

Translated by Sallie James

## A MODERNITY BEYOND THE WEST

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### FOREWORD

This book studies the relationship between the West and the East starting with an analysis of the conceptual theories of modernity and its global nature. It describes how the modern western world functions, internally and externally; how it began; how it relates to the rest of the world; and what effect this has culturally on non-Western countries.

The integration of modern values in non-Western countries has resulted in a structural transformation in those countries which would make it very difficult for them to return to their former values. However, the integration of Western values into non-Western societies has led to the adaptation of modern ideas to suit local circumstances, resulting in the creation of a *local modernity* – the idea of a modernity beyond the West.

However, 'A Modernity Beyond the West' is not a book against the West. It neither takes sides nor argues a political point but rather reflects on the birth of a new era where the emergence of globalization encourages non-Western societies to create their own unique cultural, economic and political identities.

These new emerging societies are dual societies, neither totally modern in the Western sense nor totally traditional in the Eastern sense. Instead they have their own unique characteristics.

We are witnessing an extraordinary era where, for the first time, a complete dissociation between modernity and the West is occurring. This era is the beginning of *modern non-Western countries*. The colonial era, as well as the neo- or post-colonial era is thus definitely past. But the world which is emerging as a result of globalization is a divided world.

In this way for two centuries modernity has infiltrated countries known as traditional. Today its presence is undeniable. This influence, encouraged by the fast-moving process of globalization, has affected deeply the whole structure of formerly-traditional societies. Now, due to these unavoidable changes they have become more Western without being 'Western'.

This presents a paradox: modernity is historically Western in its origins but by nature profoundly global. This brings us to the conclusion that *the more modernity*

*becomes global, the less it becomes Western.* Modernity beyond the West is therefore a modernity that has become at the same time both global and local, a modernity which transcends its origins by becoming global and by combining values which are more acceptable to non-Western cultures. It is a mixed modernity.

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This book is written in three parts: the first part introduces the fundamental theories of modernity and its Western characteristics; the second develops the idea of globalization and modernity; and the third highlights Asian emergence and growth. The first part is based on more abstract concepts, and readers who do not wish to engage in philosophical debate can simply skip the first five chapters.

## INTRODUCTION

A situation of historical non-return

This book is based on a central hypothesis: that the exteriorization of modernity and its integration into non-Western societies brings structural changes which irreversibly *condition* the historical evolution of these countries. This conditioning means that attempts to change have been constructive but also non-constructive<sup>1</sup> and are to some degree different, influenced knowingly or not by the elements of modernity itself.

By coming into contact with non-Western countries, and by influencing them, global modernity has brought a definite end to all possibility of *returning to the source* or *returning to the past*, but at the same time it is conditioned by the elements of this return and those of resistance to the West.

With driving energy and creative novelty global modernity awakens dormant forces, complicates the existence and creates a division between the past and the present in local cultures; such a situation generates on the one hand an attraction for modernity and on the other a tendency to combine both modern and traditional values. But the creation of this kind of situation does not exclude the existence of a real wish to return to the past and real attempts to do so. However a reconstruction of a past civilization is unlikely to endure and disturb in any way the move towards the globalization of modernity. Thus the global emergence of modernity has placed the so-called traditional societies in a *situation of historical non-return*.

The present thesis is inspired essentially by the work of Hegel. Despite criticism of his work (often justified), he has left us a legacy which is based on the original thought that the intellect moves in an ongoing process. This simple idea, described as *the theory of progress without return* is one of Hegel's most fundamental and well-known thoughts which merits our attention in an attempt to understand the basis of the origins of the globalization of modernity. But to make Hegel's theory work, we need to separate it from one of its principal components, which is the *determinism* dominating the nineteenth century according to which *progress* could not exist in a dimension which allowed a final definition of it. Now, we accept the fact that modernity is unbounded, and this explains its global nature and the reality of globalization.. We thus propose to interpret *the theory of progress without return*, which contains within it as a part of the nineteenth-century view the notion of *finality of progress* without this finality, by showing that the nineteenth-century idea of progress does not make sense.

The hypothesis of the *situation of historical non-return* proposes that the spread of Western civilization, and in consequence the worldwide presence of modernity

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<sup>1</sup> We understand by 'attempts at constructive changes' those which proceed in the sense of worldwide modernity, and by 'non-constructive changes' those which go against the effects of modernity.

through the development of technology, commerce and communications, is the basis of *historical situations* from which any possibility of a return to the past has been removed. By examining the Asian situation we present examples to support this idea. We maintain that this shows that the entire world shares the same destiny; that this destiny is equal for each culture and nation; and that each can adapt it to its own local elements. This destiny is modernity.

## Globalization

If modernity brings a situation of historical non-return it can be characterized as ongoing. Therefore globalization is not entirely commercial.

Faced with discussions about the globalization of commerce, often reinforced by experts in the field and by the media, we would stress the importance of the *globalization of modernity*. Beyond the *economic considerations* which reduce globalization to a logic of market economy - admittedly true and without precedent - our objective consists in developing the idea that in the globalization of modernity commerce is only one of the factors.

There are two approaches to this subject: has globalization, as claimed by some, been subject to the "internationalization of capitalism"<sup>2</sup> or is it, as others claim, the continuation of a movement which has spread since the era of colonization?

Because modernity is *total*, it is at its centre an "organic whole"<sup>3</sup>, and it is in this context that globalization corresponds, in our sense, to an *exteriorization of modernity* which goes beyond the bounds of commercial capitalism, the import and export of merchandise and the international development of technology. In fact, modernity is a composite of these values. We shall attempt to examine the idea in which globalization corresponds to the acceleration of the *worldwide movement of modernity, starting with the most profound elements of civilization (in which commerce and technology would only represent a part), and progressing to elements which are more fundamental and unknown to people living in the more remote parts of the world.*

In other words, if globalization has to be considered the most important step worldwide in determining change in our era, it has happened not only through the global movement of capitalism in the market economy and through modern technology, but also through that which exists *behind* these elements. We are therefore talking about a globalization with a worldwide vision, of a culture in itself of which the most profound part remains *Western*. Our approach consists of thinking that this process, far from being a simple tool, *touches the soul*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to annexure 1 on globalization, at the end of the book.

<sup>3</sup> G Mairet: '*Histoire des idéologies*' ed. Francois Châtelet (Hachette, Paris, 1978)

<sup>4</sup> J Ellul: '*La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*' (Economica, Paris 1990). (For Ellul, this development compares to a "cancerous tumour" which undermines the centres of decision in the highest spheres of the State.)

Are we dealing with a simple transfer of Western *know-how* or do we also have to take into account the effect of the modern '*how to be*' throughout the world? The answer lies beyond a simple mechanism, and the economy being a simple source of profit. A pertinent analysis takes into account not only the general elements but also the concepts which created them and the effects which they generate.

We know that capitalism is described as a system of economic exploitation which carries the motivation of financial profit dictated by unequal social and economic conditions. However, modernity is above capitalism, and incorporates critical thinking, rationality, the principles of equality, freedom, and respect for the individual. Thus the globalization of modernity also encompasses its ideas and values. The capitalist system has developed through its modernity, but this very modernity has progressed beyond its origins in the capitalist conditions.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the beginning of technology and rational commerce in oriental countries has not been due only to the appeal of capitalistic profit and economic exploitation. This approach would reduce Western civilization to a simple economic consideration. We also have to take into account the fact that the arrival of modernity and its principles in these countries has influenced radically all the elements which constitute oriental thinking – politically, culturally and mentally – as well as cultural and social attitudes. The idea which generates the *situation of historical non-return* emerges from this analysis of the technology and of commerce. In this context globalization began at the end of the 1980s and could have had no other outcome but an *acceleration* of Western influence worldwide due to the *continuation of the movement started during the colonial era*. Similarly, colonization cannot be reduced merely to a military or political presence by the colonial powers in colonized countries, and globalization cannot, during that time, be described as a simple development of capitalist economics.

In short, our objective will be to examine to what extent *Western know-how*, through globalization of commerce, has brought *recognition of the conflict of modern and traditional values* with the outcome of a crucial structural *métissage*\* of values in non-Western countries. The opening of the borders of the very Westernized countries to the capitalist economy and its invasive logic, as well as the use of Western technology has had an effect on the thinking of the people, who are divided between tradition and modernity. The direction in which a situation like this evolves is always towards modernity and never towards tradition.

## The Rise of Asia

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<sup>5</sup> Modernity, born at the same time as capitalism, produces above all criticism of this. Critical thinking assures the health of modernity.

\* *Métissage* is a typically French word. It comes from the word *métisse* which was first used in colonial times to describe the children born to parents of different races, such as French and Algerian. Later *métissage* was used to mean 'composition', such as a *métissage* of cultures or values. (Translator)

Contrary to what some authors claim, it would be difficult to maintain that the only winner in the process of globalization would be the West. In fact, the West would fall victim to a dominant liberalism and would be at risk of not knowing how to take advantage of the new situation, and would find itself already overwhelmed by the effects of its victory in the world. On the other hand, globalization seems to benefit what has been considered the "third world", particularly the Asian countries, by leading to the actualization of a historical emergence.

From now on, Asia enters the game of economic competition with the West with more power than *she could ever have imagined during the past four centuries*. China has shown itself as one of the prime contenders in this field.<sup>6</sup> From this perspective we do not have to ask if the Asian people are actually *gaining* from this competition but should understand that it is creating an upheaval for the first time in *four centuries of Western domination* over the world. Asia has become, today, a Superpower in her own right; a Power which challenges the West. This new status represents a definite change and is one of the most important in the relationship between North and South, and East and West in world history since the beginning of the Middle Ages. It is one of the most far-reaching and positive results of globalization. Asia has entered a competition for which *she has not set the rules*. In effect, during the colonial era, the West forced that continent to *imitate* the indisputable master. *Imitation* became the weapon of the oppressed, and was the most decisive element in giving Asia the opportunity, after thousands of years of tradition values, to enter into direct competition with her former colonizers.

#### Western uncertainty and the question of the Centre of World Power

The rise of Asia has already placed the West on the first step towards a competitive conflict *without future*. *But who will emerge 'the victor'?* To claim that the future victor is unknown would confirm that the West, for the first time, has been led into a *process of historical uncertainty*. This possibility is the most dangerous element which globalization presents to the Western world.

One of the major consequences of this situation, based partly on Western uncertainty and partly on the emergence of Asia, the question of who will emerge 'the victor' remains problematic. Could the economic rivalry between Asia and the

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<sup>6</sup> For more than twenty years, the World Bank and the world's most important research organizations have concentrated on the rise of China. "The Chinese efficiency" in economic planning has been the subject of many debates, despite the importance of the social inequality, the corruption, the system of authoritarianism, and its repression of every form of political opposition. Many studies have been published about China both in French and in English. We refer to recent articles on this subject: *Le Monde* 2, December 3, 2005, an interview with sinologist Francois Julien; *TIME*, December 5, 2005, (Italy versus China) on the role of China in Italy; *Le Monde* 2, September 24, 2005, on the role of the Chinese in Algeria (*Ces Chinois qui bâtissent l'Algérie*), *The Economist*, December 3, 2005, about the recent Chinese ambitions in the East of Asia, and also an interesting report in *Le Figaro*, November 18, 2005, on the determining role of the Chinese in the textile market in North Italy.

Western world change the role of leader assumed today by the United States?<sup>7</sup> In fact, this leadership is in danger of becoming *exclusively economic*, losing the equilibrium necessary to support a *sense of direction*.<sup>8</sup> While in general each world power has to have a sense of direction, the West seems to be moving towards a situation of crisis and a period of instability. Faced with the Asian emergence and taking into account the fragility of the actual centre, we should thus ask whether the West is not moving towards a gradual decline, and whether the world is in the process of preparing itself for a shift of world power, probably towards Asia.

### The advance of modernity

A very important factor has just been added to this way of thinking: that of the existence of the ideology of power evident in Asia today. This ideology of Asian power manages to bridge the gap between modern and traditional values and attempts to give us a *localization* of Western values. A 'Japanese version' of modern values can currently be seen in Japan, and a serious attempt to "catch up with modernity" has been evident since the end of the Second World War. Before we touch on the question of values, we should first define *Japanization*, particularly in the political context. Actually, in Japan, but also in many other Far Eastern countries, according to Bernard Stevens, "... there is a persistent tendency to try to get out of *the role of being a follower of the West* and to show autonomy, not only through economic, geostrategic and military plans, but also through the choice of civilization and social and cultural issues. This cannot fail to have ideological and political implications".<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, according to a study by S.E. Eisenstadt on the Japanization of values Japan has never become an integrated part of other civilizations. In Japan "...the imprints – ideas, objects, technology, clothing, doctrines ... have already become *Japanese*." This Japanization means that foreign values have already been incorporated according to Japanese principles.<sup>10</sup> Other authors also refer to "Japanese modernity" where it is possible "to be modern without being Western".<sup>11</sup>

Let us concentrate on three points:

(1) The process of the mixing (*métissage*) of these values, far from being totally conscious or planned, seems to overtake the personal, intellectual or political will of a nation. It seems to happen unconsciously as *an automatic, historical action*. The mixing seems to be, on the one hand, the result of subjective will and on the other hand an *inevitable* historic progression. This is what distinguishes modernity from modernization. As much as the latter introduces visible changes, so modernity

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<sup>7</sup> Fernand Braudel: '*La Dynamique du capitalisme*' (Arthaud, Paris 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Z Laidi : '*Un monde privé de sens*' (Fayard, Paris, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> B. Stevens : '*Ambitions Japonaises: nouvel asiatisme et dépassement de la modernité*' in *Revue Esprit* (Paris) July 1995, p5.

<sup>10</sup> S.E. Eisenstadt : '*L'expérience historique japonaise : le paradoxe d'une modernité non axiale*' in *Revue Internationale de Sciences Sociales* (Paris), no 151, March 1997.

<sup>11</sup> P Pons et P.F. Souyri : '*Moderne sans être occidentale*' in *Le Monde des débats* (Paris), November, 1992.

introduces slow changes in thinking, culture and education which are not immediately visible. Whereas modernization is based on established plans and decisions, modernity works in an invisible, but inexorable manner.

(2) Secondly such a process does not happen only in Japan, or in the Far East, but throughout that group of countries with non-modern origins, even if authors and observers do not pay much attention to this fact. Today the process of *métissage* is happening all around us, in all countries and cultures in the non-Western world. Being in contact with modernity affects these cultures to different degrees according to their historical background and involves a process of integration where the more 'receivable' elements of modernity are integrated with the more flexible elements of tradition.

(3) In reality, the existence of cultural mixing (*métissage*) confirms our principal hypothesis, in which *situations of historical non-return* are created where modernity has made its appearance. It is only in such situations that the mixing becomes obvious. If such a return seems impossible it is because external elements are already deeply integrated in the entire structure of non-Western civilizations.

#### Modernity and the problems of the 'receiving' societies

In his reflections on Japan, Eisenstadt underlines the fact that "foreign imprints" have been received and "structured *following the principles taken from the Japanese experience*".<sup>12</sup> This observation leaves us perplexed when faced with the real effects of these foreign ideas on the 'receiving' country (in this case, Japan) and of the possibility of the country's remaining *unaffected* by this contact with foreign ideas.

On the other hand, the meeting of these civilizations takes place in a context of *reciprocity of cultural exchange*. The question is: does the character of the 'receiving' society remain intact - that is to say capable of taking isolated elements from the whole and only those suitable for their *own needs* and for their own experiences? The question is to determine whether these foreign elements have been made *Japanese* with principles taken from the Japanese experience or whether these principles have been modified? For, in fact, it seems difficult to imagine that a society could receive foreign influences without being affected in some way. These questions are fundamental to the development of the hypothesis of the *situation of historical non-return* and the idea of *métissage* because, according to this hypothesis, we admit that the contact between modernity and non-Western societies affects the structure of the receiving society and in turn, influences the *way* in which modernity is received. On one hand the historical structure and the values of each receiving society seem to influence *the way in which the foreign imprints are received*: on the other hand, the imprints themselves

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<sup>12</sup> S.E. Eisenstadt : 'L'expérience historique japonaise: le paradoxe d'une modernité non axiale' op.cit.

are also influenced, to different degrees in each country, because each culture interprets modernity differently.

In this perspective, we are dealing not only with *influences* but also with their *effects*. Firstly there is the subjective possibility of *selecting* from the foreign factors whereas, secondly, there is the *overwhelming*, and dominating nature of modernity, which seems to have more effect in practice. This corresponds equally to the idea of a composition of values, a structural *métissage*, resulting in the absence of a real possibility of selection.

This is how we propose to examine the idea in which every society, and thus every country, according to its history, would be able to establish a unique contact with those foreign elements suitable for its own singular needs. That is why we cannot conceive that the Japanese could absorb foreign elements which suited them without a *new situation* being born at the heart of their society. This situation is the immediate result of the participation of both local elements and external elements in the composition of a culture. It introduces *new needs* at the heart of the receiving countries. The elements of tradition are being reactivated, and this determines the limits of the structure of the receiving society.

## PART ONE

### MODERNITY : THE BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN EPOCH

#### Introduction

The problem of finding an acceptable definition for modernity

The philosophical attempt to find a universally acceptable definition for *modernity* remains a problem in a Europe which already has post-modern schools, and in a century tormented by conceptual crises. There are two main obstacles.

(1) The problem of plurality of areas and the plurality of usage of modernity.

On the one hand, *modernity* occurs with multiple meanings in recent terminology. In the writings of Baudelaire and Rimbaud the term has an aesthetical formulation, but Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Kant and Hegel take a more philosophical approach. On the other hand, *modernity* corresponds to an historical epoch defined by the different philosophies of several thinkers of modern times, especially Hegel. *Modernity* is also global, as shown in the work of J. Chesnaux, and is associated with sociology in the works of Jurgen Habermas, Raymond Aron and Alain Touraine. The anthropology of Georges Balandier contributes considerably to the nature of the concept.<sup>13</sup>

This plurality of use, sometimes contradictory, makes it difficult to find a universally acceptable definition of *modernity*, because each definition leads to a generalization. This is limiting by nature and is already in contradiction with the notion of a *modernity* which is irreducible to only one domain or one sole method of use.

Further confusion arises from other uses of the same term. The technical term '*modernity*' appears in recent occidental literature in the same context as the terms 'historicity', 'religiosity' and 'traditionalism'. However, nowadays the term '*modernity*' has undergone a process of extraordinary popularization which makes it difficult to give any technical definition of the term.

In its popular conception *modernity* is used to describe any attempt at 'new creation', whatever the period. We have to recognize the role played by the media in this popularization. For some authors *modernity* is used to describe certain developments dating from the Middle Ages; for others, from Antiquity! For example, a historian refers to *modernity* in connection with Zarathustra, a Persian prophet six centuries before our time, since he represents novelty in relation to the previous era!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In the analysis of modernity which follows, we shall return to these authors.

<sup>14</sup> R. Faribian contends that sayings from Zarathustra correspond to the most adaptable definitions of modernity today, and that he was the first *modern* man in the history of

More serious perhaps is the belief of the German sociologist Habermas, that *modernity* is not specifically reserved for the modern world but that it belongs also to certain attempts at creation during the Middle Ages.<sup>15</sup> In his 'Philosophy of Technology', the French historian, Jean-Yves Goffi writes of the "modernity of Aristotle".<sup>16</sup>

## (2) The problem of modernity as a historical period

The difficulty in giving a definition of *modernity* emerges equally when the term used to define a historical period. The original thought of Hegel aims at this objective. Jurgen Habermas also seems to consider modernity as a historical concept.<sup>17</sup> Matei Calinescu speaks of modernity as a "phase in the history of civilization".<sup>18</sup> Our approach in this study remains philosophical, but the analysis of the features of Western civilization is placed in a historical context.

Until now we have not encountered any major problems. Paradoxically, another examination following Hegel's principles disturbs this assertion by raising the question: how do we define a period before it has even ended? For Hegel, to think of an era, and to try and define it, would only be possible once it had ended. But has the modern era reached an end? For Hegel, we know, it represents the beginning of an end, but an end that cannot be achieved. This end seems to be a paradox: the modern era is already 'closed', because it puts an end to the attempt at the acquisition of freedom of thought.<sup>19</sup> 'The Philosophy of History' by Hegel allows this first point. Alexandre Kojève, Hegel's French commentator, considers the end of human action as "a negative action".<sup>20</sup> It also corresponds to the achievements and successes of mankind.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, we remember from Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Mind' that every action is negative and that every negation must lead to a beginning, to a new action. Hegel's phenomenology maintains that the absolute, once it has reached this stage, rebuilds this process and takes a new path. However, this negative action, this acquisition of freedom in modernity, seems, according to Hegel, to be the *last* acquisition in the history of mankind. It is not "another freedom" compared to that acquired in modernity. In modernity, the essential is a fact and the essential is subjectivity. It is

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humanity. (See R. Faribian: 'Zarathoustra et la Modernité' in *Zand, monthly revue (Paris) no 9, May 1998, p.13.*

<sup>15</sup> Jurgen Habermas : 'La modernité, un projet inachevé' in *Critique* no 413, Paris, October 1981.

<sup>16</sup> J.Y. Goffi : 'La philosophie de la technique' in Paris PUF, *Que sais-je?* 1998, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Jurgen Habermas: '*Discours philosophique de la modernité*' (Gallimard, Paris, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> Matei Calinescu : 'Five faces of modernity' p. 41, cité par A. Nouss: '*La Modernité, Paris*', PUF *Que sais-je?* 1995, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> G.W.F. Hegel : '*Raison dans l'Histoire*' (*Introduction a la philosophie de l'histoire*), traduit par Kostas Papaioannou, (Editions 10-18, Paris, 1998) pp. 295-296

<sup>20</sup> A. Kojève : '*Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*' (Gallimard, Paris, 1947), among others: p.69.

<sup>21</sup> According to Hegel, all is in the negative. Kojève wrote: "This thought gives rise to a negation" *op.cit.* p.69.

true that for Hegel the *end* or the finality represents at the same time a stage and a movement in the ongoing process of the evolution of the spirit. All "ends" aspire to move towards a higher synthesis. All negation, a fundamental element of Hegel's philosophy, is the breaking up of a limit. That is why the end exhausts itself continually in "infinity", in the dialectical process of the "absolute Spirit".

A fundamental question now arises: does this essential lesson suggested in '*Phenomenology of Mind*' contradict the main principles of Hegel's '*Lectures on the Philosophy of History*'? Could there be *another era* after modernity? Hegel maintains that in modernity the essential point is made. All desire for freedom is not temporary, due to the complexity of the system. This action is achieved *historically*. From now on, there is no other "historical task" to achieve. However, it has not achieved an *empirical* level. In that case we would not have to think about constructing a new historical period. In this sense, according to Hegel, modernity represents the "end of history" but, because this end is subjective, the struggle in real life continues. *It is the pursuit of effective realization or experience of that which has already acquired subjectivity, that knows freedom*. This task is not historic, but temporary, and thus interminable and *infinite*. In Hegel's conception of history, we are not moving towards another era: we are going towards the accomplishment of freedom inscribed in modernity, achieved in an infinitely open era.

To distinguish between the empirical and the subjective task, according to Hegel, modernity is defined as an era which remains infinitely open in its "empirical task", an era which ends in the realization of freedom for mankind, already acquired in subjectivity".<sup>22</sup> This struggle for freedom seems at the same time infinite in its historic temporality. The struggle for the blossoming of freedom is an infinitely long process and at the same time interminable, because freedom is infinite. This is how we need to understand Hegel's thinking. This is how modernity moves towards infinity, and this is what makes it as difficult to comprehend in the heart of Western civilization as in the countries that have been touched by it.

Our approach to modernity

Faced with these two problems regarding an acceptable definition, *modernity* remains "multifunctional", halfway between the aesthetic and the philosophical on the one hand, and between a subjectively achieved history and its historical boundlessness on the other hand.

In what follows we are going to limit our definition to that suited to a historical study of modernity. Habermas describes modernity as a "historical concept".<sup>23</sup> He also attempts, in his article 'Modernity: an unattained project', to introduce an aesthetic definition of modernity. Matei Calinescu stresses that there is *a conflict*

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<sup>22</sup> G.W.F. Hegel : 'Reason in History' *op.cit.* p.296.

<sup>23</sup> J.Habermas : 'Discours philosophique de la modernité' *op.cit.* First chapter.

*between two modernities*, saying "... modernity is like a phase in the history of Western civilization, and modernity is like an aesthetic concept".<sup>24</sup>

Modernity as a *historical phase* seems a good place to start. In the following chapters we will attempt to show the importance of this approach. However, it is also very important to consider the concept of *political modernity* which has developed with democracy since the eighteenth century. At the same time we can discern a *social modernity*, born out of the industrial revolution from the capitalist economy, but also from technological progress. In short, *modernity is a composite* with a cultural, aesthetic, political and social history. It is therefore *consciousness* and *a way of thinking*, whence arises *critical modernity*.<sup>25</sup>

The end of the reign of the sacred gives modernity a critical foundation in thought, in politics, and finally in the dominant present. Concisely, *critical modernity* is at the heart of Western modernity. The analysis is potentially a permanent dissection. Its force is in the element of potentiality, thus reactive and preventive.

We propose to develop this idea of modernity being *a historical whole*, inspired by Hegel's thoughts. It characterizes itself, certainly, as a 'historic phase', a phase which encompasses politics, culture, economics and also science and philosophy. This modernity is therefore the mark of *a totality*, but an open totality. It corresponds to a *civilization*: the modern civilization formed in the West since the end of the Middle Ages.

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<sup>24</sup> ) Matei Calinescu: 'Five faces of modernity' p. 41, cited by A Nouss, '*La Modernité*' *op.cit.* p.14.

<sup>25</sup> A Nouss, *ibid.*, p.31



## Chapter One

### Modernity: Introductory definitions

As a source of theoretical confusion the intellectual debates on the definition of modernity seem inexhaustible. In fact, they are inundated with recent terminology. In France the research on modernity goes back to the 1960s. 'The introduction to Modernity' by Henri Lefebvre <sup>26</sup>, published in 1962, presents probably the first study of this concept.<sup>27</sup> It is one of the most thorough, but paradoxically, the one least mentioned or criticised in contemporary French literature. Older than the word *modernity*, the term *modern* has a long history.

### The origin of the word

The name *modernity* comes from the word 'modern' taken from the Latin *modernus* which means 'recent', 'current'. *Modern* seems to be a cross between *modo* in the sense of 'not long ago, soon after' and *hodiernus* meaning 'from today'. We notice that Francois Châtelet, in his studies on modern philosophy, gives three definitions of the word *modernity*, saying that "modern can be called at the same time, *current, original and contemporary*".<sup>28</sup>

In the Middle Ages the term referred to what had already been. According to Henri Lefebvre, '*modernus*' appeared at the end of the fifth century, a period coinciding with the transition from Roman antiquity to the Christian world. '*Modo*' means 'recently, just now' and in origin 'exactly'. It was formed starting with '*modus*' which means 'measure'. '*Med*' in its Indo-European roots indicates 'measure' in the sense of evaluation, as in 'to measure' or in the sense of 'taking the appropriate measures for a given phenomenon'. In this way, 'modernity' carries a double meaning in its terminological history: '*modernus*' sets the desire for periodisation, signifying '*current*' as opposed to the beginnings of the Christian church, then the Roman civilization and finally to the Carolingian Empire. This term is used in the Middle

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<sup>26</sup> Henri Lefebvre: '*L'introduction a la modernité*' (Minuit, Paris, 1962)

<sup>27</sup> During the years after the publication of Lefebvre's work, Raymond Aron wrote '*Les disillusions du progress – Essai sur la dialectique de la modernité*', published in 1969. In 1967, J. Favret wrote a work entitled '*Traditionalisme par excès de la modernité*', *Archives europeennes de sociologie, vol. VIII*. And yet it is regrettable to see that Jean Baudrillard in his '*Modernité*', where a good summary of all the ideas concerning the subject is presented, does not quote Lefebvre (See: *Modernité*, in Encyclopaedia Universalis, Paris, Corpus, Tome 15, pp. 552-554.)

<sup>28</sup> Francois Châtelet: '*La modernité en philosophie*' in '*La philosophie*' ed. A. Akoun (CEPL, Paris, 1977) p. 316.

Ages in a larger context also, in reference to past times, considered positive and, as such, as a model to follow.<sup>29</sup>

In the twelfth century a second meaning appears, and this carries an authenticity relating to Antiquity as much Pagan as Christian, and which is seen as an epoch which has acquired maturity and achieved cultural progress in comparison with the past. The term '*modernitas*' appears in this context. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries see the sudden appearance of those movements seen as an artistic, theological and religious renewal. The fifteenth century testifies to the arrival of the word 'modern': it is the Renaissance.<sup>30</sup>

## The destiny of Modernity in the West

Does modernity have a definite starting date?

Francois Châtelet questions the validity of the idea of a 'beginning of modernity' in the West but, he proposes for this date, the end of the seventeenth century, coinciding with the "dispute between the Ancients and the Moderns". Henri Lefebvre argues for an earlier date.<sup>31</sup> In France during the Middle Ages, he writes, in towns with *county magistrates* (in the north of the country) and those with *consulates* (in the south of France), the elected or co-opted magistrates called themselves 'moderns'. Those whose mandates had expired called themselves '*ancients*' in comparison with '*moderns*'. Lefebvre returns to this history, pointing out the double meaning of this term: "*that of a recurrence and that of a regularity in the recurrence*". The election was made following a method (*modus*) well-defined by the charter and the municipal traditions. Lefebvre explains that this idea of "a regular cycle in the changing and in the norm of changing" quickly becomes less marked. In the different sectors of social and political life and especially in cultural life, the term 'modern' appears at various dates and always in a controversial sense.

Since the end of the Middle Ages, at the time when art and thought were given a rebirth in what is known as the Renaissance, we perform 'modern music' as opposed to 'old-fashioned' music. Why, asks Lefebvre? Because "*music was already a flexible domain, an avant-garde activity, an inventive sector*". On the other hand, the techniques and innovative research give this period an aggressive *modernity*. This controversial sense is highlighted at the end of the eighteenth century with the famous dispute between the Ancients and the Moderns. The ideas and situations become complicated. Those who would like to be 'modern' on one hand, call themselves 'anti-modern' on the other.<sup>32</sup>

## The aesthetic Modernity

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<sup>29</sup> H.R.Jauss: 'La modernité dans la tradition littéraire' in 'Pour une esthétique de la réception' (Gallimard, Paris, 1978,) p.165. In Alexis Nouss : 'La Modernité' p.8.

<sup>30</sup> A Nouss : '*La Modernité*' op.cit. pp.8-9.

<sup>31</sup> F. Châtelet : 'La modernité en philosophie' op.cit. p.316

<sup>32</sup> H. Lefebvre : 'L'introduction à la modernité' op.cit. pp.169-170

The emergence of modernity is directly linked to the evolution of art in Europe during the post-Renaissance period. A fundamental trait defines the ancient and the medieval world. For Plato, the Supreme Being is the Good. There is no difference between the Good, the True and the Beautiful. In this philosophy, however, the Good is supreme, without doubt because it is "impossible to imagine the highest perfection as being inactive or indifferent", and because "the Good adds the dimension of action to that of contemplation". In describing the advent of Modern Times, Louis Dumont emphasizes that the moderns separate science, aesthetics and morals. In fact, "... the nature of our science is such that its very existence explains, or rather implies, the separation between on one side, the true, and on the other, the good and the beautiful, and in particular between being and moral value, between *that which is* and *that which should be*".<sup>33</sup>

With this origin it is easier to understand how the advent of modernity is profoundly related to the evolution of art in Europe. Modernity appears already in 1823 as an *aesthetical* terminology in the work of Balzac. Baudelaire uses it in his essay on Constantin Guys: 'The painter of modern life'<sup>34</sup>. According to Baudelaire, modernity is "half the art". It consists of "releasing that which can contain the poetic in history and retrieving the eternal mystery" in modern life. It is "*the transient, the fleeting, the contingent*, that half of art of which the other is the eternal and perpetual".<sup>35 36</sup> From now on, as N. Blumenkranz notes, modern exaltation becomes the common denominator of all the poetic and artistic movements. Rimbaud declares: "We have to be absolutely modern"<sup>37</sup> and each avant-garde author or artist echoes this and uses it to enrich the myth of modernity.

Poetic modernity, notes Henri Meschonnic, is first of all 'antisocial'. Rimbaud says: "*I am on strike*". Mallarmé proclaims that the poet is "*above the law*", who is "*on strike before society*".<sup>38</sup> For Henri Meschonnic, in his '*Modernité Modernité*', Baudelaire composes that which he calls *modernity* of a subject, of an activity and of an object, in which none can be separated from the other. The subject is, writes Baudelaire, "*this solitary man gifted with an active imagination, always journeying through the vast desert of mankind*". Regarding the activity and the object, he writes: "He (the subject) searches for something which we can call *modernity*, because there is no better word to describe the idea in question..."<sup>39</sup> This object which requires many things to perceive and represent it does not exist in these

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<sup>33</sup> L. Dumont : '*Essais sur l'individualisme*' (Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1983) p.257. In italics in the text.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Baudelaire in : H. Meschonnic : '*Modernité Modernité*' (Verdier, Paris, 1988) pp. 104-120

<sup>35</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> See also : N. Blumenkranz : '*Modernité (esthétique)*' in '*Dictionnaire des notions philosophiques*' (P.U.F., Paris, Tome 2, 1990) p.1656.

<sup>37</sup> Rimbaud in H.Meschonnic: '*Modernité Modernité*' *ibid.* p.123.

<sup>38</sup> S. Mallarmé : '*Oeuvres complètes*' pp. 869-870, cité par H. Meschonnic : '*Modernité Modernité*' *ibid.* p.68.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Baudelaire : '*Le Peintre de la vie moderne*' p.597 in H. Meschonnic : '*Modernité Modernité*' *op.cit.* pp. 116-117. In italics in the text.

things: "it is created by *this activity*". In reality, according to Meschonnic, modernity for Baudelaire is not that "which is the present life".<sup>1</sup>

For Habermas, modernity has a philosophy and a history which are relatively different. The sociologist attributes modernity to a 'pre-history', which he qualifies as

"a cultural modernity". In his celebrated address on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 1980, which he entitled 'Modernity: an unfinished project', he emphasizes that the term 'modernity' was used for the first time at the end of the fifth century "with the purpose of distinguishing *a Roman and pagan past from a Christian present* which had just started to attain official recognition." For Habermas, modernity has a "changing content", always conveying "the conscience of an epoch" which is placed in relation to a definite past such as Antiquity, resulting in a transition from the ancient to the modern".<sup>41</sup> From this first definition of modernity, following Habermas, we accept that modernity is "a way to move forward", which is not inevitably a characteristic of the modern Western era. Baudelaire said that, after all, modernity is a "*way of being*".

The essential thing is that such a passage does not limit itself only to the Renaissance, which "means *for us*", recalls Habermas, "the beginning of Modern Times".<sup>42</sup> The time of Charlemagne, the twelfth century or the Age of Enlightenment are also called 'modern'. Through this notion, we can understand that for Habermas modernity is not necessarily limited to the modern era but has a more *general* meaning. In his description of this concept, the author explains as follows: the modern has appeared more than once: "...each time that a connection with Antiquity is renewed it gives rise to the consciousness of a new period in Europe." That is why, points out the sociologist, "... the *antiquitas* was kept as a normative model until the famous dispute between the Ancients and the Moderns, a term which at that time pointed to the defenders of classic taste in France at the end of the seventeenth century".<sup>43</sup>

In fact, modern is "that which allows an actuality which spontaneously renews itself to express the spirit of the time objectively". In the end it is a matter of "... a novelty surpassed and devalued by the renewal brought each time by the style which succeeds it."<sup>2</sup>

Whereas *simple fashions* are "out of fashion once they are in the past, *modernity* keeps for its part secret links with classicism." What is then the problem with the *classic*? Since we have always believed that *classic* was that which survived the passage of time, this strength, modern terminology, in the emphatic sense of the term, does not however depend on the authority of a past era, but solely on the

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<sup>40</sup> H.Meschonnic: 'Modernité Modernité' *ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> Jurgen Habermas : 'La modernité, un projet inachevé' in Critique (Paris), no 413, October 1981. pp.955.

<sup>42</sup> The italics are those of the author himself.

<sup>43</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *ibid*, p.951.

<sup>44</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *ibid* p.952.

authenticity of a past actuality." Here Habermas quotes Jauss: "... *it is modernity itself which creates her own classicism*".<sup>45</sup>

By '*aesthetic modernity*', Habermas understands a spatial metamorphosis of the 'forward posts', an 'avant-garde' which advances and clarifies itself in "unknown territory", exposing itself to the dangers of unexpected and shocking encounters, conquering "an unexplored future", and which must thus orientate itself and find its direction. This forward orientation, this anticipation of an undetermined and uncertain future, this '*cult of the New*' is, in fact, the "glorification of an reality which never ceases, subjectively, to generate a new situation." For Habermas, the "new consciousness of the present" is the experience of a society "in a state of mobilization", of a daily life marked by the *intermittent* but also with a revaluation of the *transitory*, the *temporary* and the *ephemeral*. It behaves like a "movement in self-denial". This, in our opinion, is the best way to define *modernity*. Here, without a doubt, the author refers to those poets and writers who saw in the *uncertainty* the foundations of modernity:

In his work 'Point of Convergence', Octavio Paz emphasizes that "modernity is a kind of *self destructive creation*... Modern art is not only the offspring of the age of criticism but of self-criticism", a "point of convergence".<sup>46</sup> From another point of view, Theodore Adorno insists on the idea that modernism is less defined by positive declarations and manifestos than by a process of 'negation', without limits, and for this reason it does not spare itself.<sup>3</sup> By being against history, against the "the continuity of becoming", *aesthetical modernity*, according to Adorno, "... desperately denies the closing of the eternally similar." It is an '*anti-traditionalist*' energy. In this sense, modernity is in effect "a myth *turned against itself*; its *timeless* character leads to the catastrophe of *the moment which fractures the temporal continuity*."

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This is how the definitions of *modernity*, as well as its destiny in the West and its schematization in the field of aesthetics shows modernity to be an *event*, a movement always unfinished, incomplete, a projection always made in advance, a transitory state, fleeting, contingent and finally as a constant, unconditional tendency to disintegrate. Modernity is a battle which wishes to react to tradition, to place itself in opposition to the future and to force a confrontation with it. Modernity necessitates this fragmentation, placing the weight of the future on the present and the past.

To summarize, a general characteristic permitting identification of the emergence of modern thought would be the tendency to *part with tradition through an unconditional validation of the new and of the time to come*.

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Octavio Paz: '*Point de convergence*' (Gallimard, Paris 1976) p.16. (Our italics)

<sup>47</sup> Theodore W. Adorno : '*Théorie esthétique*' p.41, in Jurgen Habermas : '*La modernité, un projet inachevé*' p.953.

In fact, since the end of the Middle Ages, modernity has overwhelmed every aspect of Western life. Alexis Nouriss says rightly that modernity is a "global phenomenon of which the appearance can be discerned in the major fields of knowledge without it being easy to establish uniqueness".<sup>4</sup> Another essential characteristic of modernity, according to Nouriss, is its "self-reference".<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it is this same characteristic which makes it so difficult to have a unanimous, acceptable definition of modernity. This is why we have chosen the plural expression 'definitions' for our study.

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<sup>48</sup> A.Nouriss : 'La Modernité' op.cit. p.3

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*p.9.

## Chapter Two

### Modernity and infinity

Modernity and the will for an unconditional breakdown

Heidegger: "Modernity is inseparable from the Metaphysics of subjectivity and from the question of a total and absolute knowledge ... this modernity started with Descartes ... ."

Saint Augustine: "There is no sin except in the will."

Meschonnic: "Modern Times are not modernity. The relationship between the two is neither immediate nor objective. Because modernity is much more. A mysterious essence, a spirit of the time, a value, a set of values".<sup>6</sup>

The break with the past and its replacement with the new is not conditioned by any order. In modernity, neither the moral, religious, political nor any other order would be able to slow down or limit the movement of breakdown and replacement. It is this same reality which makes modernity a period very different from other periods in the history of mankind. The will to break unconditionally is a fundamental characteristic of modernity. This manifests itself in all aspects of modern civilization, be it technology, politics, science or the arts. But where does this will come from? Is it aware of its consequences?

In order to understand this concept, we should first reverse the question. To understand modernity better, Henri Lefebvre asks himself what eludes the definition of 'modernity'? Should *modernity* be described as a *structure* or as an *indication of a structure*? Is it determined by a state of stability? The answer is clearly: *no*. What is not modernity? It is not an "entirely 'viable' way of life and consciousness". This form contains as many myths as the forms of consciousness and contemporary life which would not want to be 'modern' and would like to pretend that they are traditional, customary.....<sup>51</sup>

Modernity, according to Lefebvre, contains many "profound contradictions". That is why it cannot be defined as a structure. But it is characterized by an unsuccessful attempt at structure and coherence: "Everything happens as if the 'deconstruction' reached the structures before *they acquired inner balance and coherence, and the integration of the new unity previously threatened by contradictions and negativity.*"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> H.Meschonnic : 'Modernité, Modernité' op.cit. p.25

<sup>51</sup> H Lefebvre : 'L'introduction à la modernité' op.cit. p.187

<sup>7</sup> H Lefebvre : *ibid.*

This definition seems to agree with the one which Octavio Paz gives about modernity: "*modernity*," he says, "is a kind of *auto-destruction*".<sup>8</sup>

Should modernity be defined as a 'structure'? Lefebvre thinks that our era seeks "definite coherence and balance around certain socio-political notions...." but "*does not achieve this*." This is the principal point which we retain from the analysis of this philosopher. "No specific plan can claim to be enough. Sooner or later, projects and notions dismiss themselves, interfere with each other or blend together." There are attempts towards equilibrium and coherence, but an attempt historically and by nature unsuccessful, followed by anxiety and solitude; *that is modernity* and "...anxiety and distress accentuate the feeling of solitude. This gives rise to innumerable subjective expressions or interpretations of objective signs"<sup>9</sup> That is why, for Lefebvre, the *truly modern* would be the contradiction between "...individual solitude and the meeting of the masses in huge cities, in colossal enterprises, in large offices, in the armies, or in political parties. It is the conflict between a certain *atomization* ... of life, and an over-organization which follows, accompanies and without doubt presupposes it." We have here a separation and a totality. The breaking-up affects that which concerns the individual and real life; the totality is created by means of the state, of the global society, communication, the norms and of the culture, etc.<sup>10</sup>

The attempt at totalization comes from the State, that of atomization comes from the individual. Modernity is situated between these two logics, two forms of action, two ways of interacting with one another. But what is this totality? We are talking about an open totality. The wish for an unconditional break comes from a logic according to which all totality appears fragile and never absolute. The dialectic between the individual and totality corresponds to a *tension* which seems to favour *the individual* over the totality. Since the individual has become free, the totality has become more fragile, because he ceases to refer systematically to the totality as the source of his everlasting protection. *The fundamental identity of modernity is the freedom and subjectivity of the individual.*

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This is how we realise that modernity is linked to two elements: *passion* and *anxiety*. Passion comes from the impatience of mankind to discover freedom and the pleasure which comes with it; anxiety results when this freedom, given to man, seems unknowable, of infinite dimension, and is seen as uncontrollable. The passion is a source of ongoing creation and continual change, a source of criticism, attempts at supremacy, turbulence, revolt, and finally revolution. In short, it leads to the wish to give oneself to the unknown. Did the Middle Ages and Antiquity never experience passion at the heart of their struggle for identity? In his analysis of the coming of modernity, George Lukacs responds in the negative. We will underline the

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<sup>8</sup> O. Paz : 'Point de convergence' op.cit. p.16.

<sup>9</sup> See also Hegel's analysis in 'The Phenomenology of Mind' in the following chapter.

<sup>10</sup> H Lefebvre : op.cit. p.189

principles in the pages and chapters that follow. The wish to devote oneself to adventure is effectively limitless and unconditional. It is thus *infinite*.

Man is anxious when he finally discovers the immensity of freedom, freedom which he grants himself on his own merits, in the absence of celestial orders, myths or religion. Paradoxically, this anxiety explains the desire and the temptation to return to the ideas of the past. If the wish to break unconditionally is at the heart of the passion of modern man, it represents at the same time the end of all support which might give him assurance and certainty. Modernity puts an end to the tranquillity of ancient man, powerless in the face of the destiny, because anxiety leads to *the unknown*, to an uncertain future once he is free of imposed limitations. This infinite freedom is a source of anxiety for man, as is his powerlessness in the face of destiny and his unconditional wish for subjective order.

Anxiety comes equally from fear and from the solitude of man's discovery of the infinite because: "... in the new world, to be a man, is to be alone." The anxiety of man is "the abyss" which he introduces between "me and the world".<sup>11</sup>

Modernity is infinite

*Modernity is thus infinite*, it is an ongoing creation. If this unconditional situation exists, if it overcomes the persistent limits, the material or practical obstacles, it can only be subjective. The unconditional wish is a subjective wish. It embodies liberty and the infinity of this liberty. This wish is generated by a break with the 'final' characteristics of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Georges Gusdorf declares that in Ancient Greece and also in Europe in the Middle Ages "... the order of things as well as the social order and the order in man is governed by a revelation which came from above. Hellenic cosmology, the scheme of which is maintained in the Medieval system, fixes the place of existence and the coming of events according to the rhythms of an astral Providence; the position of man remains subordinate to the description of the whole; his wisdom consists of submission, humility, piety and respecting Divine law. The Copernican revolution corresponds to a break in this established contract".<sup>12</sup> The uncertainty of Montaigne, the methodical doubt of Descartes, and the intervention of Galileo all point in the same direction: calling into question the ancient order in favour of a new historical consciousness.

The French philosopher and scientist, Alexandre Koyré used the same approach in his brilliant description of the advent of modern science. For him the *infinite Universe* is the outcome of historic changes beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and resulting in the beginning of Modern Times. This marks a break with the ancient conception of the world.<sup>13</sup> During the sixteenth and

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<sup>11</sup> G.Lukacs : 'La Théorie du Roman' tr. J. Clairevoye, ( Editions Denoël-Gonthier [Méditations] , Paris 1963) p.28.

<sup>12</sup> G. Gusdorf : 'La révolution galiléenne, Tome 1, (Payot, Paris 1969) pp. 65-66.

<sup>13</sup> But a break from whom, wonders Daryush Shayegan: "the other side of humanity remains closed and resistant until our time" In: 'Qu'est-ce qu'une révolution religieuse?' (Albin Michel, Paris, 1991) pp.78-79.

seventeenth centuries, wrote Koyré ".....the human spirit or, more specifically, the European mind, underwent – or accomplished – a profound spiritual revolution, a revolution which modified the foundations and the very framework of our thoughts. Modern science is at the same time the root and the fruit of this revolution. ... The development of the new cosmology which replaced the geocentric world of the Greeks and the anthropocentric world of the Middle Ages with a universe decentralized by modern astronomy, played.....a role of the utmost importance in this process".<sup>14</sup>

Koyré next presents various existing conceptions relating to these important changes: certain historians emphasize mainly the social implications of these spiritual changes, insisting on the so-called conversion of the human spirit from the " ... *contemplativa* to the *scientia activa* which would transform man from a spectator of nature to its possessor and master.....". Some saw its most important characteristic in the "... secularization of the consciousness, its conversion from transcendental ends to inherent objectives; that is, the substitution of concern with the 'other world' by interest in this one." Others again "...favour the replacement of teleological and organized doctrine by causal and mechanistic explanation, leading finally to the 'mechanization of the conception of the world', so apparent in modern times, particularly the eighteenth century". But the historians of philosophy, adds Koyré, put the emphasis on "... the discovery by modern man of the essential subjectivity and on the resulting substitution of the subjectivism of the Moderns for the objectivism of the Ancients". And finally, the historians of literature note the "... despair and the confusion which the 'new philosophy' brought to a world where all coherence had disappeared and in which the Heavens no longer proclaimed the glory of the Eternal".<sup>15</sup>

These observations put into perspective the significance of the advent of the new era. Koyré summarizes this event as a general diffusion of scepticism and of "free thought", adding that we are, however, talking about a process more profound and more serious where "... man has lost his place in the world, or, perhaps more precisely, has lost the very world which formed the boundaries of his existence and the object of his knowledge, and had to change and replace not only his fundamental conceptions but also his frame of thought." This reality, essentially, has been able to produce two basic changes: "the destruction of the Cosmos, and the geometrization of space. That is to say the destruction of the world conceived as a completely finished and well-organised whole, in which the spatial structure embodied a hierarchy of values and of perfection..."<sup>16</sup>

The break with the world as it exists, in the new configuration which we begin to see, provides the basic elements for the creation of modern Western thought and infinite modernity. Koyré describes firstly the influence of certain Greek trends in modern scientific thinking, then stresses the significance which Nicholas of Cusa has

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<sup>14</sup> Alexandre Koyré : '*Du monde clos à l'Univers infini*' (Gallimard, Collection Tel, Paris 1962) pp.9-10

<sup>15</sup> Koyré : *ibid.* (Author's italics)

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

had since the sixteenth century<sup>17</sup> and the "... scientific and philosophical arrival of Copernican astronomy which, by uprooting the world from the centre of the universe and placing it in the sky among the planets, has undermined the very foundations of the traditional cosmic order, with its hierarchical structure and its qualitative opposition of the celestial domain of immutable being to the sublunary terrestrial regions of change and dissolution."<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, philosophically and psychologically, the consequences of this change in perspective were without doubt incalculable. As described by Koyré, the interpretations of this transformation are numerous.

In a remarkable description, the philosopher Darush Shayegan, inspired by Koyré, emphasizes that this cultural transformation started in the eighteenth Century and did not reach fulfilment until the Age of Humanism.<sup>19</sup> This happened in two stages "... the first being the emergence of an animist and pantheist vision which we see blossoming in the philosophy of the Renaissance, and the second stage - which is the realization of the first - which is embodied in the great systems of the seventeenth Century: those of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz. Already, the philosophy of the Renaissance had shaken the hierarchical order of the world as perceived by Saint Anselme and Saint Thomas. The hierarchical stages of the world analogous to the divine order were replaced by the array of infinite worlds imagined by Nicholas of Cusa and continued by Giordano Bruno. The latter distinguishes between the Universe and the world: *God*, the Infinite Being or the Universe is the Prime Mover, the eternal cause of the world, the *natura naturans*, and the *world* is the totality of these effects and phenomena, the *natura naturata*. The identification of the Essence of the Divinity with the Universe is precisely what gave the world its magical aura, constituting the animist trait which gives one of the most seductive characteristics to the philosophy of the Renaissance: we find this in all the great thinkers of the time, also in Paracelsus and Boehme as well as Bruno".

This is how Shayegan describes the advent of infinity in Modern Times as distinguished from the infinity of the ancient era: "And now, parallel to this hylozoic vision we witness an 'ennoblement' of the concept of the material. This acquires a new dignity: it is no longer the non-being (*me on*) of Greek idealism, nor the spatio-temporal order characterizing the subject as in Saint Thomas, but is the mother of all the forms, intrinsic principle of internal development of the end-subject, an act of deployment in the universal order. The world is an ordered form (not an analogical emanation) from God who, in the two roles of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, is material and form at the same time. There is no longer a hierarchical gradation of singular worlds between God and Nature, but the universal homogeneity of a primitive substance present in all things. To the dependence of nature on divinity there succeeds the autonomy of nature identifying itself with the Divine Being. It follows that the relationship of the world towards God is the same one which governs the finite compared with the infinite: the finite is the world displayed by the

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<sup>17</sup> Koyré : *op.cit* pp.17-25

<sup>18</sup> Koyré : *op.cit.* p.47

<sup>19</sup> Darush Shayegan : '*Qu'est-ce qu'une révolution religieuse?*'*op.cit.* pp.78. All the quotations from Shayegan are from pages 78 to 83

Infinite Being, therefore finite-infinite and individual-subject in the form of the 'monad' (Bruno) is a mirror reflecting according to its capacity all the other finite beings." This idea was later taken up by Leibniz.