

IDEOLOGICAL HYPOSTASES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT PROJECT

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The Enlightenment project wants to be a new revelation, self-proclaiming soteriological, apodictical message, valid in the same measure for individuals and for communities. The assisting at the spectacle of the revolutions within the frame of science means, for the initiators of this project, a sufficient reason for believing that such radical changes, with miraculous consequences, could be made as well in the register of collective mentalities. **Meliorism, optimism, incongruence to the given reality, its radical change** – here are a few recurrent themes of the Enlightenment Age. This time, the certain criterion for salvation is neither the affiliation to the Ecclesia, nor the belief in a personal God: the escape from the courtyard of the Church and the trust in the universalism of the reason are the solely decent and *efficient* conducts, according to the Enlightenment logic.

Comparing to a past based only on the merit of having constituted a propedeutics to the Third Age, the contemporary approved behavior and mentalities are the nihilist ones: a radical new beginning is needed, an immersion in the waters of the primordial chaos, and only after that the march toward the sanctified future can begin. The thought of the revolution is unavoidable. The manichean element is present again, especially through a difference of nature, postulated between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness. The gnostic mission justifies violence and fanaticism. The symbolism of light is here extremely strong, and the entire Enlightenment discourse can be interpreted as **a theodicy of the natural light**. Even for the cleric, if we could give credit to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the faith is maintained alive only from an utilitarian prospect, he preferring „the true useful dogmas”¹. The need of the group adhesion is no longer satisfied by the parish or by the *monasterion*, its accomplishing being let in the care of the saloons, which made up „a new social space”². The affiliation to *bourgeoisie* was the solution for the dilemmas of solitude, while „its ideas were those of classical liberalism”³.

Group cohesion doesn't legitimate anymore on sharing and conservation the values of a common past, but, on the contrary, on destruction and on the construction of an Utopian future. If in the collective imaginary there is any affinity to what it could be called The Golden Age, this time it is transmuted from a repudiated past, impregnated of superstitions and minerate, towards a cathartic future. The French Enlightenment, in a greater measure than in any other part of the European continent, proves to be antimystical and anticlerical, mystic being catalogued as „suspect” after the exam of the Reason, while the ecclesiastical hierarchy was considered as attempter to the civil rights and liberties. Traditional Christianity is replaced by „voltairean deism, parliamentary Jansenism, savoyard vicar [...]”⁴. Nevertheless, for the Enlightenment, everything that doesn't conform to calculus and usefulness is considered to be suspect⁵.

¹ See Dominique Julia, „Preotul”, in Michel Vovelle, *Omul Luminilor*, Editura Polirom, Iași, p. 260.

² See Roger Chartier, „Omul de litere”, in *ibidem*, p. 119.

³ Eric Hobsbawm, *Era revoluției (1789-1848)*, Editura Cartier, Chișinău, 2002, p. 74.

⁴ François Furet, *Revoluția în dezbateri*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2000, p. 112; see also Alain Besançon, *Originile intelectuale ale leninismului*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1993, pp. 26-27.

⁵ See Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Verso, 1997, p. 6.

The project proposed by the partisans of the Enlightenment admits as supreme principle the Reason, the only active reminiscence of God's intervention in nature, faculty which was given to man for the purpose of the continuation and improving the begun work. Like the millenarists, the attorneys of the Enlightenment feel responsible for the direction in which the history evolves, because it is the medium in and through which the process of theogony continues, God being understood as „Prime Watchmaker who leaves to His children the care for the machinery”⁶. The dissimilarities between the individuals are produced by the different degrees of gnosis receipting, of that knowledge acquired through education, due to the same supraindividual, transcendent reason. Because the values which have to be accepted are identical, the modern societies are quite similar. This assumption will be accused of fundamentalism and of lack of satisfactory empirical ground⁷.

The exclusion of some real possibility of value conflict, as well as the lack of any authentic historical accidentality within the communities imagined by the mentors of the Enlightenment - who have as the unifier element the impersonal, unhistorical and infallible reason - juxtaposes their project with the classical image of Utopia, which used the same proceedings.

The unusual optimism of the Enlightenment was probably deriving from the fact that its followers didn't make a distinction of nature between theory and praxis, between the projected Utopia and the complex reality. They didn't distinguish „life from speculations. Maybe such harmony never existed before between theory and practice, between philosophy and life. All the conceptions were immediately transformed into facts; and all the facts were subordinated to some general principles and were judged according to some theoretical norms. This is the feature which gave to the XVIII-th century its force and its inner unity”⁸.

Reason means, for the advocates of the Enlightenment, an intact faculty, remained untouched by the stigma of the original sin, and that's why the world they dreamt is a perfect one. The idea of God must be extended beyond a prohibitive and parochialistic Christianity. *Les philosophes* - as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Helvétius - are rejecting the myth and the miracles and mostly everything that could break the limits of human understanding. In the name of the process brought against by a *Ratio Universalis*, even the particularism of nation's spirit doesn't remain lawful, as Rousseau - his main apostle - wants to assure us: „Today we are not speaking anymore about the French, the Germans, the Spanish or even about the English people, because, whatever may be said, there are only Europeans. They all have the same tastes, the same passions, the same habits, because none of them got the national form by some special foundation”⁹. Indeed, the Age of the Enlightenment is, above all, - in addition to those of Baroque, Romanticism and Surrealism¹⁰ - one of transnational patterns. Occultation and nihilism are the most preferred attitudes and instruments of the Enlightenment's new era. The sense of belonging to the humankind remains the first, true important quality of the individual, while the other conditionings - as Christianity or nationality - are considered simple accidents.

The necessity of cohesion is realized not through a complex process of organic growing and enrichment of human communities, but through an Utopian rationalist project.

When they refer to the nation, the encyclopedists are adopting an anti-empirist and an anti-traditionalistic attitude. Only what never existed has a true value, that is to say, *the possible*.

⁶ See Alain Besançon, *Originile intelectuale ale leninismului*, p. 26.

⁷ See John Gray, *Cele două fețe ale liberalismului*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2002, p. 33.

⁸ Ernst Cassirer, *Mitul statului*, Editura Institutul European, Iași, 2001, p. 224.

⁹ See Jacqueline Russ, *Aventura gândirii europene. O istorie a ideilor occidentale*, Editura Institutul European, Iași, 2002, p. 175.

¹⁰ See Raoul Girardet, *Naționalisme și națiune*, Editura Institutul European, Iași, 2003, p. 73.

The idiosyncrasy of the *Aufklärung* towards the nationalism was representing, at the same time, the resistance to the inequality related to it.

But what can be more Utopian, for example, than the projects that authors as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles-Irénée Castel, the abbot of Saint-Pierre, or, finally, Immanuel Kant, were proposing in their writings, and which aimed at - no less! - than „an eternal peace”? The cosmopolitism they imagined was proposing the European unification of all states, their subordination to a central government, a centralized army, and an universal constitution, where the commandments of the natural law have priority over those of the positive law.

The conditionations and the limitations proposed by the affiliation to ethnical, religious or linguistical communities are understood as lawless, when the propagated ideal must be that of the emancipation from any form of imposed circumscription.

The soteriological mission of the Reason will be accomplished, in this case, especially by the contributions brought to the emergence of an universal language, a wish shared by authors as Voltaire, d'Alembert or Condorcet.

The contemporary proposal of the “global village” reactivates all these patterns, specific to the modern and enlightened mentality, legitimated by the ideal of universality, in all its forms. The idea of *mathesis universalis* is meant to reinforce the ideas of the Enlightenment; only a science which includes all the others, and only a world without frontiers could be up to a high standard, fitting to the citizen imagined by this project. Even from the year 1600, the Utopia wants to designate less the place which doesn't exist, and more the places that doesn't exist *yet*: „the perfect society didn't fit anymore to the diffuse outline of the enclave, but it tended to invade the epoch, to merge to the scientific and religious atmosphere of Europe. The word «Utopia» itself had been enriching the meanings: it didn't designate anymore the stories of some travelers about astonishing distant lands, but it came to describe the visions about a *hic et nunc* ideal state, about generous reformist projects”¹¹.

In a bizarre way, the Utopias - although opposing the state – imagine, in all their forms, modalities of existence after a statal pattern, varying, after case, only the dimensions. The discouraging restraint – or even the absence – of private space can be observed from the types of the descriptions of the education made in common, beginning with the *Republic*, where the claims to difference must be diminished in the name of equity and equality. Speaking of them, we must see their reminiscences in the contemporary scenarios of a wondering transparent global society, where the individual is everywhere accompanied by the insidious view of the all-seeing electronic eye.

The Utopian elements – common meals, state education, spending free time after strictly settled norms – are also present in the Utopias of the XVIII-th century, as *L'Histoire des Sévarambes* (1702), written by Vairasse d'Alais, *Découverte australe* (1781), written by Rétif de La Bretonne, or *L'Île inconnue* (1783) of Grivel. The feasts of the past are repudiated, because of their ethnocentrism. The abstract principles of the *Aufklärung* are entirely congruent only to the festivities celebrating the unity of human nature. The institutions built on the ground of the natural law are prior both logically and chronologically, to those legitimated by cultural or religious tradition¹². Traditions, far from enriching, are, in the age of the Enlightenment, seen as prohibitive and limitative. From now on, the rights and liberties of the individuals must be based not on the spirit of the sacred pledge, but on that of the *Declaration*; therefore, the new ideology

¹¹ Sorin Antohi, *Utopica. Studii asupra imaginarului social*, Editura Idea Design & Print, Cluj, 2005, p. 161.

¹² See Ernst Cassirer, *Mitul statului*, p. 228.

„begins to criticize mercilessly the religion, the monarchy, the society and the frame of the national state itself”¹³.

The authors of the Encyclopedia are proposing a set of ideas, resulted from long transactions and from numerous compromises between the most different points of view, all being subsumed to the same “illuminated elitism”. This also happens because the discourse of the Enlightenment was prepared by authors as Descartes, Locke, Hume or Cumberland, it hadn’t being named after an unique author, but after a precise process: *the illumination*. The themes of this type of speech had been passionately and long debated in saloons, academies, scientific communities, and in different lecture societies, especially because the affiliation to societies – in general - had become a fashion, a need for a new kind of sociability¹⁴.

The admission of some alternative ideology is totally disavowed, for the simple reason that this is not possible. The resulted society will neither found nor regulate the human relations on particularistic determinations, but on a solidarity of the human genre, essential theoretical basement, with profound practical consequences, and which will announce the appearance of the famous Kantian imperative: „Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law”. This time rights and duties are overlapping, and the possession of the rational faculty by every person becomes a sufficient argument for the Enlightenment to proclaim itself a project which is preponderantly one of **moral meliorism**.

Excepting the cases registered in the clinical archives of the social projects, of an obvious pathology, and which are expressing in the need of the autistic escape, of the schizoid duality or of the morbid rationalism¹⁵, it also can be identified others, less visible, as that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, or of Thomas Jefferson. Despite his propagation of individual rights and liberties, Jefferson was postulating a natural and – on his opinion – innocent separation of the human genre between a category of undeniable owners and administrators of rational faculty – the genuine people – and another category, of an ungrateful species, that of the negroes, which, by virtue of their resemblance with the animals, and on the basis of the preponderance of sensorial life, may be easily the property of the formers. Being himself a slaves owner, Jefferson proves himself to be strikingly schizoid, when it comes to his inability to decide to renounce splitting the humanity – which, by the way, has the same universal nature - between completely human people and others, less human, as the negroes and the Indians, and without whom his properties from Monticello would not have been at all possible. Let’s compare, for example, the assumption inaugurating the *Declaration of Independence*, edited by he himself, and which remains, as Stephen E. Lucas said¹⁶, one of the best-known sentences in the English language: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that [all men are created equal](#), that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are [Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness](#)” with another paragraph, whose author is also Jefferson: “Their griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions, which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them. In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection. To this must be ascribed their disposition to sleep when abstracted from their diversions, and unemployed in labor. An animal whose body

¹³ See Serge Bernstein, Pierre Milza, *Istoria Europei. State și identități europene*, vol 3, Editura Institutul European, Iași, [n.y.], p. 307.

¹⁴ See Ulrich Im Hof, *Europa Luminilor*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2003, pp. 113-115.

¹⁵ I reproduced here the taxonomy of the Utopian pathology, as described by Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, in the book *Utopia sau criza imaginarului*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, pp. 203-226.

¹⁶ See Stephen E. Lucas, “Justifying America: The Declaration of Independence as a Rhetorical Document”, *American Rhetoric: Context and Criticism*, ed. Thomas W. Benson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).

is at rest, and who does not reflect must be disposed to sleep of course”¹⁷. In this case, for those implicated in this context, it becomes true the sentence given by Immanuel Kant, according to which happiness would represent rather an ideal of the imagination, and not of the reason¹⁸...

The ideology proposed by Rousseau in *Contract*, for example, strangles the initiatives of the particulars or of the minoritars, which must comply with the implacable general will, which cannot mistake, always tending to the common good, by virtue of an artificial logic of big numbers¹⁹.

The aritmetization of the individual wishes betrays the same tendency, which is present in almost every modern writing of the genre, of making an Utopian engineering, whose necessary result is comprising in the formula: “the people can never be corrupted!”²⁰. Rousseau removes from his Utopian scheme all that could denounce the vulnerability of the deified will. He is deploring, as the greatest evil, the situation when “the social bind begins to shatter and the state to weaken, when the particular interests begin to become visible and when the small societies begin to influence the big one”, when “common interest changes negatively and you can find opposers”, when “you cannot find unanimity of votes anymore”, when “the general will doesn’t mean the will of all anymore”, when are breaking out “contradictions, debates, and when the best of all opinions is not accepted without disagreements anymore”²¹. Invested with sacred attributes, the general will is - no more, no less – always constant, indestructible and pure, remembering of the Being of Parmenides. The superstitious exclusion of the conflict from the city is as Utopian, as dangerous, for the idea of liberty.

By contract, the individual gives to the state a role of tutelary power, accepting, of his own accord, to be treated – when the circumstances are demanding – as a minor!²². Kant’s *motto* – *Sapere Aude!* – is alarmingly blurring, while the autonomy-heteronomy dilemma always persists in the background. From claiming that the general will is always right, to the sentence that, in communism, the Party-State never makes mistakes, is no more than a single step, or maybe none. The lights of the modernity, wanting to guide messianically the individual to the paths of the dreamt Utopia, are diminishing in intensity, ending, in the XX-th century, in the darkness of the concentrationary beast. The duplicity, in the case of the “civil” faith, as Rousseau named it, is roughly punished, by death penalty! Here is the moment when Utopia turns into dystopia and when the generous ideals of the Enlightenment meet the demoniac spirit; as a reader, you begin to have doubts about the legitimacy of the inclusion of Rousseau between the encyclopedists.

Taking into account the analyzed aspects, regarding rousseauist philosophy, we can understand it as the inspirer of the totalitarian projects that followed, which were groundlessly

¹⁷ See Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on Virginia", *Writings*, ed. Lipscomb and Bergh (Washington, D.C.: 1905). See also Richard Rorty, *Adevăr și progres. Eseuri filosofice*, vol. 3, p. 92.

¹⁸ See Immanuel Kant, *Bazele metafizicii moravurilor*, Editura Antet, București, [n.y.], p. 42.

¹⁹ It is not to be wondered, for Edouard Laboulaye, that Rousseau serenely conceives that individual liberty is possible only by a voluntary servitude to the general will, but especially the fact that "an entire century, and more, an enlightened one" gave him credit (See Edouard Laboulaye, *Limitele statului și alte scrieri politice*, Editura Nemira, București, 2001, p. 52).

²⁰ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Contractul social*, Editura Antet, București, 2000, p. 27.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

²² See *ibidem*, pp. 97-98.

sanctioning "the supposed intentions"²³, and which took the face of Terror, either robespierrist, or leninist.

For the postmodernist critics, the Enlightenment remains a project of an "egalitarian Utopia", which begins with a wrong premise of the existence of a possibility of creation a new society, *ex nihilo*, while destroying with luciferic pride everything that was created till then. The error of the Illuminist philosophy, besides the elimination of a whole spiritual tradition, was that of imagining an universal human nature, valid for all people, from every temporal and spatial specters, nature which was ready to be modelled after the strict rigors of the social engineering.

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²³ See Pierre Manent, *Originile politicii moderne. Machiavelli/Hobbes/Rousseau*, Editura Nemira, București, 2000, p. 195.

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