



THE RELIGION OF INDIVIDUALISM

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When friends understand each other well, when lovers understand each other well, when families understand each other well, then we believe ourselves to be in harmony. Pure deception, mirror for larks. Sometimes I feel that between two who smash each other's faces with blows there is much more understanding than between those who are there watching from the outside (Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*).

There are those who see in postmodernism a break with the rationalist tyranny of modernity, but that is only part of it, because it is not so much a separation from modernity as a continuation of its individualistic anthropology.

Postmodernism holds that only the individual knows, so that the person could and should self-identify as he or she chooses. Not only that, but the Promethean act of self-definition would be precisely the rebellion necessary to reformulate a system where all knowledge is really a pretension, a tyrannical lie to gain access to power. I did not invent this; it is Foucault who says so.

Postmodernity goes against the idea of truth because it states that truth cannot be known in its totality, and that any pretension to the contrary is an absolutist lie. Far from feeling defeated by this, it vehemently maintains the need to express itself without justification. It does not care about contradiction because no one can be a valid interlocutor. Only oneself can know oneself, and that is enough, since understanding between two different beings is fundamentally impossible.

It is curious how this doctrine justifies itself in order to take power and even to lie shamelessly. On the one hand, it says that real sense and real knowledge are impossible; on the other hand, it uses language instrumentally, cynically, to seize power. What matters to the postmodern is his "authenticity," his own preconception of his being, his subjectivity. He claims to be an oppressed victim, but he does not care about oppressing in order to express himself, nor about being incongruent, since congruence is impossible. His is inevitable, autochthonous, natural selfishness.

In fact, for postmodernity the only thing that really exists is power and the need to use it: that would be knowledge. Put this way it sounds like the speech of a Hollywood villain, but it is not fiction. Or at least it is not just fiction, but faith in something, in a new religion; or in one that perhaps is not as new as one would like to believe.

The "new religion" is very much like Gnosticism, an ancient belief that paraded on the same individualistic catwalks as modernity and postmodernity. It proposed that full knowledge of this world was impossible, since Earth and Heaven were at war. Creation had been a failure: the demiurge (or "artificer"), trying to emulate a superior deity, created the world without the necessary wisdom, and therefore evil and ignorance existed in the world. That is to say, it is based on alienation from reality as a fundamental principle.

Some Gnostics said that the creation was deliberately misguided, in order to mock the main god; others, that it was simply ignorance without evil intention. However, these Gnostic views agreed that, in spite of the creator's mistakes, he was unable to eliminate the spark of divinity that lies in man. As a consequence, they proposed that man must find and recognize in himself that spark of divinity in order to transcend the world and free him from the tyranny of this creator-traitor to become what he should always have been, a god.

It is somewhat similar to Christianity, on which it was superficially based, but it is also similar to humanism (and empiricism), which believes that man has the capacity to know the world if only he uses a certain faculty natural to the individual. Such is the Gnostic apotheosis: to search within oneself for the essence of the divine, in practice presupposing that "I am god" in the human eagerness to feel good. That is the religion of today, the mystical background of Freemasonry, the worship of one's own human nature as an image of the divine.

For the modern, the spark of divinity is the human faculty of discursive reason by which, if man studies reality deductively, then he can attain knowledge, create utopia and even transcend himself as man.

For the postmodernist, the divine spark is that everyone can know himself if he has the courage to do so. His desires are "his truth" to be expressed as existential daring, since in his interiority he knows himself to be good, and if he were not good it would be due to ignorance of that truth which he resists (and which is recursively his intrinsic goodness to be expressed). I-me-me. More of me.

If modernity sought technical mastery of the world in order to impress its own reason (and identity) on the universe, postmodernity seeks to impose politically its own arbitrariness: the emotional and political expression of its particularity.

To achieve its goal, postmodernity needs to engender gigantic monsters, disparate groups that claim to be tolerant and that the only thing they do not tolerate is "intolerance" (as in the alphabet crew). In reality, it is intolerance of everything which implies restricting their full vital expression, understood as their freedom to define reality. (In other words, psychotics at perpetual war with reality, seeking love and recognition at gunpoint).

Such is the problem of "free expression." Since nothing exists outside of expression, if we choose to prohibit something we would either have arbitrariness and incoherence, or it would not be legitimate to prohibit anything. What would be left of freedom of expression then? It would be one more entelechy for the pile.

The point is that the error of these people is not exclusively theirs, but of the entire liberal culture that surrounds them. Carrying the rainbow banner, they represent the vanguard of the cultural ambitions of their environment in its maximum expression. They thus believe themselves to be redeemed.

Such an attempt to free man from himself can only end in a war against humanity itself, creating imaginary enemies so that some can feel good about themselves. Therefore, if today there are not enough racists, it would be necessary to invent them so that the eternal warriors would never have to face their limitations, or it would become clear that the problem is not so much external as of their own heart.

If individualism makes the individual a god, postmodernity is not so much a critique of modernity as its more maudlin "side-B" Stripped of its intellectual garb, postmodernity is the victory of the human drive in its irrepressible desire for expression, an inveterate contradiction that claims to disbelieve in the word because it would only be an instrument to prohibit or enable its insatiable hunger for recognition and fruition. The fundamental thing would be to express oneself, and congruence would be a tyrannical fiction. But why believe those who admit to lying and deny the possibility of truth?

Hegel argued that from the sum of all these processes we would arrive at full knowledge. If only everything were expressed, a synthesis would emerge from their conflict: a total order and peace. But this overcoming dialectic was neither a new idea nor is it real, but a rationalistic recapitulation of previous cosmologies—such as that of ancient Greek religion, or that of the Egyptians or the Babylonians, which extolled the human capacity to unite the disparate, the power of man to order. This is what the deistic Freemasonry that founded the new republics believes.

For the Greeks, the world was the product of a war between the gods to order each other, and Prometheus had stolen for men the reason of the gods, who did not want man to have it. The Egyptians, for their part, worshipped Horus, the god who reunited the limbs of their father Osiris, who had been betrayed and torn to pieces by his brother Set. And the Babylonians worshipped Marduk, who established the world from the corpse of Tiamat and a whole lot of the same.

All those cosmogonies as a starting point presuppose an evil creation, war as the mother of the world, which conveniently expels the guilt of evil outwards (and incidentally glorifies conflict as fruitful), as well as glorifies the consolidation of self-improvement: to unite by one's own means physically and conceptually disparate fragments to order the cosmos. They are humanist religions!

Fascism, Marxism and social democracy were nourished by the same myths. It also turns out that the libertarian "self-made man" is not entirely a new myth, since it is again the individual imposing an overcoming order that he himself imagined to be superior.

In psychological terms, these myths express the mentality of a wayward child who believes that he can scream and kick and get his way if he is competent enough. That is, it is the idea that reality is established by tantrum or brute force, and that reality is pure power: virtue is power and weakness is insufficiency. It is the usurper who kills his own father to be king, Cronus castrating Ouranos: the man who kills god to define reality and thus attain divine fullness. It is power for power's sake.

Gnosticism complains that the demiurge usurped the true god who, being good, would have given us the perfect paradise, without evil, and that we should therefore usurp the usurper by finding the true god within ourselves and thus awaken others from their error. Heroic and populist, he nobly pretends to enlighten us all, believes himself to be the savior, seeks to show himself virtuous, like a millennial in networks, and explains the globalist or neoconservative impulse to export democracy to the whole world as a universal panacea.

For this perspective, the biblical God is the true devil, since He tried and tries to hide the truth from us: that we are gods. It is only a matter of finding that secret knowledge within us; of eating of the forbidden fruit. "Believe in yourself," or what is the same: "do your will." From that lens, the devil was a Promethean hero who tried to alert us to the original betrayal so that man would be free to define himself and become god, since such divine knowledge could only be found within oneself (or we would have no way to know it).

We can keep trying to ignore religion and believe it to be empty mysticism—but religion will not ignore us. Man always has beliefs and worldviews, and they always come into play. They are what determine our identity, our loyalties and our destiny. That is why it is necessary, first, to question the idea that it is possible to be neutral, to lack cosmological axioms (which are also psychological), and then to establish how it is possible to understand or know ourselves.

On that metaphysical plane one can converse and compare beliefs; the alternative is modern primitivism. The only thing left is war—the banal struggle for power, believing that we are absolute and that the world must submit. This fatal arrogance that wants to define everything from the individual, sooner or later, will kill us.

Iván Engel writes from this Spain. This article appears through the kind courtesy of [El maifesto](#).

[Featured](#): *Jeune homme à la fenêtre* (*Young Man at the Window*), by Gustave Caillebotte; painted in 1875.
