On Politics[1]

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Politics is a fundamental part of human existence, a constituting element of society, i.e., there cannot be real humanity without it. Unavoidably, politics exists, first, because man is a socio-historical being with contradictory aspirations, and second, because social development is not set beforehand but, on the contrary, is always undetermined. It emerges fully, as an autonomous category, when, within a given society, the kinship system can no longer regulate conflicts and determine common objectives. At the same time, it constitutes both a practice and a field.

As a practice, politics can be defined as the art of decision-making concerning the common good. It is an art, rather than a science, because it implies a plurality of choices, and its objectives depend on ever changing, but concrete situations. This art requires discretion when determining means and ends, because politics can only create provisional resolutions. It also requires decision, because deliberation alone is not enough to lead to action. All common space implies a plurality of agents, aspirations or viewpoints (the "polytheism of values") and thus a framework within which these aspirations and viewpoints can be differentiated. Evidently, as far as the common good is concerned, it is not the aggregation of particular interests, but what is missing in every individual taken separately.

As a field, politics designates the public dimension of the social. Thus, it presupposes the distinction between public and private. (The subordination of the public to the private characterizes liberal governments, while the opposite characterizes totalitarian regimes). When juxtaposed to the private, which corresponds to the familial, domestic and economic

1. Translated by Julia Kostova.

sphere of necessity, politics represents the sphere of freedom. It is a privileged access and use of freedom, a way to achieve excellence. The political field is a space of reciprocity, where people do not meet as private individuals but as citizens, in order to act and decide in common. The fundamental role of politics is to organize communities by holding them together. It institutionalizes social relations, establishes dependencies, founds mutual belonging, and fulfills the desire to live together (*philia*). It is the place for face-to-face encounters where common business is transacted. As Gauchet notes, politics "does not dictate its mode of existence, it makes it happen." Althusius correctly defines politics as "the art of association" (*consociandi*). Both as the medium for collective existence based on mutual relations and specific forms of action, politics is the place where the *common* is negotiated.

Thus, politics is not reduced to the organization of powers or the ability to "designate the enemy," and even less to the level of a simple system of command and obedience. Politics is not exclusively related to the state. The mistake of reducing it to state power is to believe that, to the extent that the state represents politics, it *is* society. It is not. It does not determine social forms and cultural values. Rather, the opposite is the case: the codification of cultural values and social forms determines the system of power. The denial of the ontological condition of plurality leads to an unlimited privileging of unity, which violates the social and ends in tyranny. This is the basis of all systems inherited from Roman absolutism.

Politics appeared in Greece at the same time as democracy. Better yet, it appeared *as democracy.* This is not an accident. Assuming that participation in public life is the best way for people to improve and to exercise freedom, as claimed by the whole tradition that runs from Aristotle to Hannah Arendt, then democracy is not "the least bad political system," as is often claimed by some who see it as the lesser evil. Rather, it is the best and maybe even the only truly *political* system to the extent that it is the only one based on the principle of participation of the largest possible number of people in public affairs. In essence, then, democracy is first and foremost participatory, rather than representative. Participatory democracy is a form of generalized reciprocity. It is to politics what the ceremonial gift is to sociology: a means for mutual recognition within a given community. Within this community, it achieves what the ancient right of people achieved with respect to war: to limit hostility. It allows for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and for the determination of opponents without criminalizing or annihilating them. On the contrary, to the

extent that they boil politics down to simple power plays, all despotisms betray its spirit, because they are based on confiscation.

Today, many writers talk about the end or the death of politics, whether to praise or deplore it. Others acknowledge that there has been a "depolitization."[2] This is not a new complaint, but recently it has been made more frequently. How is such a conclusion reached? Nowadays, predominant ideologies treat politics as discontinuous with human nature, as something added on — an artificiality. Here, the opinion of the Moderns differs from that of the Ancients. When he defined man as a "social and political animal," Aristotle meant that politics is a constituting dimension of the social, and, more precisely, of the socio-historical.

For modern thinkers, the transition from the "natural" to the social state is explained by the quest for security, survival and self-preservation. According to Hobbes, man enters society to avoid the war of "all against all." For Locke, this occurs in order to better protect individual rights already obtaining in the natural state. As such, man is no longer political by nature, but becomes so by necessity. His true nature is both pre-social and pre-political; he is an independent, disconnected individual. *Necessity*, related to fear or interest, is substituted by *telos*, which is related to the search for the best way to live together, for common goods and shared values. As Myriam d'Allonnes writes, ". . . political modernity is spreading globally based on this change of direction: from concern with ends to concern with origins. What is this origin? It is the *individual* or, more precisely, the multiplicity of individuals simultaneously posed as the foundation, considered to be self-sufficient, and left to its own devices and dysfunctions until an order or regulation emanating from a principle intervenes, which is simultaneously unifying and extrinsic: political society."[3]

Here, there is another fundamental difference between the Ancients and the Moderns. The latter see necessity at the origin of politics. For the Greeks, it is exactly the opposite: the public sphere corresponds by definition to the sphere of freedom, while everything that emerges from necessity is relegated to the private sphere. This results in a radical transformation of the status of freedom. While for the Ancients freedom was achieved first and foremost by the citizens' active and constant

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2. See Pierre Birnbaum, *La fin du politique* (Paris: Hachette, 1995); Nicolas Tennser, *La société depolitisée* (Paris: PUF, 1990); Myriam Revault d'Allonnes, *Le dépérissement de la politique, Généalogie d'un lieu commun* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002); *La fin des souverainetés*, a special issues of *Revue politique et parlementaire* (Paris, 2001).

3. D'Allonnes, *Le dépérissement de la politique*, *op. cit*., pp. 72-73.

involvement in public life, for the Moderns, or, more precisely, for the liberals, freedom is defined as what cannot be truly enjoyed outside the private sphere. That means that freedom is no longer what allows for politics, but what is taken away from it. Initially, freedom is the possibility to escape from the public sphere, to be free from politics. "Freedom begins where politics ends." It "is no longer connected with politics — the city — but with that part of existence which is independent of politics."[4]

This concept of "extracted" freedom is mitigated by the idea that political power is only a necessary evil, that by nature all power is dangerous: always suspected of seeking to expand, power threatens freedom, because freedom is defined as that part of existence which escapes it. According to classical thinkers, the *raison d'être* of politics is above all to allow and to guarantee the satisfaction of individual needs and the fulfillment of private desires. The fundamental question is no longer about political power, but its limitation. Then, the "private" individual is not only cut off, but virtually opposed to the citizen. As D'Allonnes notes: "In the natural community, the problem of integration now becomes a problem of separation . . . . From the moment freedom is defined as part of individual existence, detached from politics, it is not surprising that such logic — of separation and of individual independence from power — carries the seeds of conflict between the individual and the citizen, between the public and the private, as well as a preference for private satisfactions."[5]

The distinction between public and private acquires a new meaning. While for the Greeks the private sphere could not be the locus of freedom, because it is the locus of necessity and need, this same private sphere, redefined as "civil society," is juxtaposed to the public — the domain of power, constraints, and domination. Civil society, which comes about when the political community is no longer regarded as a natural fact, is the concept which, posing the social as a synonym for the private, cuts off its political dimension. Politics is no longer a *dimension of the social*, but part of the public sphere.

Since the community is no longer a natural fact, the well-known answer to the question concerning what makes society possible points to the dialectic of egoistic interests and the multiplication of exchanges: social relations are instituted by *contract* and maintained by the *market*. These two concepts which, as Hegel showed, result from the same abstract presuppositions, allow for a better understanding of the antagonism

4. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
5. *Ibid*., pp. 93-94.

between civil society and the public sphere. Since private interests give way to the public sphere through exchanges, civil society as the place where they occur can only come first, both chronologically and in importance. From the contract's perspective, power is perceived as a threat to be held in check; its only function is to guarantee individual rights and allow individuals to pursue their private interests. From the market's perspective, it remains auxiliary to the economy (it establishes a market place), destined to extinction, because the simple dialectic of interests is supposed to lead to society's self-regulation.[6]

What is important is that, according to contract theoreticians, politics can end just as it began: created by an act of will, it can disappear in the same way if men no longer need it. Some talk about the need to reassert the "primacy of politics." Modern thinkers challenge this primacy by denying the "natural" character of politics and considering it to be artificial. But what does "the primacy of politics" mean? The priority of the common good over individual interests? The superiority of political over religious, esthetic, military as well as economic and market values? Does it mean that politics comes before culture, or before society of which it is a dimension?[7] The question remains ambiguous.[8] That is why it is better to talk about the

6. *Ibid.*, p. 97. As D'Allonnes put it: ". . . this reversal has been made possible by the development of the economy as well as monetary and market relations, i.e., the development of productive forces and of the division of labor, as well as the bourgeoisie's rise to power."

7. Consider the classical error concerning the Maurrassian "primacy of politics." Maurras defended only its chronological priority. In his *Réponse à André Gide* (Paris: Editions de la Seule France, 1948), p. 22, he writes: "Chronologically, the means comes before the end." For him, politics is the means, while the economy is the end. In *L'action française* (February 16, 1923) he wrote: "When we say 'primacy of politics,' we mean politics in the order of time, not in the order of dignity." The entry "Economy" in the *Dictionnaire politique et critique* reads: "As the art and science to feed citizens and their families — the promises of a prosperous and fecund life — the economy is one of the necessary ends of all politics. It is more important than politics. It must come after politics, as the end comes after the means, as the point of arrival is located at the end of the road, because one takes the road to get to the point of arrival." Jean Madiran, in *Maurras* (Paris: NEL, 1992), p. 179, sees the "primacy of politics" as "philosophically unsustainable," and cites Aquinas to the effect that "The end is first in the order of intention, but the last in the order of execution."

8. In his "Polythéisme des valeurs et monothéisme religieux," in *Etudes sur Max Weber* (Geneva: Droz, 1990), p. 186, Julien Freund writes: "Every human activity develops according to its own law, its own *Eigengesetzlichkeit*, which determines the particularity of the relation of ends and means. The aim of economics is different from that of politics or art, and consequently, the means to achieve economic ends are not the ones used in politics or art. Each activity has its specific ends and, therefore, its specific means, i.e., they do not serve the same values. . . . It follows that economic values do not conform with political or artistic values. The conflict results precisely from the attempt to reconcile them, or to reduce them to the same measure of value."

autonomy or the specificity of politics, rather than of its "primacy."

To pose the autonomy of politics means that it cannot fall back to another kind of human activity, be it science, morals, ethics, esthetics, economics, metaphysics or law without distorting its nature. Politics must be *politics*, which means that its principles cannot be derived from other independent principles. Thus, political legitimacy is a political notion: to ground this legitimacy in morality, law, religion etc. is to betray its nature. What is at stake here is not the "primacy of politics," but the primacy of what in politics is properly political over what is *apolitical*. Freund defines the apolitical as "what contravenes the pertinence of political action or harms politics' spirit and vocation."[9] The apolitical [*impolitique*] also means to do politics without understanding what is being done.

Thus, today politics is understood apolitically, not only because its exact nature is no longer understood, but also because it is increasingly threatened by the hegemonic tendencies of economy, law, morality and technology. This decline of politics is accelerated by the domination of an hypertrophied legalism, moralizing worldviews, technocracy and market values. The most visible take-over is by the economy. The Greeks excluded from politics anything that had to do with needs. Aristotle emphasized that the economy belongs to the domestic and private spheres (*oikos*) and that, as such, it does not concern politics. Freedom is achieved by participating in political life; to be free means to be free of utilitarian constraints and of the dynamics of needs.[10]

The West is the only civilization where the economy, once embedded in society, has become emancipated from it before reintegrating it by forcing it to conform to its values and laws. The promotion of this "economistic ideology" is inseparable from the constitution of the individual in the liberal sense of the term.[11] The end of this process is the establishment of a "market society," i.e., a society where market values not only take precedence over all others, but the market model becomes

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9. Julien Freund, *Politique et impolitique* (Paris: Surey, 1987), p. 1. See also Roberto Esposito, *Categorie dell'impolitico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988).

10. Now, according to D'Allonnes (*Le dépérissement de la politique*, *op. cit.*, p. 48): "To the extent that it goes to the heart of the citizens' very being, the borderline between the private and the *polis* is not only a philosophical, but also a concrete problem. The identification of the self with political life — the constitution of political identity — presupposes that political belonging is transposed to domestic and familial belonging, i.e., anything that deals with needs and private interests."

11. See Louis Dumont, *Homo aequalis. Genèse et épanouissement de l'idéologie économique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977).

the paradigm of all social relations.

From the viewpoint of an economistic ideology, politics can only be derivative or a residue. On the one hand, the birth of politics should be explanable by economic considerations. Thus, originally, it is a mere calculation of interests. On the other, political action is generally associated with administration. Finally, according to liberal theoreticians, a society entirely subjugated to market mechanisms spontaneously establishes a natural harmony of interests. Thanks to the "invisible hand," which correlates supply and demand, the aggregation of egoistic interests by the market, defined both as a generalized place of exchange and as a social operator, miraculously creates the best conditions within a global society. In the foreseeable future, political competence will be displaced by economic efficiency. "It is the reduction of society to a generalized exchange between producers, which brings about the displacement or the weakening of politics."[12]

Marx did not believe in a natural harmony of interests, and argued that this idea seeks to legitimate the economic alienation typical of the capitalist mode of production (thus, the productivist critique of the reification of social relations). Yet, he assumed the liberal definition of man as a productive individual, which results in his missing altogether the meaning of politics.[13] Actually, politics cannot be reduced to economics, first, because the common good is not an aggregation of particular desires or material goods, and, second, because diverging desires never adjust spontaneously. This is why it is ridiculous to talk about "political market" — not that in politics there is no demand and supply, but because political balances cannot be definitively established, even through voting.

Today, the growing presence of the economy has brought about a generalized commodification, i.e., the idea that everything that arises from desires or needs can (and should) be negotiated — the other side of this being that what is produced are only commodities that can be sold, while what does not come with a price tag is forgotten. In this light, the citizen is seen as a consumer, and politics is run according to the model of private enterprise. The normative model becomes the behavior of the market negotiator. Meanwhile, economic and financial pressures restrict

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12. D'Allonnes, *Le dépérissement de la politique*, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

13. As D'Allonnes put it: for "Marx, the realization of man takes place within a completely socialized humanity, detached from the political: a civil society delivered of the subjugation to capitalist production, where exchanges take place between free productive individuals and where labor is set free. In other words: a socialized self-regulated humanity." *Ibid*., p. 135.

the scope of government actions, which, through "realism," now bow to the "laws of the market economy." The emergence of a market society "is much more than an intellectual phenomenon." The market model is about to spread everywhere: "an event with immense anthropological consequences that one barely begins to notice. . . . It contributes to remodeling the most intimate constitution of people."[14] Marcel Henaff concludes: "Reducing politics to economic management means forgetting its sovereign function of public recognition of citizens."[15]

Another form of the apolitical, which maintains a tenuous and rarely noticed connection with "economic ideology," consists in regarding political society as an extension, an *analogon*, of the family. Most common in conservative milieus, this error has been propagated by numerous authors, who have regularly described the sovereign as the "father" of his subjects, or compared political power to that of the head of the family. Aristotle criticized this comparison: "Those who believe that the political leader, the royal chief, the head of the family and the slave owner are the same notion express themselves in an inexact way. They imagine that these various forms of authority do not differ but in terms of the number of subjects, and that there is no particular difference between them."[16] There is a difference, and it is not quantitative, but qualitative: the family, which does not have a public character, but constitutes only an economic unity and a place of affective, interpersonal and intergenerational relations, does not belong to the political sphere. That is exactly what Rousseau argued in his critique of Filmer:[17] citizens are not "children," and paternal power is foreign to political power. Similarly, Carl Schmitt challenged the identification of the monarch with the father as justification of the monarchical principle: "If the monarch is seen as the father of the State, and if that is seen as entailing the dynastic notion of a hereditary monarchy, the first idea is that of the family, not of the State."[18]

The hypertrophy of law at the expense of politics is another consequence of the rise of liberal ideology. The first liberal theoreticians, who

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14. Marcel Gauchet, *La religion dans la démocratie. Parcours de la laïcité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), pp. 86-87.

15. Marcel Henaff, "De la philosophie à l'anthropologie. Comment interpréter le don?" in *Esprit* (February 2002), p. 155.

16. Aristotle, *Politique* I, 1, 1252a.

17. See Simone Goyard-Fabre, *Qu'est-ce que la politique? Bodin, Rousseau et Aron* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1992), pp. 26-27; Alain de Benoist, *Famille et société* (Paris: Labyrinthe, 1996).

18. Carl Schmitt, *Théorie de la Constitution* (Paris: PUF, 1993), p. 431.

explain the birth of politics and society in terms of a contractual will, also attribute to individuals rights inherent to their proper nature, i.e., subjective rights, pre-existing society altogether, since objective rights are a function of conventions introduced by the social contract. Human rights ideology has thus posed the superiority and pre-existence of rights, allowing at the same time the constraining of politics by law.

This implies a significant transformation of the notion of equality. While for the Ancients equality was political (all citizens enjoy equal political prerogatives, because none of them are more or less citizens than anyone else), with the Moderns it becomes juridical. Belonging to a society does not automatically imply political equality. That is why the modern redefinition of politics is not immediately linked to the institution of democracy, but to the natural equality of rights. Equality no longer consists in the equal possibility to participate in public affairs or to hold political power, but in having the same right as others, thus defining the equal dignity of all.[19] Politics comes into play only to guarantee this equality of rights.

Contrary to liberal theory, what is fundamental are not rights, but politics. Juridical activity can take place only after an instituting power has set up a structure with a system of positive norms. (This is also the reason why legitimacy cannot be based entirely on law). Besides, only politics can give law its empirical validity; if not, "how could a law without power triumph over power?" In fact, there cannot be juridical norms before political goals. Law is not an extension of politics, or vice versa, if only because juridical reason has nothing to do with power, but only with procedures. Precisely because they are not coextensive, there can always be a conflict between them. Thus, one cannot generate a juridical theory on the basis of what transcends the law.

The fashionable character of human rights ideology brings about an endless and constantly growing list of assorted and often contradictory "rights," which lead to an escalating number of juridical procedures. Everyday life gradually becomes a legal matter, and consumers of rights are transformed into litigators. What was once a convivial life now depends on various clearly spelled out regulations. Judges, who consequently gained power, now pose as moral authorities, above politics. The expansion of judicial regulation at the expense of political will is

19. D'Allonnes notes: "Equality then becomes equivalence: no one is irreplaceable in a world where everyone is worth the other and everything has a price. Totalitarian regimes will deploy the extreme consequences of this atomization, which transforms individuals into a mass of interchangeable parts." D'Allonnes, *Le dépérissement du politique*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

supported by an antipolitical utopia, where conflicts among people are regulated, instead of being resolved directly by the collectivity.[20]

At the same time, international law undergoes a transformation to substitute its control for political authority. The result of the combination of law and morality, this new international law, symbolized by the International Criminal Court, pretends to dictate its law to states, without whose approval its decisions would remain useless. "Increasingly, juridical power is based not on a nation's constitutional law, but on superior theories, such as human rights or the 'superior principles of humanity' inscribed in a 'Charter of Fundamental Rights' already accepted by European states. Ever since, judges have been able to exercise an almost unlimited power without being hindered by juridical formalities or local legislatures, and they base their legitimacy on texts that are as imperative as they are evasive."[21]

In March 1999, the Western intervention in Kosovo was a decisive turn, where the principle of the "right of intervention" prevailed over international law as hitherto defined. It was not difficult for wary observers to show the fundamental hypocrisy of this "humanitarian" intervention, actually motivated by power interests.[22] These disturbing requirements and demands in the name of humanity appear just as the notion of humanity becomes increasingly problematic, primarily because of developments in the natural sciences. Through the prejudice of human rights and the "right of humanitarian intervention," morality attains a global dimension. Policies branded "bad" are not allowed to make their case against the pious thoughts of the "good." Moralizing idealism overcomes the last resistance of a realism, described as cynical or perverse. In this praise for an abstract "humanity," the contrary happens: there is a complete indifference to particular beings. Rousseau had already denounced "those fake cosmopolitans who . . . claim to love everybody in general in order not to love anyone in particular."[23] What would he have said about today's biased "humanitarians," who accuse all those supposedly obstructing the rule of the Good?

Contemporary humanitarianism is the successor of 18th century "politics of pity," which at the time already divided the world into "happy"

20. Marcel Gauchet, *La religion dans la démocratie*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

21. Xavier Darcos, "Politique et globalisation morale," in *Commentaire* 97 (Spring 2002), p. 58.

22. Cf. Daniel Bensaïd, *Contes et légendes de la guerre éthique* (Paris: Textuel, 1999); Régis Debray, *L'emprise* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000); Noam Chomsky, *Le nouvel humanisme militaire. Leçons du Kosovo* (Lausanne: Page Deux, 2000).

23. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Le contrat social*, 1st ed., Book I, Part 2, p. 287.

and "unhappy."[24] It is based on generous, yet uncritical sentiments. This generosity degenerates into abstract sentimentality, maintained by voyeurism, whose aim is to reach out as far as possible, rather than to stir deliberation. Today, voyeurism has become television's currency. "Television immediately provides the means to mold opinions: indignation, horror, emotion, the spectacle of mourning or suffering. With its own conscience unclear, the public uncovers evils it has avoided and feels the scandal of its own comfort. Thus, in order to relieve its own uneasiness, it appeals to or rejects some concession, before forgetting once again universal injustice and becoming embroiled in local squabbles or family quarrels."[25] This ethereal philanthropy, where loving everybody except one's neighbor becomes normal, is obviously the other side of the individualism and solitude it engenders.

A typical expression of this return to morality as a way of reducing political space is the appearance of "ethical committees," the recognition of "moral authorities," and the popularity of "charitable" organizations. By accepting the idea that social problems (unemployment, exclusion, etc.) are primarily moral problems, the dominant ideology leaves social justice to charity, thus deactivating all claims. As Emmanuel Renault put it: "There is a tendency to formulate political problems in moral terms, thus compelling those involved in political conflicts to abandon the usual expression of particular suffering in order to operate within a universal horizon where consensus is eventually possible."[26]

While old liberalism is characterized by a relative disjunction between politics and morality, this moral ideology appears to constitute a new common sense. There is, however, a kind of paradox. On the one hand, liberalism pretends to avoid morality, which it reduces to norms meant to regulate private life, thus making politics morally neutral, and granting the members of society a disembodied citizenship, disconnected from their identities. On the other hand, morality forced a return to the public sphere. The paradox is resolved when it is understood that this morality does not deal with the *good*, but with the *just*.

Disillusionment also played its role. It explains the popularity of this

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24. Cf. Luk Boltanski, *La souffrance à distance. Morale humanitaire, médias et politique* (Paris: Anne-Marie Métaille, 1993).

25. Darcos, "Politique et globalisation morale," *op. cit.*, p. 56.

26. Emmanuel Renault, *Mépris social. Ethique et politique de la reconnaissance* (Begles: Editions du Passant, 2000), p. 10. Régis Debray adds: "When politics deceives, morality consoles."

new wave of moral humanism with many old followers of critical thought. Converted to the Kantian model on which most contemporary political theories are based (Habermas, Rawls, Apel), a large part of the radical Left sees a return to moral norms as the only possibility against alienation. As Renault writes: "Those of the 1968 generation who converted to humanitarianism and the duty of intervention practice morality as a last resort."[27] One can only agree with Pierre-André Taguieff, who claims that compassionate humanitarianism, "which sees humanity only in the victim, today is the worst enemy of civil life . . . which sees man as a political animal, and assumes that man's humanity can only be achieved in and through civic life, within particular political communities."[28]

There are other equally apolitical ways to define the relation between politics and morality. Where the former is subordinated to the latter, they are generally confused, or political action is attributed an "ethical" character, so foreign to it. The first position is the one held by the Church. Traditional Catholic teaching does not confuse politics and morality, as they differ in both means and ends (the temporal common good in one case, the perfect good in the other). It insists that the former must be subordinated to the latter, just as civil law should be subordinated to "natural law." According to this view, politics is regarded as a material cause of human salvation, while morality is its formal cause.[29] In case of conflict, it is always morality that should prevail.

The confusion is even more serious in Kantian philosophy. In his 1796 *Project for Perpetual Peace*, Kant argues that politics must borrow its principles from morality. Political action should consist in applying moral principles to the particular reality of human nature. This view was readily rejected by Hegel: to Kant's formal morality, i.e., morality (*Moralität*) that does not take into account ethics (*Sittlichkeit*), i.e., the social and political conditions necessary for the realization of a moral life, Hegel opposes an ethics concerned with the realization of freedom, in which social and political conditions define the meaning of moral norms.[30]

Another source of confusion of morality and politics can be found in puritan Calvinism, which aspires to transform the world radically in the

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27. *Ibid*., p. 13.
28. Pierre-Andre Taguieff, in *Marianne* (May 21, 2001), p. 69.
29. Cf. Rémi Fontaine, *Politique et morale. Eléments de philosophie chrétienne* (Boueres: Dominique Martin Morin, 2002), who argues that "confusing politics with morality means mixing the cause and the condition."
30. Cf. Charles Taylor, *Hegel et la société moderne* (Paris: Cerf, 1998).

name of God.[31] Politics becomes the sacred and dogmatic work of redemption. It seeks to regenerate history, at man's rebirth as a new man. Once secularized, this aspiration ended up inspiring all modern revolutions. It is immediately obvious that this morality does not address primarily individual behavior and is not limited to personal ethics. It is first of all a collective ethics, linked to the biblical notion of "justice" and requiring the emergence of a "moral politics."[32] The purpose of politics should be to create a "more just" society, i.e., its vocation should be to change the world, to "repair" it. Arendt rightfully denounced this aspiration which, of course, denies any autonomy to politics.[33]

In a democracy, the identification of politics and morality is in fact so inconsequential that democratic thought can only gravitate toward immanence, as a result of which popular sovereignty is no longer respected. The idea that politics has to do with salvation is nothing more than a secularized religious idea. It has no connection to what is truly political, because the goal of politics is not to change the world or to make it conform to a moral ideal. It is even less to establish a harmonious city — a worldly Jerusalem whose birth would coincide with the end of historical becoming. Its purpose is to make society as livable as possible for as many members as possible, and not to try to establish an "ideal" collective. It works here and now, by always keeping in perspective the necessary and the possible.

Today, the moral concept of politics can be found mostly within the Left. It is seldom realized, however, that it can also be found within the Right as an *ethical* vision of politics, which is just as inappropriate. Political action is taken to "exemplary" ethical heights, a sincerity of beliefs and an esthetics of action, with its intransigent radicality expressed mostly by slogans: the dream is of a "politics of ideals" — an "heroic," "sacrificial," "metaphysical," "absolute" politics. Totalitarian regimes

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31. Cf. Michel Walzer, *La révolution des saints* (Paris, Belin, 1988).

32. As Darcos concludes, "Morality does not consist in acting morally, but in clearly identifying the good through petitions, admonitions, denunciatory sermons. . . . The same 'wild bunch' who cause trouble in the suburbs and who throw stones at the police and schools, are ready to organize demonstrations . . . against racism or in favor of any third-world theme." See Darcos, "Politique et globalisation morale," *op. cit.*, pp. 55 and 57.

33. For a particularly stupid and truly ridiculous exposé of this type of moral critique of politics, cf. Benny Lévy, *Le meurtre Pasteur. Critique de la vision politique du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 2002). Polemicizing with Spinoza, the author, who defines politics as the "empire of nothingness" and as "an empty space" instituted by Moses' death, proposes explicitly to "depart from the political vision of the world." One should understand that the departure is situated somewhere in the biblical tradition, i.e., in the abandonment of human autonomy in favor of the absolute.

have often used this rhetoric to generate "enthusiasm" in the masses. The consequence was war, the cult of violence and, finally, self-destruction. This vision understands the nature of politics just as little as the previous one. "Ideal" politics are nothing more than the apolitical.

Another form of moral politics consists in the desire to establish a virtuous political power, i.e., in "moralizing politics." Such a requirement, which also requires "transparency" and "visibility," rests on an erroneous postulate, according to which political action can be made to coincide with moral idealism. It is often linked to the deep conviction that political power always implies lies and frauds — a very popular idea originally advocated by liberal theoreticians. The requirement of virtue is opposed to the opacity of political action, always interpreted as concealment, as well as *Realpolitik* or "*raison d'Etat*."

Naturally, it would be better if politicians were honest rather than corrupt, just as it would be better if they behaved according to the principles they preach. Unfortunately, their honesty and the sincerity of their convictions do not guarantee that they are good politicians. Better yet, whether a politician is honest or not is *politically* irrelevant. What counts is, first, that he is a good politician, and then, that he *appears* to be virtuous, because the opposite might result in social and political disorder. The exemplarity of a politician is exercised only on the level of public visibility; he is not accountable as far as his private life is concerned. There is no "hypocrisy" in this conclusion. Whoever challenges it betrays an "apolitical" approach to politics. In politics, only appearance counts, for the simple reason that in the public domain it is impossible to distinguish between appearance and reality. Machiavelli is very clear on this: private confessions have no place in public affairs. Therefore, "if the fundamental condition of politics is to operate within appearances, we do not have to question the gap between the depths of hidden reality and the visibility of appearance. . . . To attempt to 'moralize' politics by subjecting it to personal norms is to destroy it. To separate the validity of political action from private motives is the very condition of its existence and practice."[34]

Freund writes that the identification of morality and politics is "one of the sources of despotism and dictatorships."[35] Such an identification necessarily leads to removing politics from public affairs, to its going beyond itself. It is not an accident that French Jacobinism insisted on identifying politics and morality more than any other regime. The insistence on virtue

34. D'Allonnes, *Le dépérissement de la politique*, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-238.
35. Julien Freund, *Qu'est-ce que la politique?* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), p. 6.

and the fight against hypocrisy, as conceived by Saint-Just and Robespierre, i.e., pretending to extract from the citizens' soul all bad thoughts to the point of trying to suppress bad intentions, ended in terror. By aspiring to control the private sphere, 20th century totalitarian regimes have demonstrated the moral, therefore inquisitorial character of their outlook. Meanwhile, they have revealed their *antipolitical* nature to the point of abolishing the distinction between public and private. In so doing, they abolished one of the presuppositions of politics. This terrorism of the "good" has resurfaced with the "humanitarian" theme, which automatically places those whom it opposes in the name of humanity *outside of humanity.* D'Allonnes is right to argue that "any attempt to realize morality by political means bans the very dimension of politics," and that totalitarian systems have made "the most extreme attempt that humanity has ever known to *totally destroy politics*."[36] When "everything is political," nothing is.

The mistake of this moral vision of politics is separating good from evil in the way religion does: by believing that good can engender only good, and that evil can engender only evil. Historical reality testifies to the contrary. It is what Max Weber calls the paradox of consequences. From the complexity of historical action and the impossibility of apprehending all of its parameters, a good intention may have unfortunate or disastrous consequences, while an evil one could very well create the conditions for the realization of the good. The ethics of conviction is not always opposed to an ethics of responsibility.[37] Yet, whenever it absolves bad consequences in the name of purity, when it only judges consequences according to initial intentions — "we correct the vice of the means with the purity of the end," as Pascal said in his *Provinciales* — then it becomes irresponsible.

Politics cannot be subjected to morality, and even less confused with it, because they are not from the same order. A political command has nothing to do with a moral duty, with a "commandment" in the biblical sense; it is only an order. Similarly, political action does not depend on "truth" and "falsity." To make a political decision, whether by voting or by a governmental act, is to create the necessary conditions for achieving a concrete objective, not to state a truth. Finally, Socrates to the contrary notwithstanding, morality and politics cannot be identified, because what

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36. D'Allonnes, *Le dépérissement de la politique*, *op. cit.*, pp. 220 and 261-262.

37. Max Weber writes: "The ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility are not contradictory; rather, they complete each other and together constitute the authentic man, i.e., a man who could meet the requirements of political vocation." See *Le savant et le politique* (Paris: Plon, 1959), p. 199.

is *morally just*, from a personal and private viewpoint, is not necessarily synonymous with what is *politically good* from a collective and public viewpoint. Thus, a political choice concerning the common good cannot be decided according to principles of private morality; it is different from a personal moral choice. As Freund writes, "morality and politics do not have the same goal. The former responds to an internal requirement and concerns the righteousness of personal acts, each one assuming fully the responsibility of its own behavior. Politics, on the other hand, responds to a social necessity, and whoever takes this road expects to take charge of the global fate of the collectivity."[38]

That does not mean that politics is not concerned with "morality." On the contrary, it has its own *ethos*. Politics realizes the good to the extent to which it remains true to its purpose: to serve the common good, to allow everyone to realize one's freedom by participating in public affairs. But some naiveté is necessary to believe that this civic morality, based on the love for public life, never contradicts morality. Machiavelli, who in his critique of Savonarola had already shown that the establishement of the kingdom of moral virtue would have meant the end of politics, states that, regarding a conflict between Naples and the papacy, the Florentines "preferred the grandeur of their city to the salvation of their souls." Montesquieu expresses a similar view when he wrote in the preface of his *The Spirit of the Laws* that virtue in the republic "is not a moral virtue, not a Christian virtue, but a political virtue."

The last threat to politics is the rise of technocracy. In a society where internal complexity is constantly increasing, and where the state is fragmented into a multitude of administrative units, the role of technocrats becomes inevitably more important. Consequently, politics is limited by the opinions of experts, who purposefully maintain the complexity of their files, so that in case of failure no one is responsible or guilty.

On a deeper level, depolitization results from the idea that for any political or social problem there is only one possible technical solution, and that it is up to the experts to determine rationally what it is.[39] Its consequence is the increasingly rationalized and bureaucratic exercise of power, and the occlusion of the fact that it is up to politicians to decide the goals of public action. The assumption is that democracy is too fragile to be left to the people, and that, in order to remain "governable," it must be separated from public participation and deliberation. In the same way that economic ideology tends

38. Freund, *Qu'est-ce que la politique?*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
39. Cf. Fernando Vellespin, *El futuro de la política* (Madrid: Taurus, 2000).

to equate governing with the management of things, technocracy regards politics as an artificial activity based on the only rational control.

It seems that politics is a "doing" (Hobbes already praised "action as doing") and that it obeys the laws of reason. It is the legacy of Enlightenment theoreticians who, following the model of the exact sciences, believed it possible to transform political action into an applied science based on the norms of physics and *mathesis*. The objective is to eliminate chance, uncertainty, and indeterminacy from the plurality of choices, as well as conflict, which by definition causes uncertainty. The hope, which always remains frustrated, is to match the rational and the real by forging a "scientifically" predictable future.

To turn politics into a matter of expertise means to dispossess citizens of their priorities by reducing the political game to an exercise in universal rationality. When Aristotle discusses practical wisdom (*phronesis*), he clearly shows the difference between the rational and the reasonable. Challenging the belief that politics could ever be a science, he warns against "the idea that the same degree of rigor and precision could be achieved in human affairs, which are variable and subject to decision, as, e.g., in the mathematical sciences."[40] The conclusion is that experts can never play more than a subordinated role. Political competence does not stem from expertise, because it is not up to experts to determine the goals of public action. In their diversity, people as a whole know better than any individual alone. Citizens do not need to be experts to participate in deliberations and to express preferences or choices.

According to Freund, the problems of politics are the result of the disorders brought about by technology.[41] More precisely, for several decades technology has done more to transform social life than any government has ever hoped. As Massimo Cacciari put it: "the immanence of technology means global depolitization."[42] Like the "government of judges" or the "government of financial markets," the "government of experts" is nothing more than a cover for the contraction of political space. The question is to know how this space can be expanded and redefined.

Since the late 1980s, the European political scene has changed radically. Having given up its utopian visions as well as its illusions, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet system most of the

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40. D'Allonnes, *Le dépérissement du politique*, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
41. Freund, *Politique et Impolitique*, *op. cit.*, p. 409.
42. Massimo Cacciari, "Le nouveau sujet du monde, c'est la volonté de puissance," in *Libération* (Feb.23-24, 2002), p. 45.

Left understood that what was being sought through "socialism" could very well be achieved within the welfare state, i.e., the liberal state, precisely when the difference between liberalism and social democracy was giving way to a new form: Guy Debord's "integrated spectacular state," Alain Badiou's "capital-planetarianism." It joined the market economy, while reviving "antifascism," which at that point could only serve as a sort of moralizing sentimentalism. Having lost its natural adversary, the Right entered a serious identity crisis. It had gradually accepted "leftist" cultural positions, while the Left was slowly adopting "rightist" positions on economic matters. Within the context of the worship of commodities, "human rights" became the basis for a new consensus and, simultaneously, a substitute for political thought, while in fact they were only the expression of a juridically-grounded moral discourse.

This readjustment of agendas has led the electorate to think, not without justification, that there is no longer a fundamental difference between Left and Right, and, at the same time, to try to locate itself outside of this obsolete cleavage. The consequences are well-known: a growing abstention from voting, the distribution of votes among numerous candidates, the rise in protest votes benefiting mostly extremist parties, the disappearance of traditional electorates defined by sociological, professional or religious criteria. While between the two world wars each political family (communists, socialists, liberal-conservatives, nationalists) had its own culture and even its own language or particular life-style, the homogenization of life-styles, accelerated by consumerism and the media, now translates into a growing flattening of electoral behavior, but also, paradoxically, into a fragmentation of the electorate.

Voters strongly identified with several social groups, who are less influenced by general ideas and less mobilized by collective representations, vote for the most different candidates. They no longer seek a receptive party to reflect their views, but jump from one party to another according to their interests at the moment. The political options are also increasingly fragmented. Politicians, whose positions are always distorted by the media, no longer attain anything but circumstantial majorities, which vary with the issues at stake. Voters no longer have to choose between representatives, who embody conflicting concepts of the general interest, but between teams of professionals who try hard to respond to contradictory demands, linked to so many particular interests. The fragility of opinion and the uncertainty of expertise produce a fundamentally hesitant politics, lacking foundations and generating indecision. As Marc Abélès notes: "This leads

to a governing style ruffled by the heterogeneity of demands, as can be seen by the influx of categorical claims and responses."[43]

There is now a crisis of representation, whose main cause is the complication of conflicts of legitimacy. Confronted with this crisis, politicians rely obsessively on polls, like Roman patricians used to consult the oracles. But research institutes, which are often wrong, are entrusted primarily to carry out market research. Evaluating voting intentions from "representative panels" with certain purchasing power, they only obtain the answers to the questions asked, which allows them to ignore the ones posed by the voters. Political democracy is transformed into a democracy of opinions, and political action into the "pure management of economic constraints and social demands" (Alain Finkelkraut). Obviously, this public opinion has nothing to do with the general will.

While politicians strive to regain the voters' confidence, a gap has appeared between the citizens and a political class that seems to have no ambition other than to perpetuate itself. This gap widens even more between the challenges of the times and institutional responses, between morality and law, the advances of technoscience and the legislation related to it. In other words, today the New Class receives no more than a third of the votes. As Werner Olles writes: "Behind the stated objectives, it is obvious that politicians constitute a homogenous class concerned primarily with its own interest. Then, not only are men discredited because of their hypocrisy, but so are their ideas, which appear to be vulgar alibis. Concepts of popular sovereignty and representation lose their shine and appear to be empty ideas meant to disguise the seizure of power by a particular class."[44]

By the way, the age of intellectuals is long gone. Of course, there are still intellectual discourses, but they have no focus or political impact. Intellectuals have ceased to be a moral force (the conscience of their time) or a social force (the voice of the voiceless) that they were once upon a time. Disqualified by the rise of technocracy and the media, they no longer generate meaning, only intelligibility. Gauchet concludes: "the culture of intellectual elites has become indecipherable for most French people, while political manipulation has become normal."[45] Intellectuals have no choice other than to withdraw to university research centers and specialized literary societies or to become "cultivated" media objects, at the risk of finding themselves in a position to run non-stop behind a reality

43. Marc Abélès, "Le retour du politique," in *Le Monde*, May 2, 2002.
44. Werner Olles, "Le nouveau 'Kulturkampf'," in *Catholica*, Spring 2002, p. 21.
45. Marcel Gauchet, *Libération* (April 26, 2002), p. 17.

which prevents them from transcending their times.

Having become "the central place for the production and diffusion of morals and culture," television attempts "to detach itself from politics,"[46] while public life suffers the effect of presentism. Politicians worry only about the short run (generally, until the next election), and do not bother with long term problems. But what kind of politics does not deal with the long term? Public action is so much more vulnerable that it finds itself constrained by immediacy. As it is presently practiced — i.e., as desymbolization, the disappearance of conflicts, the rise of personalities, the voters' political apathy — politics seems to be heading to is own demise. "Small phrases" replace discourse, opinions and beliefs no longer constitute public space, do not inspire collective representation, and debates concerning ends have disappeared. "Citizen" is no longer an eminently political notion.

The way in which Europe is constructed — economically strong and politically weak — contributes to this apparent depolitization: everything is done as if only a process of depoliticized integration could guarantee its completion. Cacciari suggests that the "process of European integration represents a definitive decline in the need to deploy *political decisions* in the proper sense of the term."[47] The only goal of this Europe of Maastricht would be to end political conflicts just as in the past the nation-state ended religious wars. It is "a wave of depolitization, in fact, an attempt to reject everything that constitutes the specificity of the political as well as, more particularly, of democracy."[48] In fact, democracy is a system which, by definition, allows or should allow the largest participation in political life: "There is no democracy without a political community of citizens held together by common principles and goals. And there is no democracy in the modern sense without the people's sovereignty."[49] The political deficit in a democracy corresponds to a democratic deficit in politics.

But must one talk about depolitization? Actually, nothing is less certain than depolitization. First of all, if politics is a dimension of the social, if it is part of man's social nature, there is reason to be skeptical about its disappearance. But even if today the economic, the juridical or the "humanitarian" appear to limit political space (which they undeniably do) then, to the extent that they substitute for the political, they in turn become political. The

46. Michel Wieviorka, "Déréliction du politique?" in *Le monde des débats* (June 2001), p. 31.
47. Massimo Cacciari, "Pensare l'Europa," in *MicroMega*, No. (1999), p. 202.
48. Taguieff, *Marianne*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
49. *Ibid*.

economic has to do not just with exchange and production, but also with conflictuality; humanitarianism regularly disguises power interests, and morality has repercussions that go beyond its own sphere. Thus, Schmitt, who argues that the political is defined by the intensity of a relation, concludes that all sectors of human activity are "virtually political, and become political as soon as decisive conflicts and decisive questions appear there."[50]

Freund has a similar view: "The fashionable slogan — the future belongs to the economy, and not to politics — makes no mention of the decline of politics. On the contrary, it indicates that power flows through the hands of economic entities and that the distinction between friend and enemy is made on an economic basis, just as it was once made on a religious basis."[51] It would be better to talk of unacknowledged politics, or politics operating in different guises, rather then of depolitization. It could also be argued that what is disappearing today is the *modern* form of politics: it is not politics that disappears, but its modern version.

Modern politics was organized primarily around the nation-state, as the engine of the administrative and institutional apparatus, and a productive agent. The great concepts, e.g., the notion of sovereignty, on which it was predicated, were basically secularized theological concepts. This normative model, which was established in the 18th and 19th centuries, has entered a crisis as a result of the appearance of political agents outside the state, or of social agents demanding political recognition. Recently, the nation-state has also been constrained by transnational restrictions over which it no longer has any control. Today, "the state no longer organizes society, it disorganizes it. Then, the state runs the risk of no longer being the natural space for the expression of popular sovereignty."[52]

As is well known, state and politics have never been totally coextensive. Politics exists both before and after the state. The justification of

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50. Carl Schmitt, *Der Hüter der Verfassung* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr-Paul Siebeck, 1931), p. 111. Schmitt came back to this idea a number of times, notably in his *La notion du politique* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1972), as well as in 1930: "Politics, understood literally, shows only the intensity degree of a unity. Therefore, political unity could comprise different contents and combine them. But it always defines the most intense degree of unity. . . . The point of politics could be attained by all domains and all social groups — Church, unions, corporations, nations — become political . . . when they approach this point of supreme intensity." See "Ethique de l'Etat et Etat pluraliste," in *Parlementarisme et démocratie* (Paris: Seuil, 1988). This argument clearly contradicts or weakens the weight of Schmitt's warning against the emergence of an entirely "depolitized" world. If all human activity is always potentially political, the risk of politics disappearing is almost zero.

51. Julien Freund, *L'essence du politique* (Paris: Surey, 1965), p. 447.

52. Alain Bertho, *Contre l'Etat, la politique* (Paris: La Dispute, 1999), p. 75.

statist monopoly over public life has led to the almost complete dissociation of those two notions. What disappears is not politics or the state, but the identification of state and politics.[53] It also puts an end to the time when political parties were "natural" mediations between society and state. Consequently, when decisions are made more and more frequently by appointees, rather than by elected representatives, "rising to power" no longer seems like the first objective of political action or the necessary condition for the fulfillment of a program. "Leninism as a political theory ends at the dawn of year 2000."[54] More generally, politics as secularized theology is about to disappear.[55]

What follows is, first of all, that today typically modern, sanctified politics, with its absolutist concept of sovereignty, its parties organized like churches, its militants committed to a long-term quasi-ecclesiastical contract, is no longer plausible. Political and religious belief are separate, in the sense that the former no longer tries to imitate the latter. The beginning of postmodernity implies giving up all hopes for the historical objectification of an absolute (nation, people, class, race, etc.). The feeling of emptiness — enhanced by the sense that the state "feeds on false hopes," that politicians "follow" developments they no longer control — is nothing more than the disorientation resulting from the exhaustion of this kind of politics, which was a substitute for faith. Those living under the old regime, the supporters of the "one and indivisible" republic, fail either to understand or to admit that their world is falling apart.[56] Religious belief implied an authority from the past, using tradition as a model; modern political belief implied an authority coming from the future. The common trait of both was that the principle of social organization was founded on a principle of heteronomy. Neither of them is credible today. In postmodernity, the authority comes only from the present. Postmodernity is then the advent of autonomy, i.e., of indeterminacy, and that implies the possibility of a new beginning.

The fading of all traces of "religion" in politics brings about a radical

53. Cf. Stephan Lahrem and Olaf Weissbach, *Grenzen des Politischen. Philosophische Grundlagen für ein neues politische Denken* (Stuttgart-Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2000), p. 65.

54. Bertho, *Contre l'Etat*, *op. cit*., p. 168.

55. As Pierre Rosanvallon put it: "*Metaphysics of the will* is what disappeared at the end of the 20th century. It is simply not possible to continue to think of democracy in theologico-political terms." See his *Le sacré du citoyen. Essai sur le suffrage universel en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 396.

56. As Gauchet notes, "We are about to learn the politics of man without heavens — not with the heavens, not instead of the heavens, not against the heavens." See his *La religion dans la démocratie. Parcours de la laïcité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 65.

transformation of relations between society and state. The institutions which functioned as "melting pots" (e.g., school, army, parties, trade-unions) are now all in crisis, and have lost their ability to create social relations. Since then, these are created elsewhere. In response to the nation-state's paralysis, there has been a flourishing of networks and associations, identitarian phenomena and new social movements, which aspire to play a public role. This tendency obviously tries to compensate for the social disjunction. Pleading for a "politics of recognition," these identitary groups and new communities seek to regain their rights in the public sphere, from where republican and secular principles, along with the Jacobins' hostility toward intermediary bodies, had banished them to the private sphere.

This development, however, cannot be interpreted in terms of the liberal scheme of a "civil society" opposed to the public sphere. The private sphere does not impose itself against the public sphere; rather, society as a whole revives the political dimension of which the state monopoly had deprived it. Politics leaves the statist-institutional sphere in order to rediscover its place within a global society. The emergence of a society of networks modifies and renews the conditions of public life, while the state loses the overbearing holiness it had when, placed immediately above the citizens, it imposed a uniform and abstract model. Now, the state becomes part of "horizontal" representation, by forcefully adapting to the new conditions of social life. It takes the advice of ethics committees and "moral authorities," it allows people with no political experience to become ministers, it tolerates the right of recognition of certain groups which were previously hidden within the private sphere. The phenomenon is equivocal, and the results could be evaluated differently. What is important is the destruction of a classical model, which rested on the strict separation of the public and private spheres, and the presumed neutrality of the former.

Naturally, this evolution also has some negative aspects. One of them is related to the appearance of individualistic utilitarianism, encouraged by consumerism. As no one believes in "great discourses," they look first and foremost after their own interest, and thus run the risk of transforming society into a competition among individuals and groups, with no notions of the common good. But, at the same time, new political phenomena have appeared. The main split is no longer between Right and Left, or even between "fascism and democracy"; it is now vertical: the low versus the high, the people versus the elite, the popular classes versus the ruling New Class. This is "like the situation right before the French Revolution, with the marginalized, who have been denied the advantage of social mobility,

and a barely representative endogenous elite, closed from the outside, incapable of talking to the popular milieus and of hearing them."[57]

The multifaceted phenomenon of "populism" is the direct consequence of this new split. Trapped by most diverse national, liberal, social ideologies, populism expresses primarily the lower classes' uneasiness and will to protest against a political class deemed irresponsible, distant, concerned only with itself and often corrupt. It should not be seen as an antipolitical phenomenon, as it is sometimes claimed, but as the result of a distancing — the people's resentment of the New Class. When they become caught in "party politics," populist movements and parties generaly denounce the monopoly of politics that the New Class arrogantly claimed. They do not wish to suppress politics, but to give it a completely new face,[58] which is why they oppose the people, the citizens, to the ruling class, concentrated in the center of the political system and the media. The general idea is that these elites constitute a coalition, so homogenous that the classical difference among the parties running the government and the opposition, between Left and Right, has lost all meaning. It is indicative that the notion of "political class" remains viable, whereas that of "social class" seems to have evaporated. For populists, the differences between "big parties" are only cosmetic: far from being incompatible, these parties get along very well, constituting a cartel which is opposed only by the growing force of populist aspirations — the only one able to bring about "true change."

Populism is not an ideology, but a style. That is why it is difficult to judge it as if it were a whole. Populism has many sides, and if too often its rhetoric turns into demagogy, in general it exhibits a strong identity meant to mitigate the crisis of representation. This is not accidental: within the political collectivity, there is more representation and less identity. Schmitt has discussed the importance of this distinction between identity

57. Jacques Julliard, in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (May 2, 2002).

58. Cf. Andreas Schedler, "Anti-Political-Establishment Parties," in *Party Politics* (July 1996), pp. 291-302. On populism, see Alexandre Dorna, *Le populisme* (Paris: PUF, 1999); Yves Men and Yves Surel, *Par le peuple, pour le peuple. Le populisme et les démocraties* (Paris: Fayard, 2000); "Il nuovo populismo in Europa," a special issue of *Trasgressioni* 29 (January-April, 2000); Marco Tarchi, "Interpretazioni del populismo," in *Trasgressioni* 31, (Sept.-Dec. 2000); Guy Hermet, *Les populismes dans le monde. Une histoire sociologique, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2001); Pierre-André Taguieff, "Populisme, nationalisme, national-populisme. Réflexions critiques sur les approches, les usages et les modèles," in Gil Delannoi and Pierre-André Taguieff, eds., *Nationalismes en perspective* (Paris: Berg International, 2001), pp. 303 and 407; and *L'illusion populiste. De l'archaïque au médiatique* (Paris: Berg International, 2002).

and representation, arguing that the people have much less need to be *represented* than to be politically *present*. For this reason, Schmitt challenges Kant's idea that "the true republic is and could only be a representative system of the people,"[59] arguing, in Rousseau's tradition, that "there is no democracy other than direct democracy," and that, in an indirect, representative democracy, "the representative element represents the non-democratic element of this 'democracy'."[60] A political society with the most identity possible is a direct or participatory democracy, while a political society with the most representation possible is an absolute monarchy.

Of course, most contemporary regimes include both identity and representation. Schmitt, however, warns against excessively representative regimes. There, the danger is to become "a state without people. A *res populi* without a *populus*."[61] On the contrary, direct democracy allows the people to be "a political unity as a real power in its immediate *identity* to itself." The term "identity" characterizes the existential side of political unity, whatever its foundations might be. Schmitt concluded that "in democracy, the participation of all citizens in the state does not have the sense of representation, but of constitution of the identity of the people as a political unity."[62]

Communitarian theoreticians like Michel Sandel and Alasdair MacIntyre have emphasized that individuals can never be posed as abstract egos, but that they are inseparable from their ends and are always determined by a particular idea of the "good life," connected to one or more constitutive factors of their identity. These factors can be inherited or chosen. Even if they are inherited, they become active only to the extent that they are accepted and wanted.[63]

Thus, the purely individualistic moment of political life appears obsolete. The emergence of communities and networks restores respect for a principle of association different from the contract. In the past, the contractual principle forced individuals to emancipate themselves from communities of belonging. As Durkheim, Simmel or Tönnies have shown, however, this also produced catastrophes by engendering new kinds of social relations. The *contract* is fundamentally different from the

59. Immanuel Kant, *Métaphysique des moeurs*, Vol. 1: *Doctrine du droit* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1971), p. 217.

60. Carl Schmitt, *Théorie de la Constitution*, *op. cit.*, pp. 352 and 356.

61. *Ibid*., p. 353.

62. *Ibid.*

63. Gauchet concludes that today "the social link is anterior to the individuals, as if it had been created by them." (*La religion dans la démocratie*, *op. cit.*, p. 84).

association. The mistake of contract theoreticians was to believe that individuals could enter into a contract among themselves without already being part of some associations. This is impossible, which is why no social contract could ever be truly foundational: in the best case, it could only sanction a preexistent association. The current revival of the associative movement, which relies heavily on Proudhon, deserves to be carefully re-examined, particularly in regard to the connection it creates between individual autonomy and the reconstruction of social relations.[64]

Roger Sue, who appeals to those who inspire or theorize the associative movement, writes that for them, "power has to proceed from a collective of associations: their vision of democracy is initially federalist."[65] He adds: "A political 'associationism' needs to emerge, because representative democracy, as conceived and practiced for decades, is no longer suitable. The idea of a multiplicity of representations needs to be integrated, one in which each citizen could be representative and represented at the same time. Thus, we come back to the principles of democracy of Aristotle: everybody needs to rule and be ruled."[66] The ideal of autonomy leads to association, not to secession. The association is one of the current models most likely to politically reactivate society.

One of the big mistakes of the modern era has been to flatten all social relations onto the private sphere, and to delegate to the state the monopoly of politics. Following this scheme, liberals have chosen to emphasize the private ("civil society"), while their adversaries defend the privileges of the state-controlled public sphere. Both accepted a dichotomy, which today appears unsustainable. The autonomy of society and its political dimension need to be taken into consideration, i.e., its ability to intervene in the public domain. Society is not the private or the simple aggregation of private behaviors. It has both a private and a public dimension. Every time a member of society acts as a citizen, he participates in this public dimension.

The way in which economics and society have been related, by the Right as well as the Left, is just as questionable. Society is distinct both from the state and the market, and can thus defend its prerogatives against both. Social regulations, meant to hold together the market sphere, cannot come from liberal "civil society," which is nothing more

64. Cf. especially Jean-Louis Laville, Alain Caillé, Philippe Chanial, *et al*., *Association, démocratie et société civile* (Paris: Découverte, 2001); Roger Sue, *Renouer le lien social. Liberté, égalité, association* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2001).

65. Interview in *Transversale science/culture* (February 2001), p. 14.

66. *Ibid*., p. 15.

than the aggregation of particular entities and the place where various interests confront each other. Opposing the state to the market (statism) or the market to the state (liberalism) does not do any good. It would be better if, through the political intervention of socirty, the distribution of social goods is not reduced to statist or market mechanisms.

François Ascher writes that representative democracy "could almost function when citizens share great ideologies and/or great socio-economic interests, they can be represented collectively and delegate their power. In a society as complex as ours . . . this system of delegation functions less and less well."[67] D'Allonnes reiterates that "representative democracy is conceivable only when the problematic of consent to power . . . turns into the problematic of effective participation in power."[68] Then, one must not reject all representation, but reinvent or institute new forms of direct democracy on all levels — that direct democracy liberals have always rejected in the name of the elites' prerogatives and out of fear that it would not engender revolutionary violence — and, at the same time, reduce the levels and forms of representation. If citizenship is immediately congruent to society, it must find the means to express itself in public life.

The natural place for participatory democracy is in associative and local action. This local action (at the neighborhood, the community, or the regional level) needs to determine the conditions for a new equilibrium, between deliberation and decision, knowing that the vote is only a democratic means among others — "only one mode of expression of preferences and wills" (Rosanvallon). In other words, and above all, it must be based on the principle of subsidiarity, which consists in delegating to higher levels only those decisions which could not be made and the problems which could only be solved by the lower levels. The idea that citizens must be able to decide by themselves about what concerns them is the basis of autonomy.[69] Today, the principle of subsidiarity is the best way to counter the global tendency of homogenization. The federal system, which Raymond Aron described as "the civilized or voluntary version of the Empire,"[70] is

67. François Ascher, "L'echo d'une société hypermoderne," in *Libération* (April 25, 2002), p. 21.

68. D'Allonnes, *Le dépérissement de la politique*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

69. D'Allonnes writes: "When it comes to making a collective decision [. . .], the best judge is not the work's author but its user: its receiver, in other words. (*Ibid*., p. 63).

70. Raymond Aron, *Paix et guerre entre les nations* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1962), p. 738. Charles Mathieu, a vehement adversary of this system, writes in his turn: "The advocates of federal Europe are the apostles of regionalized Europe. This is certainly not surprising, since the Empire has always gotten along well with the feudalities." ("Le retour des féodalités," in *Une certaine idée*, vol. 4 (2000), p. 63).

moving in this direction, since it is organized from the bottom up, according to the double principle of autonomy and subsidiarity. In some respects — shared sovereignty, a plurality of allegiances and belonging, reciprocity in sharing and exercising power — postmodernity reintroduces certain aspects of feudal premodernity.

This is not the end of politics, but of a political form: modernity is coming to an end. It is the exhaustion of a model of overbearing authority, where decision-making was concentrated in the hands of a power from above, of the failure of self-proclaimed elites whose historical experience has shown that they were not more capable or less fallible than the masses, which they pretended to enlighten. Allowing politics to return means that there is nothing more to expect from open party competition or from a democracy which, because of liberal parliamentarism, has become exclusively representative, and no longer represents anything. To the extent to which the main split is between elites and the people, no *solution from above* is now possible. The weakening of national sentiments cannot be cured by reasserting the prerogatives of the disintegrating nation-state.

Paul Valéry used to say that politics was the art of preventing people from participating in the affairs which concern them. Today, doing politics consists in making people decide as much as possible about what concerns them. It must not be forgotten that the first subjects of democracy are the people. The starting point of democratic politics is the people's instituting power. Democratic sovereignty is not national sovereignty, but popular sovereignty. Today, politics is reappearing from the bottom up, through the reconstruction of the social link and a full reactivation of the political dimension of society, in terms of local autonomy, participatory democracy, associative and community life, and the principle of subsidiarity. It means following the Greek, rather than the Roman model: substituting the image of the labyrinth with that of a pyramid.