieved to transform ‘words into action’ by equating political passivity with sin’ (84). In their mind, the Americans were ‘in a real sense modern Jews’, struggling not against Pharaoh’s bondage, but against the bondage of political absolutism (74). As mentioned earlier, absolutism (according to the Christian-republican *weltanschauung*) is a form of transgression since God alone is the only king humans are allowed to obey (Kidd 2012: 88). ‘Evangelicals and Patriots both went over the heads of leaders to the people themselves, exhorting them to obey God and not men’ (77). Just as Jefferson and Adams,

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‘common people’ who defended the resistance. As Breen (2019) asserts, they were significantly ‘more consciously religious than ... the Founders’ themselves (58).

they shared Paine's views, essentially his desire for independence from Britain, but at the same time rejected his optimistic view of human nature (Bailyn 1976: 5;) as well as his 'post-millennialist belief that the world could be transfigured by human action as an Enlightenment faith in progress' and that 'a divine being could be demonstrated by the use of reason' (Gray 2007: 153). Adams, more precisely, 'deplored Paine's excessive optimism and recalled this, writing to Jefferson in 1815' (Israel 2017: 21). Eventually, Wood's (2003) assertion that most American Revolutionaries believed in some natural virtue that makes human beings 'ideally suited for republican government' (95) rests on a series of misunderstandings. As we see, in the philosophical foundations of the movement lies the melioristic belief that human beings can escape the pitfalls of pathos by means of citizenship and active membership in public life. In the New World, writes Arendt (1990), prior to the nineteenth century, optimistic doctrines that speak about man's natural goodness as a pretext for political action were considerably unpopular (174). In contrast, the dominant republican idea revolved around the necessity of 'checking human nature in its singularity by virtue of common bonds and mutual promises' (175).

As it has been already stressed in chapters 1 and 4, the success of the Revolution was undermined by the same *actors* (the Founders of the American republic) who emerged from these spaces of public deliberation and framed the first American Constitution. According to Arendt (1990), the Constitution gave no formal recognition to the townships and the town-halls (the political realms); '[t]he political importance of the township was never grasped by the founders' (235), for whom direct political action was deemed impractical and unworkable. The parliament (they believed) could not host large numbers of citizens and, hence, all political decisions should be taken by elected representatives (236; 241). Paine and Adams, favoured the appointment of the decision-making to a group of elected representatives as the only solution to the constant expansion of American people (Kloppenberg 2016: 320; 324; 332; 390, 510; Israel 2017: 22). The representative assembly "should be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large" said Adams (quoted by Kloppenberg 2016: 326) and the public voice should be expressed *through* the representatives of the people, who in Madison's (2007) view, are more reliable for the public good than the populace itself (272). For Madison democracy should be confined to small regions (Madison 1993: 431; 2007: 673). 'Democracies have ever been spectacles of

turbulence and contention ... and they have been as short in their lives, as they have been violent in their deaths' (408). In the same way, Hamilton considered direct participation a ticket to "error and instability" (Kloppenber 2016: 334). In response, Madison (1993) proposed '[a] republic ... in which the scheme of representation takes place' (408). Madison's (2007), remedy for the overcoming of factions, conflicts and malfunctions of the state government was the appointment of one body of chosen (elected) citizens, 'whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of the country, and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations' (672).

As with Rousseau (1994), '[t]he people of England believes itself to be free; it is quite wrong: it is free only during the elections of Members of Parliament. Once they are elected, the people is enslaved, it is nothing' (127). If we interpret this axiom from an Arendtian standpoint, we arrive at the following conclusion: the people of England are *free* only during the day of the elections, only when they become *active* citizens, bestowing to themselves the responsibility of making decisions by exercising *judgment* while having to choose who among the available representatives should be put in the highest position of power. Thus, *action* and *freedom* are interconnected and interrelated, when *action* disappears, slavery returns. Representation, claimed Rousseau (1994), 'came from feudalism, that unjust and absurd form of government which degrades the human race and under which the name of man was dishonourable' (127). In my terms, representation without active citizenship deprives and dishonours the worth and dignity of man. Hence, it undermines *eucosmia*, so long as it undervalues the ability of every individual to *act* for the common good in the *political realm*, making positive contributions through *logos* and memory, through experience and virtù (resilience, courage and radical persistence). It could be, therefore, argued that the shift towards centralisation and representation, as opposed to direct participation, halted the spread of anthropocentric ideas, and (for that reason) the American Revolution remained anchored to the proto-anthropocentric worldview (e.g., limited government, free elections, the rule of law and freedom of speech) that variants of the Anglo-American seventeenth and eighteenth-century liberal (mainly Lockean) philosophy projected as an antidote to the barbarity of absolutism.

Furthermore, following Wood's interpretations, Disch (2011) considers the process of the making of the Constitution as an attempt 'to curtail the unprecedented powers that

the new state constitutions had granted their legislatures’ (356). The Federalists (Madison, Hamilton, *et al.*), used a popular language in order ‘to curb the populist forces the Revolution had released’ (Wood 2003: 163) and demanded each single state to conform to the standards of the national (federal) government (159). In their view, centralisation was not a move that would devour popular sovereignty, claims Arendt (1990). Sovereignty, they believed, would have remained with the people; representation was only ‘a temporary and limited agency of the people ... a short-term, always recallable loan’ (161). While the American Founders, drawing on Roman republican ideas, called on the people to remain the only constituent sovereign (Canovan 2005: 28), the Federalists insisted on withdrawal of the people from the political realm; they defined the people exclusively as voters, whose power was ought to be expressed through its elected representatives (Pocock 1975: 517; Canovan 2005: 28-9). In fact, the Federalists ‘had no wish to extend the reach of popular participation in political life’ (Israel 2017: 79); their main aim was to allow the existing political elites to maintain control (*ibid.*). Hence, the initial formula “government of the people by the people” was replaced by the formula: “government of the people *by an elite sprung from the people*” (Arendt 1990: 277), or even by an elite *supposedly* springing from the people. As Israel (2017) explains, the pressure for a strong central government, for banking and trade regulation, ‘had by 1787 become intense’ (79), the year when the Federal Constitution was created (73). Reactions to the dominance of the banking system and to the idea of centralisation and representation (as opposed to participation), has always been at the heartland of populism in US politics, claims Taggart (2002: 25), in his examination of the rise and fall of the People’s Party. In the next section the American populist movement (which sought to promote anthropocentric ideas, that is, political and economic participation, rather than limited government) and the role of the People’s Party will be further explored.

American populism: the democratic promise and the «εν δήμῳ δομημένη οἰκονομία»<sup>97</sup>.

The cooperative movement was ‘until the civil rights movement five decades later, the most significant democratic movement in American history’ (Clanton 1991: xiv). In

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97 Exact translation: ‘an economy rooted in the *demos*’ (see Chapter 2).



response to humiliation due to economic depression, internal migration and resettlement (Goodwyn 1976: 25-30; Canovan 1981: 18; Taggart 2002: 6; 25) the farmers, the 'plain people', '[t]he American *sansculottes*' in Postel's (2007: 65) terms, set up 'their cooperative commonwealth, in their "joint notion of the brotherhood," in their mass encampments, their rallies, their long wagon trains, their meals for thousands...' (Goodwyn 1976: 543). 'Throughout the South and West', claims Clanton (1991), 'farm families traveled miles and miles over primitive roads on horseback and in wagons and buggies to hear and practice the Gospel of Populism' (166). Their deep disdain towards large corporations turned them against the Democratic Party, which (in their own eyes) had been taken over by industrial capitalists, serving the interests of railroad corporations (69; 178). During the early 1870s and on, 'farmers and their allies', writes Clanton (1991), came together 'in hundreds of local organizations to talk about the situation they confronted', formulating also 'demands and strategy' (14). Thus, 'a united community was created, and ferment escalated into what has been aptly called a movement culture' (ibid), which begun to spread across the South and the West, demonstrating how people 'of a society containing a number of democratic forms could labor in pursuit of freedom' generating their 'own culture of democratic aspiration' (Goodwyn 1976: 542). The Farmers' Alliance federation and its grassroots sub-alliances, which 'rapidly emerged as an organizational power stretching from coast to coast' (Postel 2007: 13) brought hundreds of thousands of rural men and women together. Alliance-men and Alliance-women invoked Jackson's opposition to industrialisation, modernisation, favouritism, centralisation and large property ownership, which turned into a financial monopoly, corrupted democracy, destroyed political equality and suppressed civil freedoms (Goodwyn 1976: 373; 382; 386; 414; Canovan 1981: 48). As the Populist orator Mary Lease spoke in the *Kansas City Star*, "'Wall Street owns the country ... It is no longer a government of the people, for the people, by the people, but a government of Wall Street, for Wall Street, and by Wall Street. The great common people ... are slaves, and monopoly is master' (quoted by Clanton 1991: 44).

By establishing systems that could guarantee financial self-reliance and self-management (of their own products and lives) and by owning cooperatively their means of production, the farmers bypassed 'the lien system of credit which predominated in

Southern states' (Taggart 2002: 31) and was dominated by the influence of a 'self-interested banking community' (Goodwyn 1976: 563). The lien system allowed farmers to 'purchase the means of their living even in hard times' and to 'produce cotton by the stores who would give them credit based on the promise of the next year's harvest' (Taggart 2002: 31), and to set up a large scale cooperative economy («εν δήμῳ δομημένη») rooted in the efforts of the 'common people'<sup>98</sup>. Instead of suffering in isolation, the farmers worked together in a shared hope (Goodwyn 1976: 195). 'Perhaps this, at root, was what Populism was' (ibid), an *aide-mémoire* that the actual conditions for political and economic justice (common decency) are extant, but in order to become fully accomplished, persistent common efforts are necessary. 'Never before', writes Clanton (1991), 'had ordinary people been so involved in politics' (41), in nonviolent direct action, standing up to their creditors who controlled the market and the nation's credit and currency (Goodwyn 1976: xvii; 29; 46; 90; 208; Canovan 1981: 25; Taggart 2002: 27). The pauperised farmers, from helpless, excluded and abandoned people became protagonists in economic and political life (Goodwyn 1976: 74; 135; Canovan 1981: 50), setting up public spaces (narrative action) and networks of education, networks of internal communication (Goodwyn 1976: 50), with theoreticians, lecturers, scientists, educators, economists, mechanics, artists and agriculturalists travelling to impoverished areas in order to help the participants at the grassroots, providing material to read (editorials, diaries, newspapers and letters) (Goodwyn 1976: 74; 88; 224; Lasch 1991b: 219; Postel 2007: 4; 46).

'Hundreds of thousands of rural men and women took part in Alliance education, coming off their farms to attend Alliance lectures' with 'regular biweekly or weekly meetings of the suballiances, often held in the local schoolhouse' (Postel 2007: 50). The Alliance had *always* been an educational institution, claims McMath (1992: 148); it was an 'educational movement', according to Postel (2007: 15). It was a school in which the lecturers were the teachers, the 'suballiances the classrooms' and the Alliance newspapers the textbooks (McMath 1992: 148). These popular schools sought a) to spread scientific, economic and technical knowledge to agrarian people (Postel 2007: 45-7; 56; 63), b) to create a new *political* perspective, by 'recruit[ing] and energiz[ing] a grass-roots army

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<sup>98</sup> See also Chapter 3.

capable of capturing both the state and federal governments’ (McMath 1992: 149), and c) to shape a *culture* that would challenge the dominant orthodoxy of political economy in which Americans had been instructed (ibid). ‘Both goals would be pursued by means of the written word and a kind of Socratic dialogue within the schoolroom of the local Alliance’ (ibid). Such processes (of narrative action) generated a new interpretation of politics across the nation (Goodwyn 1976: 88; Canovan 1981: 51; Lasch 1991a: 219).

The farmers produced their own poets, cartoonists ‘and a fairly elaborate folklore’ (Clanton 1991: 167). The ‘fraternal order’ of the Knights of Labor, a federation of workers and artisans ‘held together by principles of fraternalism and religion’, being ‘complement’ to the Farmers Alliance (McMath 1992: 62), conducted rural assemblies and gave hope to millions of rural Americans (McMath 1992: 83; Postel 2007: 209). ‘In community after community the Alliance was ... a vehicle for social solidarity [and] a focal point for economic cooperation’ (136). ‘In 1887 the Texas-based Farmers’ Alliance’ mobilised ‘rural people into churches, lodges [and] schools’ (91) (narrative action). The Kansas Alliance, claims Goodwyn (1976), ‘initiated widespread cooperative programs and the momentum of the effort had begun to produce a noticeable increase in the political awareness of the state’s farmers’ (182). ‘[T]he street parades of rustic humanity’ the speeches in schoolhouse debates and picnics in Kansas during the months of 1890 (195), the ‘horse-drawn parades, and open-air meetings for discussion of public affairs’ (McMath 1992: 125), served as vehicles of psychical encouragement for thousands of voiceless who escaped from the margins of social life, performing ‘specific political acts of self-determination’ (Goodwyn 1976: 196), gaining ‘what Martin Luther King would later call “a sense of somebodiness”’ (xv). Such as King and the Civil Rights Movement dramatised the inexorable suffering of the segregated African Americans ‘before the court of world opinion’, to use Colaiaco’s (1988: 2) words again, in the same way the ‘[t]he social life of the suballiances spilled out into the open in ways that *dramatized*’ ...in the larger community’ the hardships of rural men and women (McMath 1992: 125; *my emphasis*).

This allows us to integrate this historical example with our earlier theoretical discussions concerning the forms of populism I call the *viva civile*. Let us consider the following propositions:

A. According to Plato (2014 [Πλάτων 2014]), there exist cases where ‘anger [*thymos*]

and reason [the *logismikon*] ally’ («σύμμαχον τῷ λόγῳ γιγνόμενον τον θυμόν τοῦ τοιούτου») (318). As Arendt (1969a) argued, rage (or anger) are not always ‘automatic’ (63), viz. unconscious (or irrational). Only, when there is a reason to assume that conditions could be changed, conditions that offend ‘our sense of justice ... do we react with rage’ (ibid). As opposed to the anti-populist state of mind—and in agreement with Arendt (ibid)—I argue that such a reaction is not necessarily irrational or conducive to violence. Rage against injustice and suffering does not obstruct *judgment*. It would be more accurate to associate this ‘rational’ rage (or *thymos*) with what Fukuyama (1992) called *isothymia*, namely the demand of an individual to be treated as an equal (182; 295). Etymologically speaking, *isothymia* is a compound of the following Greek words: *isos* (ἴσος, equal) and *thymos*. This type of *thymos* (anger), far from being one and the same with *mēnis* (which eroded and de-activates the *logismikon*, as Chapters 2 and 4 explained) is consistent with prudence and self-limitation. Furthermore, *isothymia* corresponds to *dignity*, which is synonymous with *αξιοπρέπεια* (*axio-prepeia*)—from the words *aksios* (worthy) and *prēpon* (to be obliged)—implying the unconditional recognition of the obligation to honour those who are worthy or virtuous.

- B. It is ‘*logos* what soothes the excessiveness of *thymos*, just like a shepherd bids his dog to bark no more’ («κύων ὑπὸ νομέως ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου τοῦ παρ’ αὐτῷ ἀνακληθείος πραῦνθῃ») (Πλάτων 2014: 318 [Plato 2014: 318]). It has been already made clear that *logos* (λόγος) should not be associated exclusively with the capacity of making rational calculations; it also confers to reason, which derives from speech and hearing (Chapter 4). With this in mind, we could interpret Plato’s phrase as follows: speech (and hearing), or *action* (in other words), prevent *thymos* from becoming *mēnis*.

A and B lead to the following conclusion: when *logos* disappears *thymos* and the pursuit of *dignity* (*iso-thymia*, the rational anger) is easily corrupted by pathos, by its tendency to blind *judgment*, permitting all exaggerated desires and irrational appetites to reign supreme. Without *logos* and public reasoning *thymos* (in spite of its rightfulness) is converted into *mēnis*, inciting revenge, violence and destruction. Additionally, *logos* (the second premise of *action*) creates and preserves a common empirical world. Through

*action*, those who have fallen into the abyss of despair can (re)discover beacons of hope. *Action* brings human beings together in joint effort and encourages them to set up shared spaces of public mediation, producing and promoting meaningful aspirations for all those who are members of this newly re-created common world. Thus, *action* creates a sense of what McMath (1992) called ‘ordinariness’ (125). It ‘bestows upon the assembled members a sense of community’ (ibid). It prevents intrusion to the *underworld*. The manifesto of the Kansas’ People’s Party (November 1891), for example, stressed an ‘appeal to reason and not to prejudice ... “Come and let us reason together”’ (quoted by Clanton 1991: 75). It emphasised public reasoning (*action*) and community; ordinariness and togetherness made these ‘public meetings’, these rural gatherings and assemblies, ‘so important’ (McMath 1992: 125), bestowing a sense of meaning and common purpose. Perhaps, this explains the reason Populism triumphed, generating ‘a spirit of egalitarian *hope*, expressed in the actions of two million beings’ and a ‘culture of collective dignity and individual longing’ (Goodwyn 1976: 542).

The phrase ‘[c]ome now, and let us reason together’ derives from the Bible (Isaiah 1:18). It has been cited by a number of contemporary political advocates, for whom ‘faith was more than compatible with dialogue’ (Gustafson 2011: 20). When this passage is approached through such a (republican/deliberative) prism, the message it conveys is the following: come now, and join our common efforts, in common open spaces where we can act together, where we can speak with each other, *judging* ideas and viewpoints, identifying which among those expressed *doxas* contain elements of truth. Through such deliberative processes resentment is converted into a creative force. *Mēnis* gives way to *isothymia*. In turn, our ‘self-esteem’ and our ‘sense of possible’ are restored (Clanton 1991: 166). In Goodwyn’s (1976) words, the Kansas sub-alliances created environments for the farmers ‘to *think in*’ (185; *emphasis added*). As a result, their ‘self-respect and self-confidence as individual citizens grew’ (ibid). In public meetings and gatherings, the farmers participated not simply ‘as Alliancemen, but as citizens, because politics is for the citizen’ stressed Charles William Macune (quoted by Goodwyn 1976: 147), the main architect of the cooperative/sub-treasury plan (Goodwyn 1976: 310; Clanton 1991: 22; McMath 1992: 84-5). The aim of the subtreasury plan was to ‘democratize the marketing and financing of staple crops by providing low-cost federal loans secured by the crops themselves’ (McMath

1992: 109). In the end, the revolt challenged the conforming modes of thought (Lasch 1991a: 219; Clanton 1991: 115), ‘altered the political consciousness’ of the American people (Goodwyn 1976: xviii), making the average American aware of the social ‘structure of economic power’ (Canovan 1981: 50).

The main aim of the farmers was to emerge into politics without blindly following professional politicians (Canovan 1981: 34; Argersinger 1974: 9). William Alfred Pepper, a populist leader in Kansas, stressed the importance of ‘local self-action’, arguing that ‘the people should participate in social and political decisions’ (Argersinger 1974: 8) ““without being subjected to party discipline or to suspicions of treason to their particular political party”” (10). Organisation is successful ‘only if the people and not the politicians arrange it’ (8). He argued against all forms of centralised power, calling for a radical reform of the Republican Party (the largest party in Kansas during the post-Civil War era). But when his hopes to convert the old parties were gradually extinguished, the creation of a new party was deemed necessary (23-4). In response, the People’s Party—created in July 1892 in Omaha (Canovan 1981: 17; Taggart 2002: 27), as a result of the decline of the Alliance (Goodwyn 1976: 348) seeking to represent and express the voices of the farmers in the national elections—adopted most of their demands. The Omaha Platform challenged the ‘prevailing capitalist, so-called free market system at its core’ (Clanton 1991: 82) and campaigned for public referendums, the eight-hour day (83; 131), and for a popular government based a philosophy that ‘recognizes human brotherhood’ and protection for ‘the weak’ (106). It campaigned for women’s suffrage and direct democracy as South Dakota became ‘the first state to adopt the initiative and popular referendum—as part of a constitutional amendment drafted while the Populist Party held the governor’s office. For the first time, state voters had the power to propose laws themselves and to reject laws passed by the legislature’ (Matsusaka 2020: 122).

In other words, ‘[t]he Gospel of Populism’ sought to defeat the Gospel of Wealth, the Gospel of ‘competitive individualism’, aspiring to ‘reshape the nation in such a way that human relationships would mirror “the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man in spirit, and according to the teaching, of Jesus Christ”’ (166). As Goodwyn (1976) claims, apart from Jefferson, Lincoln and George, ‘Jesus Christ’ was also ‘cut to the theoretical and moral cloth of Populism’ (377). As with Matsusaka (2020), Populism

‘produced perhaps the highest volume of democratizing reforms in the country’s history’ and, consequently, ‘mov[ed] the country even farther from the Founders’ framework’ (121), even farther from proto-anthropocentrism of American liberalism. Sectionalism, however, proved one of the most significant predicaments for the movement to spread further, beyond the South and the West, beyond the High and the Great Plains; in Goodwyn’s (1976) words, the urban-rural split, a ‘clash of urban and agrarian radicalism’ (Clanton 1991: 113) became ‘a cultural challenge of enormous dimension’ (Goodwyn 1976: 310); the leaders of the People’s Party had never managed to articulate a solid political theory, capable of speaking not only in support of the rural farmers but also for the millions of the ‘plain people’ in the big cities (ibid). ‘[T]he Alliance organizers looked at urban workers and simply did not know what to say to them – other than to repeat the language of the Omaha Platform’ (ibid). The financial crisis of 1893 (known as the Panic of 1893), intensified political and cultural cleavages; bi-metalism (free silver) was popular in the Deep South and West where the People’s Party was performing strongly, but not among the farmers of Northeast or among the urban industrial workers (Clanton 1991: 160). The Populists believed that free silver would sufficiently stabilise the dollar (121). Thus, having failed to mobilise urban working classes under their own banner, they allied with the Democratic Party in order to keep its disaffected voters away from the Republicans (the main advocates of the Gold Standard) (149). During the 1896 elections—almost fully dominated by the metal issue (ibid)—William Jennings Bryan, an eminent Populist leader (and ardent supporter of the silver cause), in his *Cross of Gold Speech*, urged the financial power-holders not to ‘crucify mankind upon a cross of gold’<sup>99</sup>. He was nominated as the Democratic presidential candidate, receiving financial aid from an ex-banker who also ran as vice-president (Taggart 2002: 34-5). The collapse did not come as a surprise. On the one hand (as Chapter 2 explained), under the context of mass culture populist leaders often articulate discourses in the name of a people’s movement, in the name of political equality, striving to gain popular traction. They capitalise on the growing popular discontent in order to ascend into power. As a matter of fact, Bryan’s *Cross of Gold* has correctly addressed political injustices and inequalities; Bryan spoke in the name of political equality, in the

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99 Quoted by the *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention*, held in Chicago, Illinois (July 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1896) (234).

name the ‘innocent people’, in the name of the masses of the pauperised farmers and labourers; he condemned the ‘corrupt elites’ with which he, nevertheless, had joined forces. On the other hand, this alliance, *this chain of unity (equivalence)* between differentiated groups the Populists strove to set up through top-down means of campaigning was proven impotent against the predicament of sectionalism created by intense cultural differentiations and cleavages in the population. Thus, the Populist leadership took the wind out of the sails of the People’s Party, which ended up entirely absorbed by Democrats. Collaboration with the Democratic Party gradually diluted the radical Populist programme, as the People’s Party moved away from the Omaha Platform, putting an end to the efforts of Populism to break the Democratic monopoly in the South (Lasch 1991a: 218; Taggart 2002: 35).

One can clearly see that the initial pursuit of the movement—“‘[c]ome and let us reason together’”, let us share equally the power of making ‘mutual promise[s] or contract[s]’ (Arendt 1998: 245)—conflicted with its anti-political (in the Arendtian sense of the term) turn after the betrayal of 1896, after the shift from grassroots’ self-government to top-down administration. The power of *logos*, through which individuals remain *active*—by seeing each other and speaking among themselves, while *thinking* and *judging* in their pursuit of decency—eclipsed once the cooperatives disappeared. Hence, the Populist impetus was lost, signaling the greatest single defeat of a unique opportunity to break the two-party hegemony, pushing forward reforms that would regenerate American democracy according to the principles of direct participation that the movement initially had endorsed. Thus, faded the ‘culture of hope and self-respect among the voiceless’ (Goodwyn 1976: xxii) and the ‘breathtaking new perspective’ generated by Populism itself (139).

Overall, the movement served as a ‘corrective’ to American democracy that (as its main representative figures diagnosed) had become too remote from the ‘common people’. It also served as a reminder that the promise for justice, the promise for common decency, is neither a vision from some distant utopian world nor a certainty. It requires persistence and faith in the capacities of every *anthrōpos* to overcome impasses through *action*, through common effort, through political and economic participation in the community. Furthermore, the same movement, as it has been already made clear, defied secular



expectations. Its insistence on “‘artisanal republicanism’”, or (as the Populists often called it) “‘producerism’”, referring to ‘the simple idea that the producer deserves the fruits of his or her work’ was often justified on biblical grounds (McMath 1992: 51): ‘the workman is worthy of his hire’ (*The Bible*, Luke 19:7). Consider also reports made by secretary of the Falling Creek Alliance (North Carolina) in Leonidas Polk’s newspaper *The Progressive Farmer*: the populist experience spread “a kindred feeling ... among us. We really seem more like the human beings that God made in his own image. Bless the name of the Alliance, long may it continue to grow in strength, it is next to religion with us” (quoted by McMath 1992: 123). Furthermore, the Omaha platform “‘recognize[d] Almighty God as the rightful sovereign of nations ... from whom all just powers of government are derived, and to whose will all human enactments ought to conform’ (Clanton 1991: 37). It was ‘deeply and without apology influenced by the idea that human rights derive from some force superior to mere mortals—a divine spark so to speak’ (ibid). It obviously borrowed this language from the Declaration, in which the so called ‘inalienable rights of man’, exist ‘above the [human] law and [therefore] stand as the measure of the law’s validity’ (Bailyn 1976: 230). Or with Jefferson (1999), ‘[n]othing is unchangeable but the inherent and unalienable rights of man’ (386); they are unchangeable and unalienable as long as they are not mere human inventions but divine attributions, and have been ascribed to human beings by God, their own Maker (Arendt 1990: 231; Nash Marshall 2003: 136). Second, the cooperative movement, apart from stressing the benefits of free (but fair) competition, championed equality, justice and common ownership, challenging the mentality of the *laissez faire* doctrine (Goodwyn 1976: xiii; Clanton 1991: 72). As *The Jeffersonian* of Alabama, a journal sympathetic to the movement, once put it, “‘any nation that holds property rights above human rights” is practicing “barbarism”’ (quoted by Goodwyn 1976: 373). As we see, the movement promoted a new understanding concerning ‘the great battle for human rights’ that is, the great battle ‘for better conditions, happier homes, and a higher civilization’ (Postel 2007: 85).

As we have seen, while reflecting on Weil (Chapter 1), the notion of obligation is superior to that of rights; a right is effectual only ‘in relation to the obligation to which it corresponds’ (Weil 1987a: 3). The discourses articulated and disseminated by influential figures of the movement highlight our ‘eternal’ and ‘unconditional’ *obligation* (4) to

‘respect’ the human need (6) for *freedom*, the liberty and dignity, to reckon the underdog and the disenfranchised as equal (*iso-thymia*), to dignify his/her capacity for *action*, to treat (in other words) every human being as *zōon politikon*, capable to serve the common good through his/her *logos* and *judgment*. This particular understanding of obligation constitutes a robust enunciation of the anthropocentric *eucosmia*, which the deceitful Populist leadership dishonored by effectively demobilising the farmers, shifting the focus from grassroots’ *action* to top-down means of representation. In contrast, the understanding of rights as superior to obligations is a manifestation of the *liberum arbitrium*, of the pathos to legitimise the entitlement for unlimited accumulation of property, even at the expense of human dignity and *isothymia*. More extensive discussions concerning the notion of rights and their connection to the pathos for unlimited accumulation of property (proposed by Locke’s theory of *possessive individualism* as a solution to the problem of scarcity and conflict), will take place in the next section (in relation to the notion of *eucosmia*).

#### Slavery and the value of *eucosmia*

##### 1) Pathos, possessiveness and the ‘right to property’

As Locke (1998) claimed, ‘every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his’ (287-8). ‘[P]ersonal talents and productive abilities’ in Locke’s mind, belong to the labourer (Andrew 1986: 65) or to the *worker* (in the Arendtian sense of the term); they are his/her ‘unquestionable Property’ (Locke 1998: 288) and, therefore, extensions of his/her personality. But since a human being is an ‘absolute Lord of his own Person and Possessions’ (350), he/she is free to sell his/her property. Thus, he is free to sell or alienate his/her person at will, just as he/she ‘is free to part with any other asset at his’ (Andrew 1986: 65). For Locke, only what is not private property, namely life and liberty, cannot be alienated (ibid). As Weil—*contra* Locke—claims, ‘[r]ights ... are personal possessions’ and the language of rights is incapable ‘of expressing the demands of justice’ (Andrew 1986: 60). Instead, obligations (as mentioned earlier) spring from the impersonal realm, from ‘what is deep, sacred or inviolable in humanity’ (64). Hence, the rights considered inalienable confer to the realm of obligations, ‘eternal’, ‘sacred’ and ‘unconditional’ (Weil 1987a: 5). Moreover, in Weil’s thought, “‘I have a right to x” is

equivalent to "it is right that I have the X"' (Andrew 1986: 66-7). Therefore, rights 'are simple moral permits for the commercialization of life' (65); 'Hobbes's and Locke's advocacy of rights ... fostered commercial society' (70). The notion of rights primarily derives from the Roman definition of property as *jus utendi et abutendi* (Weil 2005: 82); it is affiliated with the things 'the property owner had the right to use or abuse at will were for the most part human beings' (ibid). 'T]he Greeks had no conception of rights. They had no words to express it' (ibid). '[S]o also it is alien to the Christian inspiration' since 'nobody can 'imagine St Francis of Assisi talking about rights' (p.83).

For Weil (2005) the notion of 'rights' primarily derives from the Roman definition of property as *jus utendi et abutendi* (82). It is affiliated with the things 'the property owner had the right to use or abuse at will were for the most part human beings' (ibid). On the other hand, '[t]he Greeks had no conception of rights. They had no words to express it' (ibid) Furthermore, '[o]ne cannot imagine St Francis of Assisi talking about rights' (p.83). In short, the notion of rights according to Weil has 'a commercial flavour', summarises Andrew (1986: 77). Weil's thought sheds light on the way the notion of rights could be interpreted in such a way that the 'right to have', the rise to posses, the right for unlimited acquisition (of property)—through which the instantiate pathos (the 'I-will') is gratified (as the Lockean model of *possessive individualism* proposed)—could be given full priority over the right to life and liberty, over the obligation to respect the worth and value of others. As also Chapter 2 argued, the 'I-will' points to the will-for-power, to the will for oppressing others (Arendt 1968: 162; Fine 2007: 123). Hence, does not (to some extent) the prioritisation of the right to (unlimited) acquisition of property (over other rights) open the back door for the justification of one's selfish pursuits (of his/her 'I-will'), resulting (potentially) in oppression, injustice and, subsequently, in the alienation of someone's 'inalienable' right to liberty and life? Was not the *hubris* of slavery, whose 'wretchedness and miseries' only the pen of 'a Josephus or a Plutarch' could 'enumerate and explain' (Walker 1993: 21), one of the most vivid manifestations of such an alienation, caused (partially) by human selfishness, that is, by the 'right' for boundless possession beyond moral self-limitation? Abraham Lincoln would of course agree: slavery, he argued, is one of the greatest vices "'founded on the selfishness of man's nature'" (Kloppenber 2016: 660).

Of course, to say that ‘Lockean’ lines of thought have many times justified (implicitly or explicitly) extreme exploitation (including slavery)—as we are going to see in what follows, by examining the socio-political landscape of the ante-bellum American South—should not automatically lead us to assume that the Southern defence of slavery was exclusively attributed to Locke’s theory of property. Other prejudices (possibly endorsed simultaneously) include: a) the idea that some human beings are born to be slaves and others to rule as masters (*appeal to nature*), b) the paternalistic assertion that slavery benefits the slave him/herself, and finally, c) the belief that slavery protects the structure and the coherency of society. The first factor (*appeal to nature*), is found in Aristotle’s *Politics* (as I explained in the Introduction of this chapter). This justification (of slavery) belongs to the pre-modern world of ancient Greece. Some pre-modern Christians (Catholics and Protestants alike) have also based their pro-slavery credentials to quite similar remarks (as I will explain in the second part of this section, where I will also elaborate on the second factor, on the appeal to social paternalism). While similar justifications were not absent in the ante-bellum American South, by shedding light on the way this peculiar institution (in the Old South) found justification on Lockean grounds we could acquire a more holistic conclusion concerning slavery in the American context.

Let us dig deeper into the viewpoints expressed by intellectuals<sup>100</sup> who have been inspired by Southern traditions and sought to defend them by any means necessary, if we follow Hartz’s observations (1955), we could identify a *metharmōsis* of ‘Lockean’ liberalism to reactionary traditionalism (148). Reactionary movements in Europe despised the philosophy of the Enlightenment, striving to restore the old feudal order that liberalism had wiped out. But in American liberalism had not been built upon the ruins of feudalism (Hartz 1955: 20; 30; 150; Israel 2012: 463; Κονδύλης 2015: 48 [Kondylis 2015: 48]). It had destroyed nothing (apart from the society of the Indians, which the Southerners had no intention to restore). Thus, traditionalist sensibilities found no real reason to denounce it altogether (Hartz 1955: 152). After all, America’s liberal past had been too good for the

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100 These are John C. Calhoun, Richard Weavers, and George Fitzhugh *et al.*, often described as ‘Southern Agrarians’ (Genovese 1994). They are also labeled as ‘Tory socialists’, ‘Tory anarchists’ (Hartz 1955, p.181), ‘Southern Flimerians’ (9) and/or advocates of reactionary (or feudal) Enlightenment (145).

populace (47) and Locke had been proven ‘too empirical, too historical in America to attack’ (153). Eventually, the Southern intellectuals—who drew on Benjamin Disraeli, as well as on Carlyle and de Maistre (165), aspiring to transform the American social and political life beyond the sway of ‘liberal capitalism’ (180)—reproduced a philosophy, namely ‘the philosophy of a feudal world’, that America had never experienced (150). Being unable to transcend the same ‘liberal past out of which they came’, they accepted several proportions of it, like (for instance) the doctrine of free trade (180-1) as well as the notion of limited government (165). In short, their Romantic (ethnic, or racial) anti-liberal nationalism remained anchored to liberal ideas, and more importantly to the right for unlimited acquisition of property and personal wealth.

Their insistence on the doctrine of states’ rights was aiming to limit the prerogatives of the federal ‘Leviathan state’ (Genovese 1994: 56) in order to defend ‘the South against the North’ (Hartz 1995: 165)<sup>101</sup>, that is, to protect the ‘Peculiar Institution’ (slavery) against the Northern model of political liberalism and centralisation. For Hartz (1955), this insistence on states’ rights (against federal centralisation) echoes Locke’s insistence on limited government. At the same time, the traditionalist spirit of the Old South, according to Genovese (1994), points to Edmund Burke, ‘who has long been a hero to southern conservative [intellectuals]’ (27). The same intellectuals had scorned Paine (46) and thoroughly rejected the ‘philosophical extravagance of the French Enlightenment’ (23). Instead, they ‘followed principal figures of the Scottish Enlightenment’ (ibid). Hence, the worshipers of Disraeli and de Maistre, by clinging on the idea of economic competition and unrestricted free trade and by denouncing the ‘greedy’ and ‘Yankee moneymaking’ North at the same time (Hartz 1955: 190), counterposed a mixture of liberal capitalism and reactionary traditionalism; their feudal dream was, in fact, an absurd synthesis of two explicitly antinomical (if not mutually exclusive) social philosophies. Their profound detestation for the Northern model of centralised capitalism and ‘wage-slavery’ went hand in hand with their apparent defense of chattel slavery, with their intense support for the idea of ‘property in man’ (180; 193). For the Southerners private property (including

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101 Eventually, a few Southerners became truly attached to Romanticism in order ‘to give up constitutional apologetics’ (Hartz 1955: 164-5). Their ethnic nationalism was reformulated in Lockean terms (164-5).

‘property in man’) constituted the basis of society’s spiritual and moral well-being (Genovese 1994: 79). According to Richard Weavers, who wrote ‘in the spirit of eighteenth-century British political theory’, property was “‘the last [remaining] metaphysical right’” in a highly secularised world (ibid). In his mind, the capitalist North represented a clear “‘violation of the very notion of *proprietas*’”, of the most important ‘foundation for individual freedom’ (81).

From a different angle, when ‘the slave regime underwent consolidation’ and when the legal system of the Western world began to adjust itself to the standards ‘of the bourgeois idea of private property’, the Southern slaveholders invoked certain principles of the same idea in order to justify the existence of pre-modern institutions (including slavery and ‘property in man’) (Genovese 1974: 45). Adam Smith (2012), for example, considered slave labor expensive, unprofitable, coercive and violent (382; 384; 387). Overall, if the South by ‘assailing Locke, found itself going back to the hierarchical world’ that Locke himself was ought to destroy (Hartz, 1955: 170), it was due to the *metharmōsis* of his theory to the slave-holding regime. Put otherwise, it was partially due to the practical implementation of a particular interpretation of economic liberalism concerning the right for unrestrained accumulation of wealth, even at the expense of the ‘inalienable right’ to liberty Locke’s and other eighteenth-century liberals had so ardently defended. Locke (1998) had rejected obedience ‘to the inconstant uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will of another Man’, which—in his view—equals to ‘*Slavery*’ and ‘*is nothing else, but the State of War continued, between a lawful Conqueror, and a Captive*’ (284; *emphasis in the original*). For Locke (1998), obedience ‘to the inconstant uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will of another Man’, equals to ‘*Slavery*’ and ‘*is nothing else, but the State of War continued, between a lawful Conqueror, and a Captive*’ (284; *emphasis in the original*). Walker’s (1993) comments, ‘[s]ee your Declaration Americans!!! Do you understand your own language?’ (95), the language of liberty and equality by creation, point to this explicit contradiction between the liberal rejection of all arbitrary powers as illegitimate and the acceptance of slavery (Israel 2017: 141) ‘in this REPUBLICAN LAND OF LIBERTY’ (Walker 1993: 22; *capitals original*). To conclude: the ‘I-will’, the ‘will-to-oppress’ (in Arendt’s vocabulary), the right (and pathos) for domination, found solid justification in the modern ‘Lockean’ formula for unlimited personal possession (of property, including

‘property in man’).

Furthermore, as Weil (1987a) claimed, the conflation of property with profit and capital acquisition has been established by a system ‘which made money the focus of all possible motives’ (34). The equation of property with wealth and with the unlimited accumulation of riches or consumable goods is a modern fabrication (Arendt 1998: 61; Klein 2014: 863). In the classical republican—especially in the Aristotelian—tradition, the aim of property was not profit but stability and leisure; most of all, property allowed access to popular assemblies (Pocock 1976: 390-1); it was ‘a self-evident condition for admission to the public realm’ (Arendt 1998: 64)<sup>102</sup>. In Aristotle’s (1993a, [Αριστοτέλης 1993α]) thought, private property safeguards friendship, ‘the most significant good for the life of the *polis*’ («φιλίαν τε γάρ οἰόμεθα μέγιστον εἶναι τῶν ἀγαθῶν ταῖς πόλεσιν») (114). Additionally, it causes «ἡδονὴν ἀμύθητον» (‘indescribable delight’) (120). However, the same thinker opposes unlimited acquisition, through which individuals become greedy and selfish (*φιλοχρήματον* and *φίλαντον*)<sup>103</sup>, and recognizes in return the importance of shared ownership. He, nonetheless, prioritises private property over «κτήσεις κοινάς» (shared ownership) (ibid) and reckons the latter impractical and unrealistic. Property should be never shared in common involuntarily; instead it should be distributed through acts of charity and hospitality, through which men become generous (*ἐλευθεριότης*) (122). «[Ο]ὔτε γάρ ἔσται φανερός ἐλευθέριος ὢν, οὔτε πράξει πράξιν ἐλευθέριον οὐδεμίαν· ἐν τῇ γάρ χρήσει τῶν κτημάτων τό τῆς ἐλευθεριότητος ἔργον ἐστίν» (‘When there is common ownership there is no generosity, and nobody can perform generous acts. Generosity finds expression only through the use of private property’) (ibid)<sup>104</sup>. In the classical republican tradition, private

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102 A quick note: this paragraph may seem unrelated to the preceding ones. Nonetheless, when it comes to property ownership, it adds an important distinction between the *vita civile* and a) the ideology of unlimited possession (advocated by economic liberalism) or b) the anti-propertarian *weltanschauung* of communism, on the other hand. The populism of the *vita civile*, following the footsteps of classical republicanism, in line with the French and the American Revolution (Nelson 2006: 204-5; Popkin 2019: 392) and the cooperative movement, the movement of ‘proprietary democracy’ (Lasch 1991a: 15), rejects both the boundless appetite for possession and the total abolition of private property. Instead, it relies on small property ownership.

103 From the Greek *φιλῶ* (*philo*), to love, (See Chapter 2) and a) *αὐτός* (self) or b) *χρήμα* (money).

104 In other words, nobody can express his/her generosity, sharing part of his/her wealth with others, in the event he/she owns nothing.

property anchors ‘the individual in the structure of power and virtue, and liberated him to practice these as activities’ (Pocock 1975: 391)<sup>105</sup>.

More precisely, as Arendt (1978) stressed, the identity of an object is best defined by the process of making clear distinctions between the characteristics of the same entity from that of all others (*altereitas*) (1: 183). In other words, when we attempt to describe ‘what a thing is, we must [initially] say what it is *not*...’ (ibid). Eventually the existence of the public-political realm presupposes the existence, identification and preservation of the characteristics of the plurality of all *other* existing secular realms. Hence, it is the realm which secures private property (the private realm) that distinctly stands as the ‘necessary *other*’. Simply put, without private property there is no public realm; in turn without the public (and the political) realm the pursuit of ‘public happiness’ is unattainable. On the other hand, since private property is necessary, since we recognise in everyone the ‘right’ to possess something ‘more than the articles of ordinary consumption’ (Weil 1987a: 33), it is important to acknowledge the unconditional obligation for this right to be exercised within bounds, instead of offering moral justifications for unlimited acquisition, which triggers the ‘will-to-oppress’. Moral hindrances against unlimited possession are provided by transcendent norms (religion). It is time to move forward, examining the process through which religious ideals broke the paternalistic culture of the Old South, whose ultimate objective was the protection of the legal and social structures upon which slavery itself came to rest. The same culture depicts the slave-owner as a ‘generous’ and ‘affectionate’ nobleman. Let us not forget that the belief in the ‘benevolence’ and ‘generosity’ of the master (towards his slaves) was ‘grounded in the notion that only a “property” right in another man can make one truly care for him’ (Hartz 1955: 186-7).

## 2) Christian hope, *eucosmia* and *freedom*

The paternalistic society of the American South ‘grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation’ (Genovese 1976: 4). In order to

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105 To avoid misunderstandings: this does not imply that slave labour and small proprietorship are mutually exclusive. In fact, classical Greece is a fine example that proves the opposite. Nonetheless, it was unthinkable for a classical Greek to justify (morally) slavery upon any ideology that exalts the right to property, let alone the right to unlimited acquisition of wealth (see the Introduction of this chapter)



protect the existing class paradigm, it shaped a culture of conformity; it relied on methods, which—apart from cruelty and violence—could impose and secure obedience through relatively non-coercive means (ibid). More precisely, by creating environments within which a black slave could ostensibly feel safe from hunger and physical deprivation (as well as from lynching and mob attacks), the slaveholding regime cultivated in the former's mind a perception of inferiority; the servant's feeling of helplessness and defenselessness in the absence of master's protection and charity, consolidated a form of dependency upon which the ground for the moral justification of racial exploitation was preserved (48; 76). Proslavery argument 'helped to mold a special psychology for master and slave alike' (86) and emphasised the 'reciprocal duties within which the master had a duty to provide for his people and to treat them with humanity' (144). It bit by bit shaped a perception of *noblesse oblige*, crystallised through the claim that emancipation would inevitably drop the blacks 'to the bottom of the social scale as unwanted and improvident unskilled workers', incapable of surviving in the antagonistic 'cutthroat world of the capitalist marketplace' (163).

According to Breen (2019), religious leaders, ministers and clergy members (especially in New England and the Middle States) considered slavery an insult against God and, simultaneously, condemned the overt hypocrisy on behalf of those who condemned the British Parliament for oppression but turned a blind eye to the brutal treatment of African Americans (81). For Israel (2017), the American Revolution with its emphasis on equality by creation, applied universally to all human beings, ignited the first flame against slavery (140; 144; 146); it opened energies of 'popular religiosity' (Wood 2003: 134) for the illiterate, the lowly, and the dependent' (133). Long before the Revolution, writes Kidd (2012), the First Great Awakening (1730-1740) had 'introduced common people to an exhilarating new world of spiritual possibilities', helping African Americans and Native Americans to join forces (22), while during the Second Great Awakening (1790-1820), the Methodist Church denounced slavery *in toto* as "“contrary to the laws of God”" (Israel 2017: 149) and the Society of Friends (Quakers) made opposition to slavery a condition of membership (Kloppenber 2016: 310; 407). This 'popular religiosity' led to the spread of numerous revivalist sects that Christianised large numbers of African Americans (Wood 2003: 134). Nonetheless, slaveholders saw this as an

opportunity and relied on religious customs in order to assure the obedience and docility of their slaves (Genovese 1976: 7; 30; 189; Kidd 2012: 197). Historically speaking, literal interpretations of the New Testament (as well as of the Hebrew Bible) justified slavery and subordination (Kloppenber 2016: 310). As Israel points out, Christians had for centuries endorsed slavery on religious grounds (Israel 2012: 473; 2017: 149; 2019: 731). They had accepted slavery *per se* as being ‘ordained by the “natural law” which God had devised for man’s sinful state’ (Niebuhr 1960: 76) (*appeal to nature*). Consider also Saint Paul’s ambivalent stance: when he speaks in the Corinthians (1:24) about the Commandments of God he ‘stresses that God calls (καλέω, κλησις) each person’ to remain in his/her given position (Huttunen 2010: 44); in his letters to early Christian communities he advises slaves to obey their masters in everything and the masters, on the other hand, to treat their slaves fairly (Kloppenber 2016: 42). Nonetheless, in another letter Saint Paul counsels his friend Philemon ‘to embrace his runaway slave Onesimus, now that both had become Christians, and treat him “no longer as a slave, but ... as a brother”’ (ibid).

In the ante-bellum South, ‘a literal reading of scripture’ offered moral justification to property in man (Hartz 1955: 168); as many pro-slavery interpretations (of the Bible) advocated, the black was not predestined to work for him/herself; only ‘the white man’ was allowed ‘to boss’ (Genovese 1976: 244). Slaveholders had pushed the idea that ‘in making slaves of others’ they were ‘merely acting under the authority of God’ (79). For them it was not the Christian bodies but the souls that are equal (Israel 2017: 149; 2019: 731). In fact, many slaveholders who had developed deep affection for their own servants, introduced to them Christianity, through which they believed the latter would have saved their souls (Hartz 1955: 170). Hence, Nietzsche’s (2003) view of Christianity as a dangerous and hazardous narcotic (94), a ‘slave-faith’ (1967: 24) that sacrifices ‘all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of spirit’, encouraging ‘subjection, self-derision, and self-manipulation’ (25), carries an element of truth. As, for example, Frederick Douglas (1993), write, ‘I have met many good religious colored people at the south, who were under the delusion that God required them to submit to slavery and to wear their chains with meekness and humility’ (77). Genovese (1976) reports numerous cases of African-American slaves, who developed strong emotional love-ties with their masters and, even after the Emancipation Proclamation, refused to run away, remaining faithful to those

whom they made them suffer (81; 98; 109; 112; 128; 145). For example: ‘Elisa Frances Andrews noted in her diary for January 16, 1865, that the most well-behaved and docile blacks became increasingly unruly as Yankee troops got close. On May 27, she celebrated the loyalty of her own servants, whom she called “treasures”: “I really love them for the way they stood for us”’ (102). Consider also the case of Bill Simms, an ex-slave from Missouri who ‘loved his old master and willingly return to work for him after the war’ (135). Or according to the Louisiana planter, John Sergeant Wise, his own servants had repeatedly told him that they ‘loved “old Master” better than anybody in the world’ (111-2; *emphasis added*). A high amount of responsibility for the apparent docility African-Americans, according to Genovese (1976), rests in their religious education (91). The ‘profoundly Christian ability to love their enemies ... [had] surrendered their manhood’ and propelled them to accept ‘their masters’ world view’ (282). If love instead of referring to the serene emotion of *eucosmia* (as it is expressed through the notion of *agape*, accompanied by *aidōs* and *dikin*, by a sense of care and duty to restore common decency, appeals to the *fido amor*, leaves very little room for persons ‘to stop and think’, in Arendt’s (1978, 1: 4) terms. This absurd love of slave towards his/her master reminds us the case of the Stockholm Syndrome, as described by Breithaupt (2019: 37). We are propelled to the phenomenon of *pathological confluence* (see chapter 2) again, to the process whereby an objective-perceptive-empathetic observer develops emotional attachments with his/her predator, inasmuch as his/her ‘self’, that is, capacity to ‘judge, [to] show strength, [to] lead [and] act’ is lost. This process is described, by same author (43), as ‘depersonalisation’. One factor that prompts a victim to excuse the deeds of his/her predator, deeds that cause great suffering, is the empathy the former expresses for the predator, due to the latter’s past unfair treatment, which (potentially) prompted him/her to resort to violence and aggression against others<sup>106</sup>. The victim, the ‘depersonalised’ individual, is therefore reduced to ‘something of a slave’, claims Nietzsche (1967: 142). He/she is ‘only an instrument ... in the hand of one who is more powerful’ (140). Likewise empathy can cultivate a ‘false’ and ‘absurd’ love (as the previous chapter called it) for the ‘oppressor’, in the event the latter acts in such a way that his/her oppression is masked through deeds that ostensibly portray

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106 See Chapter 2 (the third part of the second section).

him/her as an ‘affectionate caretaker’. Consider, for example, the words of Adeline Johnson, a South Carolina slave: ‘In slavery, us have all de clothes us need, all de food us want, and work all de harder ‘cause us *love* de white folks dat cared for us’ (Genovese 1976: 307; *emphasis added*). To make a long story short, the blind sentimentalism of the *fido amor* substantiates an absurd and demeaning form of love for both the oppressor and the conditions he/she creates and imposes, instead of respecting the latter only as an individual, a ‘sinner’, capable of redeeming him/herself from his/her grave sins.

Proslavery arguments were constantly championing the “‘gratitude, affection, and good-will’” of the slaves (145). Nonetheless, ‘gratitude implies equality’ while ‘paternalism rested precisely on inequality’ (146). What, therefore, best describes Southern paternalism is precisely its apparent success in producing perceptions capable of generating conditions within which the subordination of individuals could be achieved simply by sentimentalising human relations, that is, by constituting minds incapable of *judging*, incapable of distinguishing hubris from decency. In fact, the slaveholding regime could not engender in the slave’s mind the humiliating desire for servitude and blind obedience without crippling his/her inability of *thinking* and *judging*, and hence, of taking his/her life into his/her own hands. More importantly, if *thinking*, *nóēsis* and *judgment* are among the most essential prerequisites of public life, which is synonymous with *action*, and if the *raison d’être* of *action per se* is *freedom*, we understand that the real aim of slavery is not simply the alienation of someone’s ‘right to liberty’ but the complete alienation of his/her *freedom*, of his/her capacity as a *thinking* human being to serve the common good. Walker’s (1993) words, that those who consider blacks an ‘inferior race of beings’ consider them ‘incapable of *self-government*’ (85; *my emphasis*) depict the real objectives of the *hubris* of slavery: a human being ceases being a political animal. Instead, he/she becomes a *thing*.

Returning to the discussion of religion: for Israel (2019) it was the *philosophes* of what he calls ‘radical Enlightenment’ who initially called for the emancipation of African slaves rather than Christianity *per se* (730-1; 735). The influences of the *philosophes* in the destruction of slavery are, in fact, undisputable. However, to neglect the way through which religious archetypes and symbols point to the impersonal realm, to high moral ideals, that vitalise the human psyche by enhancing courage, resilience and vigour, which the

underdogs (the African Americans, in our case) need in order to resist dehumanisation and humiliation, would be serious neglectful. As Niebuhr (1960) puts it, '[r]eligion is always a citadel of hope, which is built on the edge of despair' (62); the religious imagination can develop moral capacities in individuals (51). As the previous chapter explained, the high moral ideal is seen as a standard of comparison, a benchmark for good judgment and a means for individual and collective *self-purification*. The religious experience, in other words, provides a basis 'of moral conduct and an explanation for the existence of evil and injustice' (Genovese 1976: 163). While initially Christianity had shaped a paternalistic culture of conformity to the standards of the white ruling elites, it gradually ended up a weapon of resistance for the blacks (116). It drove into the soul of the slaves a deep awareness concerning the immorality of submission (165) and taught 'them to love and value each other, to take a critical view of their masters, and to reject the ideological rationales for their own enslavement' (6). The Christian faith 'forbade slaves to accept the idea that they had no right to judge their masters; it made *judgment* a duty' (282; *my emphasis*) and helped them to escape the savagery of depersonalisation, invigorating their free will, through 'faith in God and faith in each other' (244). '[I]t strengthened the slaves' sense of belonging to the world' (248); it shaped their own common culture and enhanced their sobriety (644), offering protection against hedonism, excessive materialism and moral degradation (574; 580).

While the white South attempted to shape 'the religious life of the slaves', the slaves themselves fought to reshape the same culture, providing 'a vantage point' from which they could judge the dominant systems of values (162). Thus, drawing on religion, they turned the model of Southern paternalism upside down (5; 30). In the end, religion ended up an instrument 'in their determined effort to take care of each other in a painful common struggle to live decently' (118). Through songs that became 'hymns of joy' (249) and 'breaths of hope', the slaves strengthened their roots, their sense of belonging to a common physical and spiritual world (248; 623), which kept 'the people together with faith in themselves' (273). Songs of joy that 'turned to satire' (318) served as instruments of *public judgment*, of 'political criticism' (and self-criticism at the same time) (318; 582); they became instruments of narrative action, of the 'ubiquitous' *logos* upon which 'all life together in the "mode of speech and action," is constituted' (Benhabib 2000: 127). Through

their art and satire the African Americans ‘asserted their rights as men and women to the fullness of the Lord’s earth’ (Genovese 1976: 584). Their Christian faith, ‘which implied a sense of a higher organic order in the universe’ and the existence of a Truth ‘far above the claims of temporal relations’ (264) reaffirmed their own ‘personality and worth’ (265).

To sum up: the religious experience postulates the strengthening of ‘the moral capacities of individual men’ (Niebuhr 1960: 51) by allowing them to access *impersonal dimensions*, enhances *psychical enlightenment*, discouraging resentment and revenge (as we have also seen in King’s case). Religion, writes Douglas (1973) lightens the burden of suffering and relieves the heart, offering a ‘new light’ and a great concern ‘to have everybody converted’ (82-3), to repent the slaveholder from his/her sins ‘and be reconciled to God through Christ’ (82). Christianity, therefore, encouraged the slave to *love* his/her master as a fellow sinner, urging him/her to reject the entitlement of arbitrary rule through human ownership (Genovese 1976: 264). It elevated hopes for racial fairness and deliverance (189) without including ‘an implication of perfection and the Kingdom of God on Earth’ or embracing any form of ‘militant millennialism’ (optimism, in other words) (272). ‘Religion’, wrote Walker (1993), ‘is a substance of deep consideration among all nations of the earth’ (55).

It is true that Christianity’s message of *agape* and forgiveness has long been an important reservoir of inspiration for pacifist thinkers (or leaders): ‘Paul’s declaration that God “hath made of one blood” all nations of the world is more anthropological fact than religious poetry’, argues King (1986: 121). In the same way, the fear of divine retribution (in Christianity) can discourage moral transgression, inciting common decency. Walker’s *Appeal* (1830/1993), for example, calls black and whites ‘to engage in critical self-analysis and social reform’ according to the Christian principles of equality by creation (Gustafson 2011: 141). If white Americans refuse to reform ‘God will accomplish it’ even through punishment (Walker 1993: 50). Certainly, Walker was neither the liberal orator Douglas was nor a pacemaker like King; if King’s calls for *agape* and reconciliation reverberate with God’s kindness and generosity, as it mainly enunciated in several passages of the New Testament, Walker’s powerful jeremiad surely echoes the divine punitive judgement of the Old: ‘I warn you in the name of the Lord ... to repent and reform, or you are ruined’, he added (60). Repeated phrases like the following, ‘those avaricious and ungodly tyrants

among you, I am awfully afraid will drag down the vengeance of God upon you’ (65) and ‘unless you speedily alter your course, *you and your Country are gone!!!*’ (59), bring us in symmetry to the Miltonic *weltanschauung*, that whoever aspires to exercise self-assertive powers upon others, sins in the face of God. Like Satan’s army was thrown ‘to the bottomless pit’ (Milton 2004: 207), in the same way sinners, oppressors and tyrants will meet God’s wrath: ‘God will dash tyrants, in combination with devils’ (Walker 1993: 91, ff.). After all, it was Lincoln himself who ‘saw the Civil War as fulfilling divine purposes’ (Kidd 2012: 251). Certainly, one does not have to accept this quasi chiliastic belief as such; one does not need to bestow faith on the idea that some form of divine Providence will always be ready to punish oppressors and tyrants, emancipating mankind from all evils, as (for instance) the French Revolutionaries believed (Hampson 1983: 141). It is, nonetheless, reasonable to highlight the possible consequences of hubris (moral transgressions), namely the triggering of *mēnis*, which (in turn) fuels resentment and, potentially, wars and conflicts. In other words, we can argue about a simple *cause* and *effect* relation between oppression and insurrection. However, given the *magmatic* mode of collective institutioning (Chapter 2), which renders the outcomes of human acts unpredictable, one could object to this assertion that oppression (the *cause*) deterministically ends in war and destruction (the *effect*). Eventually, while we refute the case for absolute *causality*, we can speak of *probability*; the likelihood, the chance, the possibility for strife, conflict and wretchedness increases when the conditions (the *causes*) fostering anger (*mēnis*) and resentment remain extant. As Aeschylus (2007: 104 [Αἰσχύλος 2007: 104]) wrote in *Agamemnon*: «φιλεῖ δὲ τίττειν / Ὑβρις μὲν παλαιὰ νεά / ζουσιν ἐν κακοῖς βροτῶν» (‘an ancient hubris sooner or later, human passions will excite, bringing a new hubris forth’) and «Ὑβριν τότε ἢ τόθ’, ὅτε τὸ κύριον μόλη φάος τόκου, δαίμονά τ’ ἔταν, / Θράσος μελαίνα μελάθροισιν, / Ἄτα...» (‘in turn, hubris sends Thrasos, the untamable and unholy demon, and the curse of moral blindness, unto the households...’ (ibid; *my translation*)<sup>107</sup>.

### Conclusion

So far, we have been looking at the main ideological trends behind the French

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107 The demon *Θράσος* (*Thrasos*) personifies what in Greek this word denotes: ‘audacity’ or ‘impudence’, according to the Oxford New Greek dictionary (edited by Watts 2008, 88).

Revolution, paying essential emphasis to Rousseau's model of 'original harmony', which (together with his radical egalitarianism) legitimised the idea of human perfectibility (as the first section explained). The spread of this optimistic idea (by the so-called 'men of letters') led to the establishment of conditions within which enmity, violence (justified and glorified), and idolatry swamped the entire nation. This self-destructive violence annihilated the political realm. To avoid misunderstandings: this estimation does not negate the existence of several additional factors undermining the success of the Revolution. Consider, again the controversial role of the Girondins, and more importantly, a) the accusations of proletarian leaders against them for rising food prices (Israel 2014: 438), b) their collaboration with the Royalists when the latter marched against Paris (Kropotkin 1971: 446; 453; Popkin 2019: 307), c) their insistence on the doctrine of property, order and security (Kropotkin 1971: 106; 343; 476; 485) and d) their demands for the immediate dissolution of all 'large communes and the communal municipalities, and the creation of a third and new series of bureaucratic bodies – the *directores du canton*' (472), in order 'to "beat down anarchy"' (359). On the other hand, the more moderate (in character) American Revolution tells a different story; it was not the work of some vanguard intellectual aristocracy, 'the result of "bookish" learning or the Age of the Enlightenment' (Arendt 1990: 219). It is true that Paine's fierce attack on King George III blew away pro-royalist sensibilities (Miller 1959: 469; Israel 2012: 451-7; 2017: 54). His *Common Sense* had an unprecedented impact at persuading the colonists for the necessity of independence (Israel 2017: 49-50), the only way to protect the autonomy of the 'elementary republics' from the abuses of monarchy. But neither Paine's (nor Locke's) influential treatises and pamphlets nor the profound interest of the Revolutionary leadership for classical Greece and Rome (Bowers 1954: 5; Gustafson 2011: 1; Israel 2012: 446) explain the birth and spread of such a large democratic movement. It could be true that 'the enlightenment of society ... necessarily requires comprehensive revolution' that is, 'a revolution of ideas', a 'revolution of the mind' (in other words), and then 'a revolution of action' (Israel 2010:197-8). Nonetheless, when it comes to the American Revolution, it would be a serious mistake to claim that before *Common Sense* there was no radical philosophical thinking, given that democratic and republican ideas had already strong roots in the New World (Kloppenbergh 2016: 253; Israel 2017: 53). In fact, republican ideas in North America, 'solidly British in



origin' had been practiced for almost a century and a half before the major outbreaks of 1776 (Israel 2012: 445). According to Arendt (1990), the American Revolution was the outcome of a series of 'practical experiences of the colonial period, which all by themselves gave birth to the republic' (219). '[I]t was the common people who impelled and sustained the Revolution, enabling the leaders to secure the *Declaration of Independence*' (Israel 2019: 283). Deeply enshrined in the American collective memory, in the American collective conscious and unconscious, republican ideas were revived and brought back into the political foreground during the emergence and spread of Populism.

Discussions concerning the genealogy of these major historical events, concerning the significance of civic bonding memory in democratic mobilisations, will be postponed until the first section of the next chapter. For the moment let us return to the mutually exclusive relationship between optimism and the *vita civile*, characterised by humility in ethics, in conjunction with awareness about life's tragic dimensions, about 'the history of humanity' as 'the history of hideousness' (Καστοριάδης 2000: 126 [Castoriadis 2000: 126]), about the 'question of mankind' as a question of 'hubris' (2007: 123), stigmatised by endless moral transgressions, indecencies as well as by paradoxes and contradictions. The case of the American Revolution is a stark example of such a contradiction, given the coexistence of the passion for freedom, self-governance and political empowerment (anthropocentric elements) with worldviews and perceptions offering concrete justification to the *hubris* of slavery (elements that belong to the despotic 'cosmosystem', in Contogeorgis' terms)<sup>108</sup>. The Revolution, claims Wood (2003), destroyed 'old structures of authority' (133) and 'had a powerful effect in eventually bringing an end to slavery in America' by putting an end to the intellectual hegemony upon which the justification of slavery for thousands of years rested (127). But despite outlawing slavery in several Northern and New Territories (Kloppenbergh 2016: 402; 407; Israel 2017: 151; 153), the Southern elites, and their insistence on maintaining the right to property above the so-called 'rights of man' (Miller 1959: 498), derailed plans for the total eradication of legislation that provided legal support for slavery itself, forcing the Northern elites to cave in to their demands. Furthermore, as McMath (1992) writes, the *Emancipation*

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108 Concerning the term 'despotic cosmosystem' see the Glossary.

*Proclamation* may have thrown away the bondage of slavery, but paternalism, racial and economic exploitation in the Old South remained intact: '[t]he system of land tenure', which 'came to dominate the plantation districts by the end of Reconstruction was sharecropping' (31). The land was 'subdivided into small plots to be worked by families', most of them black freedmen, who 'were paid with a share of the marketable crop ... rather than in cash', while '[t]itle to most of the land' was owned by white planters, who created and enforced their own laws against the sharecroppers (ibid). Many thought sharecropping to be a new relationship between masters and slaves, fully adjusted to the standards of Northern capitalism (32). Whites, who joined the ranks of sharecropping, found themselves 'in the same ditch' (33). The crisis of 1893, which led to the rise of the People's Party, hit the sharecroppers severely (whites and blacks alike).

Thus, coextensive with the ethic of common decency is the tragic vision, the explicit acknowledgement of the inherent human hubris and vulnerability. The tragic vision, deeply rooted in the philosophical and ontological underpinnings of the *vita civile*, adds an anti-utopian bent to human efforts for common decency. It discourages perfection and, instead, promotes meliorism. It advocates *eucosmia* in leadership, emphasising everyone's need to '*dare greatly*', in Brown's (2012) terms, everyone's contribution to the struggle against hubris through *action*, through *logos* and memory. The previous chapter looked at the process whereby *logos* (agonal action and plurality of opinions) multiply the chances for moral lessons incorporated within past experiences to be discovered and, subsequently, to be brought into the foreground of political debates. The next chapter will focus on the relationship between *logos* and bonding memory. More precisely, it is argued that *logos* and common appearance (public time) *vitalises* bonding memory, preventing idolatry and aggressive nationalism; through deliberation and open conversations, given norms become subjects of discussion and re-evaluation, instead of being reproduced behaviourally as 'habits'.

## Chapter 7

### Does Tradition Deserve to Survive?

#### Introduction

This chapter addresses a major contradiction emerging from previous theoretical discussions. As Chapter 1 argued, *active* participation and engagement with politics is unthinkable without the existence of a common world, shaped by (common) bonding memories, by a collective identity, which provides to heterogeneous groups a reason for existence and a sense of common purpose, allowing them to function as a people, as a political entity. In addition, Chapter 4 spoke about the threats of the so-called ‘cultural decomposition’, of the loss of collective identity (or uprootedness) as a consequence of the nihilism of permissive liberalism. Cultural decomposition led to the destruction of the common world and, subsequently, to the emergence of nostalgia and idolatry (Chapter 4). The annihilation of common ideas, the annihilation of the common world, creates cracks in the inner walls of our mind, walls that protect the *logismikon* from the forces of the underworld. In the absence of a common world that could keep the restless human wonder preoccupied with meaningful objects (see Chapter 2<sup>109</sup>), the pathways for the latter to intrude into the underworld of dark passions (pathos), awakening *mēnis* and *hubris*. Eventually, pathos capitalises on the urgency to retrieve the lost roots and invents an imaginary (and idealised) past. The nostalgic mind shapes images of a past that never actually existed (Brown 2012: 26), and strives to resurrect this past, this utopian lost world supposedly emancipated from the cultural impasses of the present. Furthermore, Chapter 2<sup>110</sup>, by bringing to the discussion the problem of the passive (habitual) reproduction of negative prejudices (incarnated within a popular culture) and Chapter 5, while examining Martin Luther King Jr’s campaign against racial segregation in the American South, warned that collective identities are liable to slip over into jingoism, racism and/or nativism. Collective identities often become theologised, to use Arato’s terms (2013); they

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109 See the first part of the second section: *The empirical dimension: ethical memory (thinking and judgment)*.

110 See the second part of the second section: *Tradition and bonding memory: the construction of the empirical world*.

incite idolatry, ‘the error which attributes a sacred character to the collectivity’, one of ‘the commonest of crimes, at all times, at all places’ (Weil 2005: 76). To summarise: collective identities (and bonding memories) are necessary a) for bringing political bodies into existence (without which *action* is never possible), and b) for protecting communities and individuals from the threats of uprootedness and nihilism. How, nonetheless, could they be emancipated from negative prejudices and from ‘warlike instincts’, to use Weil’s (1987a) words? In order to respond to this impasse the following sections discuss further the distinction between the Aristotelian concept of *ethesi* (or memory) and custom (a distinction initially discussed in Chapter 2). They elucidate the process whereby *public judgment*, *logos*, *eucosmia* and active participation (the populism of the *vita civile*) assign to collective identities changeable symbolic meanings and prevent them from becoming mere habits or even idolised objects that satisfy egoistic pursuits.

When it comes to the importance of bonding memory in *action*, Arendt has brought to our attention two Latin verbs, *agere* and *gerere*. The first is synonymous with leading, with constituting, with setting something into motion, with beginning and *archein* (ἀρχεῖν) (Arendt 1968a: 165; 1998: 177; 189). The second, *gerere* (from *gero*), means to endure (Cicero 1961: 189; 347; Arendt 1968a: 165; 1998: 189) and, most of all, to memorise. Thus, *gerere* often connotes heritage, ‘obligation to one’s predecessors’ (B. J. Smith 1985: 58, ff.58), or ‘durability and continuity’ (Arendt 1990: 95). It connotes ‘continuation of past acts whose results are the *res gestae*, the deeds and events we call historical’ (Arendt 1968a: 165); ‘[f]or it is true that all thought’ and hence, all forms of action (*agere*) ‘begins with remembrance’ (Arendt 1990: 220). According to B. J. Smith (1985), Arendt in her effort to save action, downplayed the principle of *agere* (58, ff.58). By discarding *gerere* altogether, adds the same author, Arendt discarded a set of crucial concepts revolving around this principle (ibid). To a degree, *gerere* is linked to genealogy; it refers to tradition and memory, to concepts of the past that still have value for us, to ideals that continue influencing our words and deeds. In fact, populist outbreaks and revolutions have always drawn vigor and sustenance from the past, from ‘the myth or memory of a golden age’, widely echoed in the aims and pursuits of those who are directly involved in such events (Lasch 1991b: xvii). As Craig Calhoun (2007) claimed, ‘[p]eople put the culture they have absorbed (or that has been inculcated into them) to work every time they take action’ (22).

As a matter of fact, we have already spotted behind the cooperative movement certain ideals of American republicanism, which began to spread in the New World during the ‘golden age’ of the Revolution.

The first section of this chapter elaborates further on the genealogy of anthropocentric ideas of classical republicanism initially emerging during the Greek and Roman antiquity until the American Revolution (see the previous chapter), and from the Declaration to King’s campaign for peace and reconciliation. Some of these ideas (enshrined and conserved in the civil memory of the collectivity of ‘the American people’) to a degree, had been invoked by King during the Civil Rights Movement: the ‘thousands of Negro students who have challenged the principalities of segregation’ wrote King (1986), [t]heir courageous and disciplined activities’ that came ‘as a refreshing oasis in a desert sweltering with the heat of injustice’ had taken ‘the whole nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the Founding Fathers in the formulation of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence’ (103). King’s exposure to the religious spirituality of the black church—a product of a long tradition that had given, to many Southern African Americans during the antebellum era, strength and reason to hope—formulated a synthesis of American republicanism and Christianity, which influenced decisively the course of the whole movement. To make a long story short, the main purpose of this analysis is to emphasise the value of ‘pastness’, the importance of remembrance, of collective identity and culture (as means of *gerere*) for *action* (*agere*). Simultaneously, this analysis (which continues in the second section) highlights the practical fruits of *public judgment*, namely, of the ability to identify within the same culture the: a) obscene elements that must be rejected, b) concepts, ideas, gestures and norms that have to be re-evaluated in order to be amended and, c) all these elements we deem valuable and, consequently, are ought to be cherished and conserved. The third section sheds new light on the process whereby *public judgment* is stimulated by *eucosmia*, which highlights the practical benefits of *action* and *logos*. In turn, *logos* constitutes common values and concepts (bonding memories) subjects to public mediation, to open debates and dialogue. In the political realm, the ‘common people’ can re-examine, re-evaluate and re-define the significance of these (common) concepts; they can determine whether or not these bounding memories should be discarded, altered or even conserved. However, before examining the way *logos*

and dissent emancipate collective identities and cultures from indecent elements, dissociating the need for roots, the need to acknowledge the value 'pastness' and heritage (bonding memory), from the passive endorsement of (morally) indecent norms a particular heritage potentially embodies, we should examine the gravity of the past itself in the process of shaping present attitudes.

### Why memory matters

#### 1) American Populism: the *genealogy* of a concept

According to the method of *genealogy*, a certain historical moment (X) constitutes a 'pedigree' of other past events; genealogy traces the influence of these events in the X (Chapter 1). Thus, in all forms of political *action* elements of the deep past directly (or indirectly) find expression. *Action* is always historicised. It is a product of *gerere*, of bonding (civil or cultural) memory, which is also subject to historicity. Bonding memory, in other words, is reflected within the identity of each collectivity. It is shaped by perceptions that consecutive (historical) events and experiences have created (civil bonding memory), or by concepts, gestures and traditions (cultural bonding memory) created spontaneously in dissimilar moments in the history of a community from the beginning of its existence until the present time. Bonding memory is always internalised; it manifests itself in the public realm and creates new events (through human interaction). These events generate their own experiences and ideas. In turn, all these new ideas and experiences will be memorised and internalised. They will manifest themselves in public mobilisations and will generate new ideas and/or experiences. This process repeats itself *ad infinitum*. Let us elaborate further on the concept of (bonding) memory (from a *genealogical* point of view).

As Chapter 2 claimed, objects removed from sight are stored in memory; they remain vivid reflections in our imagination (Hobbes 2006: 9). Unseen objects are also retrievable through narration. At this stage, let us divide bonding (civil and cultural) memory into two groups: *physical* and *immaterial*, to use Nora's (1996) terms, collective memory. Physical (or material) collective memory immortalises historical events and popular folkways. It is *physical* since it is made up by artificial objects, such as books, photographs, paintings, and as Nora (1996) observed, of statues, monuments, buildings and sites (xvi; 27-300), which are symbolic representations of past events. The existence of

these objects allows those who have not witnessed such events to acquire knowledge about them. Consider, at this stage, the following assertion: according to Plato ‘even the walls of the city educate children and citizens’ (mentioned by Castoriadis 2007c: 176). In short, the walls of the city, or even its monuments and buildings, are ‘artificial objects’ within which aspects of a common past is immortalised. These objects contain valuable (and often educational) information concerning past events to those who have not experienced them.. Furthermore, narration enunciates these events and transforms them into immaterial objects. They become immaterial so long as they do not exist anymore physically. In short, they become stories and function as an immaterial collective memory. As the individual *thinking ego* is always in contact with the reservoir of our memory (where perceptions, concepts and ideas are stored), in short, with memorised objects which define our identity and constitute an integral characteristic of ‘who we are’, shaping and determining our personal and collective mode of being, likewise the collective *thinking ego* retrieves from the storehouse of the immaterial collective memory such (immaterial) objects. Since (as mentioned earlier) the sum of these objects find expression in most public manifestations (including mobilisations), we understand that the past co-exists with the present and remains constantly alive. With this in mind, we will discuss further the rise and fall of the Populist (cooperative) movement.

As Taggart (2002) pointed out, the movement had ‘embodied, articulated and mobilized embedded populist motifs that run deeply through US politics’ (26). According to Canovan (1981), the ‘bucolic’ farmers of the impoverished hinterlands, those who gave birth to the Alliance and helped the People’s Party raise to the top, were ‘heirs of a culture that stresses independence, self-help, and the ability of a man ... to get on in the world by enterprise and effort’ (18). They were heirs of a democratic tradition, partially reverberated through these populist motifs, being essential aspects of the American national psyche. More precisely, such ‘motifs’ are reflections of what Anthony Smith (1991) called ‘common historical myths’ (14), deeply enshrined within a national memory (Canovan 2005: 30), the (physical and immaterial) memory of the ‘American people’ (in our case). This bonding (civil) memory lies in the underpinnings of the American collective identity, shaped by the republican ideas of the Revolution, for which ‘the plain people’ must always stand up against despotism, establishing their own free republics (32). Put otherwise, the

cooperative movement appealed to a common heritage (Goodwyn 1976: 614). It appealed to ‘the original ideas of the American Revolution as creating a republic of self-governing farmers’ (Taggart 2002: 37). It incorporated elements of anti-monopolism and artisanal republicanism (or producerism), which were essential ‘part[s] of the cultural heritage of antebellum farmers and artisans’ (McMath 1992: 7). It re-discovered the republican values of civic virtue, the Protestant moral tradition (McMath 1992: 112; Postel 2007: 7) and elements of classical liberalism, attempting ‘to fashion an alternative modernity’ suitable to the interests of the farmers (Postel 2007: 4). As Müller (2016) argued, ‘Thomas Jefferson from the start’ constructed a producerist and republican discourse ‘that would be revived by many political rhetoricians defending the rights of the hardworking majority’ (86), such as the Populists themselves. Furthermore, the Populist fears towards unregulated capitalism echo the fear many early American Revolutionaries shared, the fear that unrestrained capital accumulation in the hands of an oligarchy would undermine American freedom (Miller 1959: 502). As many American Revolutionaries claimed, financial monopolies would put American farmers and workers (once victorious against British absolutism) under the yoke of new despots (Miller 1959: 502). According to McMath (1992), during the late nineteenth century Henry George and Edward Bellamy articulated discourses appealing to the ‘common sense of many ordinary Americans’ who felt that the initial principles of the Revolution were being undermined by industrialisation, uncontrolled capital accumulation and large property ownership (111). As with Henry George (2006), ‘[i]n many places today, a Washington, a Franklin, or a Jefferson could not even get into the state legislature’ (291). George (2006) sought to revert ‘the [popular] idea that land is the common right of the people of a country’ (255). This idea, he believed, would have wiped away ‘repressive governments’ and ‘standing armies’ (ibid); in turn, the American nation would have approached ‘the ideal of Jeffersonian democracy’ (ibid).

From what we already know, Foucauldian *genealogy* rejects the idea of *ursprung* and, instead, proposes *herkunft* (Chapter 1). It prompts us to trace the roots of political concepts and projects that decisively influenced the philosophy of the American Founding Fathers to cultural and political realities emerging a few centuries before the events of 1776. In other words, the (proto-anthropocentric) thinking behind the American Revolution (partially echoed in the cooperative movement) is a manifestation of ideas, philosophies



and modes of being enshrined in the collective civil (immaterial) memory of the American colonists (*gerere*). First and foremost, we should note that in comparison to most modern revolutionary movements, which sought ‘to give political form to the human capacity for beginning anew’, the American Revolution was a remarkable exception (Fine 2014: 220); the latter did not strive to emancipate mankind from the social ills of the old order once and for all (as the previous chapter made clear). This was perfectly ‘exemplified by the French revolutionary calendar in which the year of the execution of the king was counted as Year One’ (ibid). Instead, the American Revolution ‘has always seemed to be an unusually intellectual and conservative affair’ (Wood 2003: 58). Its relative conservatism ‘lay[s] in its refusal to partake in the pathos of novelty’ (Fine 2004: 224). In contrast, the French revolutionaries by destroying libraries, churches and religious emblems on the high roads (Kropotkin 1971: 519-21) attacked physical bonding (cultural and civil) memory. By uprooting old religious norms and old traditions (B. J. Smith 1985: 230; Weil 1987a: 86-7; 103; 105), by annihilating physical bonding memory they attempted to destroy the national ‘bond of union’ in its ‘ancient edifice’ (Burke 1968: 106) and ‘the whole original fabric of society’ (192). Far from expressing interest for ‘new things’, instead of making a radical ‘break with the American past’ (Miller 1959: xvii) the American Revolutionaries aspired to recover ‘old rights and liberties’ (Arendt 1990: 141), preserving a line of political heritage they thought was severely undermined by the British aristocracy (Wood 2003: 58) and (more precisely) by the Coercive Acts (passed by the British Parliament in 1774), ‘designed to curtail popular participation in normal political affairs’ (Breen 2019: 35). As a matter of fact, ‘the British government had repeatedly intervened in the colonies to save the aristocracy from the common people’, from the “giddy-headed multitude”, the “damned villains”, the “loud unlettered orators of the republican tribe” (Miller 1959: 499).

More to the point: democratic republicanism in America begins with the Mayflower Compact; the Pilgrims, who arrived to the New World from England sought to escape the clerical oppression of the British Crown (Bowers 1954: 4; Hartz 1955: 3; Arendt 1990: 167; 230; 319; Kloppenberg 2016: 92) and ‘drew up a code’, recognised as ‘the bill of rights’, written as early as 1636 (Bailyn 1976: 194). According to Kloppenberg (2016), the English ‘who emigrated to America ... in the first half of the century ... enjoyed a

remarkable autonomy' from the British Parliament (93); in New England 'they developed their own practices of popular government' (92); they followed the principles of English nonconformity (81) and, more specifically, the Christian ethic of love, equity and reciprocity, 'on which they based the institutions of self-government they created' (88). The 'fundamental principle of this most British colony in America', claims Tocqueville (1994) was the development and spread of a democratic tradition that emphasised the sovereignty of the people. This form of popular sovereignty was practiced in the townships of New England, 'constituted as early as 1650' (1: 40). The townships 'Tocqueville discovered in 1830' were a 'natural product' of small communities dominated by a class of 'independent farmers' (Magnusson 2015: 35), which Revolution later put in the forefront (Taggart 2002: 37). More importantly, the townships embodied a local tradition premised on self-governance' (Gustafson 2011: 6) and 'gave scope to the activity of a real political life, thoroughly democratic and republican' (19). In the town of New Haven, founded in 1643 by the London minister John Davenport, the colonists experienced direct democracy; freemen elected twelve individuals for magistrates and, later on, selected seven by lot (Kloppenbergh 2016: 85). As Magnusson (2015) points out, the autonomy of the English villages 'was continued in northern American colonies under conditions that encouraged democratization' (Magnusson 2015: 35). In New England 'the law of representation was not adopted', writes Tocqueville (1994), and 'the affairs of the community were discussed, as at Athens, in the marketplace, by a general assembly of citizens' (1: 40). According to Wood (2004), several ideas from the classical antiquity—revived by the Renaissance writers (particularly Machiavelli)—had been carried into seventeenth-century English thought' (92) as a *henkfurt*. They survived through books, pamphlets, or through popular folkways and oral tradition (physical memory). From the middle of the eighteenth century, Bishop Berkeley's conventional idea that the 'western cycle of empire from the Middle East to Greece, from Greece to Rome, from Rome to western Europe, and from western Europe across the Atlantic to the New World' (*metakénosis*, in my terms) was set forth (97). Jefferson and his heirs praised Demosthenes, Cicero, 'the supreme orators of antiquity' (Bowers 1954, p.5) and (of course) Machiavelli, the 'father of American populism' (Pocock 1989a, p.98). They scorned Plato for his 'continued popularity on elitist schoolmasters and superstitious Christians' (Nelson 2006: 200).

Back to the agrarian movement: apart being a synthesis of (classical and modern) republicanism, of Jeffersonian democracy and Christianity, it incorporated (and further promoted) elements of Southern (paleo)conservatism (Clanton 1991: 40). Southern conservatism opposed progressivism and rejected the liberal and industrial lifestyle of the American North, which they considered solvent to family, community and tradition (Genovese 1994: 12; 31). Southern (paleo)conservatives invoked the Burkean ‘resistance to innovation’ that presented ‘the stamp of our forefathers’ (Burke 1968: 181). Let us bring to our mind again to the notion of *public judgment*, referring to the critical re-evaluation of given social conventions and institutions, in short, to our capacity of identifying and aborting those we deem morally ‘indecent’. The more *public judgment* fades, the more laxes our ability ‘to make intelligent use of the past’ (Lasch 1991a: 82), to evaluate and abort inherited (morally indecent) norms and values, consolidated within a framework of cultural conventions. As Chapter 2 argued (while reflecting on Lasch’s *TTOH*), this Burkean insistence on the ‘stamp of our forefathers’, in the passive reproduction of inherited norms and customary values (a process Burke himself thought to be protective for nations against internal divisions), may lead to the uncritical acceptance of all sorts of cultural ‘indecencies’, such as white supremacy, whose persistence in the post-bellum South is visible through an emerging nostalgia for the Lost Cause, as recorded by Paul Outka (2008), through a persistent belief that life under the slave-holding agrarian regime was in many ways superior to that introduced by the industrialised liberal North. Notwithstanding the victory of the Union and the end of slavery might suggest radical changes, Outka’s (2008) observations concerning the way literary works (mainly novels and poems) of great popularity, produced by Southern whites, works depicting the latter’s ‘antebellum trauma’ through a mood of intense nostalgia for the Lost Cause and romanticise the old plantation as a sunny blissful Eden (85; ; 91-2; 95), reveal that the racist sentimentality in the South was salvaged. In the old plantation ‘everyone knew their place and was happy in it, where the magnolia- and rose-scented land around the gracious big house produced bountiful harvests, wise masters, beautiful mistresses ... and childlike “servants”’ (85). The ‘lands around the plantation were preternaturally lush and fertile, and that slaves liked being slaves’ (86). Outka (2008) speaks of the ‘trauma contagion’, of the way such novels and poems concerning the ‘antebellum fantasy of the Southern plantation

as an aristocratic racial Eden' (83), were spread through 'chain[s] of transmission' and found acceptance in wide audiences in the South and the North (84).

As we see, white supremacy remained deeply engraved in the customs and the institutions not only of the Old South but almost in every 'sector of American society' (Goodwyn 1976: 276), '[N]o region of the country was insulated from a slowly consolidating attitude that was overtly anti-black' (ibid). In what follows I elucidate the reasons this persistence of white supremacy prevented the spread of American Populism. We will return to the discussion concerning the way custom, as opposed to memory (or *ἔθεσι*), could mitigate *public judgment*.

## 2) Custom, memory and *ἔθεσι*

In order to avoid unfair and biased conclusions, we must initially make references to the positive contribution the Populist movement had for racial desegregation and reconciliation. The Alliance and the People's Party 'represented a politics of hope, not one of hate, and thus 'appealed to the best instincts of the voter rather than the worst' (Goodwyn 1976: 285). The Alliance sought to bring together black and white farmers. Alliancemen and alliancemen built up networks of interracial cooperation. They encouraged white farmers to learn 'their radical lessons', moving away from the party of the Confederacy (279). Black and white Southern Populists made efforts to 'unite "the people" across racial lines against "the monopolies"' (Canovan 1981: 55). The biracial Knights of Labor united black and white farmers (McMath 1992:87; Postel 2007: 39). The leaders of the People's Party campaigned for 'a free government ... built upon the love of the whole people' (quoted by Clanton 1991: 2), against 'the prejudices from the Civil War along partisan lines' (Argersinger 1974: 10). The Omaha Platform, which later on became 'the bible of the movement' (Clanton 1991: 82), appealed 'to reason and not to prejudice' (75) and called for "'every passion and resentment which grew out of it to die with it'" (quoted by Clanton 1991: 2). "'[W]e [black and white farmers] must be in fact ... one united brotherhood of freemen' (ibid), fighting for a common interest (Goodwyn 1976: 284-94; 297; Canovan 1981: 29).

Tom Watson, one of the key founders of the People's Party in the state of Georgia in early 1892, 'the first native white Southern leader of importance to treat the Negro's aspirations with the seriousness that human strivings deserve' (Woodward 1938: 221)

‘appealed for justice for the eight million oppressed black citizens’ (Clanton 1991: 133). He believed that blacks and whites had been conditioned to ‘hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both’ (quoted by Woodward 1938: 220). Racial antagonisms, he claimed, perpetuate ‘a monetary system which beggars both’ (ibid). For Watson, ‘to “make lynch law odious to the people” ... should be the object of the Populist Party’ (Woodward 1938: 221). William Alfred Pepper (a populist leader in Kansas) stood against legislation ‘motivated by sectional hatred’, by white supremacy (more precisely) and ‘maintained that the Kansas Alliance and Populists made no racial distinctions’ urging the Southerners to act likewise, ‘realizing that the interests of the oppressed transcended color’ (Argersinger 1974: 90). R.M. Humphrey, of the Superintendent of the Colored Farmers Alliance, argued that ‘the colored people are part of the people and they must be recognized as such’ (Goodwyn 1976: 290). Rueben Kold, an ardent Jeffersonian, favoured the ‘protection of the colored race in their political rights’ (295). Henry Vincent attempted to create a multi-sectional front, uniting blacks and whites, rural and urban populations (411-12). In Kansas, more specifically ‘Populist interracial efforts’ sought to keep alive ‘the Abolitionist sympathies of many of the old-time Greenbackers’ who had joined the party (304). ‘Never before or since have the two races in the South come so close together as they did during the Populist struggles’, claims Woodward (1938: 222).

Nonetheless, the issue of race, although being ‘irrelevant to the massive problems the nation confronted in industrialization ... because of their emotional content’ (Argersinger 1974: 305) and because of their persistence in the Southern tradition (as mentioned earlier) could ‘mobilize electorates’ (Argersinger 1974: 306). A significant portion of the white population never stopped to associate ‘corruption’ with ‘the mere presence of blacks in the structure of government’ (Goodwyn 1976: 278). The dedication of many Southern whites to the Democratic Party, the party of white supremacy (Clanton 1991: 61), erected a formidable barrier to the People’s Party, once the former defended popular requests (free-silver) already pushed forward by the latter (see the previous chapter). Thus, Southern whites and white Alliance leaders found in the party of the Confederacy, the party of ‘The Lost Cause’ (39), a political voice in support of their economic *demands* that had been already expressed by the People’s Party (Goodwyn 1976:

8; Clanton 1991: 39). Simultaneously, they saw the Democratic Party itself a ‘safe haven’ for their white racial sensibilities. Thus, white supremacy and free silver formed a *chain of equivalence*, to use Laclau’s terms<sup>111</sup>, between the People’s Party and the Democrats. This resulted in the gradual expansion and consolidation of the latter’s dominance and *hegemony* in the entire South.

The persistence of white supremacy, which led to the collapse of the collapse of Populism, highlights the reasons heritage and tradition should be better understood as a sum of (bonding) memories, rather than customs, passively reproduced. ‘The behavior of the person of custom is, by and large, habitual. To the question “Why?” he is part to respond simply, “This is the way it has always been done” (B. J. Smith 1985: 15). Instead, memory treats the past and the inherited norms as means of *gerere*. When the *thinking ego* retrieves from memory stored representations and ideas, wonder reflects upon them: this condition (*nóēsis*) could hinder the passive, unconscious (behavioral) and/or aggressive (due to the dictates of *mēnis*) endorsement of such representations. Therefore, as Lasch (1991a) claimed, memory is ‘dialectic’ (131). It is capable of *judgment*, of identifying the exact cultural elements that incite *hubris*, and defy the basic principles of common decency and, for this reason, must be thrown away once and for all. Thus, to recognise the value of certain elements deriving from the Southern tradition, like the notion of individual responsibility, the simplicity of manners, the explicit abhorrence to centralisation (Genovese 1994), so long as they incorporate elements required for the emergence of democratic political bodies, does not come at the price of embracing white supremacy, an enormity that deserves to perish once and for all.

Let us recall, at this stage, King’s (1986) famous speech, in which he evokes a vision of ‘the sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood’ (219), a vision that could be ‘realised only when, those descendants, black and white, can meet with mutual respect and appreciation for the greatness, as well as the evil, that has gone into the making of the South’ (Genovese 1994: xii). The task of bringing together the finest elements not only of the Southern tradition but also of the entire American nation (bridging bonding memory, let us call it), was among

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111 See Chapter 2, section ‘*Top-down populism and the vita civile*’.

the highest priorities of King's campaign for decency and reconciliation: '[w]e will win our freedom because the *sacred* heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands' (King 1986: 301; *my emphasis*). King was constantly making references to the 'Founding Fathers' of the American nation, rejecting, at the same time, the separatists and black nationalists who had 'lost faith in America' (King 2000: 100). To avoid misunderstandings: this form of 'sacredness' has nothing to do with political theologies—in Arato's (2013) terms—that attribute godlike powers to 'the people' and 'the nation', ascribing to these entities proportions which can never be called into question. Instead, it refers to the 'sacred' yearning for roots, as among the most vital needs of the soul (Weil 1987a: 4; 41; 49; 79). This transcendent attribution to the yearning for belonging does not have to be accompanied by some absolutist ideology operating as a hidden God behind 'the nation' and 'heritage'. God can be only used here as a symbol of order, 'the first of the soul's need' (Weil 1987a: 9). The need for order and the need for roots are correlated. The former requires a solid and stable empirical world for individuals to feel 'naturally included', a world that also protects the human soul from 'spiritual violence' (10) by impeding wonder from meddling with the underground mind, from wandering 'in obscurity', to use Tocqueville's (1994, 2: 331) words again. Order is shaped and preserved by interactions, by 'a texture of social relations' (Weil 1987a: 9) that erect fences against the menace of uprootedness (see Chapter 4), of what King (1986) had called as 'a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"' that African Americans were experiencing, 'living constantly at tiptoe stance never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments' (293).

King's emphasis on the need to be rooted, on the need to be 'recognised', to have 'natural participation' in the life of a community which 'preserves in living space certain particular treasures of the past' (Weil 1987a: 41) is evident in many of his speeches and sermons. He often makes reference to memory and tradition 'by quoting in full the famous song "America," or "My Country 'Tis of Thee"' (Nussbaum 2013: 238). King denounced the white segregationists who did not represent 'our beloved Southland' (King 1986: 292) and honoured 'the best in the Southern heritage', insisting that "'we Southerners, Negro and white, must no longer permit *our nation* and *our heritage* to be dishonored before the world'" (Lasch 1991a: 396; *emphasis added*). 'Why does misery constantly haunt the

Negro?’ asks King (2000: xii). ‘[H]ad their forebears done some tragic injury to the nation, and was the curse of punishment upon the black race? ... Had they shirked in their duty as patriots, betrayed their country, denied their national birthright? Had they refused to defend their land against a foreign foe?’ (ibid). King articulates a discourse of civic patriotism, ‘foregrounding the best values to which America may be thought to be committed, and also deeply and explicitly critical, showing that America has failed to live up to her ideals’ (Nussbaum 2013: 239). He understood very well that a political movements in order to succeed must make references to the nation as a *common space*, as ‘a particularist home base’, to use Canovan’s (2002: 34) words, and as a source of *action (gerere)*. Extensive commentary on the way common spaces (nations) can offer a solid basis for interactions that also create common ties, will take place in the next section. The process through which *eucosmia*, with its emphasis on *action* and *logos*, makes a collective identity subject to *public judgment*, breaking (therefore) rigid attachments that often stir up collective egoisms, will be extensively discussed.

### *Gerere, collective identity and eucosmia*

#### 1) Time and space and bonding memory

Memory and *thinking* require a texture of prolonged communal relations that create memorable events which, later on, become reference points (*gerere*) for all sorts of action. All such events ‘take place in time and space and we have only sense and memory to tell us of their occurrence’ (Pocock 1989a: 155). As Kant (2007) puts it, time is not only ‘a necessary representation that underlies all intuitions’, a source that ‘determines the relation of representations in our inner state’ but also ‘the formal *a priori* condition of all appearances in general’ (67). As our intuition ‘is always sensible, no object can ever be given to us in experience which is not subject to the condition of time’ (Kant 2007: 70-71). Both time and space constitute the two ‘sources of knowledge from which a variety of synthetic knowledge can be drawn *a priori*’ (73). For James (1980), ‘[m]emory gets strewn with dated things—dated in the sense of being before or after each other’ (270). However, the exact date of an event is conceived as an interval between two other events; it is, in other words, ‘a mere relation of before or after the present thing or some past or future thing’ (ibid). Similarly, when we think of space we acknowledge intervals and boundaries



between let us say, England ‘as simply to the eastward’ of Charleston which is ‘lying south’ (ibid). We date an event ‘by fitting it between two terms of a past or future series explicitly conceived, just as we may accurately think of England or Charleston being just so many miles away’ (ibid).

Consider, at this stage, the following assertion: part of the lifespan of an individual (person A) may coincide with the part of the lifespan of another (person B); but it is possible for both individuals to be born and die at a slightly different time, but they can share a certain amount (of time) together. There is, hence, a *simultaneity* that either refers to the *coincident time* or to *common time*:

- 1) In *coincident time* there is no interplay between person A and B, and hence, no common images and representations are created, as long as these persons are not members of the same community (they may also be located in different parts of the world), and do not exchange physical contact or interaction, neither share the memories. The actions of A have no impact in the B’s life.
- 2) *Common time*: which involves a) direct *interaction* between two (or more) groups and persons, or b) *indirect*, when persons (or groups) A, B, C (*et al.*) absorb and share the same sum of empirical knowledge, notwithstanding these individuals do not exchange contact on a daily basis. Imagine that two or more persons (or groups) experience the same war. In the event they have joined the same battle (even in opposing camps/ideologies), we could assume their interaction is *direct*. However, when these individuals (or groups) experience the same war but do not fight against each other in a battlefield, we could call this interaction *indirect*. Consider, for example, a Confederate and a Union supporter, one located in New York and the other in Mississippi. Both are Americans. Presumably, they share different worldviews, different ways of life and vote for political candidates whose objectives are dissimilar (if not diametrically opposite). Their moves and choices could affect the general direction of their nation. However, in the event these individuals are not acting (even against each other) within a space, sharing physical contact, we can speak of indirect *interaction*. Common (or *public*) time creates images and memorial objects, which the *thinking ego* retrieves from the storehouse of our memory.

So to return to James' analysis, we can assert that the perception of commonness through time is made by considering the existence of time-intervals, namely the existence of time-boundaries that separate two or more events. In turn, this process requires classification. More to the point: by identifying between two past (political or otherwise) events (A and C) another (event B) and by asserting these events are the outcome of *direct* or *indirect interactions*, the consequence A, B and C is perceived as a historical line within which groups of individuals find meaningful and bonding concepts. But as it seems, common time is unthinkable without a *space* of common interactions; space is 'well suited to contain memories—to hold and preserve them' and hence memory becomes attached to the same space 'wherein the past can revive and survive' (Casey 1987: 186). While it is self-evident that the acknowledgment of time-intervals ascribes to time itself a sense of tangibility, a sense of realness, perceptibility, and therefore measurability, this realness is purely a discovery of the mind. To an extent, Spengler's (1961) assertions that time (unlike space) 'cannot be thought of categorically', that civilisations which have reached a stage 'of mechanical Nature' are capable of measuring time and, finally, this measured image of time is comprehensible only within spatial limits (93), seems valid. Time always remains 'an abstract product of measurement ... as opposed to space which can be empirically experienced directly through our senses' (ibid). For Kant (2007), in order 'certain sensations [to] be referred to something outside me ... the representation of space must already be at the basis. ... Space is, subsequently, regarded as the condition of the possibility of appearances...' (73). In other words, '[s]pace is nothing but the form of all appearances of outer sense; i.e., it is the subjective condition of sensibility, under which alone outer intuition is possible for us' (64).

Thus, physical spaces constitute the primary basis upon which communicative interactions (*common* time that is, *public* or *political* time) can occur. What we call 'tradition', an 'essential feature of society' (Pocock 1989a: 233), is a summary of memorised concepts and ideas generated through these *direct* interactions (*public* time), which include celebrations, events concerning civic education, religious worship and other customary practices. These memorised concepts convert such spatially defined territories from vague geographical places without substantial meaning into 'mnemonic landscape[s]', to use Whitehead's (2009: 11) terms. Consider, for instance, the way King

linked ideas and concepts (like democracy and justice) to such physical (mnemonic) landscapes; in the end of his legendary '*I Have a Dream*' speech when he mentions the 'Stone Mountain of Georgia', 'the mighty mountains of New York', the Mississippi river, the 'hilltops of New Hampshire' (King 1986: 220); he 'moralize[s] geography' (Nussbaum 2013: 238); 'the mountains of New York are now not just mountains, they are sites of freedom' (ibid).

Since memory and place intersect, it is common for the sum of meaningful concepts ascribed to the former to be conceived as being one and the same with the latter. To put it another way, the mind understands the landscape as a solid representation of the meaning produced by such concepts and ideas, as well as by the interactions that have produced the same ideas. Through common (or *public*) time 'indefinite series of repetitions of an action' are performed 'on the assumption that [they] has been performed before' according to the same author, providing 'the grounds for assuming that [they] had a predecessor' (Pocock 1989a: 237). Nations, according to Nora (1996), or even cities, small towns and villages, as Winter (2006) pointed out<sup>112</sup>, can be sources of such (a common) space of 'shared communications about the meaning of the past' (Kansteiner 2002: 188) obtained through *direct* and, most likely, *indirect* interactions, through *agonal* and *narrative action*. Consider, for example, Benedict Anderson's (1983) views on the way members of a nation, of an '*imagined community*', do not exchange direct contact with their each other, do not 'meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community' (15). Through such *indirect* interactions the character, the temperament and the identity of 'the people' (of the sum of all persons inhabiting within such a common space), is shaped and meaningful concepts are created, absorbed, reproduced and ascribed in their perceptions and gestures. These concepts are immaterial memorable objects, adopted and shared by all those who are considered part of the nation, part of 'the same people', of the same collective entity. They are cultural artifacts capable of creating deep attachments (14). But while the existence of such common spaces (nations, for example) is vital for the conservation of a common identity, premised on bonding memories (without which no 'people' and, hence, no public-political realm can emerge), at the same time 'the

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112 See chapter 2 (the second part of section 2).

brutal character of the behaviour of all human collectives, and the power of self-interest and collective egoism in all intergroup relations' (Niebuhr 1960: xx) has legitimised fear and apprehension for particularism (Lasch 1991a: 376). In what follows this issue will be further discussed, elucidating the prospects of the *vita civile* to promote a 'sophisticated ... understanding of nationhood', to use Canovan's (1992: 31) words, emancipated from collective egoisms.

## 2) *Eucosmia*, logos and 'dignity'

We return to the antithesis between idolatry and *eucosmia*. Chapter 4 discussed the way nostalgia creates illusory images of a past world; nostalgia conceives this lost world not as an organic (and self-evolving) entity; it obsessively disparages the present instead of acknowledging it as a *henkfurt*, as an evolution of the past. It converts the latter into an idol, 'stand[ing] outside time, frozen in unchanging perfection' (Lasch 1991a: 83). *Eucosmia* resists idealisation and idolisation so long as it advocates *action*, which (through *logos*) has the capacity to alter the identity of a human collectivity. Changeable objects (including human collectivities) are not static (or frozen) entities. They are organic and self-evolving. They are subjects to what Heraclitus (Ηράκλειτος 2020: 190) called as «μεταβολή» (*metavolē*), implying the constant self-alteration of things (192). «[ΙΙ]άντα χωρεῖ και οὐδέν μένει, καὶ ποταμοῦ ροῇ ἀπεικάζων τὰ ὄντα λέγει ὥς δις εἰς τὸν αὐτόν ποταμόν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης» ('everything flows and changes just like a river and, thus, nobody can step twice into the same water stream') (192). Although the river flows and changes it still remains a river. Thus, objects experiencing *metavolē* do not fully alter themselves; they retain aspects of their previous identity. Hence, despite the changes human collectivities undergo, simultaneously they are 'felt to be mystically the same', to use Orwell's (1984: 76) words; they partially retain their already ascribed identities. Collectivities are neither static, fixed or immutable, nor fully *liquid* (to us Bauman's terms) and hence undefinable, incapable of shaping a solid world of common meanings (due to the speediness of their self-modification). To return to my initial point: the chances for idolatry increases when the mind fails to perceive a popular identity as an organic (changeable) object, and instead, acknowledges the entire collectivity as a static entity, cast in stone. Public and political realms enhance the vitality of a collectivity as long as they keep its members in *action* (*agere*), in a constant dialogue with themselves; this dialogue

creates the appropriate conditions for such identities to be mediated, reassessed, shaped (and reshaped), in short to be *judged* interminably. Commonly accepted norms and ideas, within which supremacist/egoistic perceptions (products of pathos) are incorporated, by being subject to public *judgement*, are constantly re-evaluated. Eventually, the chances for such perceptions to be ended effectively increase. However, dialogue presupposes differentiation and plurality of *doxas*, of opinions that come together and compete against each other. This plurality is better preserved when viewpoints and ideas are fractured down to the level of the individual. Let us dig deeper into this assertion:

Consider, at this stage, Weil's (2002) idea of *metaxu* (from the Greek *μεταξύ*, in-between): '[t]wo prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the *wall*. The wall is the thing which *separates* them but it is also their *means of communication* ... Every *separation* is a *link*' (145; *emphasis added*). In the same way, two (or more) individuals in a public space meet and discuss face to face. Disagreements (deriving from different worldviews, experiences, *etc.*) *separate* them. An invisible wall between them is erected. It is this particular *wall*, these intense disagreements, what *links* these individuals, what holds them together. For example, if person A disagrees with person B, this disagreement motivates further discussions. This *separation/disagreement links* brings them together until they reach a consensus. Since this disagreement is expressed through *logos*, we understand that the latter can be a means through which *judgments* and *counter-judgments* are enunciated. More importantly, *logos* preserves the existence of the common space, of the *public-political realm*, which links these two (or more) persons. In order to make better sense of this *rationale* we could introduce to the discussion the concept of *auto-poietikos* (or *self-functioning*) *logos*.

The word *autopoiesis* is a compound. It derives from the word *poiesis*, meaning 'creation and ontological genesis', that is through saying and representing at a certain moment in time (Castoriadis 2005: 3-4). Creation or *poiesis* is "“case of passage from non-being to being”, that which “leads to a former non-being to a subsequent beingness (*ousia*)”" (Castoriadis 2005: 197). The theory of *autopoiesis* has been developed by Chilean biologists, such as Francisco J. Varela, Humberto R. Maturana and Ricardo B. Uribe. It refers to the condition where living organisms (like cells) recursively via interactions create networks through which they can be reproduced perpetually. The same organisms can also

shape, define and determine the space within which both themselves, as well as the same networks, can exist (Καρκατσούλης 1995: 325-6 [Karkatsoulis 1995: 325-6]). Thus, it makes itself capable of creating (*poiein*), of *generating* (and preserving), the (ontological) conditions within which a public or a political realm (as a *space* proper) can emerge. In addition, public-political realms are networks of interactions that generate further discussions. Thus, *logos* is able to procreate the means (the public-political realm) through which it can be reproduced perpetually. In that sense, *logos* is *auto-poietikos*. For example: in a political assembly (*agonal action*) or in a conversation taking place within spaces of *narrative action*, in taverns, cafés and salons or even in semi-public spaces (in gatherings between families), a speaker expresses a view that triggers responses. Those who challenge the speaker's point could prompt the latter to express his/her disagreement with the counter-opinions expressed by those who stood against him/her. In turn, this could trigger further reactions and, thus, a chain of discussion is developed. In order for such discussions to continue the physical space within which such individuals could interact, a specially designed space that could host public assemblies, a *public-political realm*, in other words, must preserve its existence. However, when violence invades the political realm, that is, when the general rules that oblige all members of the assembly to rely on speech and persuasion rather than force, which for Arendt (1998) is a pre-political way of dealing with people—a 'characteristic of life outside the polis' (26-7), or of cosmosystems, Contogeorgis (Κοντογιώργης 2006; 2020]) has called 'despotic'—the self-perpetuation of *logos* is prevented. More precisely, the pathos for domination may prompt groups or individuals (members of the assembly) to usurp power in order to gratify their own ambitions. Considering they have successfully hijacked the political realm (in order to emerge into power), breaking all the rules of equal participation, they may have to resort to despotic means of repression against popular resistance. Central governments can also suspend public assemblies in the event they deem it necessary, as we have seen in the previous chapter while reflecting on the American and, more importantly, on the French Revolution.

As we see, the concept of *auto-poietikos logos* allows us to shed light on the process whereby public-political realms can maintain their existence through disagreement,, which *separate* and unite human beings at the same time. This *separation* (as noted earlier) points

to *metaxu*, to ‘the [distance] in-between which always exists in human intercourse’, (Arendt 1990: 85), that is, to the distance in-between opinion A and opinion B (or C, D, *et al.*), the in-between ‘worldly ... space by which men are mutually related’ and is preserved by ‘power’ (175), by *auto-poietikos logos*. Human beings in order to be *separated* (and linked, at the same time) must appear in these public spaces as distinct individuals. Opinions ‘never belong to groups but exclusively to individuals, who “exert their reason coolly and freely”’ ... Opinions will rise wherever men communicate freely with one another and have the right to make their views public’ (227). Moreover, ‘no formation of opinion is ever possible where all opinions have become the same’ (225). Disagreements and differentiations could keep such discussions perpetuating. Consider, for example, the issue of abortion (in the United States), on which compromise is seemingly impossible (Lasch 1991a: 111; Matsusaka 2020: 7; 163). In the event these public discussions reach a consensus, there is yet no indication that such a compromise will necessarily prevent disagreements and disputes. For example, a public assembly may end up to the X conclusion and most of its members come to an agreement concerning the validity of this particular conclusion. They do not, however, impose restrictions against future disagreements.

Before going over shedding light on the way *autopoietikos logos* (in relation to *eucosmia*) and disagreement creates fissures that open up spaces for popular identities to be altered gradually (instead of being conceived as static–inorganic–idols), we will have to apply a critical approach to Weil’s (1987a) view for a French patriotism predicated on compassion (proposed as an antidote to uprootedness). The reasons the *fido amor* (from where compassion derives) could possibly hinder *action* and individuality (in the same way as idolatry does), so long as it appears susceptible to the threats of ‘emotional foundationalism’ (see chapter 2), will be elucidated by elaborating on the *dependent* (or *upeksousios*) *logos*. In other words, *logos* is not simply *autopoietikos*. *Upeksousios logos* refers to the form of speech or language that, as Weil (1978; 65; 68) and Hauser (Chomsky 2002: 76), diagnosed (from different angles), conveys thoughts (instead of being merely a means of communication). Thus, we find language (*logos*) under the authority of *thinking* and *judging*.

Let us elaborate further on Weil’s patriotism of compassion, this ‘absolutely pure’

(162) patriotism, seemingly free from any sort of ‘warlike energies’ (163). ‘Compassion for our country is the only sentiment which doesn’t strike a false note at the present time, suits the situation in which the souls and bodies of Frenchmen actually find themselves’ (165). It is ‘all the more tender, all the more poignant, the more good one is able to discern in the being who forms the object of it, and it predisposes one to discern the good’ (ibid). Compassion ‘strongly motivates altruism’ (Nussbaum 2013: 209) and observes ‘both the good and the bad’, seeking to find in each ‘sufficient reasons for loving’ (Weil 1987a: 165). This fraternal feeling of love keeps eyes ‘open to injustices, cruelties, mistakes’ (ibid) and crosses frontiers’, extending ‘itself over all countries in misfortune ... without exception’ (166). As mentioned above, *upeksousios logos* presupposes *judgment*, that is a critical evaluation of concepts and ideas received from our empirical world, upon which we can reflect and/or intuit, constructing axioms that will be phonologically transferred from the silent world of the human mind to the world of common appearances. In this respect, the deprivation of the *logismikon* by the forces of the *fido amor* (by the love of compassion), that is, the obstruction of our capacity to *judge*, *could* render *logos* impotent and superfluous<sup>113</sup>. Of course, as Chapter 2 argued—in agreement with Breithaupt (2019)—to be ‘against’ compassion (or empathy) ‘would be simplistic’ (8). Therefore, one does not have to embrace overly categorical claims, assuming that compassion always (and almost automatically) feeds into ‘emotional foundationalism’ (*deep emotions*), crippling *judgment* and *logos* once and for all. However, ‘to uncritically embrace empathy without caveats’

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113 At this stage one might ask: if *logos* is *upeksousios*—from the Greek *upo* (ὑπό), translated as ‘under’ (Oxford New Greek Dictionary, Nikki Watts 2008, 1: 206) and *eksousia* (ἐξουσία, that is power/authority) (71)—placed *under* the *authority* of the mind (*judgment*), would it be self-contradictory to assume it is ‘*self-functioning*’—that is, capable to function without being under the sway of an external authority—at the same time? Let us look again at the theory of *auto-poiesis*. Just as a cell is dependent on water, oxygen, or another substance, without which it cannot sustain itself, in the same way *logos* cannot exist without judgment. Cells require primary ingredients in order to subsist; once they feed, they become able to function autonomously (Καρκατσούλης 1995 [Karkatsoulis 1995]). Likewise, *judgment* constitutes the prime ingredient of *logos*; in turn, *logos* becomes a means through which *judgment* is enunciated. At the same time, instead of being a mere instrument, *logos* constitutes a ‘living organism’; it has its own substance and character, through which collective realities are constituted. *Logos auto-poietikos* constructs realities that could guarantee peaceful interactions, as long as it precludes violence and coercion. Without peaceful interactions, the networks (public-political realms) within which thoughts and *judgments* find expression (through *up-eksousios logos*) cannot exist (as the previous paragraphs made clear).



(ibid), neglecting that compassion (or empathy) ‘can lead to self-loss’ (17), to depersonalisation (Nietzsche 1967: 140), which effectively puts constraints on the human capacity for *judgment* while ‘delivering aesthetic pleasure to the empathizer’ (Breithaupt 2019: 17) would be equally problematic. ‘Studies have proven that empathy, bit by bit, does the work to solidify hasty judgments’ (99). Therefore, if compassion deprives the *logismikon*, if (in other words) emotional foundationalism cripples *judgment* and if *logos* is *upeksousios*, that is, depended on *thinking and judging*, we end up at the following conclusion: the patriotism of compassion can erect fences against *logos* itself. Furthermore, if *logos* apart from being *upeksousios* is also *autopoietikos*, which relies on individuality (dissent and differentiation), it might be concluded that the patriotism of compassion may stand as an obstacle to the internal differentiations *logos autopoietikos* has need of, differentiations that can prevent the shift towards extreme forms of collective homogenisation Hayek (2007) himself feared and abhorred, a homogenisation that suppresses dissent.

More extensive discussions concerning *logos and individuality* will take place later on. At this stage we could elucidate on another reason the patriotism of compassion (proposed by Weil) is not emancipated from ‘warlike energies’. *Prima facie*, let us return to Niebuhr’s (1960: 91) assertion that collective bodies often regard the latter’s collective will as an expression of their personal will (pathos, in my terms). When this occurs their individual ego is reflected through the collective ego. If pathos fosters competition between individuals, and since an individual self finds its true reflection through this idolised collective self, we can assume that competition between individuals can take the form of competition between collectivities (including nations). In other words, the pathos inciting elevation over others, are extended from the individual level to the collective. Therefore, the antagonism between two or more individuals can often end up a competition between two or more idols, between two or more ‘collective selves’ (nations). On this occasion, ‘patriotism transmutes individual unselfishness into national egoism’ (ibid). This antagonism between collective ‘selves’ reflected through such idols and static images (nations) refers to what Fukuyama (1992) calls as ‘*megalothymia*’ (182), implying the desire/pathos to be recognized as superior to others (184-5; 304) that on certain occasions can have positive impacts, when it is stimulated by healthy competition (315-9), but in

many cases corresponds to the will-to-power, to the pathos for domination we identify in the moral character of authoritarian and/or totalitarian leaders (304-5). The exact translation of the word *megalothymia* would be ‘a great passion for recognition’. It derives from the Greek word *megalos* (μεγάλος) and *thymos*. However, one should note that Fukuyama has made up a word whose meaning (in Greek) is not the same as the one he attributes; for *megalothymia* (or else *megathymia*) refers to «πρᾶον καὶ μεγαλόθυμον [megalothymon] ἦθος» ([Πλάτων 2014: 151 [Plato 2014: 151]), translated as ‘lionhearted’, brave and/or magnanimous (Δημητράκος 2008: 4509 [Dimitrakos 2008: 4509]). Hence, it would be more accurate to replace *megalothymia* with what I have already called ‘hubris’ (or pride, or supremacy), which refers to the most exaggerated versions of *mēnis*. In fact, analogous to what is *hubris* (or excessive pride) for shame is optimism for pessimism.

It is *dignity* and *isothymia* (as the previous chapter explained) what stands in alliance with hope and *eucosmia*, with common decency and *action*. *Hubris*, deriving from the pathos for domination, assigns to this collective self a meaning that indulges our pathos for domination. In contrast, the dignity of nations corresponds to the recognition that all peoples and nations (individually) are capable of serving the ‘universal good’, of benefiting, in other words, all of humanity. If the subversion of one’s capacity to objectively assess a given reality in order to obtain conclusions through analysis according to impartial standards applied (*judgment*) is one of the principal effects of many relationships that rest on the *fido amor*, and since the deprivation of impartiality (due to the deprivation of the *logismikon*, of the *judgmental* mind) by the emotional foundationalism of the *fido amor* itself directly or indirectly force us to accept as true assumptions that gratify our intense sentiments (including the sentiment of pathos), we can assert that the patriotism of compassion is not fully capable of halting sentiments of national egoism/supremacy (*pride* or *hubris*). Therefore, significant revisions of Weil’s approach must be made if we aim to employ its practical value. Can there exist a form of patriotism that crosses frontiers, keeping eyes ‘open on injustices, cruelties, mistakes’ (Weil 1987a: 165)? Can there exist a patriotism whose emphasis on collective solidarity does not suppress free spaces for individual self-expression, which is the type of patriotism Nussbaum (2013: 218) supports as well? Certainly, this would not be the ‘patriotism of compassion’ but a patriotism based on meliorism, based on *eucosmia* and, hence, on *action*

and *logos*, on individuality and open participation.

As we already know, the anthropocentric aspects of *eucosmia* can find expression through the Christian love (or *agape*, in King's terms), through the 'the transcendent worth of ... human personality' (Niebuhr 1960: 59). One could also borrow anthropocentric insights, capable of approaching the notion of *eucosmia*, from non-Christian worldviews, like (for instance) from the 'cosmopolitan', according to Jahanbengloo (2020), Hinduism of Gandhi, or even from secular philosophical systems, from the cosmopolitan thinking of the Stoics, more precisely (Κοντογιώργης 2014: 265 [Contogeorgis 2014: 265]). Insights that lead to *eucosmia* share the unflattering faith in the capacity of the *κόσμος* (cosmos), of the 'ordinary *anthrōpos*', of the 'common people', to sense objectivity and prudence, in halting its *hubris* (incited by *pathos*) by means of persuasion. *Eucosmia* (as I am going to explain in what follows) can lead to *isothymia* and dignity (*aksio-prepeia*). It is unambiguously committed to the idea that all human beings are capable of renouncing aggression, of passing *judgments* so long as they are capable of speaking, *thinking* and *acting*. It might be argued, accordingly, that *eucosmia* addresses Weil's expectations more accurately than compassion. In other words, we could take *eucosmia* (rather than compassion itself) as the most effective stimulus that prompts persons to observe 'both the good and the bad', while keeping an eye 'open to injustices, cruelties, mistakes', in Weil's (1987a: 165) words. Let us pursue this *rationale* further.

*Logos auto-poietikos*, as previously mentioned, in order to create and preserve the network (the public-political realm) within which discussions (arguments and counter-arguments) take place, requires disagreements (*metaxu*): disputes and debates, in turn, presuppose the existence of a plurality of *doxas*, whose expression provoke re-evaluation of one's ideas cemented in the brain. Therefore, dialogue re-activates *judgment* and critical observation, which finds expression through speech. Thus, the public (or the political) realm substitutes violence and competition by physical force (which leads to the Hobbesian war of all against all) with competition of *doxas*. This 'uninterrupted contest of all against all, of *aein aristeuein*', was the most characteristic aspect of the 'agonal spirit of the Greek city-life' (Arendt 2005: 16), where orators were ceaselessly striving to persuade others, promoting their *individual doxa* as the most excellent (Καστοριάδης 2007α: 239 [Castoriadis 2007a: 239]), 'showing oneself to be the best of all' (Arendt 2005: 16). In the

*polis* everyone could distinguish himself from all others by persuading the audience about the superiority of his point of view (1998: 41). This *antagonism* of opinions, this constant challenge of perceptions, allows each participant to endorse a certain opinion (individualism), without conforming to a unified mass.

If *eucosmia* stands for (agonal and narrative) *action*, for *logos*, eloquence and persuasion, and if *agonal* (or *narrative*) *action per se* and individuality are interconnected—in fact, nobody can persuade someone to rectify his/her stance if both are unbending towards each other—we arrive at the following conclusion: individuality is intensified by the public-political realm due to its emphasis on persuasion. Individuality is in tandem with dissent, differentiation and disagreement, with the constant clash of competing *doxas* in the public-political realm, guarantee interactions, constituting a community subject to *changeability*. To crystallise this point: through this process of public interaction and mediation, through such an environment of dialogue and dissent, a chance for members of a collectivity to call into question cultural elements (deeply seated within the customs of their group) that redound to *hubris* and *megalothymia*, to selfish particularism and nationalist (but also racial and/or ethnic) aggression, is potentially given. It might be, therefore, argued that the *vita civile* itself offers a glimmer of hope against the ‘warlike energy’ of *pride* and opens up pathways for members of other groups and collectivities (including nations) to be recognised as equals (*isothymia* or dignity/*aksio-prepeia*). The sacredness and worthiness of each individual is valued, irrespective of his/her membership to a collectivity (nation, town, village, *et al.*) or a (racial and ethnic) group. Members of a group have a chance to improve their decency (*εὖ – eu*) towards other groups and towards the *κόσμος* (*cosmos*), towards peoples and nations of the entire world, in general. Thus, collectivities can acquire the same dignity. They are valued and respected. Hence, it is *eucosmia* what ‘crosses frontiers’, what could soften collective attachments, without on the other hand discarding particularism altogether. As noted earlier, the existence of a (common) space (the *public* or the *political realm*), capable to cause *metavolē* to itself (through public mediation), could hardly be brought into existence without conserving cultural (bonding) memories, which ascribe to a community a particular identity (*gerere*) and allows the same collectivity to come out as a political agent (*agere*), as a *demos*.

### 3) 'Neolithic' conservatism, *metavolē* and the 'world's tide'

Public and grassroots political realms of open participation (as aforementioned) constitute collectivities subject to *metavolē*. Certain fashions and gestures are replaced by new ones. If, for example, the England of 1940 is not the same as the England of 1840, according to Orwell (1984: 13), this could be attributed to the multiple transformations that resulted in the alteration of perceptions and principles which define Englishness. Consider, at this stage, how *metavolē* occurs in relation to an individual who 'has a stock of old opinions [in mind] already, but ... meets a new experience that puts them to a strain' (James 1978: 34). The mind seeks to modify 'his previous mass of opinions' with 'a minimum disturbance' (35). It saves past experiences (ibid) and utilises them in order to synthesise new ideas and concepts. Additionally, let us take into account Emily Brontë's poem *Remembrance* (1846/1992): The poem opens by describing a girl weeping near the 'dreary grave' (8) of her lover. '[F]ifteen wild Decembers' have passed since his death, so the girl begins to wonder whether time has melted away her love or not. Thereupon she adds, '[s]weet Love of youth, forgive, if I forget thee' since 'the world's tide is bearing me along; / Other desires and other hopes beset me' (9; *emphasis added*), since new mundane hopes are constantly created.

In order to crystalise this *rationale*, let us take further the concept of *auto-poietikos* (self-functioning) *logos*. The process through which *logos* procreates the networks within which it can be reproduced perpetually presupposes the existence of (let us say) *dialectical objects*, the existence of one or more issues, topics, inquiries, concerning disputes about public matters, upon which discussions and deliberations can be made in the public-political realm. Through such deliberations potentially new *dialectical objects* are brought into existence. More precisely, in Chapter 3 we examined the way human action brings into existence 'newborn' (and, to a degree) 'unseen realities', whose emergence and content could have never been predicted before. Likewise, dialogue is subject to *fortuna*. When *logos* expresses ideas stored in memory (which is always historicised, as previously mentioned) the same ideas appear within the real world; they are mediated through public conversation; they are compared and contrasted with the ideas and views of others. Out of this friction *new topics* are created, new *dialectical objects* and ideas emerge. These new *objects* are 'new desires and other hopes' (Brontë 1992: 9); they are the products of the so-

called ‘world’s tide’ (ibid); they are the outcomes of the constant interaction between individuals (in narrative and, more importantly, agonal action). These ‘new idea[s] [are] ... adopted as the true one[s]’ but simultaneously most ‘of the older stock of truths’ are preserved with ‘a minimum of modification’ (James 1978: 35).

Furthermore, the same old ideas could be another outcome of a synthesis of older ideas. ‘[F]or in this matter of belief’ adds James ‘we are all extreme conservatives’ (ibid). The word ‘conservatism’ derives from the word ‘τήρησις’ and ‘τηρέω’ (to protect and preserve), ‘which Epictetus used in order to describe the divine law’ (Huttunen 2010: 45), the ‘physical cosmic agent, which “forms” and “keeps” ... all there is’ (Harrill 2010: 128), the ‘existing community bonds’ that ‘are destroyed at peril’ (Goodman 1970: 192). This ‘neolithic’ conservatism, to use Goodman’s (1970) term, is willing ‘to give up everything else to conserve community bonds’ (192), to preserve the treasure of old memories. But this appeal to a common past is expressed as a form of ‘gratitude’ towards old concepts and ideas (Lasch 1991a: 90; Theodosiadis 2019: 116-7). Gratitude, instead of disparaging the present, idealising the past as a symbol of lost innocence ‘no longer accessible’ (as is the case of nostalgia) (ibid), or converting a collectivity into a symbol that indulges the hubris of nationalist idolatry, does not turn a blind eye on the ‘world’s tide’ (to use Brontë’s terms) or *metavolē*, on the process of constant re-creation of new ideas and concepts. Consider, in addition, the Japanese/Buddhist notion of wabi sabi, which may also shed further light on the *serene* and *warm feeling* of gratitude. According to this notion, objects are often considered to be manifestations of *mujo*, that is, of transience, changeability and impermanence (Juniper 2003: 162). Objects of *mujo* are ‘vehicles for ... contemplation’ (10), vehicles for *thinking*. In the same way, memorable (cultural or otherwise) objects can be manifestations of *mujo*, of a changeable (rather static) reality. Hence, they are vehicles for *judgement*, often stimulated through *agonal and narrative action* (see chapter 5). For Juniper (2003), wabi sabi is ‘associated with this quality, and as such *mujo* forms a defining aspect of wabi sabi objects’ (10). Furthermore, wabi sabi objects can ‘bring about, within us, a sense of serene melancholy and a spiritual longing’ (ibid). Likewise, common bonding (cultural or civil) memories could bring a sense of *serene melancholy*, or (to put it in my terms) a *serene emotional* appeal to ‘the reassuring memory of happy times’, in Lasch’s (1991a: 82), which relies on the past in order to draw strength and courage, facing the

challenges of the present (83; 90-1)<sup>114</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, public deliberations and debates (*action*) could constitute inherited norms and past ideas (essential aspects of a common identity) subject to *public judgment*. I have explained how this process of public mediation causes *metavolē* to the same identity. Does this, however, exclude the possibility for *action*, for public debates, to conclude in favour of conserving and protecting such norms and ideas? Here we could argue that even in cases where public deliberations converge in favour of defending and conserving the *status quo*, such decisions are products of *judgmental* moves, rather the outcome of *pathos*, which could theologise and instrumentalise the same common identity. Individuality, to put it differently, allows everyone ‘to believe what is true for [their] private heart is true for all men’ (Emerson 2000: 132) without conforming to ‘badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions’ (135), to customs and commonly accepted beliefs (Mill 2008: 59; 70). To avoid misunderstandings (1995a) this view of individuality must not be conflated with the neoliberal understanding of individuality, with the idea that persons can ‘learn to speak for themselves ... in a world in which there are no values’, in Lasch’s (1995a: 97) terms. While *action* and (*autopoietikos*) *logos* requires individual autonomy, at the same time, the individual mind presupposes the existence of a collectivity to function as a source of memorable objects for wonder to reflect upon. Although the process of altering a collective identity (shaped by the sum of bonding memories, of internalised ideas and concepts) requires interactions, that is community and public action, at the same time, this collective identity must be internalised in the collective conscious and unconscious; it must live in the sum of the individual minds of those who are members of the same collectivity. This internalised identity becomes a form of *gerere*. It can find expression in the public-political realm, within which plurality of dissimilar and *individual doxas* are disclosed as distinct from others; in the public-political realm it is mediated and, out of this process of public interaction, *new dialectical objects* are created.

This, in fact, is the main difference between the rugged individualism of eighteenth

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114 Lasch’s view on gratitude and courage (from memory), his rejection of nostalgia or of similar reactions that stimulate idolisation of the past, is the outcome of his reflection on William Wordsworth’s *Prelude*: ‘We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind’ (quotes by Lasch 1991a: 90).



century economic liberalism (also called *possessive individualism*)<sup>115</sup>, and the ‘responsible’ individualism of the *vita civile*. The former rests on a positive assessment of the unrestrained self-interest and often (implicitly) justifies selfish pursuits as a hallmark of progress, of endless industrial expansion and material abundance (Lasch 1991a: 45; 53). As also Tocqueville (1994) asserted, ‘[s]elfishness is a vice as old as the world ... individualism is of democratic origin’ (2: 98). Selfishness ‘saps the virtues of public life’ and it ‘leads a man to connect everything with himself and to prefer himself to everything in the world’ (ibid). Civic virtue, according to Pocock (1975), consists in ‘placing the common good ... above one’s personal profit’ (464). But as opposed to extreme forms of collectivism, where individuality is sacrificed *in toto* (Hayek 2007: 175), for the *vita civile* the life of the state is not superior to the life of the individual. While the individual is connected with his/her peers and recognises that he/she has unconditional obligations toward them, at the same time, his/her individual worth, free will and *logos* are highly valued and respected; they are means through which the common good is better served and conserved. Put in rather stark terms, while individuals can exist as autonomous *thinkers* and *actors*, their self-reliance must never encourage selfishness and, more importantly, must not undermine their allegiance to community (Scruton 2007: 24-5). Mill’s insistence on individuality must not go as far as to declare tradition ‘the enemy of human liberty ... and progress’ (Deneen 2018: 145) that deserves to ‘be overthrown so that those who seek to live according to personal choices’ are free to do so (144). For Deneen, tradition (bonding memory), rather than administrative directives and bureaucratic apparatuses, should control individual attitudes, and restrain individual greed (38; 62). Rugged individualism ‘demands the dismantling of culture; and as culture fades, Leviathan waxes and responsible liberty recedes’ (88). Without culture and community, without a common space within which direct and indirect interactions take place, neither the public-political realm nor the individual (as a *thinking* individual) can exist. If *thinking* presupposes memory, on which our *thinking ego* lives in order to identify objects, a *thinking* sovereign individual is the one who relies on his/her memories in order to evaluate (*nóēsis*) internalised concepts and ideas, as opposed to the rugged individualist, who claims

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115 See chapter 3 (second section).



emancipation from the past and understands happiness only in relation to his/her own ephemeral private enjoyments. In the end, as Brontë (1992) put it, '[f]aithfull, indeed, is the spirit that remembers' (9), the spirit that recognises the significance of memory (*gerere*), refusing to adopt the doctrine of progress, the doctrine of liberal optimism, accompanied by rampant innovation and excessive individualism, breaking up collective attachments, fostering oblivion and uprootedness.

### Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the merits of the modest patriotism advocated by the *vita civile*, of the patriotism of *eucosmia*, grounded on *action*. This nuanced and ethical patriotism suggests a middle path between the twin perils of 'national selfishness', to use King's (1986: 29) terms, and the nihilism of uprootedness (discussed in Chapter 4), of the so-called *cultural de-composition* and social nihilism. More precisely, the patriotism of *eucosmia* relies on (*autopoietikos* and *upekousios*) *logos*, on dialogue, openness and dissent, on 'publicness' and individuality. In the public-political realm a great plurality of viewpoints come together and conflict with each other. This constant chain of arguments and counterarguments requires individuality (as the third section of this chapter made clear) and, for this reason, has the capacity to prevent collectivities from becoming unanimous bodies. As Canovan (1996) puts it, 'when we use the term ['people'] in a collectivist sense to refer to a nation we give it a *plural verb*' (20; *emphasis added*). Consequently, to suggest that 'the Scottish people demands independence' (ibid) is to approach the 'Scottish people' *per se* as a unanimous collectivity, as a national *society* (in the Arendtian sense of the word), rigidly identified by a common voice. In contrast, the plural verb, "'the Scottish people *demand* independence'" (ibid; *my emphasis*) refers to the 'people of Scotland' as a multivariate national *community* (or *society*), consisting of several interacting groups, sub-groups and individuals. *Action*, which incorporates individuality and dialogue (*autopoietikos* and *upekousios logos*) leads to *public judgment*; it gradually alters collective identities, erecting fences against nationalist idolatry. The patriotism of *eucosmia*, the patriotism of the *vita civile*, extends the idea of individual worth from the individual to the collective level (to the nation, in other words), melting down national egoisms. This patriotism is at heart melioristic. It does not guarantee absolute protection from collective

egoism in every instance. However, it bestows hope for decency and dignity; it encourages *iso-thymia*, the brotherhood of man, to use a more vernacular language, which does not rest on some ‘abstract idea of universal human rights’ (Lasch 1991a: 36) but on man’s ‘common weakness and frailty’ as King’s Christian universalism advocates (390).

This cosmopolitanism, however, still bases itself on the merits of a modest particularism, on the need for roots, on some mild attachment to ‘specific people and places’ (Lasch 1991a: 36), without which no public realm can be ever brought into life. In the end, as Burke (1969) put it, ‘[a] state without the means of some change’, that is without being capable of reforming itself, ‘is without the means of its conservation’ (106). A constitution in order to be preserved must be flexible and open to alterations (ibid). Likewise, a collective identity, in order to be conserved, must be open to public mediation; it must be subject to new influences, to steady and gradual (or organic) *metavolē*. Under such conditions collectivities ‘whether racial, national or economic’ can ‘achieve a degree of reason and sympathy which would permit them to see and to understand the interests of others as vividly as they understand their own’, to borrow Niebuhr’s (1960) words, and ‘a moral goodwill which would prompt them to affirm the rights of others as vigorously as they affirm their own’ (xxiv). ‘[T]he desire to conserve is compatible with all manner of change, provided only that change is also continuity’ (Scruton 2007: 11) and does not wipe out the entire collectivity. As Frye (1982) pointed out, ‘real freedom is something that only the individual can experience’ (87). But as opposed to the rugged individualism of eighteenth-century economic liberalism, which treats personal autonomy as an ultimate end in itself, according to Kondylis (2007: 220-1 [Κονδύλης 2007: 220-1]), for the *vita civile* the individual is only a cog in the machine of public life; ‘[t]he individual grows out of society like a plant out of its soil’ and never breaks ‘away from it’ (Frye 1982: 87). In addition, a ‘public world’ ‘[is] a world structured by traditions, and that such a world could come into and remain in existence only if there was a “continuum of public and private memories’ (Arendt 1990: 267). In heritage cultural elements (symbols of a common heritage, images and folkways of a common life, lodged in our physical collective memory) create and preserve an empirical world within which individuals feel naturally included. This world not only offers ‘a kind of refuge, a place to which a people may repair for warmth’ but, more importantly, becomes a source of ‘inspiration’ (263) (*gerere*).

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

This dissertation begun with a critical reflection on Lasch's *TTOH* and, more importantly, on his emphasis on the distinctions between optimism and hope. For Lasch (1991a), optimism refers to the eighteenth-century liberal idea of progress, of 'steady improvement with no foreseeable ending at all' (47) and 'with the modern discovery of [material] abundance' (55). Hope, on the other hand, does not approach history through the angle of 'progress', advocating permanent improvement, on 'confidence' in the future (113). In Lasch's (1991c) worldview, hope is associated with democracy and, in turn, democracy with populism, a type of populism that draws on classical republicanism, nevertheless. The primary aim of this dissertation was to expand Lasch's analysis (his view of hope, as opposed to optimism). Thus, it addressed a set of basic *problématiques* revolving around the key arguments upon which the defenders of (liberal) optimism, as well as the defenders of pessimism, justify their position. In addition, it cast a critical eye on the impasses of the practical implementation of political projects that rely on pessimistic and/or liberal optimistic philosophical axioms. Finally, it examined the possible responses alternative political philosophies could offer, and, more precisely, the republican philosophy of Arendt, which has been one of the main influences for Lasch. In order to identify the key arguments upon which schools of political pessimism rest, I took into consideration Hobbes' and Filmer's absolutist (pessimistic) theories, coupled with theoretical viewpoints offered by crowd psychologists (such as Le Bon and Taine). The reason behind this emphasis on the pessimism of Anglo-American absolutism (over other strands of political pessimism) rests primarily on the *genealogical* connections between Hobbes' thought with liberal optimism. As Chapter 3 stressed, one of the main objectives of Hobbes' absolutism was to secure peace (against the dread of *perpetual war*, the possible consequences of the insatiable human desire for possession), even through the expulsion of the 'common people' from decision-making, from political *action* (in other words). Likewise, Locke's contractarian theory, revolving around the idea of limited government and consent, which *genealogically* follows Hobbes' absolutism, is indifferent to *action*. As Chapter 3 argued, consent and liberty alone are incapable of precipitating conditions

whereby active citizenship becomes a real possibility. Having expelled *action*, contemporary analysts who draw on Locke's theory of limited government, have substituted the absolute rule of the Sovereign with the rule of the market, which although it permits dissent and freedom of expression to a certain degree, remains intrinsically anti-populist. This anti-populism is masked with an overt optimism that standards of living will improve simply through the rapid and boundless expansion of the market forces. It has been also commented that the dominance of capitalism, that is, of the endless expansion of production (and consumption), in conjunction with the prevalence of the rule of law (against despotism) would be the final point in mankind's history, one of the greatest achievements of humanity (Fukuyama 1992). The psychoanalytic viewpoints developed in Chapter 2 challenged the panacea of economic liberalism—the total subjection of societies and individuals to the market (as the only means of salvation from the vices of human nature)—by emphasising the non-rational (tragic) way through which human collectivities institute themselves.

In response to the third *problématique*, we have examined the way melioristic populist projects, like the populism of the *vita civile*, create conditions for common decency to spring and flourish. To summarize: the *vita civile* relies on *action*, on the direct involvement of the 'common people' in public affairs. *Action* is also synonymous with ethical memory and *logos*, and requires *virtù*, the courage and resilience through which the appetites of *fortuna*, the consequences of 'tragedy' (Chapter 2), are restrained. Courage is indispensable in the political realm (Arendt 1968a: 156), which is never fully sealed from the arbitrariness of *fortuna*, from the devastating outcomes of human pathos. Thus, the populism of the *vita civile* is intrinsically anti-utopian and anti-optimistic. It derives from a democratic tradition that, in Lasch's (1991a) words, 'offers no panacea for all the ills that afflict the modern world' (532). *Genealogically* speaking, this tradition begins with the Greek *polis*, and—as both Arendt (1998) and Contogeorgis (Κοντογιώργης 2014; 2020) argued—to a lesser degree in the Roman republics. . It encompasses anthropocentric elements, which (in the western world) have re-emerged (partially as a *henkfurt* or a *metharmōsis*) in the Renaissance and, more importantly, in democratic revolutions inspired by the project of the Enlightenment, like the proto-anthropocentric French and the American Revolution. Anthropocentric elements have been more abundantly emerged

during the American cooperative movement (Populism) and, finally, in the *eucosmia* of Martin Luther King Jr.

When it comes to King's anthropocentric philosophy, consider the following famous phrase from his 'I Have A Dream speech': one day 'my four little children will ... live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by content of their character' (King 1978: 219). Centrist intellectuals (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2018) often quote this phrase in order to portray King as a liberal individualist, whose worldview conflicts with the logic of 'identity politics' spotted in several contemporary left-wing trends. As they assert, the latter's focus on (black) identity intensifies divisions (ibid). It 'goes against the most common sense of fairness and reciprocity' so long as it considers society a battleground between privileged and unprivileged groups (ibid). This exclusive focus on identity and 'victimhood' perpetuates tensions instead of promoting friendship and reciprocity (ibid). The threats of white supremacy could be combated through the rule of law, which treats every individual man and woman, irrespective of race or sex, according to her/his achievements (ibid). As Chapter 6 argued, such an interpretation points to the proto-anthropocentric *weltanschauung* of American liberalism. A more rigorous examination of King's philosophy (see Chapter 5) could lead us to a different conclusion concerning his philosophy: King had faith in the value of the human person, black and white, who does not simply have equal rights and responsibilities by law. Every individual is 'made in God's image' and is 'a person of *sacred* worth' (Raboteau 2017; *emphasis added*). Even if a person is an enemy, he/she should be treated as a potential ally (ibid), because '[t]he worth of an individual does not lie in the measure of ... his racial origin, or his social position. Human worth lies in relatedness to God' (King 1986: 122), to a transcendent force 'whose infinite *love* embraces all mankind' says King (1986: 515; *emphasis added*), while reflecting on Tolstoy's *Confessions*. We have seen that this particular love (*agape*) can be a manifestation of the friendship of *eucosmia*, for which every individual is an *intelligent* unique being, capable to use his/her *logos and judgment*, contributing to the common *eu* (good). In turn, *intelligence* (as Chapter 5 claimed) is manifested through the virtues of democratic participation the Civil Rights Movement, according to Lasch (1991a: 404; 1995: 83) and Raboteau (2017) attempted to put into practice. As opposed to the mainstream liberal (proto-anthropocentric) approach, our

interpretation of King's *agape* does not exclusively lead us to the conclusion that the Civil Rights Movement was only about equality before the law. King's *eucosmia* could lead us to the following assumption: African-Americans had also to win their dignity, their *axio-prepeia*, their recognition and self-worth as democratic citizens and, therefore, as *intelligent* persons, capable of *acting*, of using their *logos*, their *thinking* and *judgment* (in the eyes of the white majority).

Of course, there are more historical examples worthy to be studied be taken as case-studies for further research, while examining the re-emergence of democratic (anthropocentric) ideas or even the way self-organised communities are (self)instituted (to use Castoriadis' terms). For example, the English villages (briefly mentioned in Chapter 3) and the process whereby modernisation and industrialisation deprived their autonomy, the plethora of self-organised communes during the European Middle Ages, are additional cases. In addition, we have several times mentioned Contogeorgis' view concerning the Byzantine age as among the main cornerstones of anthropocentrism in the Hellenic world. This prompts us to dig deeper into the hitherto published scholarship concerning the potential contribution of the Byzantine millennia in democracy and *action*. This analysis will take place in another dissertation, which will also attempt to shed light on the way deliberative democracy could also arise from non-western philosophical roots, as in the work of Amartya Sen (for example). We could, thus, broaden our perspectives on *action* and *eucosmia*, which (to repeat once more) constitutes a more melioristic (in comparison to that pursued by Contogeorgis) interpretation of anthropocentrism *per se*.

In addition, meliorism (or hope) rejects the optimistic belief in 'the limitless capacities of human intelligence' (Lasch 1990: 13) and does not rely exclusively on the moral capacities of *logos* and ethical memory. Chapter 6 (by examining the case of the French Revolution) has shown that populist trends and revolutions inspired by the Rousseauian optimistic view of human nature, incubate threats as they systematically neglect the inherent human proclivity towards hubris, or at least, the possibility for such a tendency to exist and to manifest itself in the public sphere abruptly and almost without our knowledge (*fortuna*). In that sense, Canovan (1998) was right to assert that Arendt's *action* recommends 'a life of heroic action' (xiii). Action is exposed to hubris and 'sets off new processes [sometimes] beyond the actors' control' (Canovan 1998, p.xiii); it is

contingent and has unforeseeable consequences, even at odds with those initially intended (Lasch 1991a: 133; Arendt 1998: 176; Straume 2012: 373; 375).

As, however, Castoriadis (2015 [Καστοριάδης 2015]) argued, democracies in order to minimise the effects of hubris, require enhanced constitutional provisions, capable of protecting individual freedoms from the arbitrariness of an unrestrained majority (103). Nonetheless, such institutional safeguards will never cease being subjects of dispute by certain individuals; they can, eventually, be called into question at any time by a social majority which, in the midst of a breakdown, may decide to push reforms toward a direction that cancels all these legal prohibitions against the violation of ‘inalienable’ liberties and freedoms for certain groups or individuals (103). ‘The idea of a non-modifiable constitution is a legal and factual absurdity’ (Castoriadis 2007c: 123). In the worst case scenario, if political representatives deny constitutional reforms based on the demands of a majority (irrespective how imprudent this majority can be), nothing stops the latter from pursuing such objectives through violent means (popular unrest and insurrections) (Καστοριάδης 2015: 103 [Castoriadis 2015: 103]).

The fourth *problématique* this dissertation addresses revolves around discussions concerning the impasses of *action* in general and, simultaneously, highlights the practical insufficiency of all legal provisions and restrictions (like, for instance, the *paranómōn graphē* and the *apatin tou dimou*)<sup>116</sup> to protect permanently a populace from its own hubris. With regard to such matters, Arendt’s (1968a) position is of particular interest: fearing the consequences of *thoughtlessness* she spoke in favour of civil disobedience and backed the idea of incorporating civil disobedience within the political institutions of the United States (including the Constitution), providing legal recognition (and protection) to acts that condemn and expose abuse of power, alienation of freedoms (49-102). Such a move would not only offer legal recognition to the right of opinion, but (more importantly) would oblige certain institutions to acknowledge the objections of dissenting groups. Only under these conditions the fruits of the ‘unlimited use of the freedom of enunciating all possible opinions’ (Mill 2008: 52) could be really tasted. Chapter 6, by examining Martin Luther King Jr’s campaign, emphasised the importance of civil disobedience in relation to the

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116 See Chapter 5 (subsection: *institutions and tradition*).

concept of *self-purification*, which creates the conditions within which moral transgressions are (potentially) ended and resurrects the dormant collective *nóēsis*, boosting the collective ‘nill -will, paving the way for beauty, truth and justice. Collective self-purification (collective *katharsis*) requires dramatisation and, hence, a genuine appeal to our *serene emotions*. However, collective *katharsis* comes through individual self-purification. In turn, individual *katharsis* presupposes connection with the anonymous dimensions of the so-called impersonal realm, a transcendent realm ‘situated above this world’ (Weil 1987a: 4). It is a sacred space within which no collectivity can intrude (Weil 2005: 75). The impersonal realm connects us with a high moral idea which it highlights the moral boundaries between *hubris* and common decency (the *eu-prēpon*). It emancipates the ‘I’ from negative prejudices (products of pathos).

It follows, therefore, that common decency cannot be entrusted to secular republicanism alone. As a matter of fact, the relative success of the American Revolution, the abolition of slavery and the democratic hope the cooperative movement inspired to the ‘common people’ owe much to religion and spirituality (Chapter 6). For this reason the previous chapters highlighted the significance of a new Great Awakening to accompany projects inspired by classical republicanism. Furthermore, religious ideas could offer primary motivations for individuals to pursue what Milton believed a true revolution within the human mind (Frye 2005: 110); it is the revolution against the pathos for unbridled self-interest and unlimited material possessions. Eventually, Weil (1987a) was right to argue in favour of a spiritual revival as a potential solution to France’s cultural and political decay; such a move, she argued, would not only reduce the devastating effects of uprootedness, allowing the French to rediscover their rich cultural past, but (more importantly) it would cultivate a sense of belonging emancipated from the hubris of nationalist idolatry. A patriotism in harmony with the principles of *eucosmia* (discussed in the previous chapter), allows us to appreciate the value of particularism, that is, the value of bonding (civil and/or cultural) memory, without discarding cosmopolitanism, *id est*., the significance of nations and peoples to be ‘good’ (*eu*) with the *κόσμος* (*cosmos*, the world), with other nations and peoples, valuing their dignity (*axio-prepeia*)<sup>117</sup>. More importantly, by considering the

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117 In fact, by examining the case of nostalgia, in Chapter 4, we have seen how the collapse of this empirical world of common memories incites *mēnis*, by making possible for human wonder to



existence of such transcendent dimensions, we open up ourselves to spheres from which the mind could grasp new modes of interpreting secular life. Thus, apart from *impersonality* and purification, the impersonal realm becomes a source of infusion of radical ideas, which could help us to identify falsely established perceptions and appraisals (upon which most liberal modern societies have been instituted).

Thus, a new perception concerning so-called ‘inalienable rights’ could be promoted, by emphasising obligation, from where the right to life and freedom (not just liberty) derives. Consider, for example, the Bill of Obligations and the Universal Declaration of Human Duties; in the catalogue of human obligations we can prioritise the duty to respect in each human being the capacity for *freedom* (the *raison d'être* of *action*), which appears absent from Weil’s catalogue of needs, as outlined in *The Need for Roots* (1952/1987a). Instead Weil retreats to the idea of limited government: liberty, as she argues, is interpreted as the ‘ability to choose’ (p.12). More importantly, in order to avoid licentiousness, liberty must be limited by ‘sufficiently sensible and sufficiently straightforward’ rules (ibid). These limitations must derive ‘from a source of authority which is not looked upon as strange or hostile, but loved as something belonging to those placed under its direction’ (ibid). ‘[O]bedience, to established rules’, another essential need of the human soul, ‘presupposes consent’, or obedience itself gradually degenerates into absolutism (p.13). Liberty (see Chapter 3), a proto-anthropocentric concept, has very little to say about active citizenship. Neo-republican thinkers, like Pettit (1997), juxtaposes liberty (the so-called ‘non-interference liberty’) with the liberty of ‘non-domination’. ‘I may be dominated by another—for example, to go to the extreme case, I may be the slave of another—without actually being interfered with in any of my choices. It may just happen that my master is of a kindly and non-interfering disposition’ (22). Slavery, in other words, is a matter of ‘domination’ rather just interference. Debates concerning the flaws of ‘non-domination liberty’ should take place in separate research. Here, we can briefly assert that the liberty of ‘non-domination’ is trapped within the same *weltanschauung* that lies in the

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intrude into the underworld, permitting pathos to take over all human incentives. To a degree, Hobbes (2006) was correct to defend the existence of a common power to keep everyone in awe in order to avoid the chaos of war (70). It is not, however, his extreme statism (the absolute Sovereign) what preserves order but a common empirical world, shaped by bonding memories, by a common heritage.

underpinnings of the ‘non-interference’ liberty; it barely escapes the pursuit of self-actualisation at all costs, even at the expense of commitment to culture, tradition (*ethimikon*) and to the civic life of the political realm. More importantly, non-domination liberty does not incite *action*. In contrast, *action* is strictly associated with the concept of *eucosmia* and with the notion of *freedom* as it has been interpreted by Arendt, which Pettit dismisses as ‘populist’ and ‘communitarian’ that promotes homogenisation, precluding plurality and dissent (8).

To conclude, ‘hope “is confined to this life and to purgatory, and has no place either in heaven or in hell”’ (Bockmuehl 2012: 15); hope achieves its significance and meaning in opposition to the other ‘two false and perverse substitutes’, the belief that assured happiness is totally ‘under our control’ (p.18), or the withdrawal to a state of deep desperation, conformity and passivity. As King (1986) put it, ‘something in the universe unfolds for justice’ (14); ‘in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship’ (40). According to John Steinbeck (1976), ‘[i]t isn’t that the evil thing wins—it will never will—but it doesn’t die’ (221). Evil does not win as long as our belief in hope remains strong, which in turn ‘demands a belief in justice’ (Lasch 1990: 13), a belief in (political) *action*, and faith in ‘the common people’ (*eucosmia*), who can tame their inner lions of pathos, by joining forces in the pursuit of intelligence and public happiness. From a contextualist point of view: Steinbeck’s (1976) phrase is taken from his letter to Pascal Covici, written in January 1941, right in the midst of the Second World War (221); King’s words are extracted from his texts on non-violence written during the late 1950s, during the culmination of fight against the Jim Crow laws. In times of great misfortune a belief in the idea that in cosmic companionship (King 1986, p.20), a belief in ‘some kind of underlying justice in the universe in spite of evidence to the contrary ... that would justify cynicism and despair’ (Lasch 1991c) is necessary for individuals to remain *active*, to avoid the pitfalls of desperation and melancholy. Such a belief should not be conflated with the reckless belief in optimism. King, indeed, ‘had seen too much suffering to embrace the dogma of progress’, that is, the ‘theories of ... “false” [and] “superficial” optimism’ (Lasch 1991a: 391). In his view, the conviction that justice exists ‘in the order of being [derives] from something “deep down within”’ (ibid), from the *inner light*, from the saintly love (*agape*) of God ‘operating in the human heart’ (King 1986, p.9). On the other hand, evil

does not die; pathos is an integral aspect of human existence, an essential ingredient of the ‘terrifying formidableness (*deinotēs*) [*δεινότης*] of *anthrōpos*’ (Castoriadis 2007c: 14).

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