On Identity[1]

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It is always difficult to talk about identity because it is *intrinsically* a problematic concept. Rather than an answer or a statement, it is primarily a question. The problems of identity only become conceivable with the question: "Who am I?" which has not always been an obvious one. Therefore, it is not an overstatement to say along with Zygmunt Bauman that the problem of identity appears to be first of all a questioning, i.e., the wording of a problem. "Identity never 'became' a problem, it has always been a *problem*, it started as a *problem*."[2] Any serious reflection on identity involves an investigation into the conditions of appearance of this questioning, into the process that allowed the question about identity to be asked.

Somewhere in between psychology, sociology and social anthropology, the problem of identity is actually representative of the modern age. In traditional societies this question does not and cannot exist. Individual identity in particular was not a conceptualized thought, since individuals mostly thought about themselves as members of a group and this was not considered to be a sufficient factor for self-determination. "The word 'identity' itself is anachronistic in pre-modern cultures, which does not mean that the need for moral and spiritual direction was not absolute, but the problem was not related to the individual as it is for us."[3]

In pre-modern societies, identity was mainly related to filiations, both

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2. Zygmunt Bauman, *La vie en miettes. Expérience postmoderne et moralité* (Rodez: Le Rouergue/Chambon, 2003), p. 34.

3. Charles Taylor, *Les sources du moi. La formation de l'identité moderne* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), p. 65.

in the private and in the public space. Identity depended on the place attributed to each individual by his birth, his lineage or his group. In Greece, for instance, each individual had a double identity: a personal one, expressed by a name and a surname, and a second one, related to the community, which appeared with the creation of the city. These two types of identity are not equal. "In antiquity, the former, designed to characterize an individual, was subordinate to and overshadowed by community identity; very few traces of it remain. Individual identity became personal much later in time**.**"[4] Individuality is not denied, but it is grounded in the community. Subjective identity originates from a sense of being, expressed in the language of the myth of origin. For the Greeks, going to the theatre was like attending a *re-presentation* of their uniqueness. Complying with the nature of things becomes a measure of self-fulfillment. Other peoples' identity is represented by their customs, as described by travelers. Each people know that different people exist.

This is still true in the Middle Ages. In a society of orders and states with immovable limits, the question of identity can hardly be posed. Believed to be objective facts, they constitute most of the social structure. Legal recognition, i.e., the confirmation that one is a member of society, and as such enjoys certain liberties and guarantees, starts with those limits. In medieval societies the prevalent virtue is loyalty. Therefore, the question is not "who am I?" but "to whom am I loyal," i.e. "to whom do I pledge allegiance?" Identity is the direct result of that allegiance. Society is then divided in groups, which interlock but at the same time remain separate. This separation limits hostility between castes and states, until the Nation-state attempts to homogenize all this diversity.[5]

It is easy to understand why the question of identity appears, first, as a reaction to the dissolution of the social network and the disappearance of traditional points of reference brought about by modernity, and, second, in connection with the emergence of the notion of individual in the Western world. In the 18th century, as well as today, referring to someone as a person means

4. Christel Müller and Francis Prost, eds., *Identités et cultures dans le monde méditerranéen antique* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002). This concept is still common nowadays in most traditional societies. In New Caledonia, for instance, the names of individuals are also clan titles related to land ownership.

5. Zygmunt Bauman illustrated well in his *Modernité et holocauste* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2002), pp. 72-77, that the Jews were the first victims of that tendency to homogenization, as modernity could no longer accept particularities, which, paradoxically, medieval society, as an aggregate of distinctive groups, contended with. In other terms, modernity abolished a group of distances, which were considered dismissible, but which were also indirectly protective. In the Middle Ages, otherness did not prohibit integration.

that he has individual freedom and can rightly be regarded as independent from the groups, to which he belongs. There is then a connection between the question of personal identity and the development of individualism. The latter has two different meanings: the value attributed to the individual within the group, and the intensity of the relationship of the person to himself.[6] By the same token, the notion of identity is particular to the Western world.

That is why Tocqueville attributed to Christianity the idea of a substantial identity of human beings. It meant that all men are basically identical and their differences randomly derive from birth or history. The recognition of the unity of mankind comes from omitting those differences that are not essential in the eyes of God. Nevertheless, with the rise of Christianity, influenced by Greek philosophy, the idea of "self-concern emerges," as Michel Foucault argues. A person was not only a legal or civic entity, but also a moral being with an individual soul, able to stand independently from his community, and even be disconnected from it. As early as the third and fourth centuries, the individual became a being irreducible except to himself, with an intimacy with himself, theoretically able to think by himself without any references. Finally, thanks to Christianity, morality was no longer a matter of how good one should be, but how just one should be. Morality is no longer substantial; it becomes a perfunctory obligation.

The ideal of disengagement finds its original expression in the Platonic, Stoic and Christian ideas according to which one should no longer look for virtue in public life, but rather one should strive for self-control through reason. But above all, as Charles Taylor demonstrated, the notion of *interiority* was the first moral source of the modern age, and it was to a large extent brought by Christianity. According to Saint Augustine, the way to God does not lead through an outside source, i.e., the visible world, but through reflexive conscience: "Instead of going outward, go inside yourself" ("*Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi*"). The heart becomes a self-sufficient, secluded space for meeting God, and social relations are no longer essential. That means that the proof of God's existence is found by experiencing interiority. At the same time, free will is redefined as the ability to consent. Consequently, individuality becomes a private affair.[7]

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6. Cf. Hubertus G. Hubbeling, "Some Remarks on the Concept of Person in Western Philosophy," in Hans G. Kippenberg, Yme B. Kuiper and Andy F. Sanders, eds., *Concepts of Person in Religion and Thought* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 9-24.

7. Cf. Louis Dumont, "Christian Beginnings of Modern Individualism," in Michael Carritgers, Steven Collins and Steven Lukes, eds., *The Category of Person. Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 93-122.

Descartes takes the internalization of moral sources further, encouraging men to assume a position of control by withdrawing from the outside world**.** He sublimated the subject, conferring him some kind of ontological solitude, in which the individual does not rely on relationships in order to exist. The soul is more than a look inside; it becomes an autonomous institution. Knowledge is now based on the true representation of things built through reason inside the mind. He objectifies the external world, subjecting it to technological appropriation. Thus, he introduces a new way of learning that will be adopted by the liberal thought: "Moral judgment comes exclusively from the internal activity of the mind; it is validated by procedural standards and not by substantial beliefs. [At the same time], the modern theme of 'human dignity' evolves from the valorization of the now self-sufficient interiority and the autonomous power of reason."[8]

This will be one of the major sources for the ideology of the individual. If identity is contained inside, Cartesian subjectivism imposes the conception of the subject as an independent and "disengaged" entity. Charles Taylor writes: "Disengagement and the idea that the nature of things is located inside both contributed to a new concept of individual independence. The disengaged subject is an independent being, i.e., the person has to find in himself the essential reasons for being and can no longer let the greater order dictate them to him. One of the consequences of this position, in the 17th century, is the emergence of a new political atomism, conveyed in particular by Grotius, Pufendorf, Locke and others in their theories concerning the social contract."[9]

Locke translates the ideal of disengagement into the rejection of any form of authority originating in tradition. The ideology of progress is already looming: the past has nothing to teach us because the future will necessarily be better. Hobbes thinks that the quest for recognition poses a direct threat to the political power. Paradoxically, political liberalism coincides with what the theoreticians of nationalism will state later, in so far as it hands over the monopoly of the production of the forms of culture and comprehension to the political power. The very liberal John Stuart Mill, for instance, thinks that democracy cannot function in a pluralistic society, using arguments that the anti-liberal Carl Schmitt would have approved. He writes: "Democratic power belongs to the people, but only if the people are united." According to this view, diversity will foment

8. Janie Pélabay, *Charles Taylor, penseur de la pluralité* (Quebec: Presses de l'université Laval, 2001), p. 67.

9. Taylor, *Les sources du moi, op. cit.*, p. 372.

suspicion and the questions of identity become irrelevant.

Another new step is the valorization of "ordinary life" during the Reformation. This attitude is associated with the valorization of work and the rejection of mediations. Ordinary life defines the fields of production and reproduction, but according to Aristotle, a full human life cannot be restricted to this: that is why he counters the ideal of ordinary life with the ideal of "good life," which means achieving excellence through consistent participation in public life. Otherwise, ordinary life is private. The valorization of every day life implies that an individual's destiny does not rely only or primarily on his participation in the life of the community. Thus, it becomes possible to look at human individuality as a central authority capable of making decisions. At the same time, the idea that the purpose of science is to serve the needs of every day life promotes production efficiency and the endless accumulation of material goods. So, the Reformation places ordinary life at the center of the good life, so that they almost become one, and all the values that go beyond ordinary life become the subject of severe criticism.

Besides advocating the preeminence of practical life, the valorization of ordinary life also promotes emotional and romantic feelings. Calvinism especially insists on the virtues of work and family, which will become the foundation of the bourgeois value system. Self-interest becomes prevalent in all aspects of life. Novels no longer narrate collective sagas or archetypal stories, but they recount the fortunes and misfortunes of single individuals whose experiences are personal. Love gains new value. Intimate relationships become more and more important, as does the need for domestic space and private life. Feelings are starting to be considered as an essential part of what gives value to life.

Thus, the question of identity is definitely a modern phenomenon. It developed in the 18th century, supported by a burgeoning individualism which originated in the Christian valorization of the soul, in Descartes' rationalism, in the privileging of ordinary life and the private sphere, and finally, in Locke's theory, which favors individual free-will over social obligations. The emergence of the metaphysics of subjectivity, however, entails a contradiction. Modern valorization of nature generates an ideal of authenticity and expressiveness, which clashes with a homogenizing conception of the fragmented individual.

The ideas of inner life and ordinary life influenced Romanticism as well, but it was transformed into a desire for harmony with nature, and it imposed itself as a reaction against individualism, considered to be

"hardening." Unlike the ideal of technology during the Enlightenment, self-expression elevates feelings above the demands of material production. Feelings gain creative powers. Spontaneity and creativity become virtues. Image as opposed to concept once again unveils the deeper meaning of things. The feelings nature awakens make it more valuable, nature is internalized. As Novalis wrote: "The secret path leads towards the inside." Reason was criticized for being emotionless, too analytical, and hostile to any sense of inclusiveness. Romanticism opposed the organic to the mechanical, the diversity of reality to the important univocal signifiers. Rousseau already encouraged ordinary life close to nature and combined with the virtues of civic humanism: listening to the voice of nature inside reveals the Good. The Self is united with the body, and through it, it interacts and is in close harmony with the surrounding nature; nature is no longer regarded as a lifeless object that can be owned, but as a source of harmonious truth and authenticity. Therefore, the question of identity becomes a question of self-fulfillment.

The theory of self-expression, which finds its fulfillment in German Romanticism and in Herder's philosophy, rests on the fundamental idea that, first of all, one has to listen to one's inner nature in order to discover oneself and then, that one's personality is absolutely unique. Moral action is then dictated by who one really is: "Acting according to my nature means listening to the voice, the impulse or the inner momentum."[10] Therefore, self-expression fosters another form of individuation based on the search for authenticity and the importance of differences. Those differences take on a moral significance: they become values and means of self-fulfillment. Each individual as well as each separate human group has its own way of life. This same aim at originality applies to peoples and historic communities. Herder refers to it to express his notion of national culture and "popular spirit" (*Volksgeist*), which will be at the origin of modern nationalism and anti-colonialism. A person will express his universal humanity only if he comes to terms with his inscription in a specific humanity first. One has to be human in one's own way, and not imitate others because it is inside oneself that one will discover one's own way of life. Culture then becomes essential because the questions concerning the ultimate horizon are no longer confined to the universal: "One is not born a man, as if humanity were an attribute given at birth: one becomes human through his anchoring in a cultural (or national) tradition.

10. Taylor, *Les sources du moi, op. cit.*, p. 470.

In short, particularities make one human."[11] So, culture becomes a "*meta-good,*" something intrinsically collective, because culture alone gives meaning and value to crucial goods, which define the points of reference of our identity."[12] As Taylor writes: "Self-expression provides the foundation for a new and more fulfilling individuation. It is the idea, which developed at the end of 18th century, that each individual is different and original, and that this originality determines how one should live. Of course, the simple notion of individual differences is not new. Nothing is more obvious or more commonplace. What is new is that this difference influences the way of life. Those differences are not just incidental variations within the same fundamental human nature. . . They mean that every one should follow his own path."[13]

The themes of recognition and exaltation of differences appear simultaneously. One's own identity can only be completely fulfilled if it is acknowledged by others. As Hegel observed, the individual yearns for acceptance of his identity, which indicates that he is definitely not self-sufficient. The individual defines himself, but he also needs "significant others" to acknowledge this definition. This is the base of the ethic of "authenticity."

This, however, is also ambiguous. At first, the ethic of authenticity is very individualistic[14] and therefore, in perfect agreement with modernity. But at the same time it rejects individualism by emphasizing return to nature, community spirit, the belief that each people has its own value system, etc. On the one hand, self-expression seems to revive the "cosmic" conception of the Ancient world. On the other, the individual, who is supposed to revive his bond with nature, is indisputably modern, mostly concerned with self-expression, i.e., he is directed by his subjectivity. Self-expression is therefore an obvious reaction against the Enlightenment, against the ideal of instrumental and disengaged reason. But the source of this reaction is the same: the individual. Even when the Romantics are calling for new Middle Ages or when they denounce modernity or the fascination with progress, they remain modern. They challenge indi-

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11. Pélabay, *Charles Taylor, op. cit*., p. 78.
12. *Ibid*., p. 209.
13. Taylor, *Les sources du moi, op. cit*., pp. 470-471.
14. Taylor observes that the theory of self-expression is individualistic in three ways: "it valorizes autonomy; it attributes an important place to self-exploration, in particular of feelings; its conceptions of good life generally imply personal involvement. It follows that in the political language it uses, it formulates freedoms due to individuals in terms of subjective rights." *Ibid*., pp. 389-390.

vidualism on the basis of individualism. They turn self-concern against itself by changing its impact but, just as their adversaries, they continue to subscribe to the metaphysics of subjectivity.

That is why Taylor insists that modernity produced *at the same time* egalitarian individualism and the "revolution of self-expression." The latter is only a relative contradiction to the former, both using the same original matrix. He also stresses the extraordinary importance of the problem of identity to the self-expression theory, which invites the individual to discover his own "authentic" nature and to find fulfillment on his own, rather than to comply with a set pattern. With self-expression, identity became a search: in order to be fulfilled, one needs to find oneself, and for that, one has to understand one's own identity.

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Since the 17th, and especially the 18th century, the notion of freedom merges with the idea of the subject's independence to create a subject who is now free to set his own goals. Each individual is supposed to freely determine his own good using his will and his reason. The emergence of the individual happens at a time when belonging to a group becomes less relevant and when the ideology of the same is developing.

Emerging modernity constantly fought organic communities, and repeatedly discredited them as obstacles to human emancipation because of their ties to the past and to traditions. In this perspective, the ideal of "autonomy," quickly transformed into the ideal of independence, involves the rejection of any type of roots and also of any inherited social relationship. As Bauman writes: "Since the Enlightenment, it was accepted as obvious truth that human emancipation, the liberation of the true human potential required a complete break from all community ties and that the individuals be freed from the circumstances of their birth."[15] Modernity rests on a drastic reduction of the value of the past in the name of an optimistic vision of the future, which was seen as a radical rupture from what was before (ideology of progress). The prevailing model describes a man who has to be emancipated from his origins, not only because they dangerously limit his "freedom," but also and more importantly because they are not considered as part of the self. This same individual, however, removed from the context of his origin is essentially similar to any other, which is one of the conditions of his insertion into a developing market. Since

15. Bauman, *La vie en miettes, op. cit.*, p. 372.

progress is supposed to cause the disappearance of the communities, the path to human emancipation does not go through the recognition of peculiar identities but through everybody's assimilation to a dominant model. Finally, the nation-state claims more and more often the monopoly on the production of social relationships. As Patrick Savidan writes, in the modern vision of the world, "the other is first of all viewed as same. This means that the other is a person just like me, a subject, and as a consequence, we should all have the same rights. In other words, we are all equal, i.e., the human being as a human being appears to be similar to me. From that standpoint, differences will be reduced and similarities will be promoted."[16] Modern liberal dynamics will sever men from their natural connections or communities and ignore their insertion in a particular group. It promotes a new form of anthropology, in which men have to free themselves from their ancestral customs and their organic ties in order to achieve freedom. This separation from "nature" is considered characteristic of human nature. Unlike classical thought, conformity to natural order is no longer an ideal; the capacity to free oneself from it becomes the ideal.[17] The modern liberal perspective rests on an atomist view of society, which is now constituted by rational, and fundamentally free individuals who are supposed to act as disengaged beings, liberated from any predetermination and likely to choose on their own the means and values guiding their actions. As Justine Lacroix wrote: "Whatever their differences might be, all liberal theories share the same universal postulate: they tend to ignore all empirical elements in order to reach transcendental conditions of possibility for a just society, which would be applicable to any reasonable community."[18] Alain Renaut agrees: "No liberal concept identifies man's humanity with the goals he has chosen, but with his ability to choose them."[19] Which means that men master their goals, but they are never

16. Patrick Savidan, "La reconnaissance des identités culturelles comme enjeu démocratique," in Ronan Le Coadic, ed., *Identité et démocratie. Diversité culturelle et mondialisation: repenser la démocratie* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003), p. 234. Axel Honneth observes that the "the mixing between legal recognition and hierarchical order of value — what corresponds more or less to the moral foundation of all traditional societies — has disappeared with the emergence of bourgeois capitalism and the normative transformation of legal relations under growing market pressures and the simultaneous impact of post-traditional thinking." Honneth, "La reconnaissance: une piste pour la théorie sociale contemporaine," *ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

17. Cf. Robert Legros, *L'idée d'humanité. Introduction à la phénoménologie* (Paris: Grasset, 1990).

18. Justine Lacroix, *Communautarisme versus libéralisme. Quel modèle d'intégration politique?* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2003), p. 79.

overcome or determined by them. "I" am always defined by what "I" decide to be; a subject always makes independent choices, he remains close to his own peculiar situation, i.e., he chooses his own goals instead of discovering them. Therefore, liberal modernity states that "I" came first, before any goals or inherited relationship to a group. This, in turn, privileges the just over the good. Michael Sandel emphasizes: "While the morality of the just corresponds to the limits of the "Self" and illustrates our differences, the morality of the Good corresponds to the unity of people and illustrates our connections. In a deontological ethic where just comes before good, it means that what separates us comes before what connects us, both in an epistemological and in a moral sense."[20]

In this new ideological climate, identity is consistent with liberal and bourgeois individuality. Modernity separates singular identity from collective identity, and the latter becomes undifferentiated. Bernard Lamizet notes: "The recognition of the indistinction of rights is what made it possible for history to acknowledge the fundamental difference between singular identity, based on filiations and origin, and indistinct collective identity, based on social relationships and representation forms of sociability. . . In this sense, the universality of the law poses the fundamental question of the problem of identity."[21] Filiation becomes a private matter: "Since the institutional model rests on indistinction, filiation loses all meaning as to the structure of political identities that constitute the public sphere."[22]

From the outset, modernity attacks traditions and beliefs, at best secularizing them. It removes the question of identity from the sphere of "nature" and places it in the social and institutional field of political and economic practices, which are now restructuring the public space. It essentially separates the biological order of existence from the institutional order. The modern public space is organized as a space of indistinction, i.e., a space where the natural distinctions concerning social relations and filiation become insignificant. In the public space, people exist only as citizens with interchangeable political capacities. Law rules the public space. Abiding by the law means assuming the socially indistinct part of one's identity. (Nevertheless, this indistinction is still relative since it

19. Alain Renaut, *Libéralisme politique et pluralisme culturel* (Nantes: Pleins Feux, 1999), p. 36.

20. Michael Sandel, *Le libéralisme et les limites de la justice* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), p. 200.

21. Bernard Lamizet, *Politique et identité* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2002), pp. 302-304.

22. *Ibid.,* p. 109.

does not extend beyond the borders of citizenship. By making distinctions between polities, political life creates differences between the different areas of social relations and sociability).

If the public space rules through indistinction, then identity can only be symbolic. Lamizet also notes that "historically, politically and socially, identity can only be symbolic since individuals are confused by indistinction. . . While, in the private space, we only present the forms and practices related to our filiation, in the public space, we show the forms and representations of our social relations and our sociability which, therefore, gain symbolic value and signification. . . As soon as identity acquires symbolic value, it becomes a mediation in the public space: it is not based on the characteristics of the individual, but on the dialectical power of sociability."[23]

For Hegel, human essence lies in self-consciousness. In 1844, Karl Marx said that, consequently, any alienation of human consciousness is alienation of self-consciousness. This is just another way of saying that alienation affects identity: without identity there is no self-consciousness. Nevertheless, the great ideologies of our times have rarely been interested in the problem of identity.

Marx, for instance, was never interested in the strictly normative dimension of social struggle because he stayed attached to a utilitarian anthropology, in which social classes represent before all the interest of the group. As Honneth wrote, "the subjects of a society are not mainly moral actors demanding a series of normative rules related to fields in which they will be responsible for errors, but they are actors with rational goals, who have certain interests."[24]

Freud himself has always been opposed to a global apprehension of the individual psyche. His theory is built around the notion of symptom, which lays in the unconscious and is therefore unknown to the self. The Freudian self has no specific personal identity. Freud is not interested in identity, but he is interested in identifications, which he explains from a transfer or projection perspective. Identification means first of all trying to realize inadmissible desires, especially during childhood or adolescence.[25]

Modernity means more than merely relegating organic relations and hierarchical values, which will in turn replace honor by dignity. It does not

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23. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

24. Honneth, "La reconnaissance: une piste pour la théorie . . ." *op. cit.*

25. It is noteworthy that Jean Laplanche's and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis' *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: PUF, 1967) does not contain an entry for the term "identity."

simply discredit the relationship to traditional communities, which are regarded as archaic vestiges or irrational tensions, nor does it only relegate differences into the private sphere where they cannot thrive because recognition can only take place in the public sphere. It is also based on the exclusion of any third party and a decrease in diversity. The whole history of modernity can be regarded as the continuous deployment of the ideology of the same: suppression of the castes and states by the Revolution, homogenization of the rules of language and law, progressive eradication of specific lifestyles related to housing, work, social environment or belief, the increasing indistinction concerning male and female social behavior. In every field, including (recently) the space of filiation, indistinction is growing and this process will reach its peak with globalization. Differentiated lifestyles have disappeared everywhere because of modernity. Old organic ties have been severed. Differences between lifestyles have grown smaller. Roles within the family have been altered. When it comes to the possibility of participating in the prevailing lifestyle, only quantitative inequalities, like buying power, remain. Marcel Gauchet described the result: "Belonging to a collectivity. . . tends to become unthinkable for individuals in search of individuality, while they are more than ever dependent on it."[26] Who am I? Who are we? Those are fundamental questions and modernity has consistently obscured them or made the answer more difficult.

Naturally, the rise of indistinction has also provoked reactions. Since the differentiation of subjects and objects necessarily structures perception, an *indistinct* society creates a feeling of uneasiness because it is perceived as chaotic and meaningless. That is why, as globalization instigates new fragmentations while it homogenizes different cultures, the rise of the ideology of the Same also initiates the question of identity and then constantly spurs it on. During the last two centuries this question took different forms, for example, the revolution of "self-expression," which set off the quest for "authenticity." But the question was also approached on societal and national levels.

The valorization of labor, originally upheld by the bourgeoisie as a reaction to the disinterested and therefore "unproductive" nobility provided the first substitute for identity. Within an industrialized division of labor, individual accomplishment creates a desire for recognition, based

26. Marcel Gauchet, *La démocratie contre elle-même* (Paris: Gallimard-Tel, 2002), p. xxi.

on the fact that one has a job, and on the feeling of pride resulting from "a job well done."[27] But the new social division also transformed social class into a substitute for collective identity. In the 19th century, class war played a long underestimated role as far as identity is concerned. Belonging to a certain class represents a *status* (the status is the identity of a subject as defined by an institution) and the classes create their own specific culture. Class war allows new identities to crystallize, because class is not only defined by a socio-economic activity but also by an anthropological reference to the natural foundations of society. As Lamizet put it: "Classes acknowledge the controversial and dialectical nature of the differences between groups within the public space."[28]

Related or not to class war, politics also allows individuals to develop another identity, this time as citizens. At least in the beginning, political identities also created new specific cultures within certain sociological families. The institution of universal suffrage, too, is also an answer to the quest for identity: "Voting is nothing else than the power to give weight to the political identity one represents."[29] Clearly, political conflicts and struggles are related to identity because they put the identity of the social protagonists to test in the public space."[30]

Class identities, like political and ideological identities, are only sectoral identities competing with each other. More inclusive collective identities develop around them: national identities. Realizing that capitalism had lead to massification, which led to a "collective identity crisis," some 30 years ago Jean-Pierre Chevènement wrote that "a social being needs representation, the same way a person needs a body."[31] In the 19th century, this need for "incarnation" inspired national movements and all mod-

27. "The individualist principle of accomplishment is in fact the only normative resource that the bourgeois and capitalist society has at its disposal to justify morally the extremely unequal distribution of opportunities and goods. Since belonging to a certain estate no longer regulates prestige in society and legal and economic privileges, which one enjoys, the ethico-religious valorization of work and the establishment of a capitalist market suggest that this prestige and the individual accomplishment are in fact interdependent." Honneth, "La reconnaissance: une piste pour la théorie. . . " *op. cit*., p. 220.

28. Lamizet, *Politique et identité*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

29. *Ibid*., p. 205.

30. *Ibid*., p. 192.

31. Jean-Pierre Chevènement, *Le vieux, la crise, le neuf* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), p. 210. The then future Minister of Defense added that "the nation-state in France was built throughout the centuries by a line of cultural genocides" and that "the nationalist claims, which certainly should not be viewed as belonging to the past, are eminently popular." (*Ibid.*). This position was very different from the one he took later. See Lamizet, *Politique et identité* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2002), pp. 302-304.

ern forms of nationalism, based on the idea that "political and national unity have to be one and the same" (Ernest Gellner).

Thus, nationalism seems to be a typical offspring of modernity. But it is not only a political phenomenon. It feeds on imagination, a place where history, culture, religion, popular legends mix. Those elements are all revisited, idealized, transfigured, and end up as a coherent and legitimizing narrative.[32] Chantal Delsol wrote that "historically, each people identifies itself with specific values and models. When these values and models collapse, identity is threatened."[33] Values and models play an important role as providers of identity, as do "the great narratives" of the times of "disciplinary societies" (Michel Foucault): tales of the nation-states, of workers' emancipation, of the religion of progress, etc.

The classic distinction between "civil nations" and "ethnic nations," or, in Friedrich Meinecke's terms, between "political" nations and "cultural" nations, seems in this respect rather artificial for two reasons: first, because most national societies mix both principles, changing the proportions, and second, because the state primarily concerns society and all human societies are cultural societies.[34] Whatever their own particular political characteristics might have been, all nations have always resorted to national myths. During the monarchy, the French wanted to be (or believed they were) the spiritual heirs of the Trojans, the Franks and finally the Gauls. After the Revolution, as the nation defined itself in purely political terms, ignoring all the pre-political aspects that preceded the civil contract, the fundamental beliefs of identity remained strong. During the era of secularization, they compensated for weakened religious beliefs and sometimes even created true new secular religions.[35] Contemporary "nationism" might well be founded on a political ideal of State and citizenship, it would nevertheless be a mistake to believe that abstract political values are sufficient to create a common identity and, especially that they would suffice to convince their members to accept the sacrifices they sometimes require. Such demands can only be formulated if the bonds between citizens are perceived as a true "immediately binding

32. Cf. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

33. Chantal Delsol, *La République. Une question française* (Paris: PUF, 2002), p. 98.

34. Cf. Alain Dieckhoff, *La nation dans tous ses Etats. Les identités nationales en mouvement* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), pp. 41-43.

35. On this, see Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen People. Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Good," on the basis of the identification to a historic community, which itself is founded on specific values.[36] Myths, legends, founding tales always play the same role: they are symbolic mediations that base sociability on the transmission of a common "knowledge" or a shared belief.

This "common knowledge" is of course largely imaginary. Most of the time, indisputable historical realities are subject to prestigious interpretations or perfectly arbitrary and idealistic projections.[37] The strongest phantasm is related to the origin, which is also a phantasm of purity: in the beginning everything was clear and simple, not yet affected by the complexity of the real story. It is the phantasm of the Golden Age. The same hermeneutics transforms supposedly fundamental events and heroes: Arminius and Vercingetorix, Charles Martel, Clovis or Joan of Arc who never had in real life the decisive importance that modern imagination gave them. The battles of Poitiers, Bouvines or Valmy were not great battles that changed history. Nevertheless they are considered to be "founding" events."

Under these circumstances, it is easy for the critics of national identity to require that "historical truth be restored." Their mistake lays in the fact that they do not recognize that, even though national identity often sprung out of the imagination, those illusions are nevertheless essential to the life of the group. They are also wrong to think that exposing the phantasm will destroy the sense of identity. The "phantasm" is more like a *myth.* The myth works not *although* it is a myth, but *because* it is a myth. A belief might well be false as far as its object is concerned, but it becomes "true" because of what it brings up in the individual or the group, or because of what it gives him. Marcel Detienne is wrong to make fun of the pretense for autochtony in a book, which, besides being offensive to Fernand Braudel, also presents Ancient Greeks as early disciples of Barrès.[38] Detienne hastily demonstrated how the Greeks invented imaginary ancestors with the help of complex myths and indecent stories.

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36. Cf. Wayne Norman, "Les paradoxes du nationalisme civique," in Guy Laforest et Philippe de Lara, eds., *Charles Taylor et l'interprétation de l'identité moderne* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), pp. 155-170. Cf. also Claude Nicolet, *La fabrique d'une nation. La France entre Rome et les Germains* (Paris: Perrin, 2003).

37. Cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Wolfgang Bialas, ed., *Die nationale Identität der Deutschen. Philosophische Imaginationen und historischen Mentalitäten* (Bern-Frankfurt a/M: Peter Lang, 2002).

38. Marcel Detienne, *Comment être autochtone. Du pur Athénien au Français raciné* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).

But he has not proved anything. Even though it is true that no one can be considered an autochthon, if one looks sufficiently far back in the past, the conviction to be or not to be autochthon can nevertheless shape our consciousness and behaviors. As Leszek Kolakowski noted: "If contemporary Greeks, Italians, Indians, Copts or Chinese sincerely believe that they belong to the same ethnic community as their oldest ancestors, nobody can convince them otherwise."[39]

Durkheim was one of the first authors to mention "collective consciousness." Fourier talked about "sharing the same passions." More recently, the role of imagination in self representation within groups has been studied by Gilbert Durand (mythopoetics and structural anthropology) and by some psychoanalysts of the English school, followers of Melanie Klein.[40] Collective imagination is real: common representations and images build the framework of a group. All people and nations have a number of beliefs related to their origins or their history. Whether these beliefs refer to an objective reality, an idealized reality or to a myth is irrelevant. They just need to be reminiscent or representative of an *exordium temporis*, a founding moment. The Catholic Church always claimed to be legitimate because it was a mystical body; this legitimization allowed the Church to live on through the centuries independently from the moral value of its representatives or the evolution of its dogmas.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the dialectic of nationality or class was particularly complex. During WWI, the former prevailed. The Right usually interpreted it as a proof that the notion of nation is a more profound, more substantial reality than the notion of class, which is only half true. National identity, along with the right to vote, the welfare state and the Fordist system, became one of the means used by capitalism, i.e., the masters of the capitalist world economy, to domesticate the "dangerous classes." Stimulating national solidarity was a way of inhibiting class war (or of "transcending" it, as fascism wanted, wrongly believing that it was

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39. Leszek Kolakowski, "On Collective Identity," in *Partisan Review* (Winter 2002-2003), p. 10.

40. Cf. Didier Anzieu, *Le groupe et l'inconscient. L'imaginaire groupal* (Paris: Dunod, 1984). On the role of myth in politics, see also Georges Sorel and Carl Schmitt. There is a relation between historical "phantasm" and stereotype. The latter is an abusive generalization but, as all prejudice, favorable or not, that it generates, it is useful in constructing the ideal type. "Stereotyping involves categorizing, and categorization is indispensable to thought. The stereotype is also indispensable to social interaction, just as the cliché is to literature." Jacques-Philippe Leyens, Paola Maria Paladino and Stéphanie Demoulin, "Nous et les autres," in *Sciences humaines* (May 1999), p. 28.

possible to push the bourgeoisie to work for the nation). At the time, capitalism still had a national dimension, and liberalism, theoretically hostile to the state, actually contributed to the rise of the national spirit. In the beginning, conservatives were not great supporters of the nation; it was still challenged by international socialism. Immanuel Wallerstein wrote that "only liberals envisioned the nation as an appropriate expression of the sum of individual wills."[41] Only later did the conservatives, followed by the socialists support this new political form.

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The idea that social facts start with individuals is characteristic of liberal atomism. Liberalism stands for an idea of separation, of uprooting, which makes the transformation of the subject into a monad the necessary condition for his freedom. By favoring an instrumental and solipsist vision of reason, it rejects all access to knowledge that includes contexts of intelligibility such as the body (Merleau-Ponty), language (Wittgenstein) and community (Herder and Humboldt). Its political corollary is based on a rational contract and the primacy of law. It gives equal rights to all individuals, who act as members of an undifferentiated humanity. Individual dignity does not stem from the essential nature of the individual, but only from the fact that he is entitled to those rights. Restricting the common good to the defense and the attribution of those rights transforms public life into a legal battleground and encourages the escalation of demands. The school of communitarian thought opposes this idea and offers a different concept of society, of person and of identity.

For the communitarians, the major failure (anthropologically) of liberal thought is that it is based on the ideal of a "disengaged self" or an "unencumbered self." Since men are social animals, the individual can only survive within a society. The individual *per se* does not exist. Nobody can be defined solely as an individual, not even as one individual among others, but always as a being related to, as a member of a specific community, be it political, cultural, linguistic, religious or other. The human condition requires that the individual be always embedded in a value system, in a cultural, socio-historical field, which will allow him to understand himself. Men are *situated* beings. As soon as people are born, they are *already* something – something that will necessarily allow them to situate themselves, even if it is to distance themselves from it. This something

41. Immanuel Wallerstein, *L'après-libéralisme. Essai sur un système-monde à réinventer* (L'Aube: La Tour d'Aigues, 1999), p. 57.

makes them capable of reflexive conscience and helps them to position themselves, once they try to figure out the value of things. Taylor writes that "our place in time is not locked in the present, it is related to a past, which has defined our identity, and to a future, which reexamines it."[42]

Michael Sandel mentions "constituent communities," Michael Walzer talks about "shared interpretations," Taylor about "horizons of significations," and Robert Bellah about "memory communities." All these terms refer to the same normative reality. Everyone inherits a "constituent community," which precedes him and which will constitute the roots of his values and norms. Each human action is influenced by a meaningful background, which is a particular history and culture. Constituent goods represent the norms, which allow the formulation of desires and choices. They are moral sources. As Taylor wrote, "My identity is defined by engagements and identifications, which provide the framework that will help me to determine, case by case, what is good or who has merit, or what one should do, or what I approve or disapprove. In other words, it sets the limits wherein I can position myself."

From this angle, culture cannot be defined simply as an instrument serving the well being of individuals or, worse, as a spectacle to be consumed. The relation to culture is not of the associative order. Culture is this *already there*, which will be the background for identity. Therefore, it is a norm that is intrinsically good, and not merely a relatively advantageous knowledge. Community is a privileged place where reciprocal recognition, and therefore self-esteem, have a chance to develop. Each community is first of all a community of meaning, of signification; as such, it ensures a form of communication favorable to individual recognition. Constituent communities provide a way of thinking, a way of being alive. As Lacroix put it, "To declare that a sense of community connects members of a community does not just mean they pursue the same collective goals or have the same feelings, but it also means that they perceive their identity as being in part defined by the community to which they belong."[43] By the same token, the way individuals perceive their identity determines the type of society in which they live.

Communitarian thought counters disengaged reason with incarnate

42. Charles Taylor, "Foucault, la liberté, la vérité," in David Couzens Hoy, ed., *Michel Foucault. Lectures critiques. Foucault en Amérique* (Bruxelles: De Boeck-Wesmael, 1989), p. 118.

43. Lacroix, *Communautarisme versus libéralisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 92. See also Sylvain Santi and Jean Derive, eds., *La communauté. Fondements psychologiques et idéologiques d'une représentation identitaire* (Grenoble: Publications de la MSH-Alpes, 2003).

reflection. It illustrates how unbearable a doctrine that separates the individual from all collective and transcendental values that existed hitherto can be, it defends "the strong thesis that it is absolutely impossible to exist without references: in other words, that the limits within which we live our lives and which give them coherence, must include strong qualitative discriminations."[44] It represents man as an incarnated being, a subject-of-the-world, who cannot be removed from his context without being mutilated. Reduced to his condition of individual, man is no longer free, but just lonelier and therefore more vulnerable. As Sandel put it, "Imagining an individual free of constituent attachment is not looking at a free being, but it is imagining a being with no depth nor personality. On the contrary, immersion in a group is the first condition to realize self-fulfillment." Taylor adds that "liberal society is inhospitable to differences because it cannot accept the real aspirations of the members of distinct societies, which is their survival."[45]

Consequently, an individual can only choose from within a context of choices. Talking about freedom of choice by defining it as a pure affirmation, independent from a preexisting cultural context is nonsense. That is why communitarian authors object to the idea of a rational being in control of his choices, whose self-consciousness comes before his goals. Michael Walzer wrote that "this idealistic vision of the world, where autonomous individuals could freely and without constraints choose to create or sever ties is the perfect example of a false utopia. Sociologists always have found it absurd. . . . No society can survive without forging ties of another nature."[46] For liberal philosophy, the individual is always preexisting to his goals since his freedom supposedly resides in his capacity to dismiss the group to which he belongs. In contrast, the communitarian point of view is that people always determine their goals according to what made them what they are, which means that the community to which they belong, no matter what its nature, is part of them. Like it or not, the background for choices is already there. The individual discovers his goals rather than choosing them, which requires that he know himself. The construction of identity is the result of the discovery by an individual being built of the values and goals that define his existence and that are dependent on specific

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44. Taylor, *Les sources du moi, op. cit.*, p. 45.

45. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalisme. Différence et démocratie* (Paris: Aubier, 1994), p. 83.

46. Michael Walzer, *Raison et passion. Pour une critique du libéralisme* (Belval: Circé, 2003), p. 11.

cultural and socio-historical spaces. Identity is constituted, at least in part, by goals that one discovers thanks to the common social context.

Communitarian thought offers an alternative to the liberal concept of freedom perceived as a separation or secession. "Good use of freedom means expressing in the most genuine way possible one's normative identity, i.e., one is truly free if one's actions reflect the intrinsically good deeds one has set as goals. . . . The better one knows the goal that defines one's identity, the greater one's freedom."[47]

Finally, identity is directly related to certain moral values, which means that the self can only exist in relation with the good. Liberal doctrines emphasize *the right* thing to do (deontological morality), whereas communitarian thought insists on *the good* (aretic morality). This is similar to the classic opposition between *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität* of Hegel's critique of Kant's morality. The primacy of good over just is equivalent to the primacy of a substantial morality based on the idea of intrinsic values over a procedural and formal conception, which promotes the notion of obligation. Consequently, questions can only be considered to be moral if they are rooted in a cultural and socio-historical context, and not in an isolated subject or an abstract reasoning.

The definition of the common good is not only that it is shareable or shared, but also that what makes it a good can be shared too. It is a good shared *immediately*, a good whose sharing is considered a good. Therefore, a common good is different from a convergent good. Liberal authors define the latter as a good, whose finality is always individual even though it is shared collectively. It is a good specific to a citizen taken individually. This is an all the more untenable definition that there are collective goods, which cannot be divided into individual elements. From a liberal viewpoint, a political community is nothing more than the sum of the goods that individuals are allowed to enjoy. Here, community implies common good and its sharing. It becomes the place where common being exists. Values are not convergent, but common and shared. Communities based on shared values are stronger than those based on interest, because values unite and are easily shared, whereas interest fragments and cannot be easily shared. Common action is not limited to intersubjectivity. The group becomes a collective agent, which will intervene in public life as such. Finally, social institutions play more than an instrumental role; they have a constituent role. "Common spirit stems from common actions and

47. Pélabay, *Charles Taylor, op. cit*., pp. 256-257.

meanings that public institutions represent."[48] That is why the public sphere is more than just a mere contingent grouping of individuals.

Since the relation to a cultural group sets the framework for the agents' options, liberalism, which pretends to guarantee autonomy to individuals, contradicts itself when it refuses to acknowledge those relations, because this refusal limits their autonomy. Modernity concentrated on allowing individuals to free themselves from fixed social roles and traditional identities by promoting the ideal of individual autonomy. This way freedom is in contradiction with culture: the more clearly one broke away from the determinations of birth, the greater the freedom. That the connection to the original culture is irrational and alienating has been frequently repeated and restated. It is nonetheless questionable, as Will Kymlicka demonstrated, when he noted that the modern desire for freedom does not weaken collective cultural identities, but, on the contrary, it stimulates them: "People who consider that autonomy is important also consider that national culture is important, because national cultures build the context, in which they can best develop and exercise their autonomy."[49]

Cultural identity does not in principle limit individual freedom and connections do not mean imprisonment. It is possible to widely criticize one's community of origin, but this criticism is inevitably rooted in the relation with the community. (One can hate France and at the same time, be French, but it is still as a Frenchman that one will hate it). That means that rejecting a connection is just another way of expressing it. As Adorno amusingly declared: "one has to have a tradition in order to hate it."[50] Even a citizen of the world can only express this option as a citizen of some part of the world; feeling oneself from nowhere can only be expressed as coming from somewhere.

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Hegel was the first to emphasize the importance of recognition in

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48. *Ibid*., p. 218.

49. Will Kymlicka, "Modernity and National Identity," in Shlomo Ben-Ami, Yoad Peled and Alberto Spektorowski, eds., *Ethnic Challenges to the Modern Nation State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p. 12. Kymlicka is one of those liberal authors who plead for recognition of cultural identities from the heritage of political liberalism, with the reservation, however, that these identities do not destabilize the foundations of liberal ideology. Cf. his essay on *La citoyenneté multiculturelle* (Paris: Découverte, 2001).

50. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Réflexions sur la vie mutilée* (Paris: Payot, 2003), pp. 67-68.

1807: complete self-consciousness calls for the recognition by others. The notion of *recognition* is essential as far as identity is concerned, both at the personal and the collective level. Lamizet adds: "Be it the constitution of one's own identity through the experience of self-recognition in the mirror or the recognition of the other through the experience of communication, the process of recognition is the foundation for the symbolic dimension of identity."[51] This need has always existed, but it has become more acute with the emergence of modernity, because identity, which is not based on hierarchical position, relies even more on the recognition of others. Identity and recognition are different (e.g., there exist not-recognized identities), but linked. As Savidan noted, following Hegel's thought, one should not believe "that identity appears first, followed by the question of its recognition, but that recognition is part of the definition of that identity, since it 'materializes' this identity."[52] So, recognition completes identity. There is a natural correlation: identity becomes complete through recognition. That is why Taylor defines it as the "condition for a successful identity."

Recognition of the other implies that he is different and that similarities stem first from the fact that everyone is different. So recognition is not eliminating the difference and assimilating the other with the same, as Levinas believed, but it is rather an accepted *otherness.* From this angle, equality of rights does not mean reduction of the other into the same. On the contrary, it includes the right to be different. The equal remains different, which means that equality is different from sameness. Universality is not what remains once differences have been removed (because, in this case, there is nothing left), but it is something that feeds on differences and particularities. Since human nature always appears under multiple modalities, human identity is never one, but it is always differentiated. A political and legal interpretation of this basic element leads to the substitution of a regime of similarities by a regime respectful of differences. Durkheim had already evoked a solidarity deriving from differences, rather than from similarities. This proposition can be translated in more contemporary terms into the idea that recognition of differences is exactly what is most able to unite people.

The problem of the recognition of identities is strongly resurfacing nowadays because of the crisis affecting the Western nation-state. In the post-modern era, the great project of a unified, controlled space built from

51. Lamizet, *Politique et identité*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
52. Savidan, "La reconnaissance des identités culturelles," *op. cit.*, p. 233.

the top down is strongly challenged. Zygmunt Bauman noted that "the great identities meticulously built by the nation-states are collapsing. . . . The building of identity, and moreover the maintenance of identity, has become, under those circumstances, a makeshift job, without any obvious workshops or plant directors. It seems that the production of identity, like the rest of industry, has been deregulated and privatized."[53] In the general context of fading points of reference, the nation-state is no longer successful in integrating groups, nor in (re-)creating social ties. It no longer provides members of society with a feeling of unity, with a purpose in life or death, i.e., a reason to sacrifice one's personal interest, or even one's life to a reality or a notion greater than one's own individuality. It appears to be an abstract, bureaucratic structure, removed from real life. This evolution encourages all kinds of particular affirmations. The need for identity "tends to become stronger (and more disjunctive as in the past) since it has become obvious that the nation-states have failed in their roles of producer and provider of identity."[54] National identities are disintegrating in favor of other forms of identity. The more "national identity" is weakening, the more societies look for alternative communities providing identity.

Above all, identity has become a political problem. Since the goal of recognition is to be recognized by all, the public sphere alone is able to provide the right environment. Identity then combines all actions and practices, which allow *political* recognition in the public place. That is why the protection of those identities (cultural, linguistic, religious, sexual, etc.), i.e., what Irving Fetscher called "the right to be myself"[55] — plays such an important role in current social and political conflicts.

The goal of this demand for recognition is to escape a situation where differences are relegated to the private sphere, where therefore, it inevitably becomes dominated by public power. It expresses the desire to inscribe into the space of communication and sociability an identity, which has hitherto been denied the capabilities and powers of a political entity. As Lamizet wrote: "Identity only has relevance and, respectively, institutional credibility, if it gains recognition and accreditation in the public space: its institutional value comes from the authority of a signifier."[56] So, the definition of public space as a space of indistinction is unequivocally being challenged by requests for identity. They suggest replacing a "neutral" public space,

53. Bauman, *La vie en miettes, op. cit*., pp. 216-217.

54. *Ibid*., p. 259.

55. Irving Fetscher, *Arbeit und Spiel. Essays zur Kulturkritik und Sozialphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983), pp. 146-165.

56. Lamizet, *Politique et identité, op. cit.*, p. 58.

which does not recognize specific relations, by a new public space, which would be structured by them. At the same time, such demands show egalitarianism to be hostile to differences as it renders a standardizing vision of the world, which in turn is nothing else but a cultural principle disguised as a universal principle. Requests for identity no longer contend with a moral and political universalism, which has too often been the forefront for undisclosed practices of domination. We should incorporate a true policy of recognition of the differences into the organization of society, because this recognition represents the foundation of social ties. The path to social justice leads not only through redistribution, but also through recognition.[57] It calls for *a policy of recognition* from the authorities.[58]

Such policy necessarily relies on mutual recognition, or reciprocity: the one whose difference has been recognized has to recognize the one who recognized him. In addition, a policy of recognition should not serve as an excuse for relativism. To respect the right to be different does not mean to renounce any possibility for moral judgment of this difference, because if all values are equal, nothing has value. It means avoiding that this judgment arbitrarily becomes universal and it means handling it cautiously when it comes to judge it by the law.

Today, there are four main identity groups: the largest one involves cultural groups (regionalists and separatists, endangered populations, religious minorities, etc.), followed by attribution and imputation groups, groups of volunteers and lobbyists, and religious groups. Mutual identification is what allows their existence. All of them have recognizable social markers, which attracts individuals to join them. These markers entail social expectations, according to which the members of the group are supposed to think, act and behave. They have an objective and a subjective dimension. They can originate from the group itself or they can be imposed from the outside in a hostile manner. In this case, the general attitude within the group will be to try to position itself so that the negative social markers can be transformed into positive markers (e.g., "gay pride" replaces the degrading stigma of "queer," the beggars now proudly

57. Cf. Axel Honneth, "Recognition or Redistribution? Changing Perspectives on the Moral Order of Society," in Scott Last and Mike Featherstone, eds., *Recognition and Difference* (London: Sage Publ., 2002), pp. 43-55.

58. Cf. Amy Gutman, ed., *Multiculturalism and the "Politics of Recognition,"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in Amy Gutman, ed., *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

claim the name previously used to vilify them, African-Americans state that "*black is beautiful*," etc.). So, while social markers are relatively invariable, what changes is the value granted to them.

In the past, ethnicity had almost no political or existential relevance, but today it is one of those social markers. Ethnic components are more than just of bio-anthropological nature; they are also cultural components, that could become elements of social differentiation and categories pertinent for political action, because they are (relatively) stable. As Alain Policar wrote: "They have even been accepted as a new paradigm for social sciences, putting an emphasis on the preservation of loyalty toward communities in modern societies and on the heterogeneity of traditional societies. This double acknowledgement permits us to rectify two presumptions: first, that ethnic groups constitute homogeneous groups, and second, that ethnic ties are bound to disappear with modernization."[59]

These groups of identity should not be confused with interest groups. The difference lays in the fact that there is no need for mutual identification among the members (any individual can join an interest group as long as he shares the same instrumental interest with the rest of the group). Of course, identity groups can also defend the interests of their members, and that is what they do most of the time, but this activity is only a consequence of the group's existence: it is not its *raison d'être*. In this case, interest is not the fundamental element; it is only a by-product of the identity of the group. Amy Gutman summarizes this difference: "The politics of identity groups is linked to the idea of what people *are*, whereas the politics of interest groups is related to the idea of what people *want*."[60]

The presence of identity groups obviously is a problem for contemporary liberal democracies. These groups often represent a resurgence of a way of being together, of a form of community, to which modernity had presumably put an end. Modernity had dealt with organic ties as limitations that every man had to overcome in order to achieve freedom. Nevertheless, today a lot of people spontaneously join communities, without giving up their freedom. The prevailing ideology remains suspicious, and is often decidedly hostile toward identity groups, while easily accepting interest groups. It perceives the latter as pacifistic in nature, and the former as inherently conflictual, simply because interests are always negotiable, whereas

59. Alain Policar, "De l'ethnique en République," in *Libération* (Nov. 6, 2003), p. 35. On ethnicity as a concept, cf. Vernon Van Dyke, *Human Rights, Ethnicity and Discrimination* (Westport: Greenwood, 1985).

60. Amy Gutman, *Identity and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 15.

values are not (ignoring by the same token that, if the individual chooses to identify himself with other individuals, the perception of his own interest will change). That is why this ideology accentuates the sometimes real flaws of the communities and gladly offers an almost pathological vision of them.

Identity demands are therefore frequently treated as a "reactionary" phenomenon, an "irrational" aspiration to return to the past, to get back to a bygone "stage," or as an attempt to be exonerated from the "common law" by trying to create a "state within the state." The need for recognition is often regarded as a regressive idea, a symbol for political, social and moral backwardness, and as a threat to the unity of the political society. The same hostility applies to the notion of ethnicity, which is supposed to confine social life to "determinisms," limiting the freedom of agents. The all-relative contrast between inherited identities and chosen identities is also used to challenge the former by recognizing only the legitimacy of the latter. Inherited identities shaped by familial legacy are discredited because they refer to simple "nature."

Refusal to recognize identities has been especially prominent and constant in the "republican" tradition of French Jacobinism. While it transferred collective differences to the private sphere in order to contain them, it redefined the nation as a post-communitarian space, i.e., as a political space based on the normative principle of cultural and ethnic homogeneity. The idea of "citizenship" lost its specific substratum (one is always a member of a given society), and was given a "universal" dimension. From this perspective, every polity implies a clean sweep; each attempt to reaffirm a particularity becomes a secession attempt. To be "republican" would mean to refuse differences, at least their political visibility, i.e., their recognition in the public sphere. It would mean to privilege similarities over differences, drawing a superficial parallel between difference and particular interest on one side, and similarity and common interest on the other side. I.e., the "Republic" can only be based on the omission or the negation of communities.

Elisabeth Badinter draws a clear parallel between Republic, universalism and indifference toward differences[61]: "For me, the Republic is not an empty word, neither is universalism. Every time one advocates differences rather than similarities, one touches on a process of confrontation. I do not demand the right to be different; I demand the right to indifference. One has to escape the limits of biological, cultural and social determinisms." This reminds of Montesquieu: "I call virtue in the republic the love for the country, i.e., the love for equality!"

The current denunciation of demands for identity, in the name of the "Republic" or of globalization is a repetition of the Jacobin assimilation discourse, which saw the will to maintain traditional identities as equivalent to a refusal of "progress." The arguments against "communitarianism" used nowadays are exactly the same that were used earlier to oppress minorities or to eradicate regional cultures and languages. The paradox of this fight against particularities lies in the fact that, historically, it has always been waged in the name of a connection that is just as specific, but was presented as universal, and relied on its alleged universality to legitimate its designs for assimilation or domination. It is obvious in the Republic's fight against regionalisms. As Savidan notes, "Brittany's identity has not been negated in the name of the Ile de France, but in the name of reason, progress, freedom, equality and the universality of the Law."[62]

The assimilation of republican values with "universal" values should not fool anyone. The attitude, which opposes the "Republic" to "community" identities, is only a linguistic trick. In reality, it means privileging connections, chosen by only a few, over inherited connections. To proclaim that republican identity should prevail over all others is a way of saying that the connection to the nation supersedes any other connections. As Alain Touraine noted, "The goal is to eliminate differences and real social and cultural identities, and to place the relation to the nation above everything else."[63] Implicitly, it is a zero sum game where anything granted to specific identities would take away from the "Republic." Common law is not perceived as what exceeds and includes duly recognized distinctive identities, but as what permits ignoring or eliminating them. On the question of this republican formalism, Savidan asks: "Does such an attitude not run the risk of depoliticizing society even more by estab-

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61. "Qui menace la République?" debate with Alain Touraine, in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (June 19, 2003), pp. 26-28. In 1973, Badinter expressed a radically different view. In a commentary on Tocqueville, "Le droit à la différence," in *Combat*, (Feb. 19, 1973), she wrote: "For Tocqueville, freedom supposes first of all the possibility and the acceptance of difference. Does that mean that one has to give up trying to reconcile the equality of rights and the right to freedom? The charges against our society, which denounce the same problem in a different language, show that the question still exists. Some contemporary sociologists — and prominent ones, too — have elaborated on this debate, which Tocqueville opened. Under the guise of equality is hidden a deep desire for uniformity which is not innocuous. Today, it is hard to resist the desire to efface the differences between our culture and others, to reduce the other to a part of us. . . . Claude Lévi-Strauss rightly denounced 'the worldly civilization, which destroys the old particularities, of which the honor of having created aesthetic values, which has taken its toll.'"

62. Savidan, "La reconnaissance des identités culturelles," *op. cit.*, p. 234.

63. Debate with Badinter, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

lishing a citizenship based on the model of an abstract, generic humanity that empirical individuals find hard to invest?"[64] All it takes to get out of this dilemma is to understand that the nation with its necessary common law can also recognize different identities, it can (re-)build them, instead of ignoring or destroying them.

The recurrent idea that differences, and consequently, their recognition would be a source of conflict is just as doubtful. Similarities also generate conflicts, if only through mimetic rivalry. Moreover, as Claude Lévi-Strauss noted, next to differences resulting from distance, "there are those, just as important, that arise from proximity: desire to oppose, to distinguish one's self, to be one's self."[65] In several respects, similarity galvanizes differences. But, above all, as Tocqueville had already noted, it is the denial of recognition that is intrinsically conflictual. Historical experience reveals it clearly: the refusal to entitle demands for identity provokes aggressive tensions, convulsive expression, and all the evils usually associated with their plain acceptation. Pierre-André Taguieff defines "communitarism" as a socio-political project, whose goal is to subject members of a specific group to the norms that are supposed to be specific to that group."[66] Elsewhere, he states that "multiculturalism means imposing on each individual a group identity, determined at birth and defined by his origins."[67] At most, that definition applies to caricatures of belonging. It aims at surreptitiously disguising the *right* to be different as a *duty* to belong, which is completely different. A right is not an obligation. The right to be different is not a matter of "submission" or "obligation," it is only the freedom, given to those who want it, to build themselves on the basis of what they are (or what they think they are), to intervene in public life without having to renounce their origins. Of course, some "advocates of identity" have taken this to an extreme, interpreting any distance from the group as treason. Numerous surveys show that the demands for recognition expressed nowadays do not correspond to a will for separation, but rather to a desire for integration on the basis of a recognized identity. In this respect, Tzvetan Todorov is right to write that "difference is good because it opens the door to universality."[68]

The "republican" champions also argue that a society that recognizes

64. Savidan, "La reconnaissance des identités culturelles," *op. cit.*, p. 240.
65. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race et histoire* (Paris: Gonthier, 1968), p. 17.
66. Pierre-André Taguieff, in *Le Figaro* (July 17, 2003).
67. Pierre-André Taguieff, *Résister au bougisme* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2001), p. 48.
68. Tzvetan Todorov, "Du culte de la différence à la sacralisation de la victime," in *Esprit* (June 1995), p. 97.

differences can no longer refer to the notion of general interest or common good. The truth, however, is that it is liberal society that denies such a notion because it only wants to recognize individuals. Medieval society, based on differences, stressed most fervently the notion of common good. The fact that individuals, whatever their other connections might be, have to submit to the general law does not imply that that general law should consider their other connections to be insignificant or non-existent. Experience also contradicts the classic argument that recognition of communities would automatically cause the crumbling of trans-community solidarities, and would weaken citizenship due to the escalation of demands and a tendency to dissociation or disintegration. In the US, the recognition of distinctive communities did not undermine American patriotism; in Europe, countries, which institutionalized delegation of power to regions, have not become victims of a devastating balkanization.

Contrary to the position of "republican" formalists, communities do not endanger the Republic, but individualist fragmentation, associated with ambient Jacobinism, which engenders pathological community affirmations does. Communitarianism is the logical consequence of a society, which refuses to recognize demands for identity, of its malfunctioning, and not the reason for the disintegration of the Republic. It is less an expression of rejection than it is a reaction of disappointment. Anomie, resulting from the "neutrality" of liberal societies, pushes communities to assert themselves as exclusive groups, excluding each other. Indeed, the denial of recognition pushes groups to assert themselves, but they no longer feel bound to a common structure and law, and no longer see the necessity for a common argumentative space. This is why a policy of recognition of the differences, associated with an extension of democratic participation and a regeneration of the notion of citizenship based on the principle of subsidiarity, is essential. Far from the idea that the existence of identity groups is incompatible with democracy, the recognition of communities can, on the contrary, create the conditions for a better participation in public life. Democracy consists in recognizing the political equality of the citizens and not in denying particularities, as long as the legal attributions they induce remain compatible with the law. Diversity cannot continue to stay outside of citizenship, and citizenship has to stop being synonymous with uniformity.

5

Most of the conceptual tools used to talk about individual identity can

easily be transposed onto collective identities. It is because groups constitute specific organisms and because, in addition, the personal identity of a subject is built around his social environment.[69] In everyone, individual and collective identities are indissolubly mixed. Nobody realizes his destiny alone. An individual cannot be considered an absolute object. The being of the human being is not limited to the *topos* of the individual, but extends to the common environment, which contributes to his constitution. Human existence is, first of all, an extension toward the outside, as demonstrated by Heidegger's notion of *Ausser-sich-sein*. To find out who I am, I first have to know where I am. As Merleau-Ponty recognized, the *body* is a synthesis of body and social environment. By the same token, citizenship implies fellow-citizenship: citizenship is not the attribute of an individual, but the attribute of the fellow-citizen. The full definition of the identity of an individual necessarily includes his life context, the space he shares with others, because he will define himself according to the perception he has of it. The group always transfers a part of its identity to the individual through the language and the institutions.[70] It is impossible to define an *I* or a *We* without referring to other than the *I* or the *We.*

"I" implies existence, but it is not enough to be an identity. Of course, identity is what gives meaning to existence, but, since existence is never purely individual, the question of identity necessarily takes on a social dimension. Even the legal identity of an individual is not limited to his civil status, but is linked to several types of contracts (marriage, work, etc.), which are partly regulated by law, but which also depend on the evolution of law and social relations. Finally, the notion of person only makes sense in relation to anthropology. That is why identity has to be reflected upon in a context of social network. Identity is not created only in connection with the subject, but also with the identity of others.

Identity cannot be limited to identifications. To study it in such a static manner means to reify it. In order to understand identity in its dynamic reality, one has to view it as a permanent process, not merely related to the identifications of the subject, but also subjected to outside pressures and influences. Both for the individual and for the group, identity implies constant back and forth between the feelings inside and the perception of the outside. It is because there are always two dimensions to

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69. On the similarity of the problems of individual and collective identity, cf. Kolakowski, "On Collective Identity," *op. cit.*, pp. 7-15.

70. Cf. Mary Douglas, who argues that "the institution decrees identity." See *Comment pensent les institutions* (Paris: La Découverte, 1979), pp. 73-84.

the identity of a subject: one that makes him a specific subject, another that makes him a social subject.[71] The relationship with others always constitutes the foundation of one's identity and it will support the subject in his symbolic experience of sociability.

Of course, the relationship with others can be either emphatic or hostile. Giovanni Sartori is right to say that "the otherness is a necessary complement to identity: we are what we are, the way we are, depending on what we are not and the way we are not."[72] Nevertheless, even a bad relationship is first of all a relationship. Marcel Mauss demonstrated that even a gift brings identity into play, because it "is not limited to giving something to someone," but it "means to give one's self to someone through the mediation of something." That is why a gift is based on reciprocity. A gift given to someone, who is not supposed to return the favor, is a gift that does not recognize the identity of the person who receives it. This is at the core of the problem of recognition.

But this is also at the core of the problem of identity, because each identity, every awareness of identity supposes the existence of others. (e.g., Robinson on his island has no identity; he gains one when Friday arrives). Identities are forged through social interaction, so that there is no identity outside of relations with others. Ethnic identity rests on the same idea: it is never purely endogenous, but is "based on the categorization by others and the identification to a particular group" (Alain Policar). Since identity is language, every language implies a dialogue. The dialogue itself contains its share of possible conflict, in the sense that it is a confrontation.

Every identity implies a dialogue. This means that the self can only become autonomous if it has an identity related to the dialogue. But that also means that the other is part of one's identity, because he helps reach its realization.

Individualism only envisions the relation to the other from an instrumental and interested point of view; the only justification for social relations is that it increases one's interest and immediate self-fulfillment. From a communitarian point of view, social relations are part of identity. As Taylor writes, the other is also "an element of my internal identity."[73]

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71. Cf. Pierre Moessinger, *Le jeu de l'identité* (Paris: PUF, 2000); Hélène Chauchat, "Du fondement social de l'identité du sujet," in Hélène Chauchat and Annick Durand-Delvigne, eds., *De l'identité du sujet au lien social. L'étude des processus identitaires* (Paris: PUF, 1999), pp. 7-26.

72. Giovanni Sartori, *Pluralisme, multiculturalisme et étrangers. Essai sur la société multiethnique* (Paris: Editions des Syrtes, 2003), p. 43.

73. Charles Taylor, *Le malaise de la modernité* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), p. 42.

The group and the individual both need to be confronted by "significant others." Therefore, it is nonsense to believe that identity would be better preserved without this confrontation; actually, it is the opposite: confrontation makes identity possible. Other subjects make a subject become subject. One cannot respect the relations of others, if one does not assume one's own, and one cannot assume one's own without respecting the others.

Pierre Nora noted that the more identity references disappear, the more the idea of identity becomes a collective notion, a collective form of self-definition.[74] That is no accident. Collective identity is at the same time a totality and a combination. It allows self-recognition and self-production, even if things change. It is where social semantic is produced.

Ethno-psychology studies collective identities and their ties to territorial roots; their primary form is the ethnic group. This type of collective identity is usually called ethno-type. It is a system that conveys meaning, a system of significations, which connotes the original articulation of politics, economics and ideology in dialectic relation with a given environment and the identity of other groups. The ethno-type, which of course is only an ideal-type, can be studied either systematically as a transformational structure (the ethno-type filters *"inputs"* and *"outputs"*), or in a semiotic way, i.e., as a group of signifiers and signified.

Collective action is inseparable from the relation to the good (what has value as opposed to what does not), which positions the individuals within a particular cultural framework. Culture is a symbolic mediation of social relations (it inscribes identity in the field of symbolic practices, which are propagated into the public space). It is also the place where identities are inscribed; culture structures relations as well as all social practices used to display, to exchange or to make one's identity heard. Bernard Lamizet defines it as "the forms and practices, which inscribe social relations into the real experience of those who represent it or claim the social connection, which grounds them in the symbolic practices that give meaning to their existence."[75] So, naturally, identity gains recognition in the public space through the forms of cultural mediation.

6

It is a common mistake to define identity as an essence based on intangible attributes. Identity is not a static essence or reality. It is a sub-

74. Pierre Nora, "Pour une histoire au second degré," in *Le débat* (November-December 2002), pp. 24-31.

75. Lamizet, *Politique et identité, op. cit.*, p. 9.

stance, a dynamic reality and therefore it constitutes a repertoire. Since it is not a homogenous, continuous, univocal element, it can only exist in a dynamic, dialectic logic of ever-changing difference.

Identity expresses more than a particularity or the permanence of that particularity. Identity viewed within a notion of continuity will quickly illustrate its limits: continuity also involves change, just as defining oneself implies a relation to the other. Taylor emphasizes: "What we *are* can never solve the problem of our condition, because we are always changing and *becoming different*."[76] First of all, one is what one has *become* and this is the base from which one projects the future. So there is no identity without transformation; keeping in mind that those two terms are not contradictory. An example from the organic world is the body: from the beginning of one's existence, the body has always been *his* body, yet all its cells have been renewed several times. It is no different for cultures and people. It is a wrong idea that peoples "always remain the same," even when history puts them through formidable changes and mutations. The right idea is that they have a *specific* capacity to change. So, it is not so much that identity is permanent, but it is the instance that defines and attributes this identity that is permanent. Identity is not what never changes, but, on the contrary, it is what allows one to constantly change without giving up who one is.

Paul Ricoeur makes the right distinction between *idem* identity and *ipse* identity, "sameness" and "ipseity."[77] The permanence of the collective being through constant changes (*ipse* identity) cannot be reduced to the idea of repetition (*idem* identity). Real identity does not refer to sameness, which is a certain order of things, but to the *ipseitas*, which defines the statute of the living. *Ipseitas* is the differential value. Identity preserves *ipseitas* through all the changes.

Furthermore, identity is always multi-faceted because, if common experience is the driving force behind human societies, this experience itself is never one-dimensional (hence the "polytheism of values" mentioned by Max Weber). Everyone belongs to multiple groups (linguistic, cultural, national, political, professional, sexual, etc.), which are not always compatible.

For the ideology of modernity, identity is entirely a problem of personal choice: birth has nothing to do with it, it is only a matter of choice. This is true and false at the same time. At birth, something is already

76. Taylor, *Les sources du moi, op. cit*., p. 71.
77. Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

there, a background, which is the foundation for self-construction; but it is not a restrictive force. There is free will, but there are also limits to that free will. This is just another way of saying that determinism cannot be escaped, but that no determinism is entirely determining.

On the other hand, it is true that the progressive dissolution of organic relations and the ensuing loss of references have made more true the fact that the individual himself has to intervene to make his own choice. Consequently, if "the subjective and the objective are two intimately linked sides of the same process towards identity,"[78] it is important to examine how the subjective and the objective sides of identity merge and unite.

Subjective identity is the one that any instance, individual subject or group, ascribes to him. Objective identity consists either in the identity ascribed to this instance by its spatial and temporal environment, or in a part of subjective identity that can be proven to be real. There is absolutely no doubt that the subjective part has nowadays become fundamental. As Taylor states: "things that were earlier centered around an outside reality, e.g. the law or nature, are now depending on our capacity to choose."[79] Pélabay adds: "In the future, identity will be the result of negotiation between my original creation and my history, the group I belong to, the tradition, i.e., everything that 'other meaning producers' (*donneurs de sens*) have passed on to me. Which means that, even if I strictly conform to tradition, my identity still needs final recognition on my part."[80]

Of course, this last point is essential. It means that the connection to a group, even if it is inherited, will not be a marker of one's identity, unless one accepts or wants to consider it as such. Just being French, Italian or German will not by itself determine one's identity. It will only determine it if belonging to a nation or to any other entity is the decisive criterion for one's thoughts and actions. Being a member of a people, a class, an ethnic group is completely irrelevant if this membership has no meaning for the person. It could determine some thoughts and behaviors, but only subconsciously. It could help others identify the individual, but it will not identify him in his own eyes. It will not be a conscious action as long as one does not regard it as a potential conscious action, i.e., as long as the individual has not accepted, chosen or wanted it to be that.

So, subjective identity implies that one has the necessary autonomy to

78. Jacques Berque, "Identités collectives et sujets de l'histoire," in Guy Michaud, ed., *Identités collectives et relations inter-culturelles* (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1978), p. 14.

79. Taylor, *La malaise de la modernité, op. cit.*, p. 87.

80. Pélabay, *Charles Taylor, op. cit*., p. 88.

perceive, evaluate and interpret himself. One decides what is important: of course, such decisions are grounded in an inherited background, in a context given before, but it is the individual's reflexive and hermeneutic capacities that determine what criteria or values to be privileged. Here again, things are as important as one chooses them to be.

This observation puts in perspective the opposition between inherited identities and chosen identities. There are unquestionably numerous associations, which cannot be subject to choice, according to the liberal doctrine's definition of that term. They are the "involuntary associations" mentioned by Michael Walzer, when he writes that community life "in numerous fields is not designed by a liberal hero or an individual free to choose his own allegiance. On the contrary, a lot of us are already members of groups, which could prove to be determining."[81] Family and gender are of course among the most important of those "involuntary associations," but there is also nation, or country, social class, culture, moral values or religion. "Because of their nature and the value we give them, involuntary associations play a significant role in our decision to voluntarily join other groups. Historically and biographically, the former precede the latter, and form the ineluctable background for social life with or without freedom and equality."[82] This observation is absolutely true, but, nevertheless, those inherited involuntary associations are not absolute. They limit, but do not eliminate one's capacity to free oneself from them. Even identity related to gender or filiation only becomes an element of identity if one decides to consider it as such.

Well known is René Char's wonderful phrase: "no testament precedes our heritage." A testament shares the inheritance. But, with humans, each beneficiary has to determine the nature of his share. To inherit means not only to identify oneself with the inheritance, but to determine the means to appropriate it. One pursues the inheritance, but also tries to shape it through his own perception of it. This shaping is a narrative process. For the individual, as well as for the group, the relation to oneself is never immediate. It passes through a series of representations and narrations that one offers to oneself. Alasdair MacIntyre shows very well that the unity of human life can be assimilated to the unity of a narrative quest: "I can only answer the question "what should I do?" if I can answer the preceding question: which story or stories do I belong to?"[83]

Objective or subjective identity both always contain a premise. It is

81. Walzer, *Raison et pasion, op. cit.*, p. 7.
82. *Ibid*., pp. 33-34.

not only an object one has to discover, but one also has to interpret it. As Dilthey, Gadamer or Ricoeur had noted, human life is fundamentally interpretative, which means it is not content with the description of objects; it tries to give them meaning. Taylor reminds us that a man is "an animal that interprets itself."[84] He is part of a hermeneutic circle, which is a space of common significations. He belongs to the world, which constitutes *him* and to the world which *he* constitutes. Identity follows the same rule. It is a partly implicit definition of oneself that the individual develops and redefines throughout his life, through an absolutely vital process. Identity is fundamentally of a narrative and auto-narrative nature. Its real subject is the narrator himself.

Similar to the narrative self, collective identity is based and evolves around the self-representations it produces. Far from an eternal essence or a fixed given, it narrates itself using a continuous process of self-definition. To have an identity means to be able to put it in a narrative form: a form, which "unveils" identity in the Heideggerian sense of the term, i.e., always preserving some level of opacity and dissimulation. Therefore the question "who am I?" cannot be simply answered by giving a name or mentioning one's lineage. "Our answer will be the recognition of what is essential for us. Knowing who I am implies that I know where I situate myself. In other words, my identity draws the limits within which I can take a position."[85] "We are 'selves' only because some questions are important to us. What I am as myself, i.e., my identity, is essentially defined by the way things are meaningful for me."[86]

One's identity is inseparable from the definition of what is or is not important. It expresses that part that one chooses to privilege over another. This choice is completely subjective. For instance, a feminist can very well define herself as "first of all a woman" (meaning that sex or gender determine her opinions and behaviors); but other women will not necessarily agree. This way of defining oneself of course shapes the role one decides to play. And, inversely, the role assigned within the family, society, workplace, etc. influences the way one perceives one's identity. That is why the notions of identity and role are linked.

Taylor talks about "strong evaluations" and "constituent goods" or "hypergoods" to name what "matters." "Constituent goods" are different

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83. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Après la vertu. Etude de théorie morale* (Paris: PUF, 1997), p. 210.
84. Charles Taylor, *La liberté des modernes* (Paris: PUF, 1997), p. 152.
85. Taylor, *Les sources du moi, op. cit.*, p. 46.
86. *Ibid*., p. 54.

from material goods or from goods that just meet a need because they cannot be assimilated to simple preferences, as they are fundamental to identity: "To formulate a constituent good means to clarify what the good life one chooses really is."[87] "Strong evaluations" are not negotiable and cannot be limited to a simple preference or a simple desire. They are not related to well being, but to the core of individuals. They concern what gives a reason to live or die, i.e., they concern values, which are considered *intrinsically* good. Strong evaluations represent moral goals with an intrinsic value.

Because identity implies the recognition of what is important, it has a moral impact. "My identity defines the limits of my moral world. It helps me to determine what is really essential for me and what is less important. I know now what touches me deeply and what is less significant."[88] The word "moral" here refers to values: identity is inseparable from an idea of good. It is a moral concept subjected to the good, because it identifies what has more and what has less value.

Identity seems to be linked to a hermeneutics of the self, to a work of narration destined to produce a "place", a space in time, which gives meaning and forms the condition to appropriate oneself. From a phenomenological point of view, where nothing is ever immediately given, but there is always an intermediate, the object can only proceed from a constituent elaboration, an hermeneutic narration characterized by the affirmation of a point of view, which retrospectively reorganizes events in order to give them meaning. "The story builds narrative identity by building the identity of the narrated story. The identity of the story establishes the identity of the character."[89] To defend one's identity is more than ritually enumerating historic references or events that are supposed to be fundamental, but understands identity as something that remains in the game of differentiations, not as the *same,* but as the *peculiar* way of constantly changing.

So there is no point in choosing the identity *idem* over the identity *ipse*, or vice versa. But we have to grasp their reciprocal relations through an organizing narration, which will acknowledge self-comprehension as well as the comprehension of others. Recreating the conditions under which it becomes possible to produce such a story constitutes the appropriation of one's self. But the latter is never fixed, because collective subjec-

87. *Ibid*., p. 392.

88. Charles Taylor, "Le fondamental dans l'histoire," in Guy Laforest and Philippe de Lara, eds., *Charles Taylor et l'interprétation de l'identité moderne* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), p. 40.

89. Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre, op. cit.*, p. 175.

tivation is always the product of a choice rather than an action, and an action rather than a "fact." A people survives thanks to its ability to be narrated, appropriating itself through successive interpretations, becoming a subject while narrating itself and avoiding becoming an object in the narration of others. As Philippe Forget writes: "An identity is always a relation to one's self, a self-interpretation or an interpretation of others, an interpretation of one's self by others. At the end, it is one's story, elaborated in a dialectic relation with the other that completes human history and transfers a collectivity to history. The narrative act allows personal identity to endure, combining stability and transformation. To exist as a subject is dependent on the narrative action. Personal identity of an individual or of a people is built and maintained by the movement of the story, by the dynamism of the intrigue, which grounds the narration as Ricoeur states."[90]

7

Identity is problematic in many ways. As a rule, consciousness of identity implies a natural preference for those who are members of the same group. This preference is at the roots of friendship as Aristotle defines it, and which has been criticized early on by Lactance and Saint Augustine, who believe that any preference towards some creatures, equal in God's eyes, is an impious discrimination. ("Why do you select people?" Lactance reproaches Cicero, who wrote a treatise on friendship.) Sociobiology explains that preference by citing genetic closeness (*kin selection*). Nevertheless, identity and belonging to a group are not synonymous. The former cannot be reduced to the latter, and, mainly, conflicts can arise from the fact that one always belongs to multiple groups.

Choices concerning group connections are similar to moral dilemmas: they appear when two or more of the components of one's identity contradict themselves. The accusation of "double allegiance" is well known, but it is in fact rather common. In the event of a conflict, which identity components is privileged? The question also arises about different levels of connection: is one first of all a Briton, a Frenchman or a European? This could engender a moral conflict: if one is French and Christian, but the law contradicts one's beliefs of "natural law," should one abide by the French law because of civic duty, or obey one's conscience and assert one's beliefs? Connections to family, nation, ideologi-

90. Philippe Forget, "Phénoménologie de la menace. Sujet, narration, stratégie," in *Krisis* (April 1992), pp. 6-7.

cal, political or religious group do not necessarily mean that a solution of continuity cannot exist. The question that comes up then is always the same: what part of identity does one consider to be the most determining?

The same problem arises when thinking in terms of "proximity." The most common dilemma is the one opposing "natural," inherited proximity (family, people, ethnic group, nation, etc.) to chosen "ideological" (intellectual, political, philosophical, religious) proximity. If one is Italian (or German) and Christian, does he feel "closer" to a non-Christian, even an atheist, Italian (or German), or "closer" to an Asian or an African Christian? If one is a Trotskyist woman, does she feel closer to a Trotskyist man, or to a Rightist woman? And what if one is a homosexual, Buddhist Canadian? These combinations go on indefinitely. The answers are of course arbitrary. (A French "sovereignist," hostile to the EU is nevertheless European, as is his fellow-countryman, who sees himself first as a European, but also as a Frenchman). They depend on the group to which one feels most connected and most estranged. Feeling closer to someone with whom one shares beliefs and convictions than to a family member means privileging those relations over the logic of filiation (and by doing so, exposing its limits). This is the kind of choice Jesus makes when he says that his real family are his disciples and those who believe in him (Matthew 12, 46-50).

Conflicts related to connection or "proximity" are not textbook examples. In a lot of concrete cases, people have had to make choices according to the situation. And the decisions they made show that inherited, most "natural" of relationships do not automatically win. The Royalists, who chose exile during the French Revolution, obviously felt closer to English, German or Austrian aristocrats than to their revolutionary compatriots. During the German Occupation, French people, who chose to collaborate with Germany, privileged ideological preferences or political convictions over plain national feeling. The same went for French communists, who envisioned the Soviet Union as the "motherland of workers." The working class, which had favored internationalism before, but supported belligerent patriotism during WWI, is a good example of an opposite type of choice. In any case, all of these choices are followed by subsequent justifying rationalizations. But at the root is always the same question: to whom does one feel "closer"? That proves how subjective the notion of "proximity" is.

Other problems are related to the notion of memory. Identity presupposes memory, which is as much an intellectual faculty as it is a collective exercise: it is not a coincidence if the theme of "duty of remembrance"

accompanies the new rising identities. The man or the group who has lost his or its memory cannot apprehend identity in terms of continuity. Memory implies a look back in the past, which in return allows anticipation and a projection into the future. Nobody can survive if there is no clear consciousness that the present is an extension of the past. From that angle, of course, origin becomes especially important, because it represents the starting (or arrival) point of memory.

Nevertheless, this memory should be distinguished from the nostalgia for times past, which are necessarily considered to be better or happier times. Christopher Lasch demonstrated very well the difference between this type of nostalgia, which idealizes the past (the further the better) and the memory necessary for identity: "Nostalgic representations of the past conjure times forever gone, and therefore timeless and unchanged. Nostalgia, in the strict sense of the term, never involves memory, because the past it idealizes remains timeless, fixed in its eternal perfection." Memory, on the contrary, "considers the past, the present and the future as a continuum. It is less concerned with the loss of the past than it is with our permanent debt toward the past; our speaking habits, our moves, our conception of honor, our expectations, our fundamental disposition towards the world around us are reminders of its formative influence."[91]

From an identity point of view, history is an argument of continuity, whereas memory can be defined as the inscription of identity in time. History grounds the identity of social actors by providing knowledge about the inherited forms of their own sociability. It allows them to recognize themselves in the past and to project themselves in the future. Therefore, the way one looks at history can never be neutral, because it provides the symbolic representations of one's identity, which defines individuals as social subjects and as free actors. Identity is a story in itself: it is the story of the specific transformations of one's identity. As Lamizet writes: "Writing and reading history are ways to root in the past one's identity, which is fundamental to the sociability in cultural and political practices. History represents a pile of representations of identity of past times and past protagonists. At the same time, by attributing meaning to the process that forms the political and social structures to which one belongs, it gives a symbolic meaning to one's identity. Herein lies the political dimension of history: in the diffusion of the forms of identity, which give social relations the consistency to allow recognition."[92]

91. Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

Hannah Arendt wrote that "if the past is transmitted as tradition, it has authority. If authority has historic credibility, it becomes tradition."[93] Nevertheless, tradition is not an inalterable instance, which would inspire and go through diverse historic manifestations without being affected by them. Tradition also has a history.

The call for memory (e.g., recalling, preserving the memory, keeping the memory, etc.) is ambiguous. First, memory could be abusive, e.g., when it overtakes history as historians study it. Ricoeur talks about "those abuses of memory, which can turn into commemorations imposed by the political power or by pressure groups."[94] Memory is abusive when it becomes militant and pretends to chronicle historical truth more accurately than history itself, while it is merely the subjective reconstruction of common memories.

Memory can also inhibit identity if it carries too many contradictory elements. It risks burdening itself with too many varied and contradictory things that, far from building an identity, will make it less transparent. The legacy becomes then a meaningless, *neutral* legacy, which could no longer be a guide. But it is precisely because memory tends to avoid such overburden that it is first of all selective, and therefore arbitrary. Memory — and this is its main characteristic as well as its intrinsic limitation — only reflects what narration chooses to remember, the episodes it subjectively believes are the most essential or the more fundamental. Here again is the dialectic of objective versus subjective identity. Approaching history in terms of "memory" is necessarily subjective.

Memory is never complete. It filters, it selects, it chooses what deserves to be remembered and transmitted. It remembers and forgets, transmits and occults. Tradition works the same way. "It makes the distinction between positive and negative, between orthodoxy and heresy, between what is important and demanding in the mass of opinions and what is worthless or simply interesting data."[95] That is exactly what Charles Maurras meant when he wrote that "real tradition is critical, and without those distinctions, the past is useless. In every tradition as well as in every legacy, a reasonable being does and has to eliminate the failures."[96] Tradition sorts out legacy. But what criteria apply and who

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92. Lamizet, *Politique et identité*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
93. Hannah Arendt, "Walter Benjamin," in *Vies politiques* (Paris: Gallimard-Tel, 1986), p. 291.
94. Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire et l'oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 511.
95. Arendt, "Walter Benjamin," *op. cit.*, p. 297.

decides what is positive or negative? Once more, it is the subjective will of the narrator, whose criteria of appreciation obviously predate his view of history. Maurice Barrès' case is an example: first, because starting with "personality cult," he ends up with nationalism, i.e., the "cult of us," which is nothing other than an extension of the former; second, because this strong adept of determinism of "the soil and the dead" chose to plant his roots in a province, which represented only one part of his background. "I am from Lorraine," he told his friends in France. It was true, but only on his mother's side. On his father's side, he came from a long line of people of the Auvergne. His "determinism" is not exempted of a subjective choice, which means that it does not completely determine.

Only a few people were brave enough to claim their entire national legacy, as did Péguy. For some, France is the "eldest daughter of the Church": Clovis, Joan of Arc and Charles Martel are its symbols. For others, France is the country of human rights, of popular revolts, revolutions and working class emancipation. For Christians, European history really begins with Christianity. For pagans, Christianity is nothing else than an ideological superstructure and the Middle Ages have only been Christian in name. But history is an entity, and memory screens it and retains what conforms to its idea of the past and to the image it wants to give in order to give it a *meaning*. Then, it justifies its choices, as did the 1793 revolutionaries, who denounced aristocrats as representatives of the "foreign party" or, as the extreme Right does, who calls "anti-France" the part of history with which it decided not to identify. Of course, those justifications are only a pretense of reality. Memory's selection process of history — be it real, idealized or imagined history — only unveils preferences. From the viewpoint of identity, invoking the past does not mean accepting it as it really was, but as Benjamin argued in his thesis on history, it means "controlling a memory, which comes up at a time of danger."[97]

The quest for origins brings up the same inevitable subjectivity. The search and designation of the "great ancestors" is partly an arbitrary process and partly progressive construction. Montesquieu, following Boulainvilliers talked about "our fathers the Teutons." Augustin Thierry, following Father Dubos countered that the French come from "our ancestors the Gauls." Others prefer referring to Rome (or Jerusalem). Europe

96. Charles Maurras, *Mes idées politiques* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2002).

97. Walter Benjamin, "Sur le concept d'histoire," in *Les temps modernes* (October 1947). The thesis closes with the phrase: "If the enemy is victorious, he would threaten the dead as well. This enemy will not stop winning."

could even be presented as a descendant of Greece (and it would not be wrong). But what kind of Greece? Homer's, Plato's, Pericles' or Socrates'? Who can say which Greece is the most "Greek"? (Flemish painting is very different from Italian painting. But Rembrandt and Rubens are also very different. Which one of the two is the "most Flemish" and why?) The values described in the *Iliad* are different from those in the *Odyssey*. Why not go back further, beyond the Greeks, all the way back to the Indo-Europeans, which would also be perfectly legitimate? If origin is essential, if ancestry provides information about ourselves, then, it is important also to find out about the origins of the Indo-Europeans, whose ancestors, by definition, could not have been Indo-Europeans. Why not go back to the first African Hominoidaes, to the Australopithecus, to the common ancestor of the first primates?

Finally, origin and history can contradict each other, even though they are both very strong sources of identity. Europe, through the course of history, departed from many of its original basic values. In some respects, all of European history can be translated into the history of this distance, which led from institutional holism to modern individualism. But, if this is true, then Europe has constantly betrayed itself. From this perspective, resorting to fundamental values means reducing identity to origin and opposing origin to history. The separation of origin and history inevitably forces (if identity is rooted in origin) a definition of history as the opposite of that identity or the entire identity as opposite to history.[98] Nevertheless, human existence can only be historic. How could one state that Europe's identity has nothing to do with its history? One could, of course, state that Europeans have always been "what they never ceased to be," but that they forgot (or were made to forget). The "European spirit" is then supposed to rest in the unconscious, in a kind of underground, and the job would be to bring it up to the level of consciousness. That is a dualistic vision, at the same time a voluntarist and optimistic one, which goes back to Plato: "the true real" is hidden: it is what one does not see, but what one postulates, contradicting immediate perception. That is easy reassurance. Karl Marx was more realistic when he said that "the way individuals reveal their lives reflects exactly who they are."[99] Nonetheless, reorientation is always possible. Not returning to the sources, but resorting

98. It becomes even more complicated when taking into consideration that some of the founding values, which Europe abandoned, are still living in other cultures that question Western modernity today.

99. Karl Marx, *L'idéologie allemande* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1968), p. 45.

to the sources, which is completely different. Peter Sloterdijk wrote that to recognize European identity "the question should be not "who, and according to which criteria and traditions, belongs to a 'true' Europe?" but "what scenes do they play during decisive historic moments?"[100]

8

As any other notion of reality, identity is susceptible to pathological deformations or modifications. The quest for identity frequently results in such pathologies, when it is denied recognition. Those who refuse to acknowledge this quest justify their behavior by the aggressivity it manifests, by the exclusivism it adopts. Such statements are based on pathological cases, stigmatized in an instrumental fashion, in order to discredit the very concept of identity.[101] The two extremes confront each other in a vicious circle.

The most popular form of pathology of identity is essentialism. Instead of considering identity as a substantial reality, which derives from a permanent narrative of the self, it is conceptualized as an intangible essence. Identity is therefore defined as an attribute which never changes, as that which is shared by all members of the group. The individual becomes only a "type," representative of the supposed traits of the group. The subjective part of identity is reified, transformed into objective identity. The difference is posited as absolute self-sufficiency and determination, in the very same way in which identity opponents present it; the only difference is that they are quite content with this determinism, condemned by others as eminently "carceral." Simultaneously, the universal — often wrongly assimilated with universalism — has been renounced, without realizing that one of the functions of the particular is precisely to attain the universal starting from its particularity; that means that the universal does not have a proper content to itself, and, hence, it could only exist through the particular.[102]

While identity is normally what allows for exchange and dialogue, in that case it only allows for exclusion. The natural preference is trans-

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100. Peter Sloterdijk, *Si l'Europe s'éveille. Réflexions sur le programme d'une puissance mondiale à la fin de l'ère de son absence politique* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2003), p. 51. "To be a European today, in the ambitious sense, means to conceive of the revision of the principle of Empire as the highest mission of both theory and practice" (p. 74).

101. Cf. Brian M. Barry, *Culture and Equality. An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), who splits multiculturalism in the name of egalitarianism. Cf. also Eric Dupin, *L'hystérie identitaire* (Paris: Cherche-Midi, 2004).

102. On this issue, see Ernesto Laclau, *La guerre des identités. Grammaire de l'émancipation* (Paris: La Découverte, 2000).

formed into exclusivism, real differences are transposed into absolute divides, into infranchisable frontiers. Thus occurs the rupture with traditional cosmic or pagan thought, creating irreparable fractures in a universe which can no longer be perceived as unitary or organic, and where everything is interconnected and holds together. The identitarian revendication becomes a pretext to legitimize ignorance, exclusion or oppression. It allows, in an obsidional perspective, to instrumentalize the fear of others' differences. Essentialism obeys the logic of the "positive ghetto," the ghetto where one isolates oneself in order not to have to know others — the only appropriate norms are those of the tribe, as Péguy mockingly affirmed. This is called an "identitarian withdrawal."

In this perspective, the distinction between "us" and "the others," which lies in the foundation of all collective identity, is initially posited in terms of inequality or hostility. Identities are set in an atemporal ideal prototype, barring all exchange instead of promoting it. Difference is absolutized in such a way that dialogue between those who are different is devalorized or presumed impossible. The races and the people are treated as distinct quasi-species, which have nothing in common. To defend identity means to necessarily ignore or despise others: a European, for example, would betray his identity by liking Arab poetry, Japanese theater or African music! That means to deify oneself, to attribute to oneself all the merits, to claim to always be right, to pretend not to owe anything to anyone, to position oneself above all others in a worldview ("us vs. the others") which could only be extremely competitive (classic liberalism) or conflictual (social Darwinism).

This idea is expressed in the perspective of zero gain: what one possesses can only be possessed at the expense of others. Then, we will be us even more, if the others will be less themselves. Our identity is threatened by the identity of the others. It could only affirm itself by eradicating others' identity. Overvalorization on the one hand, devalorization on the other: "between us" becomes the place of the norm and of good, while the external world becomes the place of threat and of evil. Such vision results in the elimination of the third: "Whoever is not with us is against us."

What Edouard Glissant called the "sacred intolerance of the roots" leads paradoxically to the subjugation of difference to the cult of sameness. Faced with the "globalizing" homogenization, one could only oppose the desire for homogeneity to a lesser degree, just like the independent and separatist movements only criticized the Jacobin state in order to defend the right to establish a micro-state, which would still be

the same. The narcissism of the group members is reinforced by the integration of ideals, attributed to the entity in which they recognize themselves. This narcissistic satisfaction allows everyone, including the most mediocre members, to identify themselves with the highest realizations (real or idealized) of their community. This is what Georges Devereux calls "supporting identity."

Biological identities, considered to be unchangeable, are frequently put to the service of ethnocentrism, racism and xenophobia. However, the biological criteria of belonging (to a race, to a species) only have a relative value. Of course they do play a role, but they do not bring out anything specifically human, because human beings have no specific essence outside of their socio-historical existence. Such criteria do not allow to discriminate between friend and enemy in politics, or to determine what notion of the common good should prevail. They also fail to explain rapid political and social evolutions which occur within a homogeneous population. To reduce the definition of who is "like me" to that means to hold on to all other forms of belonging, inherited or chosen. Add to this the fantasms of purity and impurity, the phobia for mixing (all of them rooted in the Bible), which are often used in the perspective of inevitable declines, of an imminent disaster, of the conjunction of future catastrophes: this is nothing other than a reversed ideology of progress: the inevitable only changes direction.

It is true that cultures form distinct worlds, but these worlds can still communicate among themselves. These are not different species. Because they incarnate in their variations the essence of human nature, their representatives can seek to understand and accept each other without renouncing each other. (If cultures constituted separate universes, how would globalization be possible? How could one culture convert to a religion which appeared in the center of another? How could researchers from one culture become specialists in another?)

Rousseau had already warned that identity might degenerate into self-love. Essentialism is clearly rooted in the metaphysics of subjectivity. Essentialism insists on the collective "we" with the same self-centeredness which liberalism attributes to the individual "I." This self-centeredness goes together with a self-valorization which encourages the devalorization of the other. Belonging thus ends up confused with truth, which means that there is no truth anymore. Essentialism applies to the group the same liberal principle which legitimates egoism and interest, and makes them triumph. For liberalism, individual egoism is desirable

and legitimate; for racism, group egoism is such as well. Groups then are attributed the same characteristics of self-sufficience that liberalism imposes on the individual as a self-sufficient monad. (But, on a brighter note, if I have to sacrifice everything for whoever resembles me most, I should concede everything to myself).

Essentialism is a return to Descartes' ontological solitude, with a transfer from the *I* to the *we*. Confusion of the political fact and subjectivity is shaped as a denial of the mirror and a dynamic of exclusion, in the utterly empty hope to guarantee the uniqueness and the purity of belonging. Such an attitude leads to a rejection of all political dialectic of identity. "Political identitarian integrationism consists in no longer founding involvement on a hazardous dialectic between one relation to another but on the quest for an impossible political ideal based on what could be called a *political sociability of the same.*"[103]

There is no doubt that the presence of a designated enemy totalizes the group against the threat, and manages to give it a social identity. This identity remains negative: the identity of that which opposes X is nothing other than the non-X. In certain discourses on immigration, for instance, it is easy to hear the complaints of a culture which has *already* lost its identity and goes berserk when confronted brutally with another still living culture. This complaint does not express identity, it only shows the loss. The reproach to immigrants is that they have their identity, still, while we have none. No longer sure of who I am, I forcefully emphasize what I am not or what I do not want to be.

The pathologies of identity, unfortunately, have a bright future in today's world. Globalization makes identitarian paroxystic claims, which are reactions to the threat of global uniformization. Homogenization of the world and an ethnocentric withdrawal go hand in hand. They are interdependent. Postmodern communities can rarely lean on traditions. Traditions resurge as artificially reanimated forms, postulated in the hope to normalize behaviors. As Zygmunt Bauman observes, "Communities, unlike modern nations rooted in coercive and education institutions of the nation-state, cannot be based on anything other than reproduction of our individual loyalties, their existence requires an emotional devotion higher than usual, as well as strident, sharp and spectacular declarations of faith."[104] Identity is in fact a matter of non-negotiable values, and therefore of passions.[105] The problem with postmodern identities is that, given their sub-

103. Lamizet, *Politique et identité, op. cit.*, p. 323.

jective character and the disintegration of the social field, they can only support themselves by a constantly renewed will and by the involvement of their members. The identitarian affirmation becomes an emotional process, an emphatic proclamation which frequently turns into "identitarian withdrawal." That is why each identity crisis needs a scapegoat.

9

Postmodernity marks the beginning of the moving, the flexible, the fractal, the precarious, the network, the rhizome. "Zapping" has become the emblematic model of the present. It characterizes the affective relations as well as the electoral behaviors, the emotions, the pain and pleasure, the engagements and the affiliations. Postmodern identities are flowing, exploded, and indistinct. Christopher Lasch writes that the meaning of identity "reminds us at the same time of people and of things, and that both have lost their solidity, their firmness and their continuity in the modern world." The world constituted by durable objects has been replaced by "single-use products conceived for immediate obsolescence."[106]

An atomizing and atomized society put into question what guaranteed to social and to affective relations a duration, based on the ephemeral and the fragility, on the anonymity of the masses and on insecurity.[107] All big institutions are in crisis, which means that they no longer constitute the social space. They no longer structure the social link, while the general tendency of statist politics — disguised as privatization and deregulation — is to incite the citizens to find individual solutions to social problems. The parties and the unions no longer confer identity with their few remaining supporters. Work, too, becoming both a precarious activity and a rare commodity, does so less and less. The weakening of religion contributes, too, to the questioning of identity. The result is that there is so much demand for identity that

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104. Bauman, *La vie en miettes, op. cit.*, p. 374. Cf. also Francis Arzalier, *Mondialisation et identités. Le paradoxe meurtrier du XXIe siècle. De la Corse à Kaboul, volontés identitaires, dérives et instrumentalisation des identités, 1900-2003* (Paris: Le Temps des cerises, 2004). He shows that globalization, by flattening the differences between people, favors the development of xenophobic particularisms, but concludes that the quest for identity could also be a statement of freedom.

105. Cf. Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests. Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

106. Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self. Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (London: Pan Books, 1985), pp. 32-34.

107. On the dissolution of the social and the evolution of affective relations, cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love. On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

identity becomes problematic.[108] As Bauman wrote, "one thinks of identity every time one is no longer sure where one feels at home. . . . 'Identity' is the name given to the search for an exit out of this uncertainty."[109]

As Bauman argues, in modern times, individuals were perceived as producers and soldiers; today they are consumers and players. The only power still working in society, the market, differs from anything ever seen in that it does not favor the formation of fixed identity, but on the contrary, tries to dismantle it. Like God, the market is supposed to have a response to everything. It is presented as omnipotent, but it is omnipotent only to the extent that human matter has lost all its depth. The circulation of commodities requires — besides the growing homogenization of demand — the construction of a floating subject, available for all solicitations, open to all consumption pressures, to all business and communications flux, having lost its spirit and its true personality, i.e., of an individual divested of all symbolic attachments. "Far from resolving the question of the origin, of the foundation, of the beginning, i.e., the very Hegelian question of man's desire for infinity, the Market can only confront each individual with the difficulties (which of course go together with a new *jouissance*) of the self-foundation."[110]

Better yet, man can no longer define himself in a relation to God, to the king, to the republic or to progress. He can only do it in a self-referential way, his identity is no longer the distance between him and an Other, but between him and himself. Self-foundation is permanent, a self-foundation which is confused with an endless quest because it forgets the questions of the beginning and of the end. "A subject deprived of the impossible questions of the beginning and of the end is a subject torn from being, i.e., a subject that is prevented from being such to the fullest."[111] That is why the identitarian quest, exhausting in the proper sense, ends up so often in depression.

In a market society, the individuals search frequently for exchange-

108. Today, one can change one's name, nationality, even sex. Yet, at the same time public authorities try even harder to establish a distinguishing, more precise identity: digital fingerprints, DNA, genetic marks, iris, etc. If identity could be chosen to a greater extent, it is logical that in the eyes of authority "the features of identity are displaced toward a constitutive element over which the freedom of choice cannot be exercised, i.e., the intimate composition of the body." Nicolas Journet, "Liberté, égalité, identité," in *Sciences humaines* (March 2003), p. 49.

109. Bauman, *La vie en miettes, op. cit.*, p. 34.

110. Dany-Robert Dufour, *L'art de réduire les têtes. Sur la nouvelle servitude de l'homme libéré à l'ère du capitalisme total* (Paris: Denoël, 2003), p. 99.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

able identities in the simulacra of advertising ("brands") or of consumption ("standing"). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in what Gilles Lipovetsky called the "society of hyperconsumption," a society where the commodification of needs is no longer oriented toward novelties or objects symbolizing social rank but rather toward a new type of relation to things and to oneself. Lipovetsky discusses here very correctly "a consumption of the third kind." Fundamentally oriented toward distractive and "deconflictualized" private motivations, this consumption is characterized by a fetishistic obsession with "brands," by a tendency to infantilism, by its ideal for zero effort, the futile carelessness, by the narcissistic desire not to appear less than the others, by the desire to be "known," by the will to decide for oneself and by oneself (the dream of the perfect body, of eternal youth, of a life conceived as entertainment), all those features also being characteristic of a hyperindividualism, which develops in the center of a universe of flux and networks.

The brand or the logo becomes ever so important because it serves as a criterion for belonging. It connotes an ephemeral identity of replacement. To own an object of a certain brand allows the entry into a club or a "tribe" of owners of the same object. Lipovetsky writes: "The third phase could be understood as the moment when commercialization of lifestyles no longer meets any structural cultural and ideological resistance, where all that could subsist opposition has surrendered to it."[112] He adds: "The fact is there: slowly, the principle of self-service, the ephemerity of connections, the utilitarianist instrumentalization of institutions, the individual cost-benefit analysis, permeate all spheres. Which goes to say that the market, beyond the economic transactions, has become the model and the imaginary behind the ensemble of social relations."[113]

The relation to space, and respectively to territory, has also changed. From the Great Wall of China and the *limes* to the Siegfried and the Maginot lines, the border — i.e., the controlled border, established a separation which allowed a limitation of political and juridical powers and guaranteed to the populations security and the possibility to evolve according to their own rhythme. Territory was then the most desired resource, and wars aimed at conquering new territories. Public authority was also territorial, the sign of its power residing in the capacity to control the entries and the exits. To cross a border meant to leave or to come

112. Gilles Lipovetsky, "La société d'hyperconsommation," in *Le débat* (March-April 2003), pp. 92-93.

113. *Ibid*., p. 95.

"home." This protective capacity of space has disappeared today.

Globalization leads to a generalized deterritorialization of problematics (financial, economic, technological, ecological etc). These are deployed on a global scale, and the borders, having become permeable if they still exist at all, no longer stop anything, which means that they no longer guarantee anything, and certainly not identity. This is why the risks are diffused all around the world and become uncontrollable, but this is also why living within recognized borders no longer guarantees the benefits of a specific lifestyle. Cultural, communication, ideological or other influences play borders that they cross or fly over more than draw.

In addition, power too has become extraterritorial. This is the case with the international or transnational institutions more than with national governments, and it is mobility, rather than rootedness, that represents the decisive strategic factor. As Bauman put it, "In the new global hierarchy, those rule who are least dependent on space, who are less attached to a place and more free to displace (themselves) and to move. In the 'flux space' where global powers function, what matters is speed of movement and ability to disengage and escape, and not the territorial possessions. Territorial attachments slow the movement or exclude the very possibility, they are no longer assets but a liability and a handicap."[114] The economy was the first to give the example of "delocalization." Politics, to the extent that it still has a true decision-making power, no longer belongs to the "space of places," but to that of flux.

The relation between identity and territory disappears. In the past, identity had a territorial basis. Nonetheless, even then identity and territory did not always go hand in hand. The Jewish people maintained its identity better than many, although it did not have a proper territory for a big part of its history. The reason is obvious: its referential values, and most of all its orthopraxis, allowed it to preserve itself as a people. It is necessary, therefore, to get used to thinking about identity not necessarily or only in terms of its territorial basis.

Nonetheless, besides suppressing space, globalization transforms and redistributes it. It substitutes territory with *place* — that place which makes a connection, as Maffesoli put it. The sclerosis or the crash of national discourses reminds also of the importance of the multiplicity of regional discourses and local loyalties. Hence the importance of the "local" or localism, which, in opposition to the global, seems to offer bet-

114. Bauman, *La vie en miettes, op. cit.*

ter guarantees for the preservation of identities. As Bauman put it, "the spacialization and the production of identity are two faces of the same process." This is precisely what the ancients called *genus loci* and what Heidegger renamed *Er-örterung*, i.e., assignment of place/site: "What we call a site is that which gathers in itself the essentials of a given thing."[115]

Modernity was a postfeudality; postmodernity certainly marks a return to an anterior period, but does not reconstitute it identically. This return is clearly noticeable in the reappearance of the same communities which modernity tried by all means to dissolve. Bauman writes: "A lot of hopes voided by bankruptcies or delegitimation of institutions now fall on the communities. Today we celebrate as a 'capacity for habilitation' what we denounced once as obstacles. What was once perceived as an obstacle to the way of humanity is seen now as a necessary condition."[116] But this return cannot abstract the modern elements, and this is why postmodern communities are necessarily different from premodern communities. In turn, identity often takes a communial form, if not fusional. As Maffesoli wrote: "The loss of one's own body in the collective body, either metaphorically or *stricto sensu*, seems to be the characteristic of a sensitive or affective community which derives from a purely utilitarian 'society.'"[117]

10

The key elements of collective identity remain today in language, culture in the large sense (system of values, lifestyle, ways of thinking), often (but not always) in territory, the conscience of belonging, and the desire to live together. Language established the community of language, but also the capacity to exchange and to dialogue. Allowing me to construct my own identity in relation to the other, it is by definition dialogical. Charles Taylor writes: "In principle, language is fashioned and develops not in the monologue but in the dialogue, or better yet, in the life of a community of discourse."[118] Certainly, language is not an absolute marker of identity (there is no need to speak a European language in order to be European, and in the beginning of 19th century half of the French did not speak French). It has even happened that a people lost its language without losing its identity (e.g., the Irish and the Hebrew). Nevertheless, language has functioned as a major sign of recognition. In providing a tool for mutual

115. Martin Heidegger, *Le principe de raison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 145.
116. Bauman, *La vie en miettes, op. cit.*, pp. 372-373.
117. Michel Maffesoli, *Notes sur la postmodernité* (Paris: Félin-Institut du monde arabe, 2003), p. 50.
118. Taylor, *La liberté des modernes, op. cit.*, p. 47.

understanding, it has created a connection from the outset.

Language sets thinking into specific categories. Far from being simply a means of communication, language is a vehicle of the sense of things, and as such it allows the construction of a reflexive consciousness. Heidegger would say that it gives the possibility of the unfolding of being. Language opens up a world which is the place of our evaluations, of our emotions and our relations. Better yet, the shared values are hardly comprehensible without the linguistic context which constitutes them. Different languages reflect different worldviews, and different modes of being. As Herder put it: "A people cannot have an idea for which it has no word."[119]

After language come the mores and the customs. Lamizet wrote that "what specifies our identity is the cultural and symbolic practices in which we invest our symbolic activity. These are our social uses which characterize our usage of the public space and which, in this manner, establish that part of our sociability, which is subject of interpretation and recognition by others. Our cultural and symbolic practices make us exist in a public space in the eyes of others, and, thus, construct our identity."[120] The problem today is that cultural and symbolic practices are largely laminated by homogenization of mores. Homogenization is largely consented to: how many of those who claim to want to defend their identity have a really different lifestyle from the others in the developed world? (The Germans have been trying for centuries to answer the question of what it means to be a German. Who would dare today to define what it means to be French, Italian, Spanish or Flemish?)

In traditional societies, "the symbolic rules in an explicitly organizational manner."[121] This conclusion is directly related to the question of identity, since identity is fundamentally symbolic. Precisely because it is above all symbolic, it is the first to fall victim to commodity desymbolization.

With total capitalism, all objects are reduced to their commodity value, everything becomes part of the order of pure commodities, with the latter becoming the order of ultimate reality. All that which does not have an equivalent, and more precisely, a monetary equivalent, is devalorized. The individual's statute of producer-consumer is the only one truly recognized in market society, while the state is simultaneously transformed into

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119. Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Idées pour la philosophie de l'histoire de l'humanité* (Paris: Aubier, 1962), p. 149.

120. Lamizet, *Politique et identité, op. cit.*, p. 6.

121. Gauchet, *La démocratie contre elle-même, op. cit.*

a welfare center (and the family — a caterer of goods and products predetermined by media). Market society aims before all to accelerate the circulation of things. To facilitate it, it must remove from exchange all characteristics which are not included in the commodity value. Men then have to be deprived of their symbolic weight: what circulates must not be vested in symbolic values, identity being the first to go. Thus, the exchange is directly opposed to the gift, which still contains a part of the incommensurable, and invaluable.[122] As Taylor noted, "the demands to survival in a capitalist (or technological) society are supposed to dictate a model of behavior purely instrumental which inevitably leads to the destruction or the marginalization of the ends which possess an intrinsic value."[123] The logic of capital is nihilistic in that it eradicates the symbolic, and achieves the disenchantment of the world, reaching thus the negation of all horizons.

In his essay on the "new servitude of liberated man," Dany-Robert Dufour describes very well the process by which the market eliminates all sorts of exchange depending on a symbolic, social or metasocial guarantor, in order to only allow the exchange whose worth is only determined by its relation to the commodity: "In a general manner, all transcendental figures which founded value are recused, there are only commodities which exchange at their market value. Men today are implored to rid themselves of all symbolic overloads, which guarantee their exchanges. The symbolic value is thus dismantled in favor of the simple and neutral monetary value of commodities in such a way that nothing else can be an obstacle to its free circulation."[124] Desymbolisation shows how to "rid the concrete exchange from what exceeds it in instituting it: its basis. In fact, human exchange is asserted in a body of rules whose principle is not real, but recalls 'postulated' values. Such values are rooted in a culture (depository of moral principles, of esthetic canons, of models of truth) and as such they could differ, even contradict each other. The 'new spirit of capitalism' pursues an ideal of fluidity, of transparency, of circulation and renewal which cannot accommodate the historical weight of such cultural values. In this sense, the adjective 'liberal' designates the condition of a man 'liberated' from all connections to values. All that is related to the transcendental sphere of principles and ideas, i.e., that which is not convertible into com-

122. Cf. Michel Hénaff, *Le prix de la vérité. Le don, l'argent, la philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), pp. 176-189.

123. Taylor, *Les sources du moi, op. cit.*, p. 624.

124. Dufour, *L'art de réduire les têtes, op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

modities or services, is discredited. The (moral) values do not have a (market) value. That is why their survival is no longer justified in an entirely commodified universe. In addition, they constitute a possibility for resistance to the advertising propaganda which, in order to function at full capacity, requires a spirit free of all cultural baggage. The desymbolisation then has an objective: it wants to eradicate from any exchanges the cultural component, which is always particular."[125]

Market society itself poses a market: drop your identities in exchange for more consumption, drop all symbolic values in order to focus only on market value. "Objectively the market has interest in the flexibility and the destabilization of identities. Today, the dream of the market, in its logic of infinite expansion in the space of commodities, is to be able to furnish all sorts of kits, including identitarian panoplies."[126] With desymbolisation trying to efface any referentials beyond the quantifiable interest and the logic of profit, it is not surprising that identity ends up being mistaken for assets (I am worth what I have, I am what I own). This "radical change in the exchange play results in an anthropological mutation. Since the moment when all symbolic guarantor of exchanges between men is liquidated, the very human changes."[127]

The major source of alienation seems to reside today in commodity fetishism. "The fetishist attributes to the fetish the product of his own activity. Consequently, the fetishist ceases to exercise his own power, the power to determine the form and the content of everyday life; he only uses 'powers' which he attributes to his fetish (the 'power' to buy commodities.)"[128]

Market society has obvious anthropological implications. It modifies the imaginary; it tends to create a new man defined only by his material interests: alienation of being, alienation of desire, alienation of need. Market society alone proposes a caricature of social relations, since it defines the separation from the other as the only true existence. It reifies social relations, i.e., it shapes human relations as relations between human beings and things, or between things alone. This reification is an inseparable part of capitalist logic. From the perspective of the logic of capital, men are only things who produce and consume. They are only related among each other through the exchange of commodities. The function of

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125. *Ibid*., pp. 238-239.
126. *Ibid*., pp. 217-218.
127. *Ibid*., pp. 217-218.
128. Fredy Perlman, "La réproduction de la vie quotidienne," in *(Dis)continuité* (July 2001).

the logic of capital is to alienate all living creative activity by forcing to produce and reproduce a form of everyday life which corresponds to its proper values. In antiquity, certain characteristics of living beings were attributed to inanimate objects; in the logic of capitalism, living beings are transformed into inanimate objects. It is a vicious circle, because the goal of capital is not fundamentally to satisfy the particularly human needs, but to use these needs (including the ones that it creates) in order to reproduce and extend the empire of capital.

Doctors and psychologists have been studying identity problems for a long time. They deal daily with victims of identity crisis, who complain of a feeling of emptiness, loss of self-esteem, uncertainty about what really matters. Identity crisis is a form of alienation and disorientation. Loss of identity is a pathology which deprives the individual of his singular identity (his name) and all possible sociability, because the latter always requires a mediation. In that, it is comparable to amnesia, to forgetting, whose essence is to plunge beings and things into indistinction. It is like Nietzsche's "words without voice" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*): words without a subject, without identity. It corresponds to the process by which the subject ceases to exist as such and exists only as an object. The loss of identity, both for people and for individuals, is the exit from the symbolic. This exit condemns one to a wandering in the perpetual present, i.e., to an escape forward which no longer has a goal or an end.