The Invention of Western Reason

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Introduction

Reason appears to be a hallmark of our modern, democratic, liberal, critical, and scientific civilisation. Most of us in the West are proud that our modern era has heralded the reign of reason in science, law, politics, and economics. But somehow, our "rational" society contains strange inconsistencies. First, we have witnessed the practical failure of what Hayek calls the Cartesian, Saint-Simonian "rationalist constructivism", and of Hegelian philosophy, which claimed to be the "absolute knowledge", and the ultimate rational explanation of reality. These two philosophical trends might well have led to the totalitarianisms of 20th-century systems which evidently indicate a decline of reason. Secondly, it seems that Western civilisation achieved its greatest successes only by accepting a release of reason, through such concepts as democracy, pluralism, unrestricted freedom of criticism in the sciences, and economic freedom, which all seem to have been designed to cope with the limits of our Reason. They are the various devices which social experience has found and proved efficient to circumvene to a certain degree our ignorance in political, scientific and economic fields. But of this non-fulfilment, be it a fault or failure of reason, there is a third and remarkable manifestation in the very birth of the so-called modern civilisation which claims to be the rational civilisation par excellence.

By "modern" civilisation today, we often mean the West – "the West" being an historical artefact designed between the 11th and 13th centuries in Western Europe. I will argue that the very process of its birth, insofar as we can analyse it retrospectively, is not fully rational. It seems to appear more as a "miracle", in that the process by which reason was attained seems to be itself highly irrational. My purpose is this article is to describe a process which occurred during three centuries of the Middle Ages, and which resulted in the "invention of Western Reason". But this purpose is not, strictly speaking, an historical one. Such musings are beyond the scope of this short paper. I have already elaborated a detailed understanding of reason's development in a recent book and a paper (See Nemo: 1998 and 1999). My purpose is rather to bring to light the irrational face of this history, and to focus more precisely on the "spiritual" element of it.

Before proceeding further, it will be useful to define some of the vocabulary I will be using. "Spiritual" refers to "spirit" and "mind", but these words appear (to me) to be ambiguous in the English language, while the German "Geist" is too metaphysical for what I have in mind. The French "esprit", I believe, would be a more accurate term, but I cannot use it here. Whatever the best term, by "spiritual" elements, I mean something which undoubtedly *acts* in history, although it is not *visible*; something which organises scattered historical data (such as ideas, institutions, and facts), but which we cannot see directly, at least beforehand. We can see the nascent structures, we can discover and verify that the data is becoming coherent and meaningful, but we cannot directly see the

organising centre by which this organising process is achieved. This invisible organising process is what I mean by "esprit".

Bergson has explained this very convincingly in the case of philosophical and artistic works. He argues that when a philosopher or an artist begins to work, he does not know exactly what his work will be, nor still less how his works will evolve in later years. Nevertheless, all of his works are related, one to the other, eventually achieving a unified design, or singular character. These common features and this unified design will appear only at the end, in retrospect: when you read all the books of a philosopher, you discover that all of them were pursuing the same purpose. However, no one could have predicted this beforehand, not even the author. Authors and artists are secretly guided, Bergson argues, by an "intuition" – all that he was making was secretly organised by this invisible principle. Intuition might possibly be revealed at the end, but only by the traces on what the artist or the philosopher has left behind. It is fundamental to note that this principle, although invisible, is definitely *real*. It can – even though *a posteriori* – be described, and is therefore, not an imaginary, "mystical" being, but a positive reality which does work in the real world and does produce concrete effects.

I wish to understand within the confines of this article how Western reason was designed, at a certain historical juncture in the Middle Ages, by such a "spiritual" process. As I would posit, Western "Reason" is not the fruit of "reason" – at least, if we want to say it is, we must widen the sense of this term. I have a further, more general purpose. I will offer some other examples of "turning points" in History which seem to be explicable by the same paradoxical logic. I will end by drawing some conclusions on "Reason in History", if I dare use this Hegelian expression in a non-Hegelian, and even anti-Hegelian sense. The failure of historicisms (so convincingly demonstrated by Karl Popper) must not make us believe that, now, no philosophy of history at all is possible.

1. The Papal Revolution

The process which occurred between 11th and 13th centuries in Europe began with what is currently known as the "Gregorian Reform". Contrary to the work of other historians, the American historian Harold J. Berman (1970) has termed the latter event the "Papal Revolution", firstly, because it was achieved not only by Pope Gregory VII himself, but by other popes, as well as Roman clerics and intellectuals, both before and after Gregory. Secondly, he has employed this term because it was not only a "reform" – a limited, piecemeal change – but a "revolution", a complete change, a general re-organisation of knowledge, values, laws and institutions, which resulted in the birth of a new, original civilisation – the West.

This revolution was the result of a crisis in the Church at the end of the High Middle Ages, in the 11th century. Church authority was restricted by secular powers, which often dominated it, preventing it from playing its own leading, "spiritual" role. There had been some efforts to cope with these difficulties, for instance, in the 10th century, the Clunisian Reform, which resulted in the creation of many independent monasteries throughout Europe. But the desired changes were achieved by the popes themselves, especially Gregory VII and his successors. Gregory declared, in his famous "*Dictatus papæ*" (1076), that the

Pope had the "*plenitudo potestatis*", both over the Church and indirectly, over the secular kingdoms. It was the first model of an "absolute monarchy" in Europe. He decreed that priests would no longer be married, and would so constitute an independent, solitary corps, the riches of which would no longer be scattered. He decided that bishops, abbots, and clerics would be appointed by spiritual authorities. Thus, the "*libertas Ecclesiæ*" would be recovered.

Gregory VII next decided that Roman law, which had been almost completely forgotten in Europe, would be studied again. The adoption of Roman Law resulted in the creation of the first European University, established by Irnerius in Bologna – designed in part to be a vehicle for the spread of Roman Law. Gregory's purpose was to give technical models for the new canonic law, created by the Papacy, which would collect old ecclesiastical canons, and decree new rules (the "decretals"), according to their new absolute monarchical power. Large ecumenical Councils (such as Lateran, Lyon, etc.) were summoned, and these created a new universal legislation which organised Christian society. Such changes were very new, and perhaps extremely controversial for the time. While "heresies" (among which Judaism was included) were severely attacked, the main aim of such reforms was to rationally organise economic, social, and even private lives throughout the Christian world. Soon a new "*Corpus juris canonici*", the "Decree" of Gratian (1140), was elaborated, and was incessantly updated and improved in the following centuries. Generally, a coherent system of law was being developed at this time, and it became increasingly common to use legal proceedings to decide disputes, instead of violence. A more structured, ordered society was slowly being constructed.

Many universities were established throughout Europe at this time, often by the popes, as a means of reducing local ecclesiastical and royal powers. The popes also took initiative in creating new universal monastic orders, notably the mendicant orders, such as the Dominicans and Franciscans. These were not to be contemplative, but active orders, through which Rome could control a greater part of Christian temporal life, and even political life. At that time, too, science was developed in the universities. While it is true that the first important results, really new by comparison with Greco-Roman science, would be reached only in Modern times, medieval scolasticism paved the way. Scientific methods were standardised during this time, and Greco-Roman science was studied afresh. The recovery of many manuscripts in Spanish, Byzantine, and Arab libraries contributed greatly to knowledge. Science and technology also benefited from the development of commerce and navigation.

Taking both the Papal monarchy and the old Roman Empire as models, deriving benefit from the study of the Roman public law in the universities, and using these institutions to train a new class of civil servants, States began a long, but ultimately victorious fight against feudalism. They began to centralise their administrations, to collect non-feudal taxes, to hold strong, permanent armies, and to judge on appeal from every local court. Most importantly, States began to gather together the feudal lords in the capital town of the king, thus increasing the prerogatives of royal control.

As all of these great changes were taking place in Western society, there was a tremendous increase in the various powers of the West. Between the 11th and 13th centuries, we can see a remarkable increase in population size, the growth of the existing towns and the birth of many new ones. There was also notable economic growth. These develop-

ments resulted in new geopolitical powers, as evidenced by the Crusades, the "*Reconquista*" in Spain, the "*Drang nach Osten*" movement of the Germans towards the Slavic countries, the Christianisation of Scandinavia, as well as Marco Polo's journeys and the improvements of navigation, which allowed European explorers to venture well outside the Mediterranean Sea.

One might indeed ask: what relationship existed between the successes of what appears now as a new, original civilisation (the West) – and this "Papal Revolution"?

I would reply firstly that men of the West could, at that time, both *know the world* and *co-operate to act on it* better than they ever could before, and secondly that it is the "Papal Revolution" which made possible this new use of reason – which effectively "invented Western Reason".

2. From All-or-Nothing to Measure

Berman sheds light on the *theological* roots of these papal initiatives. I say "theological", but I could equally say "philosophical" or "spiritual". In any case, these initiatives marked a change within the intellectual world, within the world of ideas, the internal world, not a contingent, external change in material things. More precisely, it was a change in the "vision of the world", and, it seems to have been unpredictable – a "prophetic" change. A miracle perhaps? This is a question which will require elaboration as this paper progresses. It is important first of all, however, to understand the stages by which a new vision of the world was achieved.

First, there was the will of the Papacy to "christianise the world", in order to make it able to attain its eschatological ends. When leaving the world, Christ promised his swift return, which would herald the achievement of the messianic and eschatological prophecies of the Old Testament. During the first few centuries of the Roman Church's existence, adherents believed that Christ's coming was imminent. However, after one thousand years had passed, and nothing had transpired, many began to question the established Church teachings. Perhaps, argued some theologians, Christ was not going to return to earth because the world was not worth His coming. Man had let the world become worse and worse, and it was obvious that, from the conversion of the Roman Empire onwards, while there were Christians in the world, the world itself was not a Christian one. Christians had lived in a sinning world, praying to escape it, but alas – they had not yet attempted to transform it. In the High Middle Ages, the most admired persons in the Christian world were the monks, precisely because they lived "outside" the world, and therefore seemed to have a foot on the ladder which ascended to Heaven. The problem was that by abstaining from transforming the world, man had let it become more and more filled with sin. Now, theologians further reasoned, the situation had become so bleak that Christ could not dwell within it.

It seemed now that the time was ripe for men to transform the world for the better, so that Christ would change his mind, come back to earth, and bring about the long awaited redemption. This was the true meaning of the "*Dictatus papæ*", and of all further measures of the Gregorian Reform. If the Pope needed to wield absolute power, if the Church needed to be free from secular control and secular society, it was because they needed to

have the power to act on the world in order to transform it. The "*libertas Ecclesiæ*" was required if the Church was to be a spiritual power superior to the temporal powers, a situation comparable to the power of prophets over kings in Old Testament. If it was necessary to have the right to change the law, to create a new canonic law, and to expand the vigour of canonic law over any customary and secular law, it was because Christians had to instigate a *revolution.*

In traditional societies, the law is fixed and is above the will of man, and any ruler daring to change the old customs would have been guilty of sacrilege. However, theologians argued that law was not superior to the will of God, as God had created a human nature that was fundamentally good, and good divine laws. Unfortunately, the sin of man had destroyed this good nature, and in no city were there laws which could be said to be equal to the true, divine "natural law". So, by making new Christian laws (the papal decretals, or the canons of the great ecumenical Councils) the Church was improving the world, making it closer to what had existed during the lost Paradise and to what would exist again at the end of times. The Church argued that it not only had a right to do this, but further – that it was bound by a most sacred duty – no matter how strongly any temporal power might resist its authority. As far as Church officials were concerned, it was legitimate to undertake drastic changes in society for the purpose of hastening the Parousia of Christ. During this period, there is little doubt that Christianity was essentially revolutionary.

Nevertheless, one cannot embark towards a remote goal without being convinced that it is at least *possible* to reach it. A serious obstacle was presented by traditional Augustinian thought, which advanced the view that human nature had been completely destroyed by sin, and therefore, no human will could ever bring about his own salvation, this being something which could only be achieved by the grace of God. This obstacle was soon overcome by several important theological changes, a good example of which was the new doctrine of *atonement* introduced by Saint Anselm, and the invention of *Purgatory*.

3. The Anselmian Doctrine of Atonement

Before discussing the work of Saint Anselm, it is important to review some of the elements of the old Augustinian doctrine that traditionally held sway. As Augustine posited, after the original sin, man deserved nothing but death, and this fault could not be compensated by human works, because the fault was infinite, whereas any human work was finite. While it was true that God could save man by his grace, nobody knew who was to be saved and who was not, and there was nothing man could do in order to change this eternal decree. Human action had no value – no good action could save, and no bad action could definitely prevent someone from being saved. The only practicable solution to this dilemma was to abstain from acting altogether, a solution wholly favoured by monastic orders, who isolated themselves from the rest of the world, and refused to act within it. Salvation could be obtained, if it were possible, only by supernatural means – through prayers, pilgrimages, or the worship of relics. Reason was not required in the magical, enchanted world of the High Middle Ages.

Saint Anselm changed the theological vision which had previously justified this attitude. Anselm was an Italian monk who joined the abbey of Bec in Normandy, and studied

as a pupil of the famous theologian Lanfranc for many years, finally becoming abbot. When William, Duke of Normandy, became the Conqueror of England in 1066, he appointed Lanfranc and Anselm, successively, to the Archbishopric of Canterbury. Through his writings, and his role as Archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm proved to be both a great thinker and, in the full sense of the term, an actor in the "Papal Revolution". He was even, I would add, a member of the revolutionary party (like so many other famous thinkers and even mystics of the time, such as Humbert of Moyenmoutiers, Saint Peter Damian, and Saint Bruno, among many others).

Saint Anselm dealt primarily with the question of sin and atonement in his two works "*De incarnatione Verbi*" and "*Cur Deus homo?*", works which directly challenged the accepted traditional doctrines of Saint Augustine. To briefly summarise Anselm's challenge to Augustinian theology – it was true that the original sin was infinite, and it was also true that it could be overcome only by an infinite merit, which no man could possibly acquire. Nevertheless, the answer lay in Christ, who was a man like no other, a man who was totally innocent, without sin, but who nonetheless suffered a horrible death. By suffering under such a totally unjust penalty, which was not the price of a sin, he won an infinite merit – a "treasure of surerogatory (*supererogatorii*) merits" – which was now available, so to speak, to redeem mankind of their sins. Salvation was no longer at stake, since the grace of God had been given, and mankind *was* saved from original sin.

While this theological reappraisal could deliver mankind from original, general sin, it was not enough, nevertheless, to save man from particular sin. In effect, man was not only guilty of original sin, but of what theologians term "actual" sins – the sins for which the individual is responsible. Fortunately, as man was a finite being, his actual sins were also, by definition, finite, and for this reason, they could be repurchased by finite compensations – concrete human good works. Anselm's theology can be understood with reference to the following balance sheet :

BALANCE SHEET

PASSIVE		ACTIVE	
Original sin, actual sins		Christ's sacrifice, good works	
$-\infty$ $-a-b-c\ldots$	$=$	$+\infty$ $+a+b+c\ldots$	

This shift in the doctrine of atonement had tremendous importance for moral life. Now, human action recovers its *meaning*, since now, any concrete human action *counts in the balance*. Whatever one does, good or bad, *does matter*, because it plays an irreplaceable role in one's own personal salvation. It is up to the individual to be saved, at least up to a point. Anselm, certainly, does not negate the role of grace, since grace is necessary for one's conversion to good works. Nevertheless, while grace exists, it's really up to the individual to act well, and if he doesn't, he will not be saved by a pure miracle without his own participation in the process. In fact, Anselm's work opened the path towards what Thomas Aquinas would later posit – that grace does not act by substituting for human na-

ture, but, on the contrary, acts by restoring it, so that man can act willingly and choose freely to do good. The theological debate over whether or not grace was "sufficient", would become a Byzantine question in theology over the next few centuries. Let us remember that, with the new Anselmian theology, human action acquired a definite *value* in the face of God.

4. *Purgatory*

While Anselm's theories made sense to a point, there were other questions which remained unresolved. To paraphrase one of the key issues still open to theological speculation, "I will be saved if the balance is positive at the end of my life. But if I begin to do good works too late after having sinned for a very long time, then it will be difficult, and perhaps impossible, to get a positive balance when I die. In such a situation, is it worth beginning to act well?" While some could answer yes, and others no, human action would once again lose its meaning. It is not by chance that, precisely at that time (11th–12th centuries), theologians invented "Purgatory", a time after death, during which the sinner would be expected to finish his good works, in order to redeem himself.
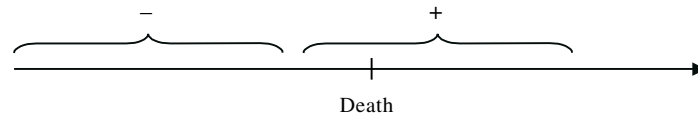
Death

With Purgatory, human actions once again had meaning. It was worth performing good works, even very late in one's life, even one day or one hour before death, because, even though it may not be enough to pay the entire debt, and one's deed might still hang negatively in the balance, the remainder of the debt, theologians argued, could be paid in Purgatory (the prayers of the living would also help).

5. *Salvation: A Human Enterprise*

With the advent of this new theology, any deeds, no matter how impressive or how insignificant, can be allotted their full value – it is now entirely up to the individual to bring about his own redemption. Human *responsibility* now becomes imperative, as Man begins to occupy centre-stage. The path towards heaven is no longer seen to be a *vertical* path, which God alone, with his magic and incomprehensible grace, or men relying on this magic alone, can ascend. Rather, the path to heaven now becomes a slant one, a series of steps, a visible way, by which man can, through rational representation, progress towards the absolute.
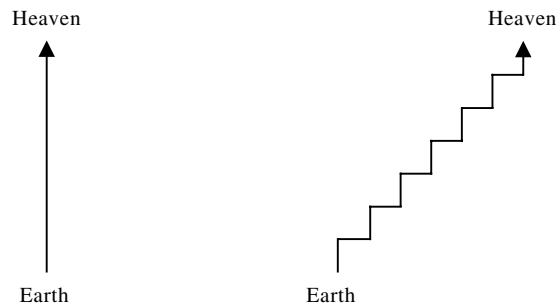
It is not by chance that the representation of Christ as a *mediator* is enhanced at the same time. Christ is God *and* Man. But in the High Middle Ages, as well as in orthodox Christianity until now, Christ was represented primarily in his God-like state. Even when he was depicted in painting or sculpture on the cross, Christ's triumphant face was emphasised, not his corporeal frame. Let us remember the Orthodox icons: they are representations of Godly persons, Christ and the Virgin Mary for example, but it is Christ, more than Jesus, who is painted, with his halo and infinitely serene face. He is depicted as having "risen from the dead", but without having actually died, only with an unimpaired glory. Even this minimalist representation was a controversial point in orthodoxy. By contrast, Western art began at that time to represent Christ as a suffering man, with his emaciated, injured and bloody body, and this style of representation became prevalent in all Western medieval and modern Christianity since that time. Such art emphasised the humanity of Christ, stressing that man could in fact *imitate* Him. Adopting Christ as a model was therefore not beyond human powers. From this time forward, *imitatio Christi* became the moral program of Western Christians. On the way towards Heaven, man was no longer alone, but was helped by Somebody who was like man and consequently knew and understood him. Christ showed man the straight and narrow path by which He has passed, and by which man too could travel. The ascent to salvation was no longer a question of pure grace; rather, it became, at least in part, a *human enterprise*.

The main feature of this enterprise which is important to understand was that it became a *rational* one. Salvation was no longer an "all-or-nothing" issue, but one in which man had to *measure* and *make use of his reason*.

First, he would have to calculate his own salvation, to balance evil acts by equivalent good works. Secondly, he would now have to employ his reason to achieve these good works themselves. In effect, what are "good" works? These are actions which lessen the sufferings of men, feed the hungry, support the needy, heal the sick, and generally speaking increase love and diminish evil in the world. In short, no action can be considered good which does not somehow *transform the world* for the better. But by transforming the world, man implies that he *knew* it, and will *co-operate* peacefully and efficiently within it. This therefore implies the use of reason, both in *science* and in *law* or *politics*. The use of reason now became a religious duty, which conflicted with the old duties to pray and to worship God (even though it did not substitute entirely for them). While the use of reason

was once little more than an earthly concern, and often a sinful one, it now became a moral duty *par excellence*. For it was commanded by God Himself, and was now deemed to be a path to Heaven.

6. *The Grand Inquisitor*

This shift in western thinking engendered a crucial misunderstanding between the Eastern and Western Churches. Eastern Christian theologians posited that when Rome decided to use reason, it effectively renounced its quest for salvation. There is a famous section in Fyodor Dostoyevski's *Brothers Karamazov*, entitled the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor", which deals with this misunderstanding. In these pages, Dostoyevski contrasts the Roman Catholic Grand Inquisitor with Jesus. The latter is obligingly depicted as a genuine Orthodox. He is pure love and heroism, while the former is only cynical, representing the Politician *par excellence*. This politically-minded, prudent Roman Archbishop figures as a representative of Western reason, which Dostoyevski posits to be basically materialist, vulgar, and deprived of "soul".

The scene is magnificent: Jesus, who has come back to 16th-century Spain and has been recognised by the crowds who have begun to worship Him, is harshly treated, and imprisoned by the soldiers of the Archbishop. In the dead of night, the Archbishop visits Jesus in his prison cell and converses a long time with him. He explains to Him that He should not have come back on earth, because He demands too much of mankind. Mankind, the Archbishop argues, is not capable of the heroic virtues which Jesus has shown by resisting the temptations of the Devil in the desert. The Grand Inquisitor and all the Roman Church have understood that the people want only to eat and to enjoy their prosaic earthly life, even though they have to buy this by being enslaved by blind devotion to the iron hand. They are neither capable nor desirous of love and freedom. The Roman Catholic elites have accepted – in their own interest, perhaps, but what does it matter ? – to dominate these poor, miserable creatures. Deprived of any ideals, the Church has undertaken to organise the earthly lives of its subjects – making the horde entirely subservient to the religious and secular powers. By coming back unexpectedly, Jesus has interrupted this smooth reign and, by bringing transcendent ideals once again to earth, will deprive the people of their hard-earned, precarious happiness. The Grand Inquisitor shall not allow that. Consequently, Jesus will be burned at the stake the next morning.

This is, I believe, a tragic misunderstanding. Substituting a step-by-step path for a vertical one does not imply that you have renounced the goal of getting to the top – organising earthly life does not mean that you no longer believe in Heaven. On the contrary, Western theologians argued that you deserve to go to Heaven only if you have been able to improve the world by employing human nature, which was restored by the grace of God. Christians can only attain the promised of salvation if God and man *together* strive towards it. In addition – and this is the main point – it is *only* if you do work towards going to Heaven that you may "organise", in the sense of "improving", earthly life. The Dostoyevskian scene summarises, even today, I think, the gap between Eastern Europe (particularly the Russians) and the West. Since Peter the Great, the Russians have realised that they are behind the times, and they still have not understood why. They have not

advanced as far as the West, only because they have not attached the same transcendent value to human responsibility, human action, human powers.

Actually, it was the Papal Revolution – the reaffirming of the Christian eschatological goals and the emphasis put on human responsibility – which made the modern world possible. This revolution determined the spectacular development of science and law in the West from the 11th to the 13th centuries, laying the basis of Western Reason in the present day.

7. The West as a scientific and legal civilization

In effect, since salvation is no longer an all-or-nothing issue, but a measure issue, men of that time realized that they needed *instruments for measure*. Science and law are such instruments. Science knows the world, and says what is possible and impossible for men to do in the world. Law makes possible that men cooperate peacefully and efficiently. Both are tools of measure, produced by reason.

The available legal instrument was Roman law. The available instrument for science was Greek science.

a) *Roman law*. This had been almost completely forgotten in the West since Charlemagne and even before. Pope Gregory VII took the initiative in studying it once again. In Bologna, a town owned by a Pope's vassal, Princess Mathild, the first university of law (in fact, the first Western university) was established by Irnerius about 1070 (This fact is sometimes forgotten or underestimated, because later Roman law, which is a non-Christian, natural or secular law, became, together with Aristotelian political theory, a weapon against the Church and especially the Papacy ; but we must not apply to 11th century what was true only later, in 14th century, at the time of Marsilia of Padova or William of Occam). Let us recall that Roman law is really an instrument for measure, a rational tool. It aims at *jus suum cuique tribuere* ("giving everybody his own"), that is to say, to distinguish the properties, the "mine" and the "yours". And to recognize them after many changes, purchases, sales, marriage, heritage, creation or dissolution of companies. So it makes possible an easy and efficient cooperation between men, even when they achieve complex jobs implying that many independant persons work together without conflicting. Roman law was used as a technical model for the new canonic law, which was developed very much at this time both by the popes and the new ecumenical Councils, and which was collected in the famous *Decree* of Gratian (1140), as we have seen.

b) Greek science. It was also at that time that Greek science was studied once again. After the first Faculties of Law, Faculties of Arts were created, for instance in Paris at the end of the 12th century. "Arts" meant "liberal arts", the seven sciences, *trivium* and *quadrivium*, which had been established in Greek and Roman schools. True, these sciences had not been completely forgotten; they had been studied continuously in the monastic and episcopal schools. But, as they were now studied in universities outside the Church, they were beginning a life of their own. It is well known that these secular sciences, using essentially reason as opposed to revelation, were not accepted in universities without reluctance. Saint Albert the Great and Saint Thomas Aquinas had to fight fiercely in order to impose Aristotle. But this was achieved, mainly by the new papal troops (Albert and

Thomas were Dominicans).

It is absolutely necessary to understand that these rational instruments, Roman law and Greek science, existed already. For instance, the manuscript of *Corpus juris civilis*, the great collection of Roman law made by Emperor Justinian in the 6th century, had never been lost in the West (copies apparently existed everywhere). Similarly, although many new sources in Greek philosophy were found in the Arabic libraries of Spain (due to the *Reconquista* and to the Crusades), and in the Byzantine libraries, actually many other texts had been continuously copied in the monasteries and had been available for a long time. So the revival of law and science must not be construed as a contingent fact, the result of some fortuitous rediscovery of texts. The new fact was that texts which had been there for a long time found some use *now*, becoming meaningful *now*. Before the Papal Revolution, Westerners had been sleeping upon these old texts, somehow like the Arabs upon oil before the 19th century, because they had no longer, or not yet, any idea of what use they could be. If you think that you will be saved or condemned only by grace, and that human action has no value, you simply do not need to calculate the value of your actions. Accordingly you do not need a tool such as Roman law which makes subtle distinctions between evil and less evil, good and less good acts and allows for their systematic classification. Then, if you stumble upon a manuscript of the Justinian Code, you will ignore it, especially if it has become too difficult to interpret, being written in an old-fashioned, obscure language. It is only if you absolutely need to be guided in your collaboration with men, if you want to effectively interact with them while refraining from sin as much as you can, and if, then, measure has become a *vital* issue, that you are ready to make the appropriate efforts to unravel the mysteries of the *Corpus*, as Irnerius did in Bologna.

8. Progressive millennarism *versus* violent millenarism

Since the Papal Revolution, the West achieved great civilizational progress which resulted in the invention of the modern world, our democratic, liberal, scientific society. The West could do that because it kept two closely linked ideas, the moral duty to aim at the eschatological ends of mankind – to improve the world unto its final salvation – and to use the natural powers of man, reason and justice, rather than being content with waiting for a supernatural intervention of God. Hence the development of sciences in universities, the revival of the State, the development of law, and more precisely: the use of law as an instrument for transforming society. Indeed law in many ways brought about the birth of "politics" in the modern sense.

Later, at the time of the Enlightenment, the feeling that a continuous improvement of knowledge and of administering justice is possible on earth seemed to be confirmed by historical events, resulting in the secular ideology of "progress". But there is no doubt that, originally, this secular ideology was essentially religious. It was the *millennarist* idea, conveyed in Jewish apocalyptic literature and particularly in St John's *Book of Revelation*. It is the idea that, towards the end of earthly times, even before the beginning of the actual kingdom of God, there will be one thousand years (a "millennium") of happiness on Earth. This millennarist ideal is shared by Christianity and Biblical religions in

general. But the Papal Revolution, by enhancing human reason and human responsibility, separated it from another version, what we might call violent, revolutionary millennarism. Actually, at the time of Theodose, when the Roman Empire became officially Christian, both the Empire and the Church began to feel suspicious about millennarism, which seemed to them dangerously revolutionary. Millennarism was not entirely rejected, but such theologians as Origen or Saint Augustine explained that it had to be construed in a symbolic way. In fact, with the resurrection of Christ, the millennium had *already* begun. "We can and must long for a better time", the argument went, "but this time will be in Heaven. We are not supposed to act for it on Earth, and even less resort to violence."

Around the time of the Papal Revolution, millennarism was revived, notably by the works of Joachim of Flore, then by the radical wing of the Franciscans, and above all by popular demonstrations and riots which took place at the time of the Crusades, and which could spontaneously develop at times of epidemic or famine, causing restlessness among poor people in towns, especially in Northern France, Belgium and Germany. Later, new doctrines were invented by such radical sects as the "Brothers of the Free Spirit", Bohemian Hussites and Taborites, Anabaptists, and Thomas Müntzer's troops of the German War of Peasants, etc.

So the West was faced with two versions of millennarism, and a momentous choice of which to adhere to.

1) Irrational, superstitious men want to hasten the coming of the millenium by violent means. Violence is justified, in any of the theories cited above, by the same core convictions. Evil is in the heart of certain "wicked" men. These wicked can be *foreigners* (Jews, Muslims …), more often they are *rich people* whom the poor envy (priests, nobles, merchants …). Fortunately, there is a circle of happy few, the "saints". They have no evil in their own heart. God loves them and will help them. From this perspective, the only problem is to overcome the fears of the crowds. The "saints" have to convince them to act quickly, to *kill all the wicked*. Certainly, the armies will be unequal. But God's armies will help the saints at the last moment (at it is said in any apocalyptic book) and, the next morning, the millenium will be there.

2) The other way is the rational, responsible way, chosen by the Papacy and all learned, educated, sensible people of the time and of the following centuries. The goal is the same: to lead the world towards its end. But we know that the means are different, they are those which we have described in the preceding pages: reason, science, law, moderate politics (except as far as heresies are concerned, unfortunately). Choosing that way implies that you think that evil is everywhere, even in your own heart. God alone knows who the "saints" are. So everybody has to atone and to pay his or her debts. The war against the "wicked" is in vain. Everybody has to become better, to perform more good deeds, to use all his or her natural talents. The love of one's neighbour does not consist in killing the wicked, but in fulfilling the needs of one's neighbour, even the needs of the wicked.

This opposition between violent, magical eschatology, and rational, step-by-step eschatology helped structure political life in the West from the 11th to the 20th century. The Right and the Left (I mean the "pure" Right and the "pure" Left, which are both *revolutionary* movements, and which both wish *to move out of History*, either backwards or forwards, as shown by Karl Popper, instead of *improving* it) are the heirs of irrational, vio-

lent millenarism, whereas the democratic and liberal tradition is the heir to the spirit of the Papal Revolution. Marx, Lenin and Hitler are obviously representative of violent millenarism. The intellectual tradition which built the main concepts of democracy and liberalism are obviously representative of gradual, legal, scientific, rational millenarism, and of the spirit of the Papal Revolution.

9. A "spiritual", "prophetic" change

Let us now focus on the nature of this great civilizational change which created the "West". It seems that in this shift in eschatological perspective, these new moral duties of mankind, these new pastoral responsibilities of the Popes and of the whole Church, and finally these new principles of theology, none of these innovations are fully *explicable*, none of them could be *predicted*, none of them was *necessary*. We are obliged to acknowledge something such as a "prophetic" change, a "miracle". What happens here is a shift which is at the same time total and imperceptible. Ideas, values, institutions are completely re-organized over a few decades, but this is not done deliberately by anybody, and this can be understood only once it is done. How is such a phenomenon possible? Harold J. Berman himself explains the phenomenon in some convincing pages (Berman 1970, Introduction), but some further philosophical references can help to formulate more precisely what is at stake here: Henri Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and Henri Atlan's *Entre le cristal et la fumée*. These authors tend to argue that all reality (whether natural or social) is perceived through certain *patterns* or *schemes* which alone give meaning and coherence to the dispersed, meaningless data of experience. Now the patterns themselves are not visible in general. "Normal science", Kuhn says, is systematic research made within the bounds of what he calls a "paradigm". When reality shifts, for whatever reason, more and more new data no longer fit into the pattern. Then the world begins to lose its meaning; it tends to become confused, opaque, incomprehensible. This impression of disorder may be made up, but the point is that, when this occurs, the process is *not* a "rational" one (in the sense of: conscious, logical) nor is it any kind of calculus or logical deduction. Rather, it comes by means of a *discontinuity*. Somebody *invents* a new pattern, a new paradigm through which the same confused data will become orderly.

Now then, this invention, just like artistic creation, is unexpected and not rationally understandable, which explains why many authors, such as Atlan, have paralleled such apparently different phenomena as *scientific discovery*, *artistic creation*, *entrepreneurial initiative*, as well as the *prophecy* of great religious or social reformers, or of great statesmen. In all these cases, they say, the same mental phenomenon is at stake, "invention" or "creation". In effect, the latter model is not *deduced* from the former, it was not contained or enclosed in it in any way. It is an "order made from chaos". The term "spiritual" designates the invisibility of this change, the internal causes of which one cannot see but the external effects of which one does see.

It is clear that the Papal Revolution was an event of this kind. Why did the Popes and their advisors think that Christ would no longer come back, that it was now up to men that He come, and, consequently, that they had the moral duty to transform society and to cre-

ate the appropriate tools for such a purpose? Why did they see the social and political reality through such a scheme? Why were they tired of the old models? And why did this occur at that time, and not two or three centuries sooner or later? We are induced to speak of a "miracle". And this reminds us of some other such "miracles" in History.

10. The five miracles of Western History

They are not many, but the phenomenon recurs often enough in History to suggest some theoretical keys to the historical processes. For instance, I think that five "miracles" shaped the history of Western civilization:

1) The "Greek miracle" (a traditional expression), by which the City (*polis*) was invented, that is to say, a non-religious State, with the related principles of rule of law, equality in the eyes of the law, individual liberty under the law;

2) The "Roman miracle" (which is sometimes underrated), is the decisive improvement of the law by the invention of intellectual tools allowing the precise definition of private property, thus making possible the birth of the individual "ego", and hence, the rise of humanism;

3) The "Biblical miracle" is the invention of a new morality, with "love" or "mercy" extending beyond mere justice. If one loves, one can no longer admit evil (as the pagans did). One cannot be satisfied with merely repairing the wrong one has done, but also has the duty to root evil out of the world. One will remain guilty as long as some evil still exists in the world: that is the true meaning, I believe, of such a badly understood notion as "original sin". Such a moral revolution changes the sense of History, or in better terms, *creates* what we call "History": time becomes linear and no longer circular; it goes from a beginning, the Fall, towards an end, the defeat of evil. And this also changes the relation between spiritual power and temporal power, because the saints, not the State, have the responsibility of improving the world. The State is only an instrument. So the State, considered as a Babylon of sin, is desanctified; it can and should be strictly controlled. As shown by Graham Maddox (1997), this is the oldest root of democracy, which will emerge in the Middle Ages and extend into Protestant Modern times.

4) The Papal Revolution;

5) The Dutch, English, American democratic and liberal revolutions created the modern world. By relieving Christianity of most of its magic and superstitious aspects, and freeing individual thought, they created their own set of moral, political, social and economic values. To give a definition of the pattern or scheme they invented: they understood that *individual freedom* is not a source of *disorder*, but rather, the origin of *the most sophisticated orders* men can create, in democracy, in markets, in the critical methodologies of science. The fifth "miracle" of the West is the comprehension, for the first time in intellectual history, of the concept of "spontaneous" or "self-organizing" social order, or, to use Polanyi's words, of "the logic of liberty".

In each of these events, we can see the same *spiritual* element at work. There is a crisis in society; the world has become opaque and incomprehensible. But, at a certain moment, a new intellectual grid is introduced through which the world seems coherent and meaningful. From that moment on, almost all values, ideologies, institutions of the time

are reorganized and result in the creation of a new civilization.

I will give only two examples (I guess I could make the demonstration for any of the "miracles", but it would be much too long for this paper; see, for the first four "miracles", Nemo, 1998).

1. The circumstances in which the Roman jurists invented Roman law are remarkable. After the conquests, Rome had become the first multi-ethnic, multi-cultural State in history. The Roman magistrates had to deal with conflicts between citizens who had different customs and laws. They then made a long-range decision. In 242 B.C., they appointed a new magistrate, the *prætor peregrinus* ("praetor of foreigners"), specialized in trials opposing foreigners against one another or Romans against foreigners. This magistrate was allowed to address these trials by special laws, different from the old ethnic Roman law (the "Law of the Twelve Tables").

But, in the meantime, Rome had made a new conquest: Greece. So the Roman magistrates had come in contact with the Greek philosophers, especially the Stoics. The Stoics had moulded the concepts of "cosmopolis", based in the idea that, as a universal human nature exists, a universal natural law exists too. Positive laws are different in each city or ethnic group. But, "beneath" each ethnic law, one can find the same natural law. So, if you are a Roman magistrate trying to deal with a quarrel between a Gaul and a Syrian, you cannot appeal to the Gaul or the Syrian customs, for neither of them agree with, or even know, the customs of the adversary. But as they are men, they do have something in common, whether they know it or not. They have the same nature, implying a set of common rules to which they are ready to agree to if somebody conveys them. This is what the Roman magistrates did. Year after year (new prætors were elected every year), over roughly three centuries, they invented legal "*formulae*" (phrases) which were more universal because they were more and more *abstract*, independent from any particular ethnic rule. The important point is that Roman law was created, not simply because the Romans had conquered the world, but because there was an *idea* which orientated the process. But, on the other hand, no Stoic philosopher could have the *intention* of shaping Roman law, because none of them knew that a great and powerful multi-ethnic State would be created soon, achieving the first great figure of cosmopolis in History. So this great invention of law is not a truly purposeful design. Both human ideals and unexpected circumstances cooperate. In this sense, it is a "miracle".

2. Modern scholars, from the 17th century onwards, and especially during the latter decades, have illuminated many historical steps in the construction of the Bible. At every step, some contingent circumstance seemed to prevail. It is because the Persians had vanquished the Babylonians that Judaea became a Persian *satrapy* (province). It is because the Persian governors, in Judaea as well as in the whole Persian Empire, needed to know how to administer the Jews, that they needed a written code of Judaic law, and this is why they took the initiative of writing the Torah. The final text of the Torah was drawn up under the auspices of two Judeo-Persian governors, Ezra and Nehemiah, obviously with a political purpose. We find the same kinds of contingent, sometimes anecdotal circumstances at almost every other step (the separation between Northern and Southern kingdoms, due to the Assyrian conquest, causing the elaboration of two different versions, "elohist" and "yahvist", of the sacred history; later, the fall of the North causes the incomplete, illogical merging of the two texts and King Josias' reformation giving rise to a new

text, Deuteronomy, etc.). So the rise of one of the most sacred texts of mankind must be given secular and prosaic, rather than religious, explanations. One can no longer believe that the Torah was written by God's finger breaking up the clouds, nor by Moses directly hearing God's voice in the burning bush. Scholars have elaborated many such sharp, destructive new explanations. The Gospels, too, can no longer be thought of as direct testimonies; these late texts, completed decades after Christ's death, reflect the slowly grown and liturgically organized creeds of some defined communities. Certain other testimonies, defended by other groups, have been definitively lost or underrated. The closing of the canons both of the Old and New Testament bear an impression of fights between rival groups, and sometimes it is visible that the strongest, and not the wisest, has won.

Nevertheless, to suggest that the Bible is only a "by-product" of a series of such contingent events would be entirely wrong. As Emmanuel Levinas once told me, the true miracle is not that God showed His face to a small number of men, while hiding it to the others. On the contrary, the really striking miracle is that, given that the text is the product of a process which took up centuries, in which hundreds of independent, variously motivated people interfered, *most of these various additions nevertheless converged*. The miracle is that the final result of this non-deliberate process was finally so coherent in depth, as the work of commentators along centuries has continuously shown. Once more, this paradoxical convergence of dispersed intellectual and practical initiatives can be explained only if we acknowledge its "spiritual" nature, namely, the role of the Jewish and Christian *prophets,* who did nothing but conveying the new morals and the new vision of the future of mankind in few but explicit words. Since these words were set forth, an *idea* was present in the world which gave all the other biblical writers the same internal patterns through which they could "see the situation" in a similar way, so that almost any of the further contingent historical events would be seen to fit into the same drama rather than being foreign to it.

11. Reason and irrationality in History

This suggests a final reflection about History. Today, we know that the whole world is evolving, not only human societies. Biology since Darwin, astronomy in more recent years, have proved that life and physical *kosmos* have their own "history". But, in any other field than human life, evolution is the mere result of "chance and necessity". One can see in it no intentions whatsoever. Surely, in many regards, this remains true even within human history itself, where many things seem to be shaped only by evolutionary, trial-and-error processes, according to the logic demonstrated by Hayek. But I think that this is not sufficient to explain history in depth (and this could be the limit of Hayek's philosophy). One can see that sometimes, at certain privileged moments, such as those which I dealt with previously, history is *guided*, *oriented* by human initiatives. From time to time, some illuminated men can "see the future", and, only by "seeing" it, *create* it. As soon as man appears on the scene, it seems that he can cooperate with "chance and necessity"or with God in creating the world. Creation is no longer a solitary, anonymous device, now man takes part in it.

If we accept this idea, progress in History would not only be a random process. It

Kosmos ——→ Life ——→ Mankind

Natural selection, chance and necessity   Free, purposed ideals
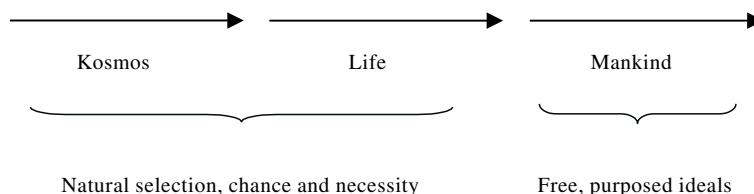
could be, to a certain degree, an intelligent, purposeful process, guided by a deliberate reflection on the past, present and future of mankind. But our description of the five "miracles" of Western history has shown us that this creation, whatever it could be, is not a *logical* process. For the new vision which cleaves history is not *deduced* from the old visions. It arrives owing to a strange "alchemy" which no Cartesian intelligence can explain, because though this alchemy changes the vision, it is not itself visible. As St John of the Cross demonstrated (possibly better than Hegel), "spirit" goes forward only through "night", so, in a sense, "spirit" *is* "night". As progress in History – whether it be science, art, or moral, political and social reforms – is a *discontinuous* process, we should think of it as a *nocturnal* process. This condemns any positivist vision of history and of the history of sciences, in the sense of Auguste Comte or of the Vienna circle.

This changes, finally, our vision of *rationality* itself. If we acknowledge that history advances by intellectual leaps, and if we acknowledge in particular that the rational civilization *par excellence*, Western civilization, was not the fruit of any clear-and-distinct reasoning, but was born from a new vision of the world prophetically proposed by the Papal Revolution, we must necessarily elaborate a new, wider concept of reason. In the narrow sense of this notion, the rational is only that which "fits into" a given scheme or pattern. That which falls outside the framework is irrational and seems to be either foolish or wicked. But we know that it is ignorant to think that somebody who disagrees with you is necessarily foolish or wicked. Erasmus wrote a "Praise of Folly" precisely to show that, very often, a new truth comes through a "foolish" statement. Kuhn pointed out the same: scientific progresses are achieved by "revolutions" which can appear but foolish to the "normal" scientists; but, if the new paradigm proves to be better than the old one, eventually everybody will think that it was the opponents of the revolution who were foolish. The important point is that, at the time when a new paradigm is proposed, no agreement is conceivable among scientists. We can say that the logic of scientific discovery creates a gulf between minds: if one of them is rational, the other one must be irrational, and vice versa. But every philosopher will agree that science is rational on the whole. Therefore it seems that we must *integrate the gap within our very concept of reason*. Not only what fits into a given scheme is rational, but the process of inventing new schemes belongs to reason in a wider sense.

The question is: how can the final truth of the process be determined? For sure, some or many minds are *really* foolish. Every thesis or work which seems foolish will not necessarily, in retrospect, prove to have been a positive step in the intellectual, scientific, artistic, moral progress of mankind. So we need a criterion by which to judge, and I would

argue that the only valuable criterion is history itself. Only through time and empirical events do things become clear. As Popper demonstrated, the ultimate proof of a scientific "revolutionary" theory is the fact that nobody succeeds in proving it wrong. But nobody can know in advance whether it will be refuted or rebutted or not. Similarly, the true value of a social vision is its social fruitfulness, which comes to light only through time. What makes the difference between Peter Abelard, founder of the scolastic method, and his adversary St Bernard of Claivaux, supporter of the old symbolic and poetic exegesis of the Bible? Nothing could during their lifetime. Both were exceptionally intelligent, brilliant, persuasive, while each of them was a wicked man and a fool in the eyes of the other. Only now, after centuries, do we know that St Bernard was wrong to oppose Abelard so fiercely, because we have witnessed the fruitfulness of Western scientific civilisation. The controversy can be settled now, but *analytical* reason was then of no avail. Truth cannot be *constructed*, it has to be *found*.

This means that we cannot spare *time* and *night*. In this sense, history *is* reason, as well as analytical thought. We must aknowledge the limits of our analytical reason in order to enhance the powers of our wider reason; "Esprit", "Geist", "Spirit" designate this nocturnal part of Reason. The paradox is that the spirit creates the world, while our analytical, positive reason does not comprehend the spirit, nor can substitute for it. That is the true *rational* base of freedom.

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