



*Commonalty,
Communities, and the
Crisis of the Modern
State¹*

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1. This topic has been the subject of countless conversations with Professor Rafael Alvira, which is why it is difficult for me to distinguish the sources on which this collaboration is based. The difficulty lies in being able to point out which ideas come from his published works, and which are part of an oral tradition, that is, from the Teacher-Student relationship, which Prof. Alvira has carried out with particular dedication for many decades.

Resumen

La teoría del Estado moderno considera que la libertad consiste en la absoluta autonomía del individuo. Esta consideración de la política y del derecho como una relación entre “iguales absolutos” -de raíz revolucionaria- además de ser contradictoria metafísicamente, es una de las causas del desconcierto intelectual actual, cuyos síntomas principales son relativismo, el escepticismo y el indiferentismo ético. Ahora bien, como una sociedad no puede funcionar sin que exista algo “en común” entre sus ciudadanos, -y se ha renunciado a toda referencia a la naturaleza humana, también a su sociabilidad- se confía esta tarea al Estado, quien establece relaciones de tipo externo que se sostienen por medio del poder. Esto presenta numerosos peligros tales como posibles arbitrariedades, falta de estabilidad social, permanente amenaza de conflictos, anomia, etc. que impiden que las personas alcancen el nivel de libertad, seguridad y paz que necesitan. Cuando se reniega de toda idea de “lo común”, las relaciones entre los ciudadanos se debilitan al punto que pueden llegar a existir solamente a través de los lazos de cada una de ellas establece con el Estado, que se convierte en la única instancia mediadora y determinante de la vida social. Se da así la paradoja de que, frente al deseo revolucionario de una libertad absoluta, se sigue una vida socio-política que limita la libertad posible, limitada, del ser humano. Por el contrario, alcanzar realmente el fin de la libertad, según su propia forma de ser, requiere fortalecer las principales instituciones mediadoras y las fuentes propiamente identitarias: la familia, la educación y la religión. Solo en ellas, cada uno puede ser “quien es” y llegar a ser “quien está llamado” a ser, que son las principales manifestaciones de la libertad humana y las fuentes más profundas de la paz y la seguridad que el ser humano necesita.

Palabras clave: Rafael Alvira, Individualismo, Libertad, “Lo común”, Familia, Educación, Religión

Abstract

The theory of the modern state considers that freedom consists in the absolute autonomy of the individual. This consideration of politics and law as a relationship between “absolute equals” - with revolutionary roots - besides being metaphysically contradictory, is one of the causes of the current intellectual confusion, whose main symptoms are relativism, skepticism and ethical indifferentism. Now, since a society cannot function without there being something “in common” among its citizens, - and all reference to human nature, also to its sociability, has been renounced - this task is entrusted to the State, which establishes relationships of an external type that are sustained by means of power. This presents numerous dangers such as possible arbitrariness of the ruler, lack of social stability, permanent threats of conflicts, lawlessness, etc., which prevent people from attaining the level of freedom, security and peace they need. When any idea of “the common” is rejected, the relationships between citizens are weakened to the point that they can only exist through the ties that each one of them establishes with the State, which becomes the only mediating and determining instance of social life. There is thus the paradox that, in the face of the revolutionary desire for absolute freedom, there follows a socio-political life that limits the possible, limited freedom of the human being. On the contrary, to really achieve the end of freedom, according to its own way of being, requires strengthening the main mediating institutions and the sources of identity itself: the family, education and religion. Only in these can each person be “who he is” and become “who he is called” to be, which are the principal manifestations of human freedom and the deepest sources of the peace and security that human beings need.

Keywords: *Rafael Alvira, Individualism, Freedom, Commonalty, Family, Education, Religion.*

1. Introduction

A great problem disguised as normality

Bruce Ackerman, a prominent liberal, once wrote, “the hard truth is this: There is no moral meaning hidden in the bowels of the universe”¹. I take these words as expressing the most essential core and creed of the liberal faith. Why faith? Because it requires an initial premise like the one just stated, which is not supported by unquestionable evidence but, instead, remains a proposition that is open for debate. It seems that precisely this initial premise gives the best account for subsequent liberal postulates like the pluralism of conflicting values, the autonomy of the individual, or the neutrality of the State. It is true that liberalism is so diverse that it cannot be properly described. This applies not only to its modern incarnations. Even the older ones are equally difficult to grasp under one overarching set of ideas or values². However, it is possible to speak of liberalism as such, even though its protagonists have had multifarious views on its content. The core can still be identified. Whether one goes back to John Locke, Adam Smith, Benjamin Constant, John Stuart Mill, or any modern liberal thinker like John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Bruce Ackerman or Robert Nozick, the crucial value in their theories appears to be freedom, understood to mean individual autonomy – freedom to establish, define, and pursue one’s goals without constraints or obstructions. Such a view is implemented in the legal and political practice of the first truly liberal State in the world. The Supreme Court of the United States of America aimed to define the nature of the country’s principal ideal: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life”³. According to Dworkin, autonomy is the right to structure one’s life according to one’s own values⁴. Thus, liberal theory always presupposes the existence of the plurality of conflicting values as well as the notion that there is no single good or value common to all human beings. Consequently, liberals cannot envision any single final goal (*telos*) for all humanity. One might claim that liberalism does not exclude the possibility of there being such a common value; it just operates on the premise that its existence cannot be proven beyond doubt. However, by promoting individual rights and the neutrality of the State as the only legitimate policy, liberalism does not actually let the people, in their collective (political) capacity, express their common ideas about the good. Thus, it precludes the possibility of ever discovering or pursuing any *common* good.

Indeed, the early premises of liberalism (about there being no common good for all individuals) are not open enough to allow any possible future finding of one or many of such goods. Once liberal theory gets implemented into political practice, it does not leave the question open. It operates on the assumption of the lack of such goods, and it actively speaks against the pursuit of any common value.

1. Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 368.

2. See. John Gray, *Liberalisms: Essay in Political Philosophy* (London/New York: Routledge), 1989.

3. *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern PA. v. Casey*, 774 U.S. 902 (1992).

4. Ronald Dworkin, *Life’s Dominion. An Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1993), 225.

Whatever is allowed in theory, the practice does not leave any question open. It seems always to be an either/or issue: either you operate on the idea that there is no common goal or *telos* of humanity, and you allow each individual to define it (or abstain from defining it altogether) for himself; or you operate on the notion that there is such an objective *telos* and you try to do your best to discover its content and pursue it.

Interpretations of the absolute (or not so absolute) reach of some individual rights in the modern State are part of a common debate in our times, with the usual response being the affirmation of the supremacy of individual freedom over all other normative concerns (*Roe v. Wade*⁵, *Lawrence v. Texas*, *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern PA. v. Casey*, etc.), taking into account only in a limited way other elements, such as tradition, history, human nature or ethics. However, I believe that the debate should start by justifying the reason why individual rights are considered absolute in the first place.

This current absolutist vision of freedom does not merely apply to courts. The current model of State itself proclaims the undisputable necessity of respecting absolute rights and freedoms, without giving any justification. A declaration that has already become a fixture of public life and public opinion. Though this absolutist vision is already widely affirmed (in public life as well as public opinion) it remains important to question the grounds on which the debate on this interpretative premise has been closed, as well as the moral code that upholds it. This is important, among other reasons, to understand the crisis of the modern State, as all absolute individualism is incompatible with an ethical perspective, because this would require some understanding of what is held in common.

It is often said, and rightly so, that a person's worth can be measured by the quality of the bonds that they establish and the goods that they communicate. In fact, better knowing the truth and loving more fully perfect the human person⁶. This is not possible in a society of individuals who do not cultivate *the common*⁷.

5. Although in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (No. 19-1392, 597 U.S. ___ 2022), the right to abortion is limited, it is not a departure from the sovereign and absolute consideration of individual autonomy. Indeed, the majority admits two ways for something to be protected as an unwritten right: if it is deeply rooted in history, or if it is an "integral part of a broader right" that is so rooted. In this sense, "Dobbs concedes that contraception, etc., may be an integral part of a broader historical right: to privacy or autonomy. But abortion is not, Dobbs says, because it takes the life of the fetus. Why is this doctrinally relevant? The idea, developed here, may be that privacy and autonomy guard a sphere over which the individual is sovereign, and which ends where harm to others begins: These rights cover acts that do not directly affect anyone else, or only consenting adults." See, Sherif Girgis, June 28, 2022 (1:53 PM), "Dobbs's history and the future of abortion and privacy law," *SCOTUSblog*, October 28, 2022, access: October 10, 2022, <https://www.scotusblog.com/2022/06/dobbs-history-and-the-future-of-abortion-and-privacy-law/>

6. See Rafael Alvira, "Persona o Individuo: Consideraciones sobre la Radicalidad Familiar del Hombre", in *Cuestiones fundamentales sobre matrimonio y familia: II Simposio Internacional de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra*, (Pamplona: EUNSA 1980), 462.

7. It is striking to note that during the years that liberalism was solidly established in the US Supreme Court on the basis of the conception of individual autonomy, in which the only links established are those willed by the individual; in Central and Eastern Europe, communism fell in large part due to the strong social fabric, far from the liberal individualism or a socialist worldview, such as the *Solidarność* worker union formed in Poland.

This occurs because there is a fundamental flaw in the understanding of the nature of civil society. In fact, disputes about civil rights are increasingly difficult to resolve because of contradictions that arise when the vindication of two opposite rights by different parties collides. This reveals an approach with an individualistic and thus unethical starting point, which simultaneously affirms a desire to act ethically.

In fact, currently what is proposed is respect for the rights of individuals as possessors of absolute liberty. This situation presents the paradox that while ethics implies an understanding that begins from what is held in common, without community there are no ethics. Community in this sense is not merely that as defined by communitarians (in the sense that it consists only of sharing spaces, traditions, stories, and shared narratives) but rather in the metaphysical sense of *the common*.

Before continuing, it is necessary to ask what *the common* is. This idea, given that it is a first principle, cannot be proven (there are no previous principles on which to base a definition). It can only be illustrated through examples, such as knowing or loving. In any case, it can be pointed out that commonality is a type of relationship in which there is the obvious paradox that the related (A and B) maintain their natural differences but are also in a certain sense the same. As Aristotle affirms about a friend: it is not that he is equal to me, but that he is “another self”⁸. This is, however, only possible to a certain extent, given that a sense of equality is necessary for a true friendship to exist. But this equality cannot be absolute equality, because if it were so, there would be nothing to *communicate*. Likewise, *the common* refers to communication. As such, two souls communicate to the best extent when they have something in common. This is where the paradox of friendship or true love becomes evident. One can only love another one (without the *other* it is impossible to love), and yet, truly loving means being interiorly the same as the other, or in platonic language, participating truly in the same. This is only possible when there is something fundamental in common which belongs to each of them at an essential level⁹. This is in contrast with differences of opinion in which there is always something fully individual because all opinion refers to the condition of the individual who possesses it. This is why they are different in nature, though there may be common points in the content of their opinions.

Rafael Alvira affirms that *the common* exists, par excellence, on the intellectual realm of the truth. Once known, all those who have come to know it, hold it in common¹⁰. Something similar can be said on the intellectual-volitional plane of love. In fact, true love is metaphysically the most convening. Could this loss of the common be part of the explanation for the loss of truth and true love so specific

8. James Alexander Kerr Thomson, trans., *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), book 9, 11 9a23-b11.

9. See, Rafael Alvira, «El trascender de la realidad y la realidad del trascender», *Daimon. Revista de Filosofía*, n. 2 (2008): 136.

10. Rafael Alvira, «Ética política. Un alegato a favor de la política», *Revista veintiuno*, n. 7 (1990): 13.

to our civilization? Surely it is, because the individualistic emphasis of modern societies has led to a “new” (relativistic) concept of truth and of love (emotions-based and lacking commitment)¹¹.

That is to say that there is no longer possible to communicate the truth and love, if they are merely individual, and thus changing, stances. Therefore, when there is nothing held in common but mere individuality, particular value is placed on public opinion, which does not communicate but rather makes public the opinions of other persons¹². But this is not authentic communication. The truth is what communicates, and this has very little to do with opinion. Both truth and true friendship are *the common*, which does not coincide with the current thought which considers it to be a synonym of what is public. What is public is available; the common is what cannot be instrumentalized or used¹³.

2. Rights and freedoms in civil society

According to Hannah Arendt, for Aristotle “it is friendship, not justice, as Plato affirmed in the *Republic* [...] that appears to be the bond of communities”¹⁴. In fact, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Stagirite says that “friendship seems to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy”¹⁵.

The importance of repressing enmity and favoring peaceful civic life is evident in the Aristotelian texts. Books V and VI of *Politics* are dedicated exclusively to the prevention of discord and its consequences: insurrection and violence. Aristotle, in fact, considered friendship to be the only way to avoid this. Clearly it does not refer to an intimate friendship that is impossible to maintain with several people at once, however political friendship consists of openness towards all of those who share the polis and its prosperity¹⁶.

11. This relativistic and emotivist vision of contemporary man is shared by the communitarian thinkers, see: MacIntyre among others, in *After Virtue* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 3rd edition, 2007, 19), when he attempts to justify moral norms through reason, he finds that “this is what emotivism denies. What I have suggested to be the case by and large about our own culture – that in moral argument the apparent assertion of principles functions as a mask for expressions of personal preference - is what emotivism takes to be universally the case. Moreover, it does so, on grounds which require no general historical and sociological investigation of human cultures. For what emotivism asserts is in central part that there are and can be no valid rational justification for any claims that objective and impersonal moral standards exist and hence that there are no such standards”. Other critics of modernity, such as Leo Strauss, also refer to the strong and continued presence of relativism in modernity. See, among other works and authors, Strauss, Leo, *Natural Right and History*, (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), vii.

12. Rafael Alvira, “Ética política. Un alegato a favor de la política”, *Revista veintiuno*, n. 7 (1990): 16.

13. A clear example is seen in marriage. When it is celebrated validly, it cannot be revoked by any power. The nature of the act itself means that it cannot be broken, given that marriage creates a community in which a diversity of persons makes one thing out of two: “Thus, they are no longer two, but one flesh” (Mark 10:8).

14. Hannah Arendt, *Filosofía y política, El existencialismo y Heidegger* (Bilbao: Besatari, 1996), 99.

15. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 1, 1155a, 22-26.

16. While, when Aristotle considers friendship (understood as benevolent friendship) to be the configuring element of society, he refers to it as something held in common. From this starting point, he affirms “one has the same disposition with a friend as with oneself” (1170b7-8). Friendship is referred to in Greek as *philia*, which comes from the same root as the verb *philein* (to love), and though it is translated as friendship, the word *philia* can be applied in a much wider sense than the current use of “friendship”. *Philia* includes all kinds of relationships or communities based on ties of affection or love, and Aristotle thus refers to such different relationships as the love of parents for their children, the passionate relationship between lovers, and civil agreement among fellow citizens, etc.

In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle says that harmony, is one of the elements of all friendship: its agreement “is not in regard to everything, but to things practicable for the parties, and the good to all that contributes to their association [...]”¹⁷. A life of association with other demands a common determination of the acts necessary to achieve the unique goods stemming from living together. While highlighting the element of agreement on what is good, which is present in all friendship, Aristotle identifies harmony with political friendship stating, “unanimity seems, then, to be political friendship, as indeed it is commonly said to be; for it is concerned with things that are to our interest and have an influence on our life”¹⁸.

In this sense, Aristotle preferred to qualify political friendship on the basis of the concept of harmony or rational agreement rather than other characteristics that are intuitively more closely aligned with coexistence in the polis, such as communication, life in common, and reciprocity. In fact, etymologically, the Greek term for unanimity, *homonoia* goes back to the notion of the same (*homo*) thought (*nous*). Thus, the Stagirite affirms: “[...] a city is unanimous when men have the same opinion about what is to their interest, and choose the same actions, and do what they have resolved in common. It is about things to be done, therefore, that people are said to be unanimous, and, among these, about matters of consequence and in which it is possible for both or all parties to get what they want”¹⁹. It is important to note the dynamic nature of unanimity, that which “has been resolved”. Citizens are initially in disagreement, but come to agree, achieving consensus through discourse (*logos*).

This agreement through *logos* is the essence of political life: man is a political animal because “among the animals, he is the only one with the gift of speech (*logos*)”. In terms of the voice, (*phoné*), on which only expresses pain and pleasure in other animals, speech “is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state.”²⁰

Political existence (*bios politikos*) is presented as a practical agreement among citizens about what is good and evil, just and unjust, beneficial and harmful, as a process of securing unanimity through the use of speech, through discourse. The observation that “the city is [...] a plurality”²¹ and that

17. Aristotle, “Eudemian Ethics”, in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 20, translated by Harris Rackham, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1981), 1241a.

18. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167b, 2-3.

19. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167a, 26-29.

20. Aristotle, “Politics”, in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 21 1, 1253a.

21. Aristotle, “Politics”, 2, 1263b.

“friendship is equality”²², manifests the contingent nature of politics, given that it consists of seeking equality among distinct individuals. This equality would be a shared vision about what is good, just and appropriate for the city. Unanimity allows society to relativize the other differences between citizens without eliminating them.

Kant, in a similar sense, refers to this attitude as “respect,” a necessary condition for the existence of a true society. a necessary condition for the existence of a true society. However, for respect to serve as an element of unity, it must have a solid foundation, not be imposed. The problem lies in finding a sufficient principle, and it is difficult to find it in respect for the rights of individuals, since individuals do not normally agree, and respect based on consensus is not truly respect.

It is insufficient to make declarations that merely affirm that “the absolute freedom of all should be protected, and so will be done in this country”, given that the opposite would turn into merely declarative phrases without any chance to be operationalized.²³ In fact, the current problem is the validity of the assumption that there are absolute rights A and B, which are incompatible with each other.

When faced with real life situations, what is the best stance to take? It is clear that both interests cannot be fully considered (A B). A simple syllogism illustrates this situation:

- Individual right A is absolute and is opposed to B
- Individual right B is absolute and is opposed to A
- Thus, if A is opposed to B, neither of these rights can be absolute.

The main problem with affirming individual rights rooted in absolute freedoms is that there is no longer any differentiating criteria that allows one to assess whether an action is good or bad. Normally, as the civilized solution cannot include using violence against those who hold contrary views (though there are still some tragic cases in which this happened²⁴), an economic-nature negotiation takes place. People become “convinced” of an opposing view in exchange for economic compensation, under the promise that they stop defending “their” freedom, while in even worse cases, economic punishment (such as losing their job) is inflicted upon the holder of absolute right A that opposed to

22. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, 5, 1157b.

23. By way of example, in 2011 the Brazilian Senate approved a proposal to amend its Constitution to include the right to happiness. The author of the proposal, concerned about happiness in the broad sense, presented economic research quantifying happiness. Both Japan and South Korea already include the right to pursue happiness in their Constitution (art. 13 and art. 10 respectively).

24. Such as the terror attack in Paris, on January 7th, 2015, by radical Islamists who ended the lives of twelve journalists from the satirical and irreverent weekly “Charles Hebdo”, or the recent failed assassination attempt of Salman Rushdie on August 12th, 2022, in New York.

the absolute right B.²⁵ It would appear that, in Hobbesian style, triumph is in the hands of the strongest party, whether by military, political or economic power.

This way of understanding politics in an economicist manner results in a loss of the meaning and of the specific goals of this practical science. Consequently, these conflicts that must somehow be overcome, end up being “solved” in an artificial and pragmatic manner, without any reference to whether actions are good or bad.

3. The origin and establishment of individual rights: The revolutionary principles

Ideas about individual rights and absolute freedoms were already present in the political through of the 16th century and in a more explicit way, in the Enlightenment thinkers of the 18th century. However, it was with the unfolding of the revolutionary thought that these ideas got to the political power. This is when these principles became salient to the political reality. It was a true political *coup d'état* that changed the reigning political philosophy.

Thus, as during the Old Regime the idea of order (the notion of something being held in common by all) was prioritized above everything else. In this sense, we can consider that these governments were psychologically right-winged, while the change of regime that resulted from the revolutions of the 18th century, were psychologically more left-winged. The latter proclaimed that everyone could do what they like, and that justice means giving to each person the most possible, without harming any third parties, that is to say it prioritized absolute freedom. Clearly, both regimes seek justice, as without justice there is no regime, but just as classic regimes seek the kind of justice that generates and respects what is held in common; in the modern justice system, justice is merely exterior and consists of subjugation to contracts or agreements under the threat of force. In this sense, from this artificial and external form stemming directly from a (conventional) decision, the citizenships are put under the jurisdiction of the law; namely, under the State power, which is understood to be absolute.

The origin of this understanding is the assumption that all political decisions are the fruit of some consensus, i.e., considered to be the result of the decision of the majority, without considering if its decision is good or bad. The conclusion of this syllogism is clear. In our time, all political decisions depend on consensus rather than considering whether something is good or bad for society (because these categories no longer exist in the modern thought).

25. Numerous cases are brought before U.S. courts against small business owners who refuse to provide services for reasons of conscience. In these cases, often involving same-sex marriage ceremonies, the “A” right to decide whether to provide a service (a supposedly absolute right), and the “B” right of those claiming the (also supposedly absolute) right to receive it (be it flower arranging, photography, preparation of a wedding cake, etc.) are pitted against each other. These situations highlight at least two things: that when there is a conflict between two absolute rights (an absurdity in itself), there is no fair solution, and that when you must take sides in such an issue, it is already done because of your ideologically determined political agenda.

As such, in the modern State, the element of unity resides in a conventional reality, and its consequences are evident: possible variations in the time that agreements are held with the strongest power, the lack of compliance when penalties are not established to the noncompliant party, etc. It is the task of the State to ensure that the norms that are obeyed, are respected through the pure use of power. This is because the modern State is a State with *potestas*, but no *auctoritas*.²⁶ Thus, its validity is only legitimized by its effective recognition. This is usually achieved by monopolizing power and manipulated the means of communication.

The point of agreement is respect for convention. It is respected, though the citizen knows that it is a consensus, and as such, it is implemented only while it is desirable. When the punishment for incompletion is lesser than the weight of complying with the norm, such as is the case in numerous fields, from respect for the environment to security, it is often less costly to pay fines for incompletion or to pay penalties for producing a defective productive, than to actually change business practices. This is what happens with all powers that are only based on exteriority without any further justification. The moment its norms are no longer convenient, compliance can only be achieved through heavy-handed punishment. Of course, as soon as an opportunity comes to be, norms change to comply with whatever is most convenient for those in power (whether because of ideology, or due to the pressures of lobby groups, or of financial pressures from those who financed their campaign or those who are helping to keep them in power, or to maintain a positive image with the electorate). This type of conduct is quite reminiscent of the conversation between Socrates and the Sophists about the nature of justice. Specifically, the case of Glaucon could be seen as “perfectly” unjust: he does all kinds of evildoings and wicked acts, but being “perfectly” unjust, he knows how never to get caught. Furthermore, if he were to be caught, he would know how to construct a seamless defense. Thus, such a man could be seen by society as a man of integrity²⁷.

The political regime of the Sophist revolution is a power based exclusively on the extreme, and the use of force, and thus reason cannot be found in its rationale, but rather a mere factual existence. In any case, it appeals to the reasonable (please, do not shoot in the streets), as justice itself is impossible, it seeks a subterfuge to seek certain conformity, which is necessary in every society. On the contrary, if society is built upon what is held in common, the necessity of “conforming” to the views of others is not discussed, because it generally creates trust. Therefore, trust in what is one’s own is widely protected for all, in the understanding that we are all part of a common enterprise in which everyone will somehow benefit indirectly.

26. In Roman Law, *potestas* is understood as a socially recognised power and *auctoritas* as socially recognised knowledge. In the Roman Republic, the conjunction *potestas-auctoritas* made it possible for knowledge to limit power, in such a way that a healthy balance could exist. When *potestas* is not accompanied by *auctoritas*, it becomes the pure use of power with no limit beyond itself. See: Alvaro d’Ors, “Claves conceptuales” *Verbo*, n. 345-346: 509-521, (1996).

27. Plato, *Republic*, Book II.

This law acts in a hidden, autonomous manner, appearing only when no other solution is possible. As such, the difference between what used to occur with the old aristocracy in which the person in power, held this power publicly, and the current situation in which those who hold great power, are not generally publicly known, is that modern power-holders do not need to give public account, and thus do not generally create enmity among other members of society. The public figure is a politician who generally depends on economic or ideological power.

On the other hand, revolutionary, absolute, freedom is independent and autonomous in itself. In this way, it presumes the inexistence of natural and social ties (whether familiar or political), and thus leads to the same result: the conviction that each individual is master of their own destiny, and on the other side of the coin, the construction of society is decided secondarily manner. It is this stance, that distinguishes it radically from the classic understanding which maintains that every civil society includes institutions, among which there is always a civil government (which is not synonymous to the State)²⁸. But the revolution that gave birth to the modern State forged it on other premises, namely, the French Revolution that emphasized equality, assuming that if it were achieved, individuals would no longer have to depend on one another, and would thus be free, and the American Revolution that insisted that absolutely freedom would spontaneously generate social balance. From this perspective, both revolutions affirm similar principles, being the primacy of the individual by way of liberty or equality. In fact, in Europe (as a direct inheritance of the French Revolution), the State continues to grow in the apparent pursuit of absolute equality; liberty is reduced to the sphere of private life. While in the United States, free and individual initiative is valued above all else, making its principal characteristic its wealth, given that the strength of individual freedom allows wealth to grow, and means that there is more to “share” among the people, and to thus contribute towards equality.

In this sense, it could be said that while the French Revolution was a “politicism”, given that it requires policies to guarantee equality, the American Revolution was an “economicism”, in which each person carries out their individual initiative in such a way that order is created if all members of society reach a certain level of wealth²⁹. This is why in times of financial crisis it is a system held hostage by financial strategies to hide the true state of the economy.

From another perspective, there is some disagreement about whether the American War of Independence, also called the *American Revolution*, represents a revolution in the strict sense as the

28. See Rafael Alvira, “Bien común y justicia social en las diferentes esferas de la sociedad”, *Revista Empresa y Humanismo*, n. 12 (2/2009): 68.

29. Rafael Alvira, “Fundamentos del gobierno en la política la economía y los medios de comunicación”, *Persona y Derecho*, n. 12 (1985): 119.

French event³⁰. As against Hannah Arendt³¹, Habermas³² argues that, strictly speaking, it was not a revolution. Essentially, in contrast with the Americans and related Europeans such as the Englishman Thomas Paine who, despite appearances, developed a liberal understanding of their political activity and remained attached to the classical tradition of natural law, the French made a transition to modern rationalist natural law which allowed a revolutionary self-understanding. Rather than continuing an old tradition or affirming age-old rights, they laid claim to the principles of modern rationalist natural law and undertook to realize them in the form of a constitution that founds and organizes a completely new society and its government or State; rather than letting a revolution result from the events, the French protagonists consciously made a revolution. Charles Taylor also points out that the American decision to rebel was taken by political authorities in terms of the early modern right to resist a tyrant ruler³³:

There is no doubt, on the other hand that the American Revolution and the French Revolution have significant differences in terms of their historical manifestations and the values that they proclaim. However, it could be considered that they shared common ideals of liberty and freedom, though understood in different tones³⁴.

The American Revolution was from beginning to end merely a *defensive revolution*, the French was, in the highest sense of the word, an *offensive revolution*. This difference is essential and decisive; upon it rests, perhaps more than upon any other, the peculiar character, which has distinguished these two revolutions. The British government began the revolution in America by resolves, for which they could show no right; the colonies endeavored by all means in their power to repel them. The colonies wished to maintain their old constitution; the government destroyed it. The resistance, which the colonies opposed against the mother country, was in every period commensurate with the attacks; the total separation was not resolved, until the utter impossibility of preserving the ancient condition was proved. The revolution of America was, therefore, in every sense of the word, a revolution of necessity: England alone had by violence affected it. America had contented ten years long, not against England, but against the revolution, she yielded to it compelled by necessity, not because she

30. Due to the world historical impact of the French Revolution, it is a singular and virtually incomparable historical event. It is the paradigmatic revolution, the one that imbues the modern idea of revolution with its very meaning, in that it was a struggle against an old order by a popular sovereign force seeking to emancipate itself from the traditional fetters of power and domination. It is not surprising, therefore, that such historical events as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the achievements of the scientific movement, the Dutch, English and American revolutions and later the industrial revolution became more generally understood as revolutions only in relation to the French Revolution, either in the run up to it or in its wake. See. Alain Touraine, "The Idea of Revolution", in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London, Sage, 1994), 121–141; Ruth and Dieter Groh, *Weltbild und Naturaneignung: Zur Kulturgeschichte der Natur*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991); Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th–18th Century* (London: Fontana, 1985).

31. Hanna Arendt, *On Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), quoted in: Piet Strydom, *Discourse and Knowledge: The Making of Enlightenment Sociology* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 290.

32. Jürgen Habermas, *Kultur und Kritik: Verstreute Aufsätze* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), 365–370; *Theory and Practice* (London: Heinemann, 1974), 82–120.

33. Charles Taylor, "Modes of Civil Society", *Public Culture*, n. 3/1, (1990): 95–118.

34. Rafael Alvira, "Clásicos de nuestro tiempo. Tocqueville", *Nuestro Tiempo*, n. 321, (1981): 79.

wishes to extort a better condition than she had before enjoyed, but because she wished to avert a worse one, prepared for her³⁵.

Exactly the contrary of all this, was the case in France. The French revolution was *offensive* in its origins, offensive in its progress, in its whole compass and in every moment of its existence. As the American Revolution had exhibited a model of moderation in defense, so the French one displayed an unparalleled example of violence and inexorable fury in attack.

As the American Revolution was a defensive revolution, it was finished, at the moment when it had overcome the attack, by which it had been occasioned. The French revolution, true to the character of a most violent revolution, could not but proceed so long as there remain objects for it to attack, and it retained strength for the assault.

The American Revolution, at every stage of its duration, had a fixed and definitive object, and moved within definitive limits, and by a definitive direction towards this object. The French revolution never had a definitive object; and, in thousands of various directions ran through the unbounded space of a fantastic arbitrary will, and of a bottomless anarchy. The contrast between the French and American revolutions, when you compare them with each other in respect to their *objects* is no less striking than that which resulted from the comparison of their *origin* and *progress*.

The American Revolution had a mass of resistance comparatively much smaller to combat, and, therefore, could form and consolidate itself in a manner comparatively much easier, and simpler. The French revolution challenged almost every human feeling, and every human passion, to the most vehement resistance, and could therefore only force its way by violence and crimes.

By way of analysis, we can employ the familiar distinction made by Isaiah Berlin between negative and positive freedoms³⁶. The former finds its roots in English political philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke and Mill and is understood as the sphere in which the subject (whether a person or group

35. Is astonishing to read that in the midst of the most vigorous preparations for a desperate defense, the members of the 2nd Congress representing the thirteen colonies resolved in July 1775, another address to the King George III named the *olive branch*. In this last address, we read: "Devoted to the person, the family, and the government of your majesty, with all the attachment, which only principle and feeling can inspire, connected with Great Britain, by the strong ties that can unite human societies together, deeply afflicted at every event that may weaken this connection, we most solemnly assure your majesty, that we wish nothing more ardently than the restoration of the former harmony between England and the colonies". Address delivered by Mr. Penn on September 1, 1775 to the earl of Dartmouth, upon which some days after, he was informed, that no answer could be given. The King refused to look at the petition, which in his view originated from an illegal and illegitimate assembly of rebels. Instead, the King had issued the "Proclamation for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition" on August 23, declaring the North American colonies in a state of rebellion. See "United States Continental Congress", in: *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 158-162.

36. Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy, *Liberty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166-218. As in the work of Isaiah Berlin, I do not distinguish here between *liberty* and *freedom*. To the contrary see: Quentin Skinner, "A Third Concept of Liberty", in: *Proceedings of the British Academy*, n. 117 (2002), 237-268.

of people) is permitted to do, to stop doing, or to be or do what they are capable of, without the inference of other people (*freedom to*). While positive freedom consists of the individual's desire to be his own master: "I want my life and my decisions to depend on me and not on external forces or any kind" (*liberty from*). Surely the American Revolution proclaimed a negative type of freedom that encouraged free initiative to build up a new, immensely rich country, with the belief of having all possibilities open to them. Not burdened by the weight of history, but rather free to fly to higher heights, with eyes set on the future. On the other hand, the Founding Fathers, beyond their diverse religious convictions, shared the vision that God supported their mission and had blessed them with a new land, free from the repression of national churches, and of vast expanse and wealth.

In this sense, because of being a people chosen by God, responsible for a continent, they sensed a responsibility to be faithful³⁷ to it and to spread the principles with which they were blessed to the whole world.³⁸ It is then no surprise that Americans consider their revolution to have higher values than the French Revolution. John Quincy Adams, for example, happily affirmed: "Happy, thrice happy the people of America, whose gentleness of manners and habits of virtue are still sufficient to reconcile the enjoyment of their natural rights with the peace and tranquility of their country; whose principles of religious liberty did not result from an indiscriminate contempt of all religion whatever, and whose equal representation in their legislative councils was founded upon an equality really existing among them, and not upon the meta-physical speculations of fanciful politicians, vainly contending against the unalterable course of events and the established order of nature."³⁹ Furthermore, according to Russell Kirk, Adams was convinced of the strong contrast between the moderate politics of the American colonies, founded on a respect for rights and custom, and the equalizing theories of French radicalism⁴⁰.

37. It is interesting that among 15,000 quotes of the founders in newspapers, articles, etc. evaluated by the Heritage of the Founding Fathers' website, it was found that 34% of the quotes the founders made were from the Bible; other main sources were Locke, Montesquieu, Blackstone, etc. who themselves took 60% of their quotes from the Bible. (<http://www.heritageofthefoundingfathers.com/> accessed on October 19th, 2022). See e.g. "In these my confidence will under every difficulty be best placed, next to that which we have all been encouraged to feel in the guardianship and guidance of that Almighty Being whose power regulates the destiny of nations, whose blessings have been so conspicuously dispensed to this rising Republic, and to whom we are bound to address our devout gratitude for the past, as well as our fervent supplications and best hopes for the future" James Madison: "Inaugural Address," March 4, 1809.

38. From the earliest days of the Republic, this nation's Founders believed that the United States had a special mission in the world. George Washington spoke of it on April 30, 1789, moments after taking the oath of office as first President of the United States: "The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the Republican model of Government, are justly considered as deeply, perhaps as finally staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people." The success of their experiment, these early Americans hoped, would hasten the spread of liberty around the globe. Also: "The flames kindled on the Fourth of July, 1776, have spread over too much of the globe to be extinguished by the feeble engines of despotism; on the contrary, they will consume these energies and all who worked them", Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1821, see: Bill Adler (ed.), *America's Founding Fathers: Their Uncommon Wisdom and Wit* (Lanham: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2003), 150. □

39. Cited in Russell Kirk's "Introduction", in: Friedrich von Gentz, *French and American Revolution Compared*, (Chicago: Gateway Edition), iv.

40. *Ibid.*

On the contrary, the French Revolution was, at least in its Jacobean form, precisely an eruption of the desire for positive freedoms and for collective self-determination by a great number of French people who felt free as a nation. For many of them the result was the restriction of individual freedoms. France's revolution took place with a clear sense of "freedom from" the yoke of the aristocracy, the Catholic Church, etc. It was in this sense a revolution of an anti-religious nature.

Another way of explaining the meaning of freedom in America, from a liberal or classical perspective, is found in the work, *The Habit of Heart*⁴¹, which compares various meanings of freedom. In the biblical sense it means freedom *from* sin, especially the selfish bias of "original sin" which delimits love. It means freedom *to* God's will and love of God's children, accepting responsibility for and to them. Hence, a clear defense of freedom based on the common dignity of all human beings who shares the current or potential gift of being children of God.

Freedom in the classical republican sense, as conveyed by Plato's allegory of the cave, means freedom *from* ignorance and the biased understanding that chains each person in solitary shadows. The truth shall make persons free *to* live together in accord to the lawful moral order that informs nature and illuminates human wisdom. The practical realization of freedom and its essential defense lies in an educated society of political equals responsibly taking part at the center of republican self-government.

With regards to freedom, it is also possible to identify a different tone. While in the United States, emphasis is placed on equality of opportunity; in Europe the State is assigned the task of imposing this equality⁴². In this sense, considering Europe's large population and the exploited state of its resources, its inhabitants fight for governments that would guarantee the Welfare State model. On this point, it is worth noting that this is what is happening to the United States as it continues to look more and more like Europe. Its democracy resembles European democracy increasingly, implementing an equality that proceeds from the State.⁴³

Certainly, though the nuances present in each of these understandings are significant, neither the American nor the French Revolution shared the Aristotelian-Platonic view of politics (of friendship in Aristotle case and Justice in Plato), nor the Christian *societas* that adds an accent of charity to the former views, as well as grace that allows for an even stronger sense of fraternity, as will be discussed ahead.

41. See Robert Bellah et al, *Habits of Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1985), 28-34.

42. Rafael Alvira, "Europa, de vuelta de todo y sin ganas de creer en nada", *El jugador universitario* (November-December, 2006).

43. There is currently a trend leading towards the Europeanization of the United States. See: Samuel Gregg, *Becoming Europe: Economic Decline, Culture, and How America Can Avoid a European Future* (Jackson TN: Encounter Books, 2013).

In the American case, however, there remains a certain closeness to Aristotelian ideas. This is not in his views on the foundations of a political life centered on friendship, as discussed in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, but rather through the idea that he sets out in *Politics* about the need for a balance of powers. There is no doubt the concept of balance of powers is an excellent political point, coming from a Lockean English inheritance, that the Founding Fathers not only maintained, but also developed and clearly spelled out in clear and precise manner in the Constitution of 1787.

In order to understand current political society, it is necessary to recognize the element of the superiority of the individual will over the common good. In the French case this is quite patent, while in the case of the United States one also notes the primacy of the individual. As De Tocqueville highlighted in *Democracy in America*, religion configures American democratic society, but it does not configure a particular political life. Certainly, while beliefs do provide a glue that binds society⁴⁴, this is where American democracy has begun to break down. The founding religion was liberal, revolutionary, and placed the individual above all else. Currently, this binding element is no longer present in an external sense, which is a manifestation of the lack of internal social cohesion.

Certainly, the revolutionary principles were manifested in different ways in America and France. However, it is not my intention to refer to the specific historical facts of either revolution, but rather to highlight the fact that they were both a true revolution with respect to how to govern and to propose a political philosophy, leaving classical principles behind.

4. Current Repercussions of the Revolutionary Values

There is no doubt that the ideology that upholds this worldview is omnipresent in the bloodstream of society that it is almost impossible to conceive of an alternative or to dare to question its validity. In fact, even those individuals who take some issue with this conception rarely reject it altogether, but rather attempt to construct a model that reinvents it with the end goal of returning to the same, in one way or another.⁴⁵ After all, who does not desire freedom and equality? Does modernity not invite

44. In this sense, it is apparent that the great political problems often come down to theological matters, whether obedience to the gods or atheism.

45. Leo Strauss is a clear example of a thinker who attacks modernity but fails to free himself of it. His criticism of modernity is clear in *Natural Right and History* (Chicago/Londres: The University of Chicago Press, 1965) and "Three Waves of Modernity", in Hilail Gilden, ed., *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 81-98. However, the impossibility of affirming truth, especially with regard to finalities, -that are, clearly matters more attuned to philosophical enquiry, affects him to the point of affirming that philosophy is not wisdom, because the origin of totality escapes of human knowledge. In such case, if philosophy does not allow man to know important truths, and to know nature itself, "knowledge" becomes mere stubbornness, the will to decide to limit the knowledge that can be reached, which will never be total in any case. This in itself does not prevent it from being true knowledge. As such, the decision not to accept or to cease the attempts to seek a synthesis in knowledge, results in the real or potential presence of relativism, this modern malaise that Strauss criticized strongly. Thus, with respect for the relationship between faith and revelation, though it may be presented in a cautious manner, he affirms that both spheres are incommensurable and thus, the cannot be judged one against another, and in the moment of having to take a stance, he opts for the modern way (as solely the product of will) "By saying that we wish to hear first and then to act to decide, we have already decided in

man to be convinced of the absolute nature of man? There are those who reject this stance, but usually their objections are considered to be secondary aspects that must be considered at most, in order to develop and creative and superficially therapeutic solution.

It is rather paradoxical that in a society that considers freedom and equality to be sacred values, it is nearly impossible to maintain an intelligent debate about many aspects of life. There is rarely sufficient space or will for a dialogue to come to its final consequences. That is how, in this day and age, as a result of egalitarian and rationalist streams of thought that have gradually come to occupy the entirety of the cultural and political spheres, the mere fact of affirming distinctions (such as differences between the sexes), is considered to be intolerably arbitrary and unjust. This kind of “political correctness” seeks to constantly administer and rationalize social life in such a way that it meets the objective of achieving the ideal of an egalitarian and absolute freedom. On the other hand, the imposition of an agenda of social transformation of this kind has led to the growth of systems of control over social life, whether they are public or formally private. They are usually justified on the basis that expertise, equity, security, and urgency are necessary in order to change social attitudes and instill relationships that eliminate discrimination and intolerance.

Programs of this kind that are often imposed have gained enormous social power, to the point that its promoters, often presented as defenders of human rights, and the State procedures that allow for their implementation, are considered mandatory by the great majority of individuals to the extent that there appears to be no alternative way of conceiving of the organization of social life. This technical-rational form of organization, which seeks to give each person the maximum possible of what they desire, is often considered to be the ideal moral tone of political and social life, and they are used frequently to justify administrative-therapeutic interventions in all spheres of life.

Many people feel the profound oppression resulting from this, but no one truly knows how to react. Many complain about general restrictions, about political correctness, which makes an honest and productive debate about public affairs impossible. Others have bigger, and more personal, worries. Parents are alarmed at the indoctrination of their children and the elimination of the family as a fundamental social institution publicly recognized as having primacy before the State. Many feel that the world that they belong to and that defines them has been taken away from them.

However, these victims and their worries are given very little respect or coverage by the media. They are complaints that, at best, are manifested in sarcastic comments, but when it comes time to explain

favor of Athens against Jerusalem” in: “Jerusalem and Athens”, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 149-150. See also John Ranieri, *Disturbing Revelation: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Bible* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 114-115; Maria Alejandra Vanney «Leo Strauss y el enigma de la realidad», *Contrastes*, vol. XVII (2012), Málaga: 287-305 and “Leo Strauss on «Athens» and «Jerusalem»: Do we Really Need «Both»?”, *Annales Philosophici*, n. 3 (2011), 37-54.

and defend them, it would seem that there is no acceptable way to do so. The disappearance of a common language that would allow for the development of true action carried out by “non-experts”, outside of formal bureaucratic channels, implies difficulties in presenting issues in a coherent manner.

There is no doubt that there are still individuals who challenge the liberal hegemony, but they rarely succeed in their attempts. Debate appears impossible while all of the instances of social power that could compete with the bureaucracy, with money and with the knowledge of the “experts”, have been discredited, co-opted, or radically weakened.

On a profound level, these ideologies have denaturalized society in such a way that it no longer functions, and no longer feels like itself. Instead of building on the common, by attempting to govern only individuals, absolute atoms, true government ceases to exist, it becomes impossible to achieve what it promises: absolute freedom for beings that have no relationship between one another.

Certainly, these are some of the characteristics of post-revolutionary societies that have been constructed on the concept of individual rights liberally understood, and “the individual” in the broad sense, instead of being based on what is held in “common”. This situation impedes the simple ideal of the common good as the aim of political society. Thus, the current ideology whether with its classical Hobbesian-Lockean slant, or modern forms of egalitarianism, lacks tools to uphold itself, given that it requires *something* to be below it in order for it to survive. This *something* includes openness to metaphysical demands, human nature, and justice.

5. The Absolute Man and the Modern Political Model

The mistake is thus in the foundations of the modern political model itself. The individual is not the first or the principal actor. Neither the individual nor their freedom is absolute. In fact, society is prior to the individual given that without the family the individual does not exist. It is clear that himself or herself, as such, cannot conceive the individual. First, a relationship between a man and a woman must exist for the individual to exist. This individual is then personalized in the midst of the family. In modern thought, the distinction between man and woman is of a secondary, and thus accidental nature.

At a deeper level, the great danger of considering the individual as an absolute, and therefore all his relationships as accidental, is that if man constructs himself, if he enjoys absolute freedom, he “loses” the “obligatory” (i.e., essential) character of freedom in relationships, many of which cannot be broken without the individual ceasing to be himself. To live is to relate to others and thus to consider pure individuality as an absolute closed in on itself, is to deny the personal essence of those of who form part of society. Thus, it is necessary to consider the importance of the essential coexistence of

individuality and relationship. For something to have content, both a container and its content are required (for example, matter as the content and form as the container). And even more so, if only one of the two is present. The two cannot be divided without falling into absurd logic. As such, there is no life (or could we say reality?) with pure multiplicity or with an empty unity. Reality is the coexistence of unity in diversity.

The individualism that characterizes society and the current political system, attempts to explain life without reference to relationships. But the great paradox is that under absolute freedom one cannot choose to associate with others, given that if the individual is absolute there is no other, and without the other there is no relationship. If one wished to relate with others under absolute freedom, with whom would they do so if they were absolutes? Certainly, this way of understanding the individual leads to the paradox of requiring multiple absolutes (atoms) whose relationships are not obliged and can only take on a purely external form. In this way the social system stops being a just system because there can be no justice where there are no obligations. This explains that both social and political life are currently understood as a system of balances that must be maintained at any price. Any imbalance would mean that one absolute is below another, a situation that cannot be rationally maintained.

Society is an organization, and all organizations have some form of mediation. Without this mediation the human being is not able to reach universality. Without mediation it is not possible to go any further than abstraction. Society as a whole is rationality in general. But as it is dialogue that is held with many, it remains abstract. Pure individualism is irrational, while building bridges is rationality. However, complete unity is abstract and in it the individual feels empty. Rationality demands coordination, an abstract notion is thus not sufficiently rational. If rationality were abstract, it would be a false rationality: if feelings are feeling alone, they are not even true feelings. The human being cannot be reduced to pure punctuality. The individual without relationships outside himself is nothing. Reality is always unity in diversity or unified diversity.⁴⁶

Certainly, both unity and relationship are primary and necessary aspects. The existence of pure unity or pure relationship is impossible. Where there is unity, there is relationship. The notion of the individual is derived from and affirmed in relationship. In fact, the word individual comes from the Latin *in-dividuus*, meaning *in* (to deny) to *dividere* (divide), meaning that the individual is that which is *divided* from the other, and thus *un-divided* in himself. This affirmation requires the existence of relationship.

46. See. Rafael Alvira, "Individuality and the EU Project", Andreas Føllesdal and Peter Koslowski (eds), *Democracy and the European Union. Studies in Economic Ethics and Philosophy*, (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer, 1997), 207.

Forgetting what is held “in common” and communitarianism

Faced with the above-described liberal thought, a group of academics from various streams of philosophical thought have reacted by proposing alternative solutions that criticize liberal individualism and propose ways in which communities in which each person live can participate actively. This group of thinkers, known as communitarian, is difficult to define clearly because they don't recognize themselves as a group and rarely coincide in the solutions that they propose. It is clear however, that their principal point of agreement is criticism of the liberal position on the relationship between the individual and society, as well as an emphasis on individual freedoms and the rights that spring from them. However, these elements require further specification to truly be defined as communitarian. This is so much so that while the title of communitarian is mainly applied to critics of Rawls from the 1980s, such as Michael Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer, it is also used for authors of a similar philosophical and political stance in the 1990s, with greater interest in social practice and sociology. Among this second generation of communitarians are Amitai Etzioni, Robert Bellah and Daniel Bell.

Having in mind the different theoretical standpoints of the above-mentioned communitarian thinkers; one might question whether communitarianism as such exists. However, communitarianism is a socio-political philosophy, a current of social theory that exists in the intellectual field at least for two reasons. Firstly, there is a common intellectual adversary in the form of individualistic liberalism and –on the other side – common adversary in the form of rigid communalism that ignores the notion of individuality. Secondly, and more importantly, there is a common positive goal of building or rebuilding some notion and practice of *community* in the modern world⁴⁷.

The ways in which community is understood by the main communitarian authors differ substantially, but its necessity is never questioned. Whether the community is supposed to be predominantly local, national, or global, no matter what view of the human being it presupposes, it, nevertheless, is perceived as the only hope of the modern atomized Western society. Considering the level of atomization of contemporary societies, the weakness of social ties, the lack of interest in the public sphere, and the practical disappearance of *the common* from the awareness of the modern human being, the appeal and attractiveness of lively communities is noticed by political scientists and social theorists of most, if not all orientations.

47. The postulate of rebuilding the lost community or building new form of community is recently being raised by many intellectuals e.g., Benjamin Barber, William Sullivan, Mary Ann Glendon, Steven Tipton, Ann Swidler, Robert Bellah, and many others. Its impact on the broad liberal tradition made most of liberals accent the importance of community in the public and political life or stimulated them to defend their own theories by attempting to prove that the ideal of community has in some or other form been present in the liberal paradigm.

The communitarian critiques of individual liberalism that have been put forward by Sandel, Walzer, Taylor, MacIntyre and Etzioni raise a number of similar issues. All of these theories stress the fact of human dependence on their communities, on their social environment integrated to a larger or smaller degree into groups. All aforementioned intellectuals claim that our individual identity is co-created by the communities into which we are born and in which we live. All of them base their considerations on the social and political nature of human beings. The fact of our dependence on others seems to them crucial, largely because it tends to be neglected in the wide range of liberal theories. Therefore, the communitarians felt the need to oppose the vision of almost self-sufficient individuals, equipped by nature with the most important and sufficient instruments for attaining the stage of rational life. They did not resign from the natural impact on our identity: MacIntyre devotes a lot of attention to our animal nature, Etzioni accepts the existence of the natural part of the self, and he seems to ground his idea of “the moral voice” at least partly in nature. However, communitarians put a substantially heavier emphasis on the process of activating this natural human potentiality by the efforts of integrated social groups. Etzioni writes that the self is divided between the lower (natural) and the higher (social) part. Society forms us and is necessary to stimulate us to actions consistent with the moral voice. This voice itself is largely created and sustained by society in Etzioni’s vision. Walzer finds local communities so important for preserving individual freedom and defining one’s conception of goods, values, and justice that he proposes to defend our local social environment against the mobilities of modernity: geographical, social, political, and familial. His picture of the self-divided among various voices speaking in the name of different values comes from community, just as all goods in his theory are described as social goods. Sandel claims that our selves are “encumbered” with essential elements of identity coming from our community. Moreover, in modern times we are multiply-situated, formed from by many communities, which complicates our condition and our ability to develop civic virtues, but does not free us from the formative experience. Taylor projects the authentic self as constantly involved in a dialogue with other members of certain community of similar horizons, language, culture, etc. thus emphasizing the crucial impact of community in both, discovering, and realizing one’s authentic self within the bounds of a given integrated group. Finally, MacIntyre describes the human being as always submerged in traditions with their ready sets of norms and practices as well as defined conceptions of goods and virtues, which have to be somehow dealt with by the individual (whether accepted or rejected) on his or her way of development because all of our tools of rationality necessarily come from a concrete tradition of existing communities. The degree to which we are socially constructed is not made clear by any communitarian theory, probably because such a problem has not been definitively solved in sociology, psychology, or anthropology. However, communitarians stress that our communities largely form our identity, and that this fact needs to be taken by “liberally oriented” political and social theorists more seriously than it has been up till now.

All communitarians point our attention to the vital role played by communities in constituting the identity of the self. They stress the importance of intersubjective relations, the interhuman dimension of our existence, our existence with and for others. Nevertheless, the ways they treat similar issues raised in their theories, differ to a larger or smaller extent: 1) their views on the self, range from the status of its radical division to a potentially and partially ordered one; 2) their assumptions of pluralism of conflicting values are not equally strong; 3) consequently, their acceptance of individual autonomy is also varied. It either aims to follow the existence of some intersubjectively adequate value judgments or presents the individual as the only source and arbiter of values; 4) finally, the principle of neutrality of the State vis-à-vis the sphere of community values is embraced by some communitarians, while rejected or reformulated by others.

Regarding the communitarians picture of the self, most of the authors present it as divided. It is either drawn between higher and lower (Etzioni); arbitrating among various values and goods (Walzer); claimed by many loyalties coming from its multiple situatedness (Sandel), etc. However, a more unified picture of the self is drawn by Taylor and MacIntyre, the dialogical self (Taylor) is oriented to the good, its life is presumed to be ordered in response to the higher and lower goods, so there's a certain envision of a certain order of values or at least a pretty clear distinction between more and less constitutive ones. But his stipulation stating that no good can have an unflinching priority as well as his claim that hypergoods depend on our articulation and affirmation of them make this order both within and outside the self rather unstable. Somewhat similar problems befall MacIntyre. He assumes that individuals strive to establish a narrative unity in their lives. Moreover, his perspective envisions a progress towards the attainment of certain virtues that help us move closer to our *telos*. In order to develop, the self has to be ordered, while its values and priorities need to be set straight in a hierarchy. But MacIntyre's concept of *telos* is pretty vague and procedural (the good life is the life spent searching for the good). His reservations about the unity of virtues or strictly hierarchical visions of the good tend to make his claims about common *telos* and ordered values in community rather weakly grounded.

So, while some communitarians openly say that the self is internally divided and others move towards its internal cohesion and integrity, all of them, though to a different extent, accept the vision of endemic *conflict* of loyalties that claim the contemporary individual. These internal conflicts experienced by each individual supposedly come from value conflicts, which cannot be definitely overcome in modern conditions.

However, here again communitarians do not speak with one voice. Walzer seems to accept a radically conflictual vision and even perceives it as safeguarding the individual freedom. Etzioni partly

overcomes the conflict by postulating a balance of order and autonomy. Sandel believes that raising the level of civic virtue can somehow satisfy conflicting loyalties. Taylor and MacIntyre reduce the conflict to the minimum by accepting the priority of values that are central to the particular community, but they do not dispose with the conflict completely.

This takes us to the third point: the assumption of conflict does not allow communitarians to accept any heteronomous view of objective good and values beyond the human person and independent of its will. *Consequently, they accept the central liberal tenet of the individual autonomy*, though its understanding is again varied in their writings. In most of communitarian's theories, the individual is the final arbiter of values. Although they claim that values and goods come from the common, social sphere, they also seem to subscribe to the view that *common values do not really have meaning until they are chosen and accepted by the individual*. Communitarians are not fully consistent in taking this position. They speak with two voices at the same time, as if they wanted to preserve both autonomy and some degree of heteronomy. Some of them move closer to the autonomous pole (Etzioni, Walzer), while others in comparative perspective seem to stand closer to the heteronomous position (Taylor, MacIntyre). Taylor writes that certain sources and hypergoods empower us and that is why we should discover them and be strengthened by them. MacIntyre describes social practices as carrying internal norms and standards of value. However, the norms are social, not independent of social tradition, not necessarily timeless and unchanging. Besides, the underlying conflicts between values and the radical plurality of conflicting goods leaves the individual helpless in front of the choice. The outer world does not represent itself as ordered; the individual has no other alternative but to create one's own tentative orders, which can never be final, stable, and lasting.

It, therefore, seems that the acceptance of conflictual visions, even if only minimal, as in Taylor and or MacIntyre, actually ruins the hopes for establishing or prolonging the stable life of any community. What is the significance of the fact that norms come from traditions of practices, if we assume that these norms are not fundamentally connected with one another and conforming to the objective order of values? Conflictual visions unavoidably lead to a radical pluralism that cannot stop at the border of existing communities. They lead straight to the individual autonomy in its most radical embodiment, which fundamentally questions any community and perceives it as always tentative. If the goods are conflicting, why should we agree on them in our groups? What can be common to a group of individuals, if the particular individuals themselves cannot establish any timeless hierarchy for each of them separately? We will not even be able to obtain the disharmonious plurality of communities envisioned by Walzer or the set of incommensurable traditions that appear in MacIntyre's theory because no community is actually possible in the world of values that cannot be somehow ordered, i.e., organized according to some fundamental idea that can overcome their mutual conflicts. Of course, the mere plurality of values (their variety) does not necessitate the appearance of conflict

that vitiates the community. But their radical pluralism within the conflictual visions does. Because nothing could then link the conflicting values in a scheme that could then bind the people to live together in a prospective community. Maybe only our vital interest in survival, but such a link was discovered by liberals many years ago. If the communitarians wanted to prove that we are linked by something deeper, then they did not succeed by accepting the vision of radical, insurmountable pluralism of conflicting values. The effect of this acceptance is the loss of the perspective of any radical nature, of any unity both within the self and across the boundaries of communities. Lack of fundamental unity means the actual lack of community. The likely consequence would mean the growing fragmentation and atomization of social life, the illness that was supposed to be cured by communitarianism.

Instead of stressing the differences, communitarians should stress similarities between various cultures and communities, the existence of universal principles, as well as examples of the overcoming of conflicts in the practice of real-life communities. I think that the conflictual visions cannot explain our reality adequately because they cannot grapple with the fact of our persistent life in common. Therefore, it seems that practical life speaks against the vision of radical and perennial conflicts. But communitarians have not moved on towards such conclusions. True, they started their considerations from the assumption that communities *do exist* and that, therefore, the liberal theories do not describe the world correctly in abstract terms of individual interests, autonomy, etc. However, communitarians did not seem to take the fact of the existence of community in the real world enough seriously. They did not draw the conclusions that would shatter some of the liberal assumptions. They did not even question the assumption about conflicting values, although they could do it by referring to examples of our real-life communities that persist through time *despite* the liberal assumptions. Instead, they accepted these assumptions themselves and they sooner or later moved them towards accepting the already tried liberal solutions to the liberal problems: the vision of various separate traditions, radically different communities, and incommensurable value systems.

Similarly, they may be criticized for not taking seriously the idea of individual autonomy. This concept is not analyzed in depth in their theories and leaves a wide possibility of understanding its meaning. If it is interpreted as the freedom to create norms by individuals, rather than the freedom to accept the norms existent independently of our individual or social will, it opens the way for sure chaos in the social space, while it leaves the notion of social duty and civic virtue as vague as they have so far been in the liberal tradition.

The arguments considered above (internal conflicts of the self, radical plurality of conflicting values, and autonomy of the individual in the context of no independent normative order) bring some of the communitarians to acceptance of another liberal tenet, namely that of *the neutrality of the State vis-à-*

vis the question of values. It remains to be the central issue of Walzer and MacIntyre, despite a broad range of differences between the two thinkers. Both of them say the various local communities' thick traditions cannot be brought to the higher level of the State (not to mention the humanity in general) without losing its thickness. They claim that community borders cannot be enlarged substantially. Ultimately, the *humanity* is not perceived to institute any kind of community. The latter outlook is also accepted by Sandel, though the level of the State seems to him likely to promote some of the community values, provided that the State is not too big. The other communitarians persuasively try to show that the neutrality of the State in the sphere of community values is in fact impossible in practice. Because the community values are described as so important to its individual members, they need to find legitimate place in the public and political sphere. They need to be recognized and promoted. However, they cannot be imposed, so they have to come out of the common debate.

The importance of values justifies their higher status in the public and political spheres, but I cannot find the reasons for the communitarians hope that people will be sharing the same values and willing to debate and promote them, given the earlier assumptions about the conflict of values even within each particular individual, not to mention on the intersubjective level of communities. Logically, we can expect the growing amount of incommensurability between traditions, languages, practices, and communities, when we enlarge our perspective and move beyond the local level to the wider level of the state and of humanity. All we can have as a result is an only thin universalism. In fact, not even a thin one, as no universalism can be assumed, if all values are to come from local social context and even there remain in mutual disharmony. The relativistic perspective cannot give any real hope for building or rebuilding any community. The lack of assumptions about the existence of an objective order of values shatters the communitarian dreams because any community requires at least minimal stable agreements on values. The fact that communities do exist in reality, that all of us are born into them and co-created by them, (the fact that is raised by communitarians, though without stimulating them to draw enough conclusions) might itself prove that the conflictual visions of common to both liberals and communitarians are wrong, because the communities last, while their conflicts are minor and do not dissolve their internal bonds.

Therefore, it seems that communitarians did not manage to draw the necessary conclusions from their own analysis or from the observations of the social life and its essentially communal aspect. Hence, the fact of raising the right questions about the fundamentals of our human condition and communal existence did not save the communitarians from repeating some of the mistakes of the liberals. All in all, communitarians take community more seriously than liberals, but not seriously enough. Their acceptance of the key liberal values together with the underlying vision of conflict among values and the assumed lack of any objective ontological order makes the actual community theoretically impossible. Consequently, all their claims of promoting common values in the political

and economic spheres present themselves somehow utopian. The basic agreement on any economic or political strategy undertaken in the name of supposedly common values could always be discredited and unmasked as the cover for individual interest and the actual illegitimate limits of the value of autonomy. These claims do need to be utopian, though, provided that communitarians reject their conflictual assumptions and treat the existent communities and their actual agreement on values more seriously.

Nevertheless, the communitarians have helped to crucially refresh the political-philosophical debates of our times, because they refer to certain important issues and constitute an interesting input in the field of political and social theory, which is often said to undergo a deep crisis. Saving anything from crisis usually requires posing serious questions, and that is what the communitarians are doing when they restore to political philosophy issues as virtues, goods, human nature, etc. They bring back the most important questions, they ask about the relations between facts and norms, and they put the problem of the thick theory of “the good” within the area of interest of political scientists and sociologists. Instead of mourning over the dead body of post-Enlightenment philosophy, they try to look for, articulate, and be empowered by the sources of our life in common. Moreover, all considered communitarians uncover the hidden, forgotten, or alternative meanings of freedom, though they cannot always adequately fit these notions into their overall theories. They link freedom with responsibility, civic and political virtues and notice the importance of the intersubjective bonds and the existence of irreducibly common goods, which tends to be ignored or neglected in the dominant liberal paradigm.

7. The need for and sphere of the “common”

If the modern socio-political construct based on the individual is erroneous, the question is what social systems are then based on. On this point it is worth noting that for social life to exist, and political life to exist as a consequence, something must be held in common. This element in common is found, essentially in the human being, concretely in their intelligence, which knows the truth, and in a certain way, in the will that loves it. This is because truth is what is held in common by all those who possess it. Thus, it is the only way that truly communicates; the only element that cannot be manipulated, and at the same time requires engagement.

Understanding, in fact, functions via union. To know is to unite oneself with the being of the other. The same happens with the will, because as Thomas Aquinas pointed out, it always works in function of otherness. One cannot love unless there is another. From here spring the great mystery of friendship, love, and truth, from this need for sameness and otherness. This is why to know, and love are always conjugated in the personal.

Democracy emerged, all the same, from an atomistic understanding of society. The classical republic, on the contrary, had political virtue, and thus the construction of the *res publica*, as its key. In a society of individuals on the contrary, what matters most is opinion, and as there are many individuals, public opinion is the opinion that matters. In the classical republic, political truth had primacy and was considered to be synonymous with the common good.

Herein lies the essential element that explains modern failures. In attempting to construct a society as a mere sum of individuals, a crucial element is missing for it to be so. In order to speak of the common good, there must first be something held in common.

Faced with many attempts to unite the individual through merely symptomatic remedies (hiding the symptoms for a time), it becomes necessary to make use of an etiological medicine that treats the causes of the malaise. This is in no way an easy task. Though I understand that in order for the civil society as a whole, and the political government in particular, to undergo an effective treatment, it must apply its capacities and power to this task, most of all by letting those with the right to do so, take charge of the task of strengthening the most crucial social institutions. Therefore, it must directly promote healthy relationships between individuals, and the value of what is held in common in the social fabric, in these key institutions: the family, educational centers and religion, which are the ground or natural space for developing of the common.

A) The family:

The first means of building up the common begins in the family, given that it is the places where the common is constructed, not only spiritually but also corporally. As such, what is common for man is constructed in relationship, and most pragmatically in the family.⁴⁸ In addition to the fact that the closest common relationships usually take place in the heart of the family, which brings way to the life of children, the family is where children learn what is common, and learn to live love as something common. As such the family is the place of personalization where the individual becomes a person through filial and fraternal relationships.

In this sense, it can be affirmed that God created society prior to the individual, given that without woman and man there is no child. In fact, when the Creator affirms in Paradise that “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2: 18), it does not signify that Adam merely lacked company. The same passage of Genesis affirms in its prior verses that God Himself was speaking with Adam. As such, it is rather the

48. Rafael Alvira, «Elementos configuradores de la familia», in Manuel Peláez, Alberto López Palanco and Manuel Giménez Pacheco (eds.) *La familia y el futuro de Europa*, (Barcelona: Anales de Ciencias Sociales y Económicas de la Fundación Ferran Valls I Taberner, 1987): 162-163.

case than man was alone with respect to with whom he was to form a unity in community. He created man and woman in such a way that it is clear that they are distinct. If not, He would have created them as identical and not each in its own way in such a manner ordered toward complementarity.

In every relationship between men and woman a mutual enrichment as human beings occurs; both learn more about what it means to be a human being. In the family, men and women – father, mother, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters – learn this in the best possible manner, as a consequence of the pacific proximity and the natural love among them.⁴⁹

This pacific and lovely proximity allows the development of the inborn natural dispositions: filial veneration towards the parents; fraternity towards the brothers and sisters; paternity and maternity. It is difficult to imagine how these dispositions could be developed other than in the family, and it is difficult to figure out how a civil society can exist without people who possess these dispositions deeply in themselves.⁵⁰

Another aspect is that in the family there are primarily duties, and it is unthinkable to demand one's rights, even if in practice you have them. Every true society is based on duties, the rights are an implicit consequence of them; even more, every right only makes sense if there is a pre-existent duty.

In other words, the person learns the natural duties in the family, and he or she can transfer to other realms of the civil society the framework and the structure of those duties. So, everyone can claim his or her rights from the respective institutions.

B) Educational Centers:

At the educational centers, the relationship that is established is also very close. In fact, education is a task for two: the teacher and the student. It consists in helping the student “help himself/herself” (according to the classic thesis that the educator does not “produce” anything, but rather works by educating because the student is the only one that can set their capacities into motion and employ them), but it is clear that helping one do so is an art in itself. It is the art of humanizing man (“it is not sufficient to be born human to being human”).⁵¹ It is a task that enters the intimate sphere of the person being educated.

When this level is not reached, education is not really taking place. Concepts are merely instructed

49. Rafael Alvira, «Antropología de la familia», in *II Congreso Internacional de la Familia: Educación y familia: Libro de actas: Murcia, 2, 3 y 4 de diciembre de 2004*, (Murcia: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia, 2005): 248.

50. Rafael Alvira, «Sobre la esencia de la familia», Juan Cruz Cruz (ed.) *Metafísica de la familia* (Pamplona: EUNSA, 1995): 23-24.

51. On education as art, see: Rafael Alvira, «La educación como arte suscitador», in *La investigación pedagógica y la formación de profesores*, (Madrid: CSIC, 1980): 25-36; “Vivir la educación: Tomás Alvira y la Escuela Universitaria de Magisterio Fomento” (Lecture delivered at the Villanueva University Center, October 22nd, 2004).

or transmitted, but the students' personality is not forged, nor are they helped in the way that they most need.⁵² Dialogue reveals that the task of educating requires influence because dialogue cannot be imposed. Otherwise, it remains a sterile monologue, rather than the result of power. The "good dialoguer" is someone who listens, and yet does not impose him or herself.⁵³ The teacher, unlike the university professor, must kneel down to remain at the height of the child and become "another self" to them. With time, the professor can recover their "status" and even stand on pointed toes to reach students who are making great efforts to continue the dialogue.⁵⁴ This is only possible when a dialogue has already been born and as a consequence, when there is interest on the part of the student, they are already captivated, and want to study for themselves. This is the true task of education.⁵⁵

The educator is a mediator that put the student on a track in order for them to reach the light of knowledge by their own means. Knowledge cannot be directly communicated; it can only be offered. This is why, certainly, the educator guides, accompanies and assists so that the student may acquire knowledge through personal study. The task of the educator is arduous and compromising, in a certain co-creative manner which is fundamental for society because they collaborate directly with the socialization of people, to the extent to which they overcome individualism and renew trust within society, allowing civil society to be rebuilt. The educator has their hands in the task of sowing the desire for seeking intangibles (virtues, transcendence) in their student, along with the tools to reach them. Without these values it is impossible to create a true society based on what Aristotle calls the social virtue *par excellence*: friendship. This assumes that through the exercise of freedom one takes on responsibility for others: the great task of seeing life as something in common and taking responsibility for the others.

C) Religion:

Religion currently faces the serious difficulties brought on by the dogmatism of radical democratization. In fact, total and spontaneous individual freedom implies that the human person should take the place of God. Radical equality is the product of the geometric intellect, one that fixes the problems found between "absolute freedoms" and daily life in a radically democratic society. This is why the democratic paradox is that the originating power—individual freedom—is corrected by a mathematical intellect that, despite itself, cannot realize full equality. The qualitative nature of life, and even more so of human life, impedes it. It ends up becoming in an intellectual hermeneutic that generates constitutional policies, none of which fully achieve egalitarian justice. The result is that society is a merely exterior and always provisional construct. There is no society like friendship, like interiority and deep peace.

52. Rafael Alvira, "Vivir la educación", 7.

53. Rafael Alvira, "La educación como arte suscitador", 34.

54. See Alvaro D'Ors, *Cartas a un joven estudiante*, (Pamplona: EUNSA, 1991), 58.

55. Rafael Alvira, "Vivir la educación", 8.

In Christian religious terminology, “modernity” substitutes God with the State, which became the new “Kingdom of God” on earth for the first modern authors. In their view, peace could only be granted by an external power, given that peace is merely exterior, not interior within this world.

In the last phase of modernity, it is increasingly clear that modernity in itself does not generate peace. This is impossible, as it is something merely exterior. The current solution seems to be the attempt to resolve things to “the best possible” given that it is not possible to have both liberty and equality, and try not to “exaggerate” in either direction. Thus, great skepticism and relativism have invaded the cultural spheres, and the air of radical democratization is not healthy for religion.

Despite this relativism, or perhaps because of it, there is a serious difficulty for religion today, which is that people believe in the State and not in God. The State is what provides, at least externally, what God has promised to man: peace and interior freedom. As interiority does not count, the State provides these goods, but they are merely exterior, untruly.

The superficial environment could also be considered to be a difficulty for religion. Most of communication in our days is merely “external” and does not generate an authentic union. As such it is not true communication. Only truth, love and friendship communicate, not opinion, even when it is public. Neither pure emotivism, nor passion, does so. But the environment is full of “opinionism”, skepticism, relativism, emotivism, passion, and the generation of conflicts, both latent and not. Making opinion public does not make it any truer, nor is passion any better merely because it has been communicated.

Conclusion

Power is now in the hands of a liberal agenda, in such a way that the final consequences of a liberty and equality that are incompatible with their classical conception are coming to light. There seems to be an interminable dispute. As long as liberals continue to apply an idea of liberty that consists of letting everyone do as they please, while in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the natural law conception continue to maintain that freedom means doing things well, and thus, for people to be free, they require education in order to do so, a great tension will remain. The only way to truly reach the end of freedom, according to their own way of being, is to access these above-mentioned three sources of identity.

Religion is currently persecuted, and so are educational centers that truly seek an integral formation for their students, because the concept of absolute freedom is only valid for one of the contending parties. The concept of liberal freedom upheld by authors and progressive politicians consists of

getting the other groups to accept their concept of freedom, which is a clear imposition. It is also an insane concept of freedom because it is impossible to organize human life in such a way, given that it would permanently generate conflict in the attempts to reconcile contradictory absolute rights. In this sense, it is usually considered that everything related to personal identity works against individual freedoms. Thus, everything that configures our most personal convictions and what our conscience dictates must be rejected if they are not compatible with the concept of the absolute freedom of others. Therefore, at most there is a mere toleration of the innermost identities in terms of their reference to interpersonal relationships, as long as they do not threaten individual freedoms. This is why it is fundamental for families, educational centers, and churches to be connected to one another. They must not have contradictory identities. When this happens, people break down and fail to meet the standard of coherent citizenship that civil society requires.

This reveals the key importance of the connection between families, schools, and churches. Otherwise, children hear one thing at home, another at school, and yet another at church. This causes them confusion, anxiety, suspicion, and a possible future identity crisis. This is why parents have the great obligation, and right, to educate their children in such a way that a clear identity is forged in them. For this to happen, they must have the necessary conditions to choose educational centers that adequately reflect what is taught in family life. The mission of these centers and churches is to enrich identity, not to break it.

When the State attempts to oblige schools to provide a very specific type of education, whether theoretically “neutral” or including curriculum content that does not reflect the vision of the social groups responsible for them, it is acting against the principles of liberty and equality. When identity is not respected and schools are obliged against it (against the conscience of those in charge or those who have a responsibility to uphold its mission), we are faced with a tyranny disguised as democracy.

In fact, this is the current reality. Liberal democracy, starting from the concept of absolute freedom that it promotes, has taken steps to impose curriculum content of an ideological avenue, that constitute a disguised form of indoctrination. Furthermore, in many institutions, the lack of parental interest in these issues is equally problematic.

Finally, it must be pointed out that the current cultural environment makes it quite difficult to distinguish good from evil, and to educate in true freedom. Freedom requires education. One must learn to be free. This requires committed institutions (families, schools, universities, and churches) and a nurturing social environment. This is the challenge that currently faces those who seek to act coherently, upholding a realist philosophy that leads to the recognition of natural law and the transcendental dictates of the ethical or ethical-religious conscience.

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