

## Notes on "The Truth, Perhaps" in Pierre Manent's *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents*

by David Alexander

Pierre Manent begins the essay "The Truth, Perhaps" by noting that we moderns must affirm a "modern difference" in order to identify ourselves. As soon as we recognize this difference, it acts prescriptively and sets an agenda for our thought. Manent begins to examine this axis of our self-understanding to see in what it consists. He asks how is being a "modern" man different from being simply a "man." Manent thinks the modern difference came first in philosophy. According to the simplest definition, to be modern is to live according to reason and to establish human order on the sole foundation of reason. But then we are faced with a puzzling dilemma beginning in the later 1800s and leading up to the present: the most vibrant and powerful expressions of thought turn away from philosophy and the political order founded on it - Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. "The rational order harbors and perhaps foments the negation of reason." (Man, as the measure of man, dissents against man?) Faced with this realization, Manent sought to reconstruct an exact chronology to understand a before of prejudice (the Enlightenment's jahaliyyah) and the after of reason. He asks when and how was the modern project first formulated, and was it replaced by a so-called postmodern point of view? In this, "nothing is more important than to know exactly when and how the political critique of religion was decisively accomplished." He notes that those who neglect or avoid these questions in constructing their chronologies end up writing intellectual histories in which nothing really happens.

Manent found in the work of Machiavelli the point of departure for modernity. Manent notes that one can agree without much difficulty to the principal elements of the modern regime, namely, liberal democracy: "All legitimacy is founded on individual or collective consent; men possess equal rights; law is sovereign; the state is distinct from society and is the latter's representative instrument" (p. 36). Manent sought to recount the political history behind this modern regime and, at the same time, it was an adventure of reason for him. When placed in their dynamic sequence, the intellectual and political articulations are most clear and their correspondence most obvious. He found that the more democracy grows in extension and comprehensiveness with the passing generations, the more Tocqueville's analysis grows in truth. Tocqueville holds that modern democracy has a nature the novelty of which is radically different than its predecessors, and there is a division of humanity into two distinct humanities, aristocratic man and democratic man. The two humanities make up the one, their contradiction forming a tensed unity.

Manent writes that the political history of the last three centuries is a vector oriented toward and leading to democracy. Central to the history is "the rational and really irresistible connection of its phases, from absolutism to representative democracy, and then to democracy ever more democratic. This radicalization must be accounted for in one's theory or interpretation."

Christianity's role is debated in secularization theory. One theory is that Christianity was first established and then disestablished, equality before God converting to equality in the world. But this means either Christianity is true, which means the essential fact is the soul's relationship with the true God, in which case democracy is only derivative from this core reality, or the Christian religion is false, in which case it would be the first, imperfect, and alienated experience of democracy. Democracy would explain itself rather than religion explaining democracy. Manent asserts that Christianity does indeed have something to do with Christianity but that sometimes it is a polemical relationship in which the liberal democratic movement saw in Christianity an enemy, even *the* enemy. Manent writes,

"modern democracy appears to be both the realization and the negation of Christianity." For Machiavelli and Hobbes, it is emphatically a question of liberating men from the political power of religion. He notes that the possibility that the political domain is really the generative principle of the human world is often glibly overlooked in dismissals of the opposition that Machiavelli and Hobbes had emphasized. Manent notes that since God is "supernatural" and the goods and gifts He gives are superior to the earthly, the contest between the city of God and the city of man is unequal as long as the earthly city remains "natural." For the critique of the supernatural to accomplish its ends, a critique of nature is necessary. Manent notes that the Machiavellian critique of Christianity, the origin of the modern vector, constantly intersects with the Augustinian critique of paganism and of sinful humanity, sometimes overlapping it, sometimes superimposing itself or contradicting it. This double critique delineates and produces a dialectical circle that modern moral and political development cannot extricate itself from. Without the tension between these two, if we adhere without reservation to the modern experience of history, man becomes so different from himself that his very humanity is put in danger. If we hold firmly to a recognition of human universality, then we risk becoming unfaithful to the modern experience, and undermining our self-understanding as moderns. "We are too natural for what we have of the historical, too historical for what we have of the natural." Manent finds his work and self-understanding in scrutinizing and mending the human difference in an existence in-between being a historian and being a philosopher.

#### **Notes on "Lefort's Machiavelli" in Pierre Manent's *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents***

[Pierre Manent includes personal anecdotes and autobiographical asides in his essays. Perhaps we should follow suit and mention something of our personal background and how it has brought us to engage in this work].

Manent begins by noting how Claude Lefort criticizes two distorting assumptions often fallen into by those who study Machiavelli, the assumptions of an adequate grasp of the history of Italy and of the psychology of Machiavelli. Lefort is rare for wanting to analyze the methodical misunderstanding characteristic of the intellectual culture around him. Manent observes that Lefort and Leo Strauss approach Machiavelli's work with the same principle of reading, though for different reasons. Both would say that one forfeits the opportunity of understanding Machiavelli if one does not read him first of all as he wants to be read. Such reading is much more interesting than others but it does not dominate in scholarship. If this is the case, Manent observes, it is no doubt the case because this principle of reading obliges the historian to strip himself of his sovereignty and agree to learn something from the author he is reading by entering into philosophical dialogue. Manent thus affirms humility in reading - virtuous reading (even, or especially, when reading someone people have often conflated with the devil). Strauss and Lefort's uses of the shared principle diverge in that Strauss views philosophy as teaching and the philosopher as master who renders a judgment, whereas Lefort thinks we must not claim to conclude and the important thing is to always continue the quest.

Strauss judges that Machiavelli represents an "obfuscation," not a progress of enlightenment, because his thought "no longer has a place for itself." Lefort for his part is astonished that Strauss would argue for almost 100 pages that Machiavelli rigorously conducts his discourse and makes everything Machiavelli writes the result of decision, yet would turn around and claim that Machiavelli can be a philosopher and philosophize yet be unaware of what he is doing. Strauss's judgment is severe: Machiavelli brings not a single political phenomenon to light not already known to the classics, but merely divulges what the ancients hid from the crowd. Lefort summarizes Strauss's position: what is

new is divulgation. Machiavelli further shows that the Machiavellian discovery is intimately organized by the critique of the authority of the Bible. Lefort asks if it is true that Machiavelli's principles are not new except with regard to the situation of the power of the Christian Church. Wasn't this power new and not known to Greek philosophy? Lefort concludes Strauss is silent about this question.

Manent says that Machiavelli is the bone of contention between Strauss and Lefort. Manent latches onto an assertion by Lefort that "the truth about Machiavelli concerns here and now the establishment of the truth about politics." Manent notes that modern political philosophy is singular for its abstract character, distinguished in its trenchancy from that of classical political philosophy. Ancient political philosophy is first of all the analysis of the experience of the Greek city whereas modern political philosophy is first of all a hypothesis, then practically a project, and, in moral terms, a hope. The result has been extraordinary: the construction and consolidation of modern democracy on both sides of the Atlantic. However, an uncertainty and anxiety shadows this triumph. Perceptive moderns, Manent notes, are no longer at ease about the hypothesis in its status as a hypothesis, for all the practical successes that attend it, and they press the question: what is its underlying experience? Only if the contours of an experience proper to modern man can be drawn can it be said that modern politics is rooted and is no longer merely a hypothesis.

The modern experience that has generally appeared as belonging to modern man is that of history, because it was discovered by him. Historicism has been claimed by both the friends and enemies of democracy. Historicism appeared late in the development of modern philosophy, no earlier than the middle of the eighteenth century. We are left with a strong sense that either the modern experience precedes "the discovery of history", or precedes its thematic presentation by a philosophy of history, or that there is a modern experience more radical or original than the experience of history. The modern, whatever it is, appears when the ancient and medieval order are questioned. Radical questioning of the medieval order in the political and religious domains occurred at the same moment, with Luther and Machiavelli.

Manent thinks many readers blunt and shield themselves from Machiavelli's work by a "reassuring cloak of abstraction," explaining and neutralizing by this the shock of the reading. Manent notes that the thought of ancient politics mobilizes an ontology of nature naturally, and this is what the ontology of Aristotle is *par excellence*. Lefort writes that Machiavelli sketches "a new ontology." The Machiavellian prince receives the recommendation that he remove from his nature all real attachment to the good, in order to manifest the appearance of good or refuse to do good, according to the necessity of the case. (It is at this point perhaps where modern man has occulted his moral sources). Manent says, however reviled and contested it has been, that there has been but one ontology, that of Aristotle. For modern politics to be truly founded, it must be founded on an understanding of being fundamentally different from that of Aristotle. Machiavellian political phenomenology strikes us by its radical strangeness and novelty. If not proof of it, it is at least a sign of a new ontology at work. Manent then says, "To discover the meaning of Machiavelli's work is to recover the implicit ontology of modern politics." Machiavelli "criticizes the ontology of essence or substance, of nature, or the continuity or primacy of repose, finally, of order, and substitutes an ontology of accidents, of history, of movement and of disorder." However, Manent notes that Machiavelli's affirmation of a hierarchy of political courses of action leads back to the supremacy of the ancient ontology at the very moment it rejects it. Lefort notes, "Machiavelli cannot denounce the defects of a regime, since he has renounced the model of a regime without defects." Manent concludes that the notion of situation in Machiavelli appears "undeveloped" and "of a weak ontological alloy." It is useful for criticizing the ancient

ontology (with a hermeneutics of suspicion) but a handicap to establishing a new ontology.

But halt the conservative celebration! Affirmation of degrees of Being is not strictly the same as affirmation of classical ontology. According to Machiavelli, human desire is of two sorts. Lefort draws the most radical consequences from what Machiavelli tells us about social division. Manent urges that it is in this division that the "new ontology" finds its experience and its phenomenon. The Machiavellian thesis is that every political body is comprised of the people and the Great. The Great are moved by a desire to command and oppress the people and the people are moved by a desire not to be commanded or oppressed. The people's desire is "more decent" and the political agent, the prince, will properly base himself on the people rather than the Great. The tone of the argument is clearly "democratic." The point where the radicality of Machiavelli's reinterpretation of the social world most shows itself is in reevaluation of the relationship between conservation and acquisition. Machiavelli, against the ancient interpretation, holds that the desire of those who possess is more dangerous or "disordered" because "the fear of loss excites the same violence as the desire to acquire" and solicitude to conserve what one has prompts one to want more and more. Machiavelli is the first who is "for the people" and "against the Great."

Aristotle's ontology is "conservative" because it is an ontology of possession. The city is the place and the instrument where men appropriate, together and separately, the different human goods, especially happiness and justice. However, Machiavelli maintains that those who fear losing what they have always want more because their appetites have been whetted rather than fulfilled. Based on this, the act of having may be a source of dissatisfaction, enflaming greed. Therefore, possession can no longer provide the vital principle of the city. The city is then no longer defined as the place and instrument for appropriations of the goods and the Good since the ontology of appropriation fails to grasp the meaning of the social division. The "conservative" position falsely says that all men desire the same things. According to Machiavelli, there are two kinds of different, irreconcilable desires. The classes do not exist except in relation to each other, the one oppressing, the other resisting oppression. Machiavelli, however, is not praising the relative rectitude of the people over the Great. Rather, he focuses on how the desire of the people is completely different than the great. "It is by means of the people's desire that the being of society asserts that it is stronger than all the haves, by the people's desire society exists more as society."

Manent criticizes Lefort for not thinking that philosophy can be impartial. According to Lefort as Manent understands him, to think authentically about politics, the philosopher must deliberately attach himself to the people's point of view and to their desires. Manent says in counterpoint, "I believe that philosophy can and therefore ought to transcend this partiality." (Indeed! Should we be fool enough to say the People never err? A lot of blood seeps unacknowledged if we do). According to Lefort, it is in the hostile distance between the people and the Great that philosophy, which is distinct from the people's point of view, finds the space for critical distance. Manent concludes, "It seems to me then that modern political philosophy is more partial to the people than classical political philosophy ever was toward the Great" (p. 59). The people are not the whole of society, as Machiavelli and Lefort show by demonstrating that social division is constitutive. The city takes its form from the confrontation and tension of the two irreconcilable desires.

Manent asserts that philosophy can recognize social division without being obliged to take the side of one or the other, and he says that Aristotle models this in the *Politics* in his more impartial treatment of social division than Machiavelli's treatment of the same in the *Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*.

Machiavelli's partiality is manifest in how he defines the desire of the Great without concerning himself with what the Great say about it, thus ratifying the point of view of their enemy without comment. Also, Machiavelli "violently" reduces the two desires to animality by designating them as humors. Aristotle, on the other hand, takes very seriously what both sides say. "The desires of the classes speak: it is this speech that we must sift through in order to free the truth and deliver ourselves from partiality" (p. 60). Aristotle shows how the incompatible ideas of justice in the different divisions of society do not adequately encompass the idea of the city. Before being incompatible with each other, each one is incompatible with the complete idea of the city. The implicit city of the oligarch and the implicit city of the democrat are not truly cities. Aristotle approaches the democratic point of view "with a great deal of acumen and respect."

Manent asserts that the human mind left to itself has only two referents, that of nature and that of history. Lefort, more explicitly than Machiavelli, chooses history as the history of liberty. But Lefort does acknowledge that democratic movement might lead to a new domination. Thus, Lefort needs a referent that does not pass away to judge by it whether the democratic movement is heading into a new domination or not. This timeless referent was important to Aristotle in how he held it important to be free from the city in the sense of being able to grasp the universal order of "human things." (In a similar vein, Charles Taylor points to the lack of a "horizon" from which to judge in discussing the human thing of gay rights). If Machiavelli introduces obfuscation into philosophy, it is in introducing a partiality that despairs of arriving at the universal.

**Notes on "Democratic Man, Aristocratic Man, and Man Simple: Some Remarks on an Equivocation in Tocqueville's Thought," in Pierre Manent's *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents***

Manent, in order to lead us to a better grasp of what is original in Tocqueville, directs the reader through a comparison to contemporaries of Tocqueville that he is most naturally compared to: Francois Guizot, Benjamin Constant, and Karl Marx. He characterizes Guizot by his competence and assurance in applying available and inherited categories, in particular the conceptual idiom of representation. He describes Benjamin Constant as embodying, within French liberalism, restlessness or irony, in contrast to Guizot's assurance or satisfaction. Along with Guizot and Constant, Karl Marx's thought is dominated by the idea of representative government. In contrast to these three, Tocqueville eludes, without rejecting or refuting, the categories of "liberal sociology." Instead of representative government, Tocqueville focuses on the concept of democracy, whose origin is found in Greek politics and thought where it signifies a political regime.

The term *democracy* at the time of the Enlightenment elaboration was still in disrepute, being associated with a too disordered, insufficiently rational, too "harsh," and too "inhuman" phase of human history. "Civilization and representative government are what distinguished the modern commercial republic from the ancient warrior democracy, to the advantage of the former in the eyes of the dominant liberal school." American and French revolutionaries declared they founded representative republics, *not* democracies. Tocqueville brings out the singularity of the developing usage of the term *democracy* in his time by observing how the name of a political regime was coming to designate a "'generative principle... that regulates the greater part of human actions." A political concept was being transformed, turning into a metapolitical concept.

Democracy cannot be a clear concept unless there is something other than democracy against which to define it. Tocqueville achieves this by a pairing of democracy with aristocracy and splitting man into

"democratic man" and "aristocratic man". It is here, however, in the splitting of man *simpliciter* into two kinds, that Tocqueville introduces "a perhaps deceptive symmetry." Manent asks whether Tocqueville even answers at all when we ask him what is man, simply man, man "in all the truth of his nature."

Manent notes that for Plato, Aristotle and Thucydides, there corresponds to each a kind of political regime, a 'type,' and in this sense, a 'distinct humanity.' However, the Greek regimes are circumscribed by a cyclical history and are regulated by nature. In contrast, Tocquevillian democracy implies a process, an indefinite history. Manent goes so far as to say that this indefiniteness is the main motive of Tocqueville's inquiry into democracy and the wellspring of its pathos. In Tocqueville's democracy, the power of democracy is not the power of man over man, but the power of man over himself. There is a switch from circumscribed, defined regimes with which to compare democracy to the presence of this openness. The Athenian democracy and the Spartan 'aristocracy' in Thucydides are actualizations of two possibilities of human nature but, in Tocqueville, aristocracy and democracy are two successive and exclusive versions of humanity. Further, democracy possesses an assured status over aristocracy because it is essentially just.

Manent here raises a question. If democracy is just, it is because it conforms to man's nature or man's situation. It should therefore be stable, yet it unleashes a continuous, unending process of radicalization. Manent clarifies further what he means by this radicalization: "the passion for equality" grows even when conditions become more equal. He notes, in contrast to this desire, that hunger is not naturally insatiable.

Manent asks if justice itself is subordinated to Tocqueville's opposition between democracy and aristocracy. He notes that Tocqueville adds another division by distinguishing between the nature and the art of democracy. The nature of democracy is to push blindly toward ever greater equality, even at liberty's expense; its art preserves liberty. Democratic art is used to prevent democracy's nature from oppressing and sterilizing man's nature.

Religion, by its origins and possibly its essence, is external to democracy which, in turn, makes it capable of regulating democracy. However, to be able to moderate rather than to combat democracy, religion must adapt itself to democracy, and democracy must appropriate religion for itself. However, this reciprocal rapprochement can end in a pantheism that is destructive of religion.

Manent notes a paradox. A bond that is produced by liberty is obviously preferable to one that is submitted to through constraint. However, if a bond is thought of and if it is experienced as freely and autonomously instituted, it runs the risk of being less and less a bond. A freely constructed bond will soon be experienced as being able not to be, as not being a bond. "If we suppose that humanity lives by means of the various bonds that attach men to each other, the more these bonds become democratic, the more humanity will live with the awareness of the contingent or arbitrary character of the bonds that constitute it. Its human 'tenor' will tend, therefore, to diminish." (pg. 72-73).

What is the wellspring of the principle of the democratic art? Manent concludes that, in Tocqueville, liberty and the art of democratic liberty has its wellspring in a grace that is granted to a few. It is a gift of God that eludes both art and reason. It is therefore inegalitarian and thus anti-democratic (I am reminded here of a description of the Bible by Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis*; "The Bible's claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer's, it is tyrannical - it excludes all other claims... The Scripture

stories do not, like Homer's, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us - they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels." See pp. 14-15).

What for Tocqueville is the wellspring of the art of democratic liberty? Manent quotes an answer from Tocqueville on p. 173 which treats the passion for political liberty as a grace from God that God has prepared great hearts to receive. Nowhere as clearly as in the statement quoted does Tocqueville attribute a natural basis to his political doctrine.

The pure lover of liberty does not find a place in either of the regimes of aristocracy and democracy. With Tocqueville, Manent believes that liberty becomes a value. Manent urges that this pure love of liberty is an aspect that singularly belongs to the life of democratic societies and so it is a very interesting aspect. In the end, democratic man is endlessly at work "distinguishing and separating in his experiences, with an ever more refined chimerical scrupulousness, what can be defined and experienced as pure nature."

### **"Charles Peguy: Between Political Faith and Faith"**

Manent opens his essay by praising Charles Peguy's work as a thinker, asserting that it is undervalued and superior to much that occupies a place of greater recognition.

Manent notes that the "fundamental political, human and spiritual experience of Peguy's life was the evolution of the Dreyfus affair." Peguy's bookshop became the outpost of the Dreyfusite students during the battles over the affair between 1898-1899, with Peguy as the ringleader. For Peguy, the Dreyfus Affair revealed the value "distinctive, specific, peculiar to an event." He found the real dividing line in the affair not between the pro and con sides, but between the "mystical people" and the "political people." He attributed to the mystical people purity of intention and generosity of sentiments and to the political people, compromises and maneuvers characteristic of political action in the actual world.

Peguy noted that the modern world is not only opposed to the *ancien regime* in France, but it runs counter to all of the ancient cultures, "to everything which is culture, to all that is a city." Peguy marked 1881 as the date of the "domination of the intellectual party." What defined the intellectual party was its representation of history, which "pretends to ignore the fact that mankind has lasted a long time already." There is a break between the modern world and all of the ancient worlds.

Peguy's hostility to the modern world was a constant throughout his migration from a "personal socialism to a problematic Catholicism." Peguy was highly critical of materialism and contended that "atheism presupposes a God who is denied or gods who are denied and the definition of what is denied." He regarded as the fundamental trait of the modern world its parasitical and paradoxical character.

Peguy worked at developing the idea that what lies at the root of the modern perception was a particular representation of history. He observed that, when a modern historian has a text, an event, or a person to explain, his first impulse is to turn *away* from his subject and assiduously inventory the 'conditions' and circumstances' of the existence of the subject. Peguy's objection to this impulse was simply that the "method of infinite exhaustion" of historical detail presupposed, in effect, that the historian is an infinite god. Once modern man had rejected God without rediscovering the natural limits

affirmed by the Greeks, he has lost his place, and no longer encounters anywhere any other than himself whom he can respect. He is therefore no longer able to achieve consciousness of himself.

Peguy regarded the original error of modern thought to be its having exchanged the respective places of theory and practice, thought and action, because of its loss of understanding with respect to the radical distinction which exists between these two realms. Lacking the understanding, it became possible to ascribe the attributes of thought to action and of action to thought. Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy, for instance, conducts his thought deliberately as though it were an action. Action, above all political action, is undertaken in the name of and according to an intellectual representation of history while freedom and risk are hunted down by modern intellectualism.

To Peguy, modern ideologies seemed to be unaware of the fact that they were contributing to the destruction of the conditions of human action and the distinctive human characteristic which exists as liberty. Pascal's analysis of the act of faith seemed to him to be identical with the mechanism of the free act. Peguy summed up, "man must choose in all freedom. There must therefore in the last analysis be a total risk...one must always come back to the form of the wager." He says, "It is so that man could balance himself on the knife edge, could balance on the knife edge of liberty, that Christianity has never had, has never required proofs. If by ill-chance Christianity were to be proved... liberty would fall." (cited on p. 91). Pascal wrote, "It is in lacking proof that they [the Christians] show their good sense."

Peguy separated himself from "a certain trend in Pascal" by refusing to despise the world, nature. He rejected condemnation of the world as the typical and immemorial error of the "devout party." To the contrary, he asserted that "the eternal is in the dwelling place of the temporal." His desire, to re-establish the dignity of the temporal against the devout party and also against the modern ideologies which depreciated that dignity in another way and for different reasons, led him to look for the fulfillment of his desire and vision in a community that could reunite in itself pagan holiness and Christian holiness, a mystic civic body called "Christendom" or "France." Manent responds that people of good judgment (whether agnostic, atheist, or Christian) are repelled by this sort of extravagance for its confusion of the temporal and spiritual, politics and religion. However, he concludes that Peguy was correct to hold that a specific sacredness belongs to the political order, the civic community. Modern man mistakes this because he is heir both of Christianity, which transfers all the sacredness of the earthly city to the divine city, and the secularization of Christianity, which has abolished the sacred. When modern man became wearied of being deprived of civic sacredness, he rebelled and abandoned himself to the perverse sacredness of modern totalitarianism. Peguy's errors should not blind us to how his thought is important for all who are concerned with the destinies of Europe.

### **Notes on "Christianity and Democracy" by Pierre Manent**

Pierre Manent opens his essay "Christianity and Democracy" by looking back on the relationship between democracy and the Catholic Church and remarking about the extraordinary difference between what it was in the time of the French Revolution and what it is today. Democracy now no longer seeks to "destroy the infamous thing," Christianity, whose demise its early modern proponents had proclaimed. At the same time, the Catholic Church discovers within the faith the rights of man when, earlier, in 1832, it had vehemently denounced religious liberty in the case of Lamennais's heterodoxy and Saint Pius X, in 1906, had condemned the separation of church and state as a "supreme injustice" that is done to God. Manent asks what has happened to affect such a complete change.

Manent notes that the Church initially declared itself against democracy on the basis of the conviction that the modern democratic movement was directed against itself, against the true religion, and so against God. The vector of modern politics, the movement of the Enlightenment, sought the establishment of “the neutral and agnostic state.” This was viewed by most Catholics as state agnosticism which was, in fact, state atheism. What is true in this view is that the liberal state, in its primary purpose, wants to institutionalize the sovereignty of the human will, with no legitimacy but that which is founded on the wills of individuals. It “deprives the will of God of all political authority or validity.” The atheism of presupposition, however, is not exactly simply atheism. However, the early antireligious passion was clearly enough avowed by the great men of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Manent writes that the will of the Enlightenment then revolted against the bourgeois democratic society that it took to be a humiliation of itself. The revolutionary spirit took the form of socialism and communism. The Church explicitly condemned these revolts, at least in the case of communism. It reacted to these revolts against democracy by reconciling itself to democracy and by sharing in the responsibility for the things that are. Yet, at the same time, it confirmed its hostility to modern democracy as the engenderer endlessly of radical revolts against the church.

Manent notes three “massive facts” which must be taken into consideration: 1) The history of modern philosophy from Machiavelli to Nietzsche elaborates the concept of the will. 2) The intellectual center of modern democracy is constituted by the notion of the rational will. 3) The first and decisive affirmations of the will and of man as will were conceived and formulated in an explicitly polemical relation with the Catholic understanding of the world and with the ecclesiastical institution. Manent adds: “Nietzsche at the end of this spiritual history, joined the unlimited affirmation of the human will to the unlimited polemic against Christianity.”

What is surprising about this state of affairs is that political liberty can be conceived and institutionalized without recourse at all to the notion of the free individual endowed with a sovereign will. Aristotle’s *Politics* provides a phenomenology of political life without either prejudice or lacuna. According to Aristotle, every human association has for its end a certain good and every human action is done in view of a certain good. Each group defines itself by the type of good it seeks. Nowhere in Aristotle’s analysis does he resort to a concept of the sovereign individual will. In contrast, the concept is central to the founders of modern politics such as Rousseau in *The Social Contract*.

A problem (a lacuna after all?) was engendered in Aristotle’s view and its subsequent adoption by the Church. He held that a man or a group whose virtue was incomparably superior to that of the rest of the political body must be given either total power or be ostracized. “Certainly it cannot be said that one is in a position to resolve a problem when the principle of the solution can engender two strictly contradictory solutions with equal plausibility or legitimacy; when the premises, that is, imply two contradictory conclusions.” Western man was obliged to renounce Aristotle’s philosophy. “To have a chance of finding a solution, it was necessary to make oneself independent both of nature and of the accident that is not natural,” the Supreme Cause being beyond the possibilities of nature and the habitual action of causes that is found in things. Human sociability, both natural and supernatural, was to be decomposed and the body politic reconfigured so as to effect what the human will wants. “The movement of modernity is structured by the stages of the will’s emancipation.”

Liberals are currently “caught between their doctrinal heritage and their new fear in the face of the revolutionary event, which their doctrines had perhaps caused or in any case had accompanied and facilitated.” It is here that religion finds its specifically modern political and moral credibility. It is now

praised for what it had been criticized for as being something above the human will.

Tocqueville regarded the 18<sup>th</sup> Century hostility to Christianity and the church as an intellectual and moral aberration and he held that “an invincible penchant” leads back to religious beliefs: “Unbelief is an accident: faith alone is the permanent state of mankind.” In his view, religion singularly facilitates the use of liberty by its relationship with the will. Modern democracy is founded on the emancipation of the will which has two disastrous consequences. The first is fear before this unlimited liberty which tempts a renunciation of liberty and a consent that is to be given to despotism. The second is the desire to exercise this will in all its new amplitude, accompanied by the feeling that the human will has the right to will everything and anything: “in the interest of society all is permitted.” Manent writes: “These two consequences of the new liberty together and equally foment a new despotism.” However, when the law allows everything, religion stops the modern from conceiving of everything and forbids from trying to do everything. It tempers both the new passivity (the fear) and the new activism.

Tocqueville holds that religion in the United States singularly facilitates the use of political liberty by singularly diminishing the extent of intellectual liberty. The question is raised, “How can religion be truly useful if it is viewed by the faithful from the point of utility?” A general absence of intellectual rigor is presupposed. The separation of religion and the state produces a confusion of religion and society. Political liberty may benefit but religion loses its sincerity, and the intellectual life loses in its clarity and honesty. Manent urges that with Tocqueville we reject the opinion that there is a “‘natural,’ hence apolitical, state of religion.” This enables us to envisage the political history of Christianity as a succession of theological-political arrangements and solutions to the theological-political problem.

The first theological-political solution was the medieval one which defined the church as the true republic and as the perfect society. The second was that of absolute national monarchy. Religion remains in command, but this command is administered by the temporal sovereign. This was intended to overcome the medieval dualism of the priesthood and the emperor. Manent briefly chronicles religion in modern democracy and notes that the center of gravity of social life has shifted and democracy, understood as the working of society upon itself, becomes self-sufficient. At this point, religion can be completely separated from politics. (I’m reminded of the Obama administration’s curtailment of the free exercise of religion to a freedom of worship).

Manent notes that modern nation-states exercised such a spiritual power that they succeeded in being both empire and church. However, in Europe today, the nation which triumphed over the church as a perfect republic is in the process of taking a back seat. Manent concludes his historical synopsis by saying that we are therefore at the end of a cycle. In western Europe, the church has been completely domesticated by the nation and the nation is exhausted. The effacement of nationhood is inscribed by the massive immigration of non-Christian populations and the construction of a so-called supra-national Europe.

Manent conjectures that because of the dissolution of the nation, there will be a resurrection of the theological-political problem in an unprecedented form. Since the context for the exercise of democracy is on its way out, the problem with respect to defining a new framework will swiftly become a problem of the first order. Religion is necessarily interested in the increasingly urgent problem of the ‘self-definition’ of Europe, but religious practice has suffered quite obvious diminution. However, there is no reason to take this decline as dogmatically destined indefinitely.

The separation of the church and state, of the private and the public, is founded on an essential

inequality of consents, which gives a decisive advantage to the public institution over the private one. The inequality of the demands leads to the essential superiority of the state over the church in terms of separation (a regime of separation). The church is faced with two options: to accept the 'regime of separation' and to give the appearance of believing that belief is merely a private matter (the option that has been basically followed by the Second Vatican Council) or to become the critic of all governments. Manent writes that democracy appears to come across as a partial and contingent agent. It is quite brilliantly illuminated but, at the same time, it is severed from the fabric of all humanity (which includes the dead, the living, and those yet to be born). "By affirming its indeterminate sovereignty over itself, democratic humanity basically declares that it wills itself, without knowing itself." He considers the political submission of the church to democracy as perhaps fortunate. He says, "On democracy's side of the scale, we are left with political sovereignty and dialectical impotence. On the church's side, we are left with political submission and dialectical advantage."

### **Notes on "Totalitarianism and the Problem of Political Representation"**

Modern artificialism assumes that it is possible for man to truly divide himself, so that he is within society and at the same time he is completely outside of it. It is quite rare that someone asks if this is even thinkable. The imagination can always persuade us that we think or know something that we only will. Thomas Hobbes first formulated the artificialist idea, dividing man from matter (matter as pure passivity and man as artificer, as the subject of sovereign constructivist activity).

In politics, man resides at two poles. One is constituted by individuals and their situation and the other is the seat of power. The necessary unity of these two poles is conceived by means of the notion of representation. The idea of representation is used by both Hitler and the Communist Party, so it is a form which can be filled with very different contents. Manent admits freely that there are deceptive and illegitimate political representations but he contends that there have been so many illegitimate political representations because of the intrinsic indetermination of modern representation.

A paradox that is a condition of totalitarianism is this: the greater the value and the dignity of the represented are affirmed, the more the value and the dignity of the representative. Yet, the more the dignity of the representative is augmented, the more the dignity of the represented is necessarily diminished. So the logic of representation is self-destructive and self-immolatory.

Manent observes that it is a commonplace to say now that in totalitarianism civil society is absorbed by the state. However, he notes that "the civil society we know and the representative state mutually belong to one another. Intellectually, they were conceived together, in relation to one another." Historically, the power of the state created our civil society by destroying the 'intermediate' powers of the old regime.

Manent considers what the separation of political authority and civil society means. The material and spiritual elements of the society are the same in bourgeois society as they were in the old regime. However, these elements are "stripped of the immediate political inscription" they had had in the old regime. The society of the old regime was a 'society of bodies,' a corporate society, but now these bodies slide into the so-called 'private' sphere. Society is no longer organized by guilds and every individual has the right to engage in industrial or commercial activity. The 'material and spiritual' elements are preserved but they pass through the medium of the new individualistic civil society.

The material and spiritual contents of life are presupposed by the liberal representative state. But,

presupposition is the weakest form of affirmation and to be presupposed is the poorest form of existence. Man is defined as the being who has rights. All the contents of activities, such as religious activity, in principle lack authority and they exist only as particular applications of the rights of man. The representative state is said to be at the service of the “private” but, in reality, only what is directly inscribed in its political institutions is effectively and durably valorized in a society. Religion’s relegation to the private sphere is in some sense a disqualification. The public space of our societies is established by representation and its distancing of state and society. The state that takes direct responsibility for social activities cannot guarantee their public inscription. The state transforms itself into an enormous private person that is only controlled by the constraints of the global market and the international system. Paradoxically, liberal authorization puts in danger that which it authorizes.

The contents of life such as religion, families, and art are enfeebled as the democratic or the representative process develops. “The liberal representative state proves to the observer that it is possible for man to rise above these contents of life, since the man whose sovereignty he institutionalizes is, in principle, without a religion, without property, and without family. But at the same time this same man vehemently affirms the ‘value’ of these contents of life, renouncing his sovereignty as inscribed in the state. He never fails to proclaim his submission to the contents of life, above which, however, he has elevated himself by instituting the representative state.” Ultimately the transformation of religion into a ‘value’ is as much a negation of religion as the Marxist definition of it as alienation. There is a falsity to the new society. Human sovereignty is wholly present in the essence of this society, while its appearances are false. “The absorption of civil society by the state is only the appearance of a transformation that in its essence is the absorption of the state by civil society.”

“The French Revolution caused the contradictions of modern representation to manifest themselves with such dramatic intensity that from then on, above the real history of nations, above the slow work of democratic representation, an emblematic history was being wrought: men whose clarity and firmness had to them something of ancient characteristics led mankind to the threshold of the land promised- and denied- by the idea of modern representation.”

### **Notes on “Aurel Kolnai: A Political Philosopher Confronts the Scourge of Our Epoch”**

We live in “the age of separations” and experience an ambivalence in having both a satisfaction with the division of labor, especially intellectual labor, and at the same time a disquiet at the impossibility of a “synoptic grasp” of our human learning. The division between political and moral philosophy perhaps is more troubling than satisfying. The political philosopher now examines the workings of the body politic and posits improvements of it concerning himself with the kind of human being inhabiting it. At the same time, the moral philosopher examines minutely the perplexities of the moral agent, while usually ignoring the relation of these perplexities to the political regime.

One of the reasons for the division of political and moral philosophy is that there has emerged a single conception of political action that rests on the assumption that “as soon as a certain arrangement of our institutions has been achieved, the whole human problem will be essentially solved...” [This reminds me of John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, which aims, it seems to me, at a perfect political structure by which people can flourish without altruism or love as a requirement]. This hope for an institutional automatism and a “servo-mechanism” to guide the political body has one essential characteristic of being utopian.

Aurel Kolnai is one of the philosophers of the twentieth century who has given the most attention to the growing power of the utopian mind and the ideologizing of modern politics. “There is the risk that in

the name of utopia the legitimate search for social improvement will be perverted into an exercise in destruction.” The seductive power of utopia rests less in its content than in its promise of formal perfection which will reconcile reality and value, the *is* and the *ought*. Kolnai was convinced that the utopian mind deserves study on its own, apart from the political and sociological content it may embrace. The utopian mind may work with greater ease in the social and political ideas of the left but Kolnai thinks there is no necessary connection with the ideas of the left. Further, there exists ‘rightist’ utopias. The moderate right’s economic liberalism, for example, has a utopian stamp with its belief that market mechanisms can solve the problems of social man. There are also reactionary utopias on the extreme right glorifying the *ancien regime*, and subversive utopias, like Nazism, glorifying racial purity.

Kolnai was apparently driven to his study of the spins of utopia by dissatisfaction with the usual criticism of utopias. It is true but superficial to point out the unrealizable nature of utopia. This criticism by itself leaves out what is special about utopia, that “its unrealizable character provides the motive power for attempts to realize utopia and is responsible for the peculiarly destructive effects of these attempts.” Kolnai emphasizes that the utopian project is singled out precisely by its being contradictory or unrealizable. Utopians should be reproached not for trying to realize the unrealizable but for trying to realize what is not even thinkable, what neither he nor anyone else can think out without contradiction. “One who gives himself objectives which are unrealizable because they are unthinkable destroys or corrupts both in himself and in those he seduces or subdues, the natural relationship between ideas, motives, and values, on the one hand, and human action on the other. What he attacks is the internal constitution of the human world.”

What is “unthinkable” and “contradictory” to Kolnai about the utopian project is its claim that the new order of humanity must be attained by the conscious and deliberate actions of an enlightened group in full command of their direction while the new order itself represents the perfect spontaneity of total freedom. The artificial and preconceived is confounded with the natural, spontaneous, and unforeseen. “In every case the totalitarian project simultaneously affirms the absolute sovereignty of man... and his absolute enslavement, either to historical necessity or to blood and race.”

Manent praises Kolnai’s analysis for defining clearly the concept of totalitarianism. Totalitarian regimes may have commonalities with dictatorships and despotisms but their specific characteristic is their utopian logic. In this utopian kernel is to be found the central role of terror in these regimes. The totalitarian organization must both show it is the only victor in the political struggle and make people feel that a new reality has replaced yesterday’s corrupted world. The regime compels society to say that it is the new reality, a new world transported with happiness, in order to get over the contradiction in which the new reality is theoretically realized only through the totalitarian organization withering away to leave the new man in his spontaneity.

The unthinkable is thought by the analyst or interpreter forcing himself objectively somehow to think what cannot be thought subjectively. Kolnai shows a continuity of the utopian mind with mental attitudes commonly found among ordinary people. He shows how the utopian mind is born of perversion in our relation to values. Most people live with a day to day sense of their contingency and limitation but departmental utopianism selects a single value and claims that realizing it will lead to the realization of all other values. It obsesses not just with the particular value, but with the coincidence of *is* and *ought*. Through a subtle but decisive displacement, the ‘idea’ of evidence is transported from the intellectual to the volitional sphere. Then, “Cut off by the will’s decision from all authentic contact with the real world, the intellect feels an intoxicating license to justify and motivate whatever actions the utopian will dictates. Thus, the respective places in the human economy of theory and practice,

intellect and will, are interchanged.” The ideas which formulate the utopian project are not meant to create a bond between the agent and values, but on the contrary to liberate the will from all rules and from any mental content whatsoever, and to protect the agents of utopia from all spontaneous and personal contact with values.

This inversion of the roles of theory and practice has been made possible by the virtual disappearance of ‘practical reason’ from the political thought of the last three centuries. The transformation of political philosophy and its practical knowledge into a political science that is value-free is closely bound up with the development of liberal and representative political regimes. The utopian temptation seems to be bound up with the dwindling of ideas of practical reason and the hypertrophy of the theory of science.

Kolnai holds that we have the good fortune to have been born into a world of institutions, models, achievements and traditions and we do not, as the utopian project presupposes, have to construct an alternative world. “...our task is quite different. It is to explore our world phenomenologically and thence to derive our concepts and motives.” An accurate, scrupulous description of the framework of thought through which we express our humanity is enough to provide a sound orientation for our thinking and living.

Manent compares and contrasts Kolnai’s thought with Karl Popper and Michael Oakeshott, who he considered himself closely allied with. Though sharing presuppositions with them, he also differed with them. He thought Popper’s conservatism too exclusively epistemological, depending too heavily on the value of a traditional frame of reference. He thinks Oakeshott goes too far in his criticism of ‘rationalism’ and puts reason in jeopardy. A second fundamental objection to Oakeshott’s moral philosophy is that it gives no place to conscience. The utopian mind contemplates a condition in which conscience will have no function and no meaning. The distinctive mark of Kolnai’s conservatism could be said to be its giving a large place to conscience. Conscience understood as judging in the name of a moral absolute can easily become the principle of a revolutionary attitude, and is not conservative in this sense. “That is why, in practice, totalitarian undertakings find so ready a support among sincerely conscientious people who are indignant at the misery of the poor, say, or at national humiliation – moving them to place their moral energy in the service of a conception which destroys the very idea of conscience.” [I am reminded here of Nicolas Berdyaev’s tracing of the genealogy of Communism from exactly this humanitarian impulse in *The Origin of Russian Communism*.] We need a conscience informed and armed with a conservative political philosophy in order to avoid the danger of solaconscience.

Manent thinks Kolnai largely ignores the question about what has brought about the devastating spread of the utopian spirit in modern times, and especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He does not think that Kolnai’s admirable psychological genealogy is enough. Kolnai’s investigation is not so much a study of the utopian mind as it is a study of the extreme form of the utopian mind, totalitarianism. Manent writes, “From time to time Kolnai does recall the theories that seem to him to be particularly suggestive of the contradictions of the utopian mind, especially the theory of Rousseau. But it seems to me that Kolnai is insufficiently attentive to the actual workings of the intellectual mechanisms and systems of ideas...” that make totalitarian projects possible and which are also in the development of modern politics in general. Manent suggests that certain fundamental categories of the modern politics which Hobbes did so much to determine are fertile ground for development or dialectic whose study might illuminate the genesis of totalitarianism. None of this impairs the essential validity and the importance of Kolnai’s study of these matters. Kolnai’s nerve as a thinker linking political reflection with a phenomenology of the human world is exceptional and rare.

### **Pierre Manent's "On Modern Individualism"**

Both partisans and adversaries of the modern democratic and individualist movement share a feeling that a new type of humanity has left the old type behind. Opponents of democracy have been right in their warning that the growth of the democratic tendency has acted as a solvent of community. Communities and forms of belonging appearing under democracy do so only on the basis of individual consent. Defenders of democracy have been right when they point out that this dissolution also constitutes a liberation.

Communities to which people belong in the democratic world no longer command them. In families, the power of the head of the family has been abolished, mothers and fathers, who are now coequal as parents, demand less and less obedience from their offspring. In nations, even democratically elected governments do not dare to ask citizen-soldiers to die for their country. Even the Catholic Church, since the end of the Second Vatican Council, has ceased to insist on the urgency of salvation and the necessity of obeying the church's commandments in order to obtain it. The past too has lost all authority to command and has been thrown open to mere historical tourism.

Modern humanity records its intimate life with ever more unblushing detail. Manent observes that modern literature has sought "to unmask the falsity of all human relationships, the illusory character of love, and the ludicrous fraudulence of language." "A will to knowledge is at work here, elaborating a kind of negative anthropology that is supported not by faith but by distrust- by an explicit lack of faith in any and all human attachments." This movement opposes and seeks to displace the two great authorities which previously nourished literature: the Greek and Roman classics and the Christian Bible.

Manent says this movement is an attempt to return by means of literature to a state of nature, where only individuals exist, and only exist in their individuality. There is a double movement of artificial construction and deconstruction, an increasingly sophisticated interconnectedness paired with a life of the mind dominated by the effort to undo and "deconstruct" all human relationships. This double movement is not contradictory because both obey the same principle that there are no natural links binding people to one another so that people are the authors of their own links. (When man becomes the measure of man, then there are no sacred links). "Behind the devices and artifices of ever more technologically sophisticated civilization... lurks the abyss of human unconnectedness."

What is being described is the specific pathos of modern civilization. Modern individualism, despite its current triumph, has historically roused against itself extremely resolute foes and the two great revolutionary projects of the twentieth century have raged against it. The revolutionary critique of the extreme left attempted to recover human community but pushed it beyond a point where the city itself was destroyed in the process. The revolutionary critique of the extreme right rejected the very idea of civilization. Communism and Nazism were unprecedentedly virulent promoters of the absence of the human bond, which is the premise of modern individualism as well. The doctrines of our political regimes never confront the question: as human individuals, what is proper to each of us and what is common to all of us? This is because they presuppose that the individual is the only source of all legitimacy, and add-ons such as the body politic are mere regrettable necessities.

To institute a political order, prior to consulting the will of any individual, requires first the staking out of a common territory. "Europe" gets bigger and bigger but it has not fixed a common territory, calling

into question whether “political Europe” is not in the making despite frenetic EU headquarters activity. Manent criticizes the lack of definition of boundaries. He says West Europeans may feel vindicated for their indifference to territorial questions by the savage territorial disputes of Eastern Europe, but Manent claims these are but the “inverted image” and part of the effect of lack of territorial consciousness. By refusing to accept political responsibilities that would result from definition of a common territory, the fatal idea of an indefinite expansion of Europe persists and becomes in fact its dissolution.

This is a substitution of civilization for the political. The higher the plane on which the common realm is pitched, the more it will tend to divide rather than unite. With the removal of religious truth to the private realm, the nation became the highest common entity and the new basis of association in Europe. However, the nations waged dreadful war against each other. Now a lot of reasonable and well-intentioned people have taken the view that it is time for Europe to renounce the political form of the nation state and to live together within the realm of civilization alone. Manent admits one can renounce the nation as a political form but he does not believe that people can live long within civilization alone without some sense of political belonging, and hence without some definition of what is held in common. Some might contend that what is held in common is humanity itself. In this view only one thing is needful: that people respect one another’s humanity. Manent quotes Immanuel Kant who wrote that what we ought to respect in the other is the respect he has for the moral law. However, Manent notes that the modern individual detests the moral law. This notion of law is then displaced and our humanism becomes humanitarianism. Pity is asked to do the work of a political principle, which runs up against severe limits right away.

There are reasons pity hits a wall. For one thing, it scarcely distinguishes between men and beasts, making it insufficient as a principle for a properly human community. Also, pity is an emotion or passion, highly dependent on images, and hence vulnerable to the manipulation of images. Pity is selfish and makes one feel the pleasure of not suffering. Also, pity is indeterminate. It contains within itself no principle of evaluation or comparison. “The whiner who suffers loudly and visibly elicits our tears, while we pass indifferently by the brave man who ‘keeps a stiff upper lip’ and refuses to reveal his pain.” (I am reminded of the celebration of the cause of Bruce Jenner’s sex-“change” operation as “courageous” versus the indifference to the stoic soldiers enduring wounds for the country). Pity does not necessarily bring with it the idea of action designed to put an end to the pathetic situation that aroused it in the first place. Pity does nothing to get us out of the state of nature. There is no immediate evidence of being human nor of immediate experience of the other that disposes for us the necessity of building a political order, and therefore of asking ourselves what is to be held in common.

There is a characteristic form of justice among us by which our society combines individual liberty and social obligation, the institution of contracts. In actuality, however, in both its effectiveness and its meaning, a contract is indeterminate. Every contract depends on a context. In its most stripped down definition, “a contract means the correlation of forces, the relative strength of the parties involved.”

Manent observes that contractual justice is necessary, but not sufficient. “What is common and what may be the common denominator is what every individual possesses and what all the others also possess: for example, a body.” That which is “common” about the common denominator does not lead us beyond mere individualism. What is common in the strong and full sense is something where embrace or appropriation transforms the individual by taking him beyond himself. Can we acknowledge something greater than ourselves? Can we hope that this public thing will make us greater than ourselves? These two questions must be answered along with the question of what is held in

common in order to ascribe the right magnitude and gravity to the question.

**Manent's "Recovering Human Attachments: An Introduction to Allan Bloom's *Love and Friendship*"**

Manent notes that Allan Bloom's inquiry in the book mentioned in the title of this essay had its origin in the simple observation that our societies are the least erotic of all. The fact that we are so eager to tell all, show all, and look at everything without blushing proves that we flee Eros rather than see it as it is. Eros cannot simply be beheld as it is because there is no neutral place between desire and law, or shame. Instead, we cast over Eros a net of abstractions, the "facts" and "rights" of "sex." This gives us a fictitious mastery that allows us to derive the pleasure of feeling superiority over all preceding worlds because our "realism about life" has triumphed over the prejudices that once dominated.

Each epoch is captive to its conventions. Ours is only worse because of its pretense to have done away with all conventions. Each epoch must gain for itself the truth of human experience against its most cherished prejudices. Allan Bloom thinks that the effort to discover authentic experience is today most necessary in the domain of private attachments, in the realm of love and friendship, because it is the most natural and the most threatened. It is particularly threatened because, in addition to the illusion of objectivity, the only vocation that contemporary man recognizes is that of being an individual. Modern man aims to become evermore the author and artist of all his ties – to be always more unencumbered and bond-free.

While the emancipation of modern man can liberate from the tyrannical and mutilating, the bonds being dissolved at the same time are bonds born of experience that give form and content to life and that everyone recognizes as the most precious part of life. Human desire is inseparably desire for connection and for freedom. Today there is a lopsided satisfaction with saying "above all, do what you want."

How do we recover the rich complexity of our connections and avoid arbitrariness? Bloom starts from "the last great interpretation of love," romanticism as elaborated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. While we are not romantics, we are disillusioned or sobered romantics who commit ourselves to "realism." "To orient ourselves in this great subject, we must first recover the meaning of romanticism by understanding Rousseau. Manent believes it is a mark of Bloom's superiority that he profoundly grasped that Rousseau is not only a writer and philosopher of the first rank but that he also is the last great reformer of the West, with Friedrich Nietzsche a distant second. (This raises the question whether we ought not to go ahead and read Rousseau's entire corpus of works).

Rousseau begins with and always returns to the claim that man, by nature, loves only himself and can only love himself. However, he cannot be fully human without loving others and something greater than himself, so he must construct a second nature in which he loves only himself while loving someone other than himself. This second nature can be the city, for which the *Social Contract* provides the design. Because of the obstacles of nation-states, commerce and Christianity's influence, Rousseau thinks it more judicious to construct this second nature around the human couple. One can find support for this project in the first nature since it is inscribed in the natural difference between man and woman. Book five of Rousseau's *Emile*, Manent writes, is a text of wonderful exactitude about this difference.

The problem is that Rousseau's construction remains too much a construction and a project. Intellectually, it is an oversimplification to weave the entire human bond around the difference between

male and female. It leads to burdening the couple with a “superhuman responsibility and subjecting them to excessive pressure.” The pressure weighs with greater cruelty on the woman as spouse and mother. The romantic project aims at condensing all of life’s possibilities into the perfectly complementary human couple. However, Bloom shows that Rousseau’s vision becomes in the great novels of the nineteenth century the adulterous wife as the “effectual truth.”

Where do we turn if we do not wish to be merely post-romantics, defined by what we reject? Manent notes that the limitations of Rousseau’s vision are included in his project. As soon as one wants to transform the world, one gives up to some extent the comprehension of it. A part of the whole must be focused on where change is desired, and hence the whole must be neglected. Rousseau had to forget the larger whole that is the city and the even vaster whole which is the whole of everything. Where are we to look for an image of the whole where one may see the infinite variety of bonds that can connect man to a friend, the city, the world and the gods?

Bloom suggests that Shakespeare is this pure mirror of nature. Bloom helps us to see in his tour of Shakespeare the pairs of friends as well as the pairs of lovers, and he brings out for our discernment “the strange bond whose expression is not an embrace but conversation, whose element is not feeling but reason, whose purpose is not to engender beings of flesh but to discover in common the truth about man.” Bloom alerts us to the way of life which is the life of reason, the life dedicated to understanding life. It has its mysteriously faithful reflection in Plato’s *Symposium*. The love of wisdom is literally and non-metaphorically the most erotic of the soul’s dispositions, the one that leads to the highest possibility and that consequently is capable of forming the strongest human tie because it is the most genuine one. Life is worthy of being loved because it is capable of being understood.

### **Pierre Manent’s “Raymond Aron and the Analysis of Modern Society”**

In the introduction to *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents*, Daniel J. Mahoney mentions that Pierre Manent was a former assistant to the great French anticommunist political thinker Raymond Aron. In describing Manent’s exposition of Aron, Mahoney summarizes, “Aron worked to demystify the power of Marxist historicism. In doing so, he wished to restore the political world of choice and responsibility to citizens and statesmen.” In this, Aron was like that other great anti-Communist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who famously wrote in *The Archipelago Gulag*, “Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either -- but right through every human heart -- and through all human hearts.”

In Manent’s short essay “Raymond Aron and the Analysis of Modern Society,” originally a foreword to Raymond Aron’s *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Manent notes the exceptional testament to Aron’s famed erudition after his death by the left-wing newspaper *Liberation*, against whose stances Aron had been locked in battle during the final years of his life. The newspaper published: “France has lost its prof.” Manent describes Aron’s academic discourse as an epitome of “clarity, gravity, and nobility.” Manent says he was initially attracted to Aron’s teaching by the charm of his voice.

Manent identifies *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* as, in his opinion, the “most capacious and profound” of Aron’s books that stemmed from his university teaching. (I wonder if Leszek Kolakowski’s title for his voluminous *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution* was perhaps a hat-tip to Aron?) Manent says the book is a very rich reflection on modern society and on the condition of modern man.

“Modern man’s life is governed by two great ideas. In the domain of action it is governed by the idea of freedom, and in the domain of knowledge by the idea of science,” Manent summarizes. A science of history and society tries to abolish freedom and a “creative” freedom “reveals” the hollowness of so-called objective truth. Aron’s life was centered between these and his entire work was a battle against these two extremes.

In his book *Main Currents*, Aron moves between two authors “with whom the problem of the relationship between science and freedom comes to the forefront,” Montesquieu and Max Weber. Montesquieu, in the middle of the eighteenth century, was both the theoretician of modern liberty, founded on the progress of commerce and the separation of powers, and of a new social science aiming to coordinate the “things which govern men.” Max Weber, in the years leading up to the first World War, sought to preserve both the principle of causality, “which is the condition of all rationality,” and the sense of free and significant human action. He aimed to do justice to the “subjective” viewpoint of the agent and to a politics which struggled against the impersonal bureaucratization of the world.

The authors whose works are examined in *Main Currents* are primarily German or French. Aron was a French writer whose formation was largely German, and who fought Marxism with weapons borrowed in part from Max Weber. The development of modern society and modern freedom were much more problematic in continental Europe than in the Anglo-American world. However, this made the inquiry there into the specific nature of modern society more acute.

As Aron tells it, this investigation led continental thinkers into three main responses. The first is Karl Marx’s view that modern society is defined by capitalism and that private property is the means of production. The second is Auguste Comte’s view that modern society is defined by industry, or the application of science to the transformation of nature. The third is Alexis de Tocqueville’s argument that modern society is defined by democracy, or equality of conditions producing their effects in all of life’s domains, the first being the political domain.

What is the generative principle of modern society? While Marxism as interpreted by Lenin has hit hard times, “Comte and Tocqueville remain our contemporaries.” “Who can deny that democratic individualism, on the one hand, and the application of science to the transformation of nature, including human nature, on the other, constitute the two determinative features of our ‘global’ world?” Manent commends Aron as a guide to understand modern society since the question of the best balance between science and freedom is still with us.

### **Pierre Manent’s “De Gaulle as Hero”**

Manent begins his essay with the assertion that no modern man since Napoleon measures up to the poetic convention of heroism more than Charles de Gaulle. In writing something like an encomium on de Gaulle, it seems to me that Manent is encapsulating his own French patriotism in his honoring of de Gaulle as he sees him. I recall C.S. Lewis suggesting that Napoleon was in the outer reaches of hell, but Manent goes on to stress that he is saying a hero, not a great man. He says however that de Gaulle was a great man, or a great statesman in the second part of his career when he “single-handedly founded the Fifth Republic.”

Manent provides in this essay a précis of de Gaulle’s life with a perspective he admits frankly is contested by many. He notes that in May to June 1940, France suffered an “epic defeat” by the German army. The military disaster was followed by a political panic. In this situation, Marshal Petain, who

sought an armistice, was granted full executive and legislative powers from the National Assembly, “which thus immolated itself and the Third Republic.” Before the signing of the armistice on 22 June, de Gaulle, then defense undersecretary, had flown to London where on 18 June he issued an appeal calling the French people to resistance. Manent notes, “De Gaulle’s refusal of the armistice was the decision from which the whole Gaullist epic sprang. Our understanding and appreciation of de Gaulle’s conduct during the Second World War hinges on our understanding and appreciation of this refusal.”

Manent notes that de Gaulle’s view was that the universally condemned actions of the later Vichy regime followed inexorably from the armistice of Petain’s government. To de Gaulle’s ire, the armistice was not laid to Petain’s charge at his trial. However, the question of the armistice is debated. Raymond Aron, Manent’s mentor, thought the armistice inevitable. Manent asserts as a truism that if we concede the legitimacy of the armistice, we concede thereby the legitimacy of Vichy, which was brought into being for the purpose of signing the armistice. If we concede the legitimacy of Vichy, we concede the legitimacy of Vichy’s policy (and its spirit), which was all to shield the French people as much as possible from the consequences of their defeat. “Circumstances and necessity, once they have been accepted as the principle of a regime, speak potently in advocacy of whatever the regime has done.”

In evaluating Vichy, it does not matter that there were men of moral quality on the side of Vichy. What matters is the moral content of a political position or decision. The armistice meant the forsaking of French sovereignty which had not been done in 14 centuries and which was not done by any other European government. Some retort to this that France in all practicality was no longer sovereign in June 1940, when the armistice was signed. Manent forgoes entering into a debate about the practicability. Instead, he notes that both Gaullists and Vichyists agreed that France had been defeated in the field. The question that divided them was whether to accept and consent to the defeat that they acknowledged.

Some regard the Vichyists as “hard-nosed realists” but Manent believes this a grave distortion. Instead, he emphasizes how the two sides framed the defeat. He says the broader question is “which elements of reality do you consider?” “...in which ‘whole’ do you live and do you purport to act?” The whole of the body politic of France that has lasted fourteen centuries, or a group of people just trying to survive one more day. There is a disproportion between a great body politic and a stunning military defeat since, while the defeat could annihilate a small group, it does not do so to a great body politic. “Only the obstinate will not to accept what one is forced to acknowledge answers the moral nobility of political life.” Rather than accept reality, Petain’s role was to shield the French from reality. “It is this strain of complacent flight from reality that, more than its crimes, gave Vichy its unbearable character.”

Manent calls de Gaulle’s June 18 appeal the liberating act of will France needed in this Styx like state of affairs. “In this founding and pregnant proclamation, de Gaulle gave time and space, that is, faith and reason to the French cornered and blinded in despair.”

De Gaulle’s first career was as a military reformer who was tireless and shrewd but sometimes got on people’s nerves. He was an advocate for the new military instrument of an armored division. “As a military reformer, de Gaulle received more rebukes than attention and more attention than success.” De Gaulle gained the confidence of Paul Reynaud during this time who would later appoint him as defense undersecretary. Without this appointment, de Gaulle may never have had the platform for the deeds he later performed. Shortly before de Gaulle’s June appeal, he was on the brink of despair and resignation but a good man named Georges Mandel fortified him.

Manent reflects that de Gaulle acted outside of anything prescribed by the law and subordinated everything to the law of honor. He notes that honor, particularly military honor, has no recognized place in modern moral life “despite, or because of” the size and destructiveness of modern wars. The sanctioned modern motivations are protection of life and limb, relief of man’s estate, the bettering of the human condition, the realization of social justice, etc. De Gaulle disclaimed every modern motive, or at least did not resort to any. De Gaulle “simply and inflexibly pronounced himself, and made others admit, that he was the trustee of French honor, and, consequently, of French sovereignty and destiny.” He was designated this trustee by the sole power of his own will and dedication.

Manent believes that in de Gaulle’s political and moral being, he owed nothing to democratic convention but in his political action, he never turned against democracy, and obviously Manent affirms this as the act of a “truly great man.” “A great part of de Gaulle’s analytical and rhetorical skill went...to demonstrate that the rebirth of France was not only the natural desire of every decent Frenchman, but, also, the rational desire of every good European and friend of the Free World.”

Relations between England and France deteriorated after the June 1940 armistice. De Gaulle’s policy in response to the armistice was founded upon a kind of fiction, that the armistice was null and void and France had never quit fighting, so that the Vichy government was completely illegitimate. De Gaulle’s action was meant to bring France, or as many French forces as possible, back into the fight and for them to be acknowledged by the Allied Powers, so that in the end France could be counted among the victors against Hitler.

Manent stresses again the important of the frame of reference in interpreting De Gaulle’s actions. “In which frame of space and time, in which whole, do you purport to act, or do you look at your actions and those of others?” De Gaulle emphasized a historically broad frame of reference that encompassed far more than the few years leading up to the armistice, stretching to the “Thirty Years War” in the course of which Germany had twice made a bid at European and world domination. Between 1914 and 1918, France bore the brunt of German assaults. In spite of that, Britain and the United States turned their back on France soon after the war, with France feeling in her bones that she could not withstand the next German onslaught with at best grudging support.

The right frame of reference takes into account not only history but the future and what will come after victory has been won. The French people were in danger of turning toward the Communists if they were spurned and condemned by the Allies. De Gaulle wrote to F.D.R., “Victory ought to reconcile France with her friends: it would be impossible if she had not a share in it.” F.D.R. did not deign to respond. De Gaulle anticipated the debt of gratitude the French people would owe the English and the Americans but he also realized they would not acknowledge the debt they owed to France for taking the brunt of the earlier war. De Gaulle made himself unbearable to the English and Americans, as he himself admitted. His intransigency flowed from his, and France’s, powerlessness.

Manent explains in his view why many intelligent and good people in France dislike or even hate Charles de Gaulle. He says despair gives rise to two sets of sentiments: one is the desire for, or at least acceptance of consolation. The other is to reject consolation and prefer to go on despairing. He classes Gaullists as lovers of France who welcome consolation and the anti-Gaullists as lovers of France who spurn consolation. He regards those who reject consolation as more stiff-necked than de Gaulle ever was. Manent concludes, “Charles de Gaulle is indeed a hero.”

**Pierre Manent’s “Raymond Aron and the Analysis of Modern Society”**

In the introduction to *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents*, Daniel J. Mahoney mentions that Pierre Manent was a former assistant to the great French anticommunist political thinker, Raymond Aron. In describing Manent's exposition of Aron, Mahoney summarizes:

Aron worked to demystify the power of Marxist historicism. In doing so, he wished to restore the political world of choice and responsibility to citizens and statesmen." In this, Aron was like that other great anti-Communist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who famously wrote in *The Archipelago Gulag*, "Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either -- but right through every human heart -- and through all human hearts."

In Manent's short essay "Raymond Aron and the Analysis of Modern Society," which was originally a foreword to Raymond Aron's *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Manent notes the exceptional testament to Aron's famed erudition after his death by the left-wing newspaper *Liberation*, against whose stances Aron had been locked in battle during the final years of his life. The newspaper published: "France has lost its prof." Manent describes Aron's academic discourse as an epitome of "clarity, gravity, and nobility." Manent says he was initially attracted to Aron's teaching by the charm of his voice.

Manent identifies *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* as, in his opinion, the "most capacious and profound" of Aron's books that stemmed from his university teaching. (I wonder if Leszek Kolakowski's title for his voluminous *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution* was perhaps a hat-tip to Aron?) Manent says the book is a very rich reflection on modern society and on the condition of modern man.

"Modern man's life is governed by two great ideas. In the domain of action it is governed by the idea of freedom, and in the domain of knowledge by the idea of science," Manent summarizes. A science of history and society tries to abolish freedom and a "creative" freedom "reveals" the hollowness of so-called objective truth. Aron's life was centered between these and his entire work was a battle against these two extremes.

In his book *Main Currents*, Aron moves between two authors "with whom the problem of the relationship between science and freedom comes to the forefront," Montesquieu and Max Weber. Montesquieu, in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, was both the theoretician of modern liberty, founded on the progress of commerce and the separation of powers, and of a new social science aiming to coordinate the "things which govern men." Max Weber, in the years leading up to the First World War, sought to preserve both the principle of causality, "which is the condition of all rationality," and the sense of free and significant human action. He aimed to do justice to the "subjective" viewpoint of the agent and to a politics which struggled against the impersonal bureaucratization of the world.

The authors whose works are examined in *Main Currents* are primarily German or French. Aron was a French writer whose formation was largely German, and who fought Marxism with weapons borrowed in part from Max Weber. The development of modern society and modern freedom were much more problematic in continental Europe than in the Anglo-American world. However, this made the inquiry there into the specific nature of modern society more acute.

As Aron tells it, this investigation led continental thinkers into three main responses. The first is Karl

Marx's view that modern society is defined by capitalism and private property is the means of production. The second is Auguste Comte's view that modern society is defined by industry, or the application of science to the transformation of nature. The third is Alexis de Tocqueville's argument that modern society is defined by democracy, or the equality of conditions producing their effects in all of life's domains, the first being the political domain.

What is the generative principle of modern society? While Marxism as interpreted by Lenin has hit hard times, "Comte and Tocqueville remain our contemporaries." "Who can deny that democratic individualism, on the one hand, and the application of science to the transformation of nature, including human nature, on the other hand, constitute the two determinative features of our 'global' world?" Manent commends Aron as a guide to understand modern society since the question of the best balance between science and freedom is still with us.

### **Pierre Manent's "Democracy Without Nations?"**

The contemporary political world is marked by the victory of democracy. With the collapse of its two most terrible enemies, the democratic principle of legitimacy no longer has a politically credible rival to be found anywhere. Pierre Manent thinks even the upheavals of "Islamic fundamentalism" do not undermine the general validity of this appraisal.

Manent notes that the democratic principle of legitimacy is the principle of consent. A democratic regime is that regime that, in principle, is willed by each individual. Democracy defines itself, and seeks to be that regime that is willed by each individual. Even totalitarian regimes deferred to the principle of consent in organizing mock elections.

Manent observes, "In a certain sense, an opponent of the principle of consent is always in self-contradiction: by choosing a principle of action different from consent, he in effect wills not to will. We see here the intrinsic superiority of democracy over all its competitors. The will of each man as man is appealed to and man's universal humanity is the 'sole 'hypothesis' of a democratic regime.'" This contrasts with the rivals to modern democracy who explicitly denied the humanity of certain persons. Nazism subjected or exterminated the "naturally" inferior races and communism subjected or exterminated the "historically" condemned classes.

Manent posits that the totalitarian denial of the unity of the human race was made to seem plausible to so many by a basis in certain aspects of being human that are also constitutive of our humanity, a basis in differences which define man almost as much as his universal humanity: nation and class. He observes that the triumph of contemporary democracy coincides with the weakening in the West of nation and class, which is due partly to the discredit totalitarianism has cast upon them. Manent says now "universal humanity" overwhelms difference so that between the individual and the world nothing intrudes except weak demands for respect for ethnic, religious, and sexual "identities." Manent describes the current modern feeling as a mixture of varying degrees of satisfaction at the triumph of the democratic principle although with anxiety about the disappearance or the weakening of all political forms of articulation with respect to the world, especially the nation-state.

Manent declares his focus here to be on the nation-state and he begins by observing that, historically, the Enlightenment produced an initial homogenization of Europe. However, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic enterprise produced both more homogenization and unleashed a contrary movement of particularization and national separation. Though European nations had long existed, their particularity

now burst forth with a new intensity and energy. From passive existence as nations, they moved to willed existence as such. Democracy and the nation henceforth had a common existence. The nation provided a concrete context and gave 'flesh' to the democratic abstractions of the sovereignty of the people and the general will.

The most difficult problem of all regarding democracy arose. Modern democracy as distinguished from ancient democracy is not immediately political. Tocqueville observed that the "dogma of the sovereignty of the people" is the "last link in a chain of opinions which binds around the whole Anglo-American world." The great maxim on which civic and political society rests in the United States is on the belief that Providence has given each individual the amount of reason necessary for him to look after himself in matters of his own exclusive concern. Extended to the nation as a whole, this becomes the dogma of the sovereignty of the people.

Manent calls this dogma the principle of consent. He notes that in ancient politics, democracy presupposed the city, a form. The city as city made ancient democracy possible and called it forth. The political problem of modern democracy has been largely unrecognized as long as its national framework or context was taken for granted, which has been the case since the French Revolution. The nation has now, however, lost its self-evidence, at least in Western Europe. The practical political difficulty is this: the democratic principle does not define the framework within which it operates.

The nation has weakened as the community of belonging *par excellence* and democracy seems to be discarding it as a vehicle. This is worrisome because no new vehicle is available or even clearly under construction. Some suggest that "Europe" is this new political framework. The European idea did help to reconstruct the European nation-state after the Second World War, but now "Europe" perhaps means the depoliticization of their collective existence, shifting into "civil society" and "civilization." It could also mean the reconstruction into one enormous European nation. The ambiguity between these two possibilities has become paralyzing. Manent describes Europe as possessing a sleepwalker's assurance and obstinately refusing to think about itself comprehensively. A political order puts something or has something in common, but for Europe there is ambiguity on just this point. Manent asserts that democracy requires that the population consent to the political structure proposed to it, but he notes that the population that is to be asked for consent is ambiguous in the case of Europe.

The case of the former Yugoslavia seems to confirm to Europe the basis for its aversion to defining territory and population because of the savage ethnic cleansing that manifested itself there. It thinks it can avoid this savagery by an intentional form of ambiguity. However, Manent notes that after much lost time, a definite territorial arrangement was imposed on the former Yugoslavia by the "imperial" power, the United States. He concludes that "Europe does not understand that if it wants to think and act politically, it first must think and will a definite territorial arrangement."

One objection is that politics, as the putting of things in common, is outdated and the network of communications is now so dense and extensive that humanity as a whole possesses a "sensorium commune" sufficient for its legitimate needs. It is also observed that the various nationalisms of today, even when they are violent, tend to be defensive rather than expansive. Manent, however, cautions with the example of the older, homogeneous Europe which nevertheless exploded into "furiously inimical nations." He notes also that "communication," in itself, does not create a true bond among people. "It is like an amorous encounter reduced to the 'kiss' of two telephone numbers on a computer screen."

Classically, the political community was considered the community *par excellence*, or the "supreme"

community. The question is now raised about whether we are not better off without such a community. Manent responds with a series of counter assertions. He says that man is a free and rational being and cannot fulfill himself except in a political community. It is only there that we seriously put things in common. The family and the extended community are not adequate because these fall short of the need for the rational deliberation that justice requires. "The political community is thus irreplaceable as the framework of deliberation over justice."

Manent therefore argues that we should show more respect, not for passive, lifeless "identity" but for political bodies that are the political contexts of human action. In Europe, this means the nation. He notes that thinking of the nation as the political context of action rather than as a "cultural identity" makes the nation a less conflictual concept. Rather than speaking of passive "identity," he countenances speaking of "identification," which is active and a call to action. Manent believes we must acknowledge that politics is about action and the motive of action is the view of the future.

Manent says there already exists a certain tradition of common European action which can be appealed to. He says the moral-political root of the construction in Europe was the decision taken by Germany and France in the 1950s, and later ratified by Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer: to consider each other as allies. The point Manent wants to carry here is that speaking of common political action by European nations is a proposition that is quite meaningful.

Manent warns perhaps prophetically: "If we do not succeed in tightening the dangerously loosening bonds in the Western world between human communities and the political actions of their governments, the divorce between the nation and democracy will be no less dangerous for the latter than for the former." Manent remarks that modern democracy is royally ungrateful to the nation and that it wants to be self-sufficient but it cannot do without a body. He says in the interim that democracy has put on the abstract body called "Europe." This "body" is not delimited however, and every limit is arbitrary from the point of view of the democratic principle.

Manent observes that now that the principle of consent has banished every other principle, it is not clear how a new body could form and then subject itself to the principle of consent that has constituted the democratic nation. "The political molds are broken and the democratic vigilance inhibits their reconstruction." Manent corrects himself and says better say arrogance and immoderation than vigilance. He notes the growing impotence of the European citizen where the instrument of democracy has been swallowed up by democracy.

Manent underscores what is wrong with this limitless democracy. Since man is not the sovereign author of the human world, it is dangerous and illogical for him to act as if he were. He notes, "...we are the first people who wish to submit all the aspects of the world to a single principle." He urges that the true friends of liberty must acknowledge that liberty itself has need of limits. He underscores that the principle of consent is increasingly becoming a principle of political impotence and paralysis. Given such a condition, the only other principle capable of producing political institutions, or at least political effects, is the unprincipled principle of pure force.

He notes that a political body always combines force and justice. He warns however that leaving behind political existence endangers us with the complete separation of justice and force, despite all our baubles of ingenuity. "Our old nations... are tired, unwieldy, slow to move, obtuse, and pretentious. But they are also substantial and enduring; they are infinitely precious 'condensations' of thoughts and actions" and they are still the only political entities we have between us and a "state of nature," or

civilization without justice.

Manent stresses that his essay is a defense of the nation as a political body and not as an expression of particularity. He says the nation as a political body has succeeded in a manner only comparable to the ancient city in “realizing the articulation of the particular and the universal.” He notes that today the nation’s power to articulate the universal on the basis of the particular is weakening, and the two are coming apart. “The nation remains the indispensable form that gives concrete expression to our common human nature and aspirations.”

### **Summary of “Strauss and Nietzsche” by Pierre Manent**

Pierre Manent opens by remarking upon his experience in reading Leo Strauss. He feels that Strauss sheds great light on certain major junctures of the history of political philosophy, but at the same time too, Strauss himself is enigmatic and obscure. Though Strauss was very devoted to the works of Nietzsche, he wrote only one book on Nietzsche and merely made scattered remarks about him in other works.

Manent begins with the author that, according to Strauss, resembles Nietzsche the most: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The movement of Rousseau’s thought can be characterized as a return to antiquity and a radicalization of modernity. The rhythm of Rousseau’s thought, his motif, is a rhythm which continues today to provide the dynamism to modern thought. It is characterized by “the return to the Greeks” and a simultaneous exposition of the limits of the thought and the humanity of the Greeks, entailing the “promulgation of a new determination of man’s being.”

Manent asks why Strauss chose to study this motif in Rousseau and not in Nietzsche or Heidegger. Put another way, why did he stop at the French Revolution? The conditions of political philosophy were radically changed by the French Revolution. For the first time in its history it “accepts a revelation, even if a revelation of reason.” It thereby left or it leaves its element and Strauss suggests that it has never returned to it. The specific value which Strauss attributes to Rousseau is that he is “the last modern who posed the human problem in the original terms of philosophy, as a problem of nature and convention, as the search for nature beyond convention, for the life according to nature.”

Manent asks why Strauss appears to be only interested in “limit-case” and “extremist” authors such as Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. It is in these authors that are the source of the movement that characterizes modernity as it best reveals itself to us today. However, it is misleading to say that Strauss says nothing about the other, “nonextremist” authors such as Hegel (for example).

Manent examines a passage from Strauss on Hegel in his dialogue with Alexander Kojève. Manent notes, in particular, Strauss’s proposition that “Hegel’s teaching is founded on Hobbes’s doctrine of the state of nature and fundamentally is “only worth as much as the later.” Hegel’s philosophy, in short, “fundamentally amounts to what his analysis of the state of nature is worth, that is, of his analysis of the fear of death.” The main point of pivot of Hegel’s analysis is his formulation of the virtues and the limits of warrior courage. However, there are other possible analyses of courage, such as those of Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, or Blaise Pascal. Philosophy’s task is to compare and contrast these to determine the one that is most adequate to natural human experience in its totality. Strauss suggests then that, before interpreting Hegel, one must begin by asking, What is courage?, since all of Hegel’s analysis depends on the validity of his interpretation on this point.

Hegel's interpretation of the original human experience of courage is understood to be a synthesis of the Greek and Christian interpretations. The task therefore is to free each one in its native authenticity and thus, by so doing, the clearest awareness of the fundamental problems will be recovered. The double polarity of nature and convention, philosophy and revelation, comes to the fore. Strauss writes, "The true and unique theme, the most profound theme of the history of the world and of men, to which all the others are subordinate, remains the conflict between unbelief and belief." Thus Strauss believes what appears to modern man to be progress in self-understanding as instead being the obscuring of fundamental problems.

This brings us to the contrast between the ancients and the moderns. The Greek city is the site of natural experiences in their highest degree and intensity. Philosophy is the endeavor to keep one's distance, to refuse adherence to all interpretations by interposing between them and oneself the small question, "What is?" Philosophy refuses, for instance, to succumb to the authority or charm of any interpretation of courage. It is essentially not a doctrine, a system, or a view of the world, but a way of life. Philosophy shows one can live without resorting to any of these interpretations, in a state of nature, but it also shows that only the philosopher can live this way.

With Christianity, this original meaning of philosophy as self-understanding or self-consciousness has been dangerously obscured. On the other hand, philosophy was received as an authorized and noble activity in the Christian world. The two established authorities of philosophy and revelation appear in polarity now as two cities, each one the result of a long effort of elaboration and abstraction.

The modern project is polemical and it is sometimes against Christianity, sometimes against philosophy. It is directed against what the two have in common. "It is a matter of renouncing the vain and corrupting search for 'imaginary principalities' dreamed of by both philosophy and religion and of assuring the actualization of the just or satisfying social order." To do this one must lower the goals of human action and overcome chance to establish man as the master of nature, including his own nature. This modern project is a construction. It pits philosophy against Christianity, neutralizing both of them. With Thomas Hobbes, pride, Christianity's most implacable enemy, is turned into "vain glory" which can be overcome by human art, by "Leviathan." "The sin of the Christian, once neutralized, becomes the right of man."

The history of Christianity proves the power of a weak or base will. It is the weakness of the modern man that best proves the strength of willing. Strauss was powerfully attracted to Nietzsche from his youth and he remained attracted to him. It seems to Manent that he was attracted most to Nietzschean psychology. In Nietzsche's view, one must re-establish the possibility of action while preserving historical consciousness. Nietzsche faces a problem: one must think of human action in the context of a theoretical interpretation of the world that appears to deprive it of meaning or motive. Like Hobbes, he has recourse to the notion of power. In Nietzsche, the will to power is liberated from natural limits and it "creates values."

The idea of the will to power also comes from the historical experience of Christian peoples. It is inseparable from an extreme valorization of biblical religion. Nietzsche, the atheist philosopher, maintains a doctrine "that until now has found its best illustration, and truth or verification, in the Christian religion." For Strauss then, Nietzsche exhibits ambiguity, equivocation, and fragility of character as a philosopher. He is incomparably closer to religion and more intertwined with it than the classical philosophers and the modern philosophers until Rousseau. Is the philosopher of the future (of which Nietzsche speaks) a novel version of *homo religiosus*? Manent is certain that, in Strauss's eyes,

Nietzsche remains a modern to the extent that he does not succeed in recovering the original idea of philosophy.

“Modern atheism, atheism motivated by conscience or probity...represents in a certain way the ultimate victory of biblical morality, that is, the moral attitude as such over the philosophical attitude as such...” The ultimate alternative is finally that between the moral and philosophic attitudes (according to Strauss). The modern’s project to conquer chance, realize the ideal, and subject or replace religion has progressively effaced the fundamental distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason. What remains is a practical attitude which no longer can, or wishes to be, reason. They have ended up replacing philosophy with a new sort of faith which, like Christian faith, is both intelligence and decision. Nietzsche retains some of the “provincialism of the nineteenth century.” Heidegger, for Strauss, best illustrates this new thinking. Strauss judges that the efforts of the new thinking to escape from the evidence of Biblical understanding of man and Biblical morality have failed.

The greatest threat to thought or to philosophy according to Strauss is the moral point of view. “With its rather ostentatious critique of morality, modern thought frequently hides from itself that its initial impulse is essentially moral. Even Nietzsche wants to institute a new morality, “ever more anti-Christian in its content but ever more Christian in its form.” Strauss acknowledges that one must act morally, but he rejects that one must think morally. Nietzsche and Heidegger think morally and invite us to act immorally from time to time. Socrates is conceived of, by Strauss, as being able to act morally without thinking morally. Strauss’s true criticism of Nietzsche and Heidegger is his decision to devote the last and most important part of his work to rediscovering the authentic figure of Socrates.

### **Summary of “On Historical Causality” by Pierre Manent**

Pierre Manent states at the beginning his intent of seeking to illumine how we are to understand and explain what the German historians call *Sonderweg*, the “separate path” of the West. This problem is central and complex and it has mobilized all the disciplines as well as occasioning the birth of sociology, which Manent calls “the reigning science of the modern period.” Marx, Tocqueville, Comte, and Weber (“these fathers of almost all our thoughts and ideas”) have in common the fact that they question themselves about the specificity and the genesis of the modern difference. The particular problem Manent has encountered is best explained if one turns to Tocqueville and notes how he accounts for the genesis of the original characteristics of modern society and modern man.

Manent explains himself as seeking the cause of a movement in which man changes. He then qualifies this by saying, “This is at least what the man who changes says about himself: he becomes modern, ever more modern.” Modern philosophy desires this change, whatever it is. Manent notes that in this way philosophy becomes a part of the question he asks. In questioning those who ask the questions he is neither a philosopher nor not a philosopher. If he is divided, so is philosophy, which is divided into ancient philosophy and modern philosophy.

Modern philosophy rejects the point of view about man that was previously considered to be the most lucid about man. Aristotle, from being “the father of those who know,” becomes one denounced as the father of error. “But to break with Aristotle and with ancient philosophy is to break with the original expression of human universality...” Philosophy is characterized as the effort to arrive at self-understanding, but the result of this break is two self-understandings. Manent strikes with his shepherd staff here and says we ought not to ignore this scandal of reason divided against itself and we ought not to be philosophers in this way since, philosophers whom nothing astonishes. ?

Manent thinks Heidegger and Strauss have meditated on this scandal with the most perseverance. He says he would have followed one or the other and he has devoted himself to them as a disciple if their two solutions had not been contradictory. For Strauss, man is always the same but the source of the modern movements is man's effort to master nature and thus to change the nature of man, which cannot be changed. This interpretation assumes that the experience of the modern movement is entirely illusory. Heidegger on the other hand thinks this experience obliges us to deconstruct and to redo the most fundamental categories of traditional philosophy, above all the idea of eternal truth. (Hans Jonas makes some related points in breaking with his teacher, Heidegger. See footnote #1 below). As Heidegger puts it, "The old ontology... must be fundamentally revised - if we seriously want to understand and master our own life and present in its fundamental intentions." For Heidegger, as Manent puts it, "in order for man to be a historical being, it is necessary for Being itself to be history."

Faced with the juxtaposition of these two positions, Manent found them both simultaneously rigorous and untenable. Manent notes that the movement he seeks to understand has its location in the element of politics and its generative principle belongs to the political order. But for Heidegger, there is no place for this element except as something derivative and subordinate. He rejects this "history of Being" as he observes, with Aristotle, the importance of exploring man's political condition and his analysis of political regimes.

Before turning to his refutation of Strauss, Manent notes that he does not believe that it is possible to understand the human world without having recourse to the notion of human nature. While believing this, he finds the description that Strauss gives of the modern movement, especially its propensity to radicalization, as poorly fitted with this idea of nature. "There is something unnatural about this movement away from nature described so well by Strauss." Sometimes Strauss suggests and even affirms that the modern movement was unleashed and motivated by 'anti-theological ire', hostility toward and revolt against Christianity. Strauss sometimes asserts, however, that the modern movement cannot be understood without any mention of Christianity, thus distancing himself from the widespread interpretation of the modern movement as the "secularization of Christianity." This is a contradiction as only one of the two things can be true.

Manent concludes that his work consists therefore in "interpreting the modern movement, the condition of modern man, in accordance with a triangularization that takes seriously the ancient, modern, and Christian poles." By taking seriously the Christian pole, he is able to escape from the alternatives of Straussian "naturalism" and Heideggerian "historicism." Strauss brings out in relief how philosophy is necessarily in conflict with the city because it reveals the city's limits. Manent then notes, "the decisive novelty brought by the Christian church is the church herself, which is a real universal community."

The philosopher himself is divided in being with the citizen against the Christian in only wishing to know what is accessible to human reason. However, as a philosopher he is with the Christian against the citizen, because he is for the universal against the particular. In this way philosophy in our modern times comes to play an unprecedented political role, one situated between the interface of the city and the church. By means of the role that he plays, the philosopher legitimates the city before the church, affirming human virtues. At the same time, he affirms at least the universality of the church against the particularity of the city, providing a critique of the pride that marks this particularity. Here is a quotation from Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*, "Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Nihilism" where skepticism is shown toward every self-assertion that remains particular:\

This it is eternity, not time, that grants a present and gives it a status of its own in the flux of time; and it is the loss of eternity which accounts for the loss of a genuine present. Such a loss of eternity is the disappearance of the world of ideas and ideals in which Heidegger sees the true meaning of Nietzsche's 'God is dead': in other words, the absolute victory of nominalism over realism. Therefore the same cause which is at the root of nihilism is also at the root of the radical temporality of Heidegger's scheme of existence, in which the present is nothing but the moment of crisis between past and future. If values are not beheld in vision as being (like the Good and the Beautiful of Plato), but are posited by the will as projects, then indeed existence is committed to constant futurity, with death as the goal; and a merely formal resolution to be, without a *nomos* for that resolution, becomes a project from nothingness into nothingness. In the words of Nietzsche quoted before, 'Who once has lost what thou hast lost stands nowhere still.'"

### **Summary of "Liberalism and Conservatism: The Transatlantic Misunderstanding" by Pierre Manent**

Manent opens by urging us to ponder the following sentence by Hegel, "perhaps the weightiest sentence in the weightiest modern work of political philosophy": "This principle of modern states has prodigious strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the extreme of self-subsistent personal particularity, and yet at the same time brings it back to the substantive unity in the principle of subjectivity itself." Manent believes both liberalism and conservatism are encompassed in Hegel's sentence as two equally necessary aspects of the same political contrivance, "our good and great contrivance, the modern democratic regime." Liberalism is the party of the state as the sovereign agency responsible for peace and justice, and conservatism is the party of society as an association of equal, free, and accordingly responsible individuals. Modern society needs a sovereign and representative state and since the modern state needs a free society, the two are locked in symbiotic relationship.

Manent admits his conservative leanings but says that he thinks that the "Gordian knot of our present condition is not tied around the points that divide liberals and conservatives." To give a sketchy account of our present situation, he directs us to our *arche*, the latest decisive event to mold these circumstances. (Manent wrote this in 1997). This event was the collapse of communism. The end of communism is identical with the triumph of democratic legitimacy. The "science of history" had to give way to "the consent of the people." Democracy's two great enemies, Nazism and Communism, have fallen. The victory of democracy was a result of their successive falls, but it was one more of democratic principles than of democratic countries, with the sole exception of the United States.

Manent notes that communism died "drowning under the applause of the whole Western world" and that "people recoil from thinking about communism further than to agree 'it does not work.'" It consequently was not condemned as the incredibly criminal enterprise it was. This failure to confront the nature of communism is a festering sore at the heart of Europe. Though not a famous victory, the fall of communism was an American victory. It was not a European victory because European countries did not really want it. Rather, they wanted the status quo. "When communism collapsed under its own ignominy and nullity, Western Europe did exactly what Gorbachev was doing: it put the best face on it... If the then French president, Francois Mitterand, could have saved communism in the USSR, he would have done it."

As a consequence of this victory being an American victory, the European nations have been more enfeebled than strengthened by this victory, and the political gap has grown between each European country and the United States. The United States is becoming more and more of an empire in the traditional sense. The political units at the periphery have a diminished capacity to act in their own best judgment, and the main body of the empire is increasingly disinclined to let them do it when they wish to. The American body politic is less and less able to distinguish between what is within and without the American provenance.

The end of communism ended the solidarity of Europe and the United States against a common menace. Now the differences come to the fore. Americans tend to think Europeans are complacent and lazy and that the French in particular suffer delusions of grandeur. Europeans tend to think Americans overwork themselves to the point where life is not worth living. Manent finds both ways equally exasperating.

Under the American way, (the “I did it my way” way), Americans are the ones who take modern liberty’s ambiguity in stride. The ambiguity of modern liberty is that it is just a means to an end, but such a pervasive and necessary means that it resembles an end in itself. For the American, the end is a means and the means is an end, and there is no motive ever to stop, no place to rest, and no leisure. Money becomes the most socially explicit thing.

Europeans tend to agree that liberty is a means to something more substantial but they do not agree what that is. Liberty can be a means to security and well-being, but state is taking responsibility for that, so why bother with it. Liberty can be a means to culture, but culture or *Bildung* has historically hit its peaks in less than democratic settings, implying culture may be better taken care of by the state, the church, or a tiny circle of distinguished individuals. Liberty can be a means to Liberty, in which man, previously a slave to the dead, breaks forth as really living and sovereign, a law unto himself. This self-overcoming is supposed to take place in the most fearsome of European deeds, revolution. Though no longer stirring to real action, the idea of revolution makes the prosaic liberty of modern democratic society seem shabby in comparison to the utopian horizon.

The relative strength of America depends on its successful synthesis of human motives, bought at the price of some simplification. Commerce comes to connote a new regime of human action itself, and its development gives the axis of human progress. People are now linked to one another without commanding one another, and without necessarily sharing a common way of life.

In comparison, ancient politics depended on two great means for social cohesion. The main one was the institution and preservation of a fundamentally unequal relationship between the few who are entitled to command and the many who are obliged to obey as a matter of conscience, an iron law of human obedience and inequality. The radically new relationship of persons through commerce consists in the link between persons now being what they severally do, with no one explicitly commanding anyone or sharing a common way of life. Interest, sympathy, and benevolence become the new and invisible rulers of this new society.

Though the idea of “commercial society” was first birthed and celebrated in Europe, it did not spell the end of political command, but was followed by the era of national wars and total states. The nation-

state on the one hand freed commercial society from its shackles; on the other hand the nation-state embodies a reaffirmation of command and hierarchy. The hierarchical structure of command, while it was found in some places like the United States military, played a much larger role in Europe. This common trait among the European countries contributed to their fateful stiffness and inflexibility in dealing with one another in their rivalries and in their mad obstinacy with which they carried on their quarrel after war had broken out in August 1914.

The European pairing of the “system of liberality” and the system of command ended up with the mere weight of the hierarchy voiding the rationality which was to operate in liberal freedom from its free content. When the system thus drains action of its congenial motives, it often incites citizens to do nothing or occasionally presses them to do mad things. The communist system is the perfect realization of the system of command reduced to itself. Under it, not much difference is left between the army, the university, the factory, and the police, etc.

It seems clear to Manent that these two systems developed together. No serious observer would be content to say that the system of command is just a legacy of the ancien regime. (This reminds me of William Cavanaugh’s point that the “European wars of religion” from 1524 to 1648 are better understood not as religious wars but as the wars of the birth of the modern nation-state.) The system of command grew with the growth of modern civilization and society. When the individual breaks free from the old, unequal communities of birth, he must now find his place within the new community, the nation-state. He best does this by finding his place within one of the great organizations through which the new body politic now articulates itself.

European nations have generally followed Hegel in favoring mediating institutions between state and society. Americans in contrast have generally eschewed this “dangerous supplement to the original design of the liberal polity.” Americans have to settle for less social precision than Europeans have long been disposed to accept.

The enmity between the system of liberty and the system of command cannot be that which liberal philosophers make it out to be. The system of liberty is summarized in the formula, “Do your own thing” within the limits of the law. The system of command can be encapsulated as, “Do as you are told because what you are told comes through the hierarchical order that embodies the higher finality of the institution.” Generally, the hierarchical logic tends to outstrip the logic of the corresponding activity. The formal structure of command came to the fore paradoxically because the intrinsic spirit of the institutions began losing some its natural vigor even as it was exacerbated.

The welfare state is the instrument of self-obligation. This is not only because the unity of the society must have some vertical, political inscription which makes necessary use of the state. It is, perhaps more essentially, because what we do cannot be accompanied only by bland commentary that we have the right to do it and that we hope we will do even better next time. This is by any measure an insufficient public account of what we do. However, if we stay within the confines of liberty, we are not authorized to say much more. “The principle of subjectivity- my right, my way- is not self-sufficient...It has to be brought back to the substantive unity, as Hegel said.”

Much liberty means much free space, much free space means much void. Even left to itself, the system of liberty is busy producing its own devices to fill its own void, to give itself the determinacy it

necessarily lacks. It multiplies the representations of itself in what now goes by the name of communication. This self-presentation aggravates the indetermination it is intended to abolish or to attenuate.

The collapse of communism meant the end of the most complete, the most iron-clad system of command with the most perverse system of mendacity to boot. The system of liberty, with America at its center, has won the day. Nevertheless, it would be imprudent for Americans to push hard for dismantling of every system of command, particularly in Europe where they still fulfill many worthy goals.