

THE RELIGION OF SOVEREIGNTY, PROGRESS, UTOPIA AND EMANCIPATION

Mihai UNGHEANU

Researcher, Ph.D., Romanian Academy (Romania), E-mail: mihail_li@yahoo.com

Abstract. *It is customary to conceive of modernity and present-day age as being completely secularized, as being free from religion. Is not quite right. Man's religiosity has found other ways to manifest itself. Equating Christianity with religion, or Islam or Hinduism with it is wrong. Religion is a much complex phenomenon than one may think, and it still present and alive in the life of humanity even in the 21th century. There are many ways in which the religious element of human life express itself, and these expressions are not bound with the idea of God or of god. This paper, based mainly upon the insights that can be found in the work of Jacques Ellul, Pierre-Andre Taguieff is based upon the presupposition that the man is still a religious being, and that the nowadays pervading religions can be found in different ideologies like communism, the so-called social justice, liberalism transhumanism. The paper tries to present four concepts that express the modern trans-ideological religion. These concepts are emancipation, progress, utopia, sovereignty. They belong together and they relate to each other.*

Key words: *religion; ideology; progress; emancipation; utopia.*

1. Introduction

The modern world is not as areligious as one might think or as one was being told. Religion or religions can be seen as fundamentally heterogeneous phenomena that might have little in common. Religion or being religious are marks of humankind. The religious element is at work even when there are attempts to eradicate it, as it has been attempted to do in Soviet Russia or during the nineteenth century (Ellul 2003: 252). This eradication or would-be abolishing of religion that happened in Western Europe in the age of positivism was an attempt to eradicate Christianity, which was identified with religion *per se*. The identification between religion and Christianity, whereby Christianity becomes synonymous with religion is mistaken. Though this attempt seems to work, it only succeeded in rebuking or rejecting what was left of Christianity. Nonetheless, religion remained but it had to find new ways to manifest itself. The appearance of the new religion does not take place immediately after the disappearance of the old one. It takes time to express itself. The secularization is a process – at least in Europe – that abolishes from the public space, but not only there, the Christian dimension of the state, community, etc. But it is only that, not the abolition of religion *per se*; the religious element or force in man endures though. Religion or religious sentiment is a part, an essential part of mankind. It comes from the deepest level of human being (Ellul 2003: 193). Human beings need to elaborate a religion so that the necessities of their core being could be fulfilled. Christianity and religion do not belong together in Jacques Ellul's view. Christianity is contrary to religion. Religion is just an expression of the fallen human being. The Bible teaches that there is an irreducible opposition between the self-revelation of God and the religion invented by man to fulfill his desires (Ellul, 2003: 192). Religion, in this sense, has a pragmatic function to fulfil. One of its roots lies in the state of human existence, as this is tainted by weakness, by lack, by powerlessness. Religion is a system of beliefs and representation, or acts that fulfill the function of orientation in existence, but also helps people to overcome the fear, giving him hope, consolation, and an overcoming of an

isolated existence. Religion offers the man a set of guarantees and it offers him security. It is an attempt to gain a hold on the future, to master it, and also an attempt to make future predictable (Ellul 2003: 198). Religion, generally speaking, offers a global interpretation of the world and of life (Ellul, 2003: 199) Every religion entails, at least, the beginnings of an explanation of the world, which is not systematic and its purposes are not intellectual. Its purpose consists of offering a way for mankind to find itself, to orient itself in existence. People can't live in an orderless, chaotic, incoherent universe. Religion gives man an interpretation of the world, a history of human existence, it gives him the means to instill meaning and order in life and existence. Religion crosses in the realm of myth, it is rooted within and it is expressed with the help of mythical thought. Through religion, man can understand his existence, to accept it. To function, religion does not need God or to relate man to a deity. Religion is a system of inventions, representations, way to act that express a certain gamut of human needs, and which leads to a certain attitude (Ellul, 2003: 200). It is an irrational attitude, based upon non-demonstrable beliefs that work together as a system that is not affected by empirical denials. This irrationality is a necessary component that makes it possible that religion can achieve its goals. Religion must offer certitudes. Modern-day religions fulfill the same function as the old ones. They break up the oppressive isolation that modern man feels, sheltering shelter from the panic or anxieties generated by modern society. If religions populate the world with different characters, gods, fairies, demons, this happens because they express a fundamental need of man. This need can't be expressed or oppressed, a need for communication with someone, a need to understand oneself, a need for communion, etc. (Nonetheless, Ellul does not accept the concept of religion as being something innate to man's being). It is a sociological, collective expression of a very basic need in man (Ellul, 2003: 205). Even the destruction of a religion leads to the construction of a new one. The most pregnant and complete forms of the new religions can be found in Communism, Fascism, Maoism, etc. But also, in the interest expressed in astrology, in New Age ideologies. The need of mystery is still present in society and every ideology, or scientific activity that tries to give answers to the essential question relating to death, mortality, etc. are an expression of this fundamental religiosity or religion. Even consuming drugs is a sign of this religiosity, the consuming of drugs being the visible token of a need for community, a community that has been destroyed by progress, economic, and political developments. Using drugs is also a way to recreate or to live similar experiences very alike to religious and mystical ones. It is a substitute for a religion different from the present-day religion and deification of the state. And there is also the religion of consumerism. Consumerism, publicity, technology are no brute facts they are not merely material facts but have become the meaning of life, the main sacred objects or ideas of the modern world. Even the ideology of structuralism is a kind of revived theology under a guise. The structure can be seen as a kind of creative deity (Ellul, 2003: 234). In the present world, the religious components of Christianity have been collected and transformed into political religions (Ellul, 2003: 256). These new religions are organized, they have myths and rites, dogmas, they have clergy, too. Marxism, National-Socialism are very good examples. They offer a global interpretation of life and world; they assign meaning to history and to human life. The works of F.Engels show this very clear, because he construes reality in such a way that he comes to view matter not simply as something physical but as a deified matter, and to affirm the possibility of a deified human existence (through emancipation and progress) (Ellul, 2003: 259). The historical dialectics that undergird Marxism appears in this view as a new *deus ex machina* of history.

Religion might not refer itself to an otherworldly transcendent God or to a god but can refer itself to some values that are held sacred, values that man is not allowed to criticize. The State, The Party, The Individual, Human Rights (but no duties though), etc. One of the main components of the religion or religions that belong to the essential makeup of modernity is the concept of emancipation. This is not the only concept that is bound to it. There are some others like the idea of progress, the concept of sovereignty, and of course what is usually called utopia, which as such is not just a kind of literary genera or political and social project, but a manifestation of a structural element present in man, an element that has been called social imagination by some (Bronislaw Baczko), or a kind of pathological functioning of human imaginary, as it was described by the French author Jean Jacques Wunenburger (2001). As with many concepts, the signification which those spoke above are multiple and can be understood along many lines, depending on the individuals involved, of their culture, belonging to a particular people, class, the century they live in, etc. Though different, these concepts are not functioning alone but built a kind of structure, one implicating the others, more or less. Progress and emancipation, for example. Or emancipation or sovereignty, the idea that man must become the master of nature, the being that produces its existence conditions, etc. An outgrowth of this attitude, but which has deep roots in human nature and existence, is also what Jacques Ellul called the technological system, which can be seen as the material incarnation of the will to power. This system transforms man's life and surroundings while dehumanizing him at the same time. It is a system with its rationality, characterized by self-growth, always extending itself in all domain of society, though it is a system of tools and means. Nonetheless, the permanent growth thereof causes man to give up reflection about the purposes of human existence, about the technological system, about its role, etc. Other features of this system are that its existence is governed solely by the imperative of self-efficiency and by its capacity to abolish or distort every other kind of value; the technological system also succeeds in incorporating every critique that is oriented against itself. This technological system is essential for the existence of modernity, because as a system of means, technology and science are seen as instrumental in the pursuit of progress, emancipation, sovereignty over external and human nature, and happiness. Trans- and posthumanism are to be understood along these lines.

Another pair of concepts that undergird the modern-day religion are the concepts of sovereignty and utopia. Sovereignty and utopia imply one another. Utopia as a perfect society is a blueprint for realizing human sovereignty, man's dominance over nature, over space and time themselves. A contemporary expression of this can be found in the fictional society of the Time-Lords from the British series *Doctor Who* (which had become meanwhile extreme leftist propaganda, advocating gender-change, bestiality, advocating transhumanism or even a kind of Gnosticism as the latest episode from the series - the *Timeless Child* - implies that the main protagonist is a kind of divinity, etc.). Utopia or the eternal wish of a better or perfect society/life can be seen as a reprisal of the myth of the Golden Age albeit there are some considerable differences between these two. Utopia has marks that distinguish it from the myth, like the orientation towards the future, the idea that mankind can engineer this future, scientism, etc. The utopian imaginary is not possible without the possibility of modern sciences, without the conviction that nature, life, etc. can be scientifically ordered (Wunenburger 2001). The mythical Golden Age is not a state of being created by man but by God or gods, ontological forces superior to man. Utopian productions express the opposing view, that of man as a being conquering the central ontological place of existence. Utopian imagination implies sovereignty and its view of things is quite akin

to that of the Heideggerian *Weltbild*, a synoptic view of being or existence wherein every being is considered as a part of the totality and is thus objectified. The only value that being have in such a conception is that of mere means meant to serve and accomplish man's desires (Heidegger, 1977: 87). Utopian, progress times are the expression of an age that has been dubbed as the age of the *Weltbild (Zeit des Weltbildes)*.

2. Progress

The idea of progress is a concept essential for modernity, even though today it is no longer the main way to express the modern worldview that constitutes the framework of modernity. It is related to concepts of utopia, of sovereignty, and emancipation. In the second part of the twentieth century, the concept of progress had been considered dangerous, because of the experiences of two world wars. Now the concept of progress is being revived. The narration of progress is undergirded by the modern narrative of emancipation, the inner core of the religion of progress, or progressivism (Taguieff, 2019: 48). The historical optimism returned in the mind of some intellectuals, not always from the left. Steven Pinker comes to mind. Progress is in reality not a single movement toward a better future or toward a necessary betterment of humanity, but a collection of local improvements or evolutions in different realms which belong to the „reign of quantity” (Rene Guenon), that is they belong to the realm of verifiable effects. Nowadays, progress is most of the time associated with capitalism, as if it would be an objective hard fact. The idea of progress implies a purpose and evaluation, both these categories being bound to an evaluating subjectivity. The thesis of general progress or of the betterment of humanity is in no way deducible from facts (though there are no hard facts). There is no progress without thinking a final state of being which is deemed to be the concrete realization of a transcendent state of being. Making a paradise from earthly existence is the categorical imperative of progressivism as Saint-Simon expressed it (Taguieff, 2019: 54). As Taguieff observed the religion of progress, and its underlying historical optimism is the tie that binds communism and liberalism (Taguieff, 2019: 336). Both these extremes of the political spectrum do value the future as being automatically better and damn the past and the heritage of the past as being without exception evil. Breaking up with the past, becoming modern, value change is all expression of this demonic faith. The world must be remade through science, technology, reason, etc. and the past – the Old Man in theological language must be abolished, too. What does it mean to believe in progress? it means to believe that Paradise will necessarily be built on Earth.

„Croire au Progrès, c'est se mettre en position de croire à la réalisation graduelle, dans l'histoire, des idéaux de liberté, d'égalité ou de justice. De croire aussi à la marche progressive de l'humanité vers la satisfaction de tous ses besoins, condition supposée de l'accès au bonheur.” (Taguieff, 2004: 120-121)

This ideology, the success of the French Revolution, utopian thinking has abolished the traditional Christian way of things, and have replaced it with a new enchantment of History, secular or atheistic mysticism, to the cults of the Freedom, Equality, Reason, etc. The last and final perfection is God stripped of the personal form (Taguieff, 2004: 121), or even as the divinization of man. Thanks to the limitless processes of growth of reason, science and technology it was and it is still thought that humankind was bound to create Heaven on Earth, to obtain perpetual peace. This process is deemed to be necessary, since the natural result is produced by the passing

of time; the obstacles are only temporary and might be removed through a violent revolution. On a political and social level, progress was supposed to be the work of extensively applying the principle of utility, by producing the maximum of well-being or happiness for the greatest number of people (and this by letting everyone expressing and following his or her own interests). The progressive society and utopia were supposed to be accomplished through democratization, but this process had been leading in another direction. This desired democratization can be achieved in two different way, that is along the lines of meritocracy which imply equality of chances or along the line of equality of conditions/results, which is based upon the utopia (or dystopia) of equality of aptitudes, abilities: excellency is not sought, but it is tried to be abolished. This distinction boils down to the opposition between neoliberals/liberals and communists. The outcome of this conception on history, human life, society is nowadays expressed in the totalitarian demand of being open, open-minded, and in the unending and unlimited claims to rights without any claims for duties (Taguieff, 2004: 124). The roots of this modern religion or trans-ideological ideology of progress is to be found of Francis Bacon and in Rene Descartes. This trans-ideological religion can be understood through the categories of „secular religion” or „religion of collective redemption” (Taguieff, 2004: 18-19). The content thereof is not reducible just to the idea of the betterment of human existence, of human knowledge or society. To its very core, belongs the conviction that progress will satisfy all human needs and desires and even, as later shown, it will abolish even the unintended consequences of human action (Bourg, 2001: 21), as stated in his *Anti-Dühring* text by F. Engels. Summarized, this position was baptized by Pierre-Andre Taguieff as *bougisme* – from *bouger*, which means movement. It is related to the idea of continual evolution, maybe punctuated by some revolutions, and is expressing the idea that this is the meaning of history or History. It is the conviction that history goes in a certain direction, and this direction is essential a progressive one whereby the things are getting better, even if one wishes or not. Change in itself is good, maybe the supreme value. Good is whatever is new. Modernity, progressivism is a system of conviction and beliefs which postulate that the fundamental law of history and, maybe existence as such is the process of ascending to a better stage of human existence, an infinite process infinite. „Mouvement nécessaire vers le mieux ou marche générale vers la perfection finale” (Taguieff, 2004: 11). To be a supporter of progress means to be in favor of transforming the whole of society or human existence in the name of an idea, be it through reform or violent means, through revolution (Taguieff, 2004: 12). Modern existence is orientated toward future, the future being the defining temporal dimension of modernity. Novelty is good in itself, and thus the present age defines itself as modern and superior to every other age in history. The future is intrinsically desirable, and it is conceived of, as being knowable, being made so by the advancement of technology and sciences (Taguieff, 2009: 76-77). Abolishing the hazard! The concept of progress encompasses the following ideas: the idea of continuous growth of knowledge, the continuous growth of human power, the idea of advancement towards happiness and the idea of moral betterment of humankind. All of these are connected and chained to each other (Taguieff, 2009: 99). This conception of progress is a kind of logical fallacy – *Post hoc, ergo melius hoc*, as Taguieff rightly remarks. The French author rightly remarks what is the true motivation behind progress: the lust for power. This is best expressed by Thomas Hobbes in his works. The English philosopher denies the classical conception that human behavior is guided by some common good or by some transcendent good that imposes duties on human existence. The motivation of human behavior, or what he terms felicity consists in a permanent going forward of human desire, from an object to

another and so *ad infinitum*. The inner makeup of man makes the satisfaction of human desire impossible, his drives being unable to be satisfied only with getting one object of desire. Instead of stopping after reaching one target of the desire, human beings will go after another. Therefore, what human beings try to achieve is to build a satisfying life, which allows for steady access to the objects of the desire. In other terms, the main drive motivation underlying human behavior and progress is the desire of getting or acquiring power after power. It is a process that comes to a stillstand only in death (Taguieff, 2004: 39).

3. Utopian, technological progress and the will to power

The religion of progress does not stand alone. It is intertwined with the idea of sovereignty, of emancipation, and as already mentioned utopia. True utopia can't be thought outside the ideas of science and technology and, in opposition to real myths, implies an orientation towards the future, even if, paradoxically, the perfect societies they depict are static structures that abolished time and change. The fact that Francis Bacon, one of the authors of the modern idea of progress, had also authored a work called *The New Atlantis*, which describes a utopia centered around an organization made up of wisemen, of people practicing the experimental method of doing science (Taguieff, 2009: 111). This organization is called the House of Solomon centered upon the sole purpose to acquire knowledge on causes of things and accomplishing all possible things. The promise of knowledge and the promise of a relentless growth of power through technological advance is also a promise to happiness. In this view, as it is already happening today, technocracy replaces philosophy and theology; technology replaces divine grace. The faith in a new kind of Providence enters the world stage. This new Providence has been baptized historical evolution. And it has his roots in distorted theology.

„La volonté du progrès est volonté de puissance et de bonheur. On ne saurait mieux dire qu'elle exprime la toute-puissance du désir en même temps qu'elle réalise le désir de toute-puissance.”(Taguieff, 2009: 112)

On these grounds, the new man and the perfect society are supposed to be built. The ideology of progress and social evolution had become normative and is pervasive in the way a contemporary person thinks. Whenever anyone expresses his surprise or dissatisfaction with a state of affairs on the ground that such and such things shouldn't be possible in the year 2020, expresses involuntary this system of belief, the idea that progress is the law of history, that the passing of time produces the betterment of human condition. Everyone who fancied themselves as modern or revolutionary is bound to adopt this view on things. This system of representations and beliefs leads to the literary genera of utopia, to the literary expression of social imagination (Backzo, 1971) or as a pathological, schematized function of human imagination (Wunenburger, 2001). The new conception of history as progress ends up by assimilating the conception of a utopian future wherein a new-born regenerated humanity lives. The building of the ideal city is the penultimate step on the road to perfection. This new way of thinking fosters another feature or a new attitude: the unconditional refusal to accept the present-day order of the society wherein the modern thinker/philosopher lives. Utopia starts to be seen as the principle of every progress. Utopia is an expression of human imagination and points out to the position of man in his existence, social, political, or otherwise. In a sense, utopia is rooted in the particular time-period, in the society man lives. In its concrete form, it expresses the view that people entertain

towards their society in a certain, his desires, dissatisfaction, criticism, disagreements, and the hope for something better. It is bound to a certain age of society, nonetheless, it evacuates history from the construction of the best human polity (Backzo, 1971). Utopian literature should trigger the activity of social imagination, to instill a distance between it and the respective society, toward its norms, values, hierarchies, and to exercise freedom and liberty towards it (Backzo, 1971: 385). Meanwhile, this process comes to a halt because utopian thinking centres itself around some themes that are repeated constantly. Thus, the social imagination becomes stiff and is being blocked. This is the result of pushing the denial of immediate reality to the limit, of the wish to forge society anew: repetition and uniformity. Utopia is not a reformatory endeavor. There is no place for reform, as is no place for evil, contradiction, freedom and therefore history. Evil is completely abolished. *Das Böse wird vollkommen ausgelöscht*. No contradictions, no conflicts, no real differences. History has been abolished (Backzo, 1971: 386). The connection between the myth of the progress and utopia is not hidden; it can be found in the work of Sébastien Mercier *L'année 2044*, published in 1770 (Backzo, 1971: 372). The novelty in Mercier's work consists in placing the perfect society, not on a far and isolated island, but in the future, the Paris of the future; the idea introduced is that of a future that will be automatically and unavoidable better. Time itself produces the changes that led to the perfect society. Time is from now on the essential factor in bringing about the evolution and perfection of human existence. Time itself establishes the orientation and purpose of human existence. The time of utopia is the time of progress. Progress is now understood as a unitary force and movement of the whole history, a history oriented towards the future. Mercier is not the only one that linked progress to utopia. This linkage, or the conception that there is no progress without utopia, can be found in the work of N. Condorcet shows (*L'esquisse d'un tableau historique du progrès de l'esprit humain*). It shows how progress results in producing the perfect city. This conviction was buttered by the outcome of the French Revolution that showed that an existing order can be overthrown, and the impression that humankind could free itself from serfdom, etc. Somehow, the Terror and subsequent oppression had been forgotten just the communist oppression and totalitarian oppression are nowadays relegated to the realm of memory or purposefully overseen. The idea that utopia is totalitarian and that is expressed in the symbolic form of a city is not new. Anticipating to a certain extent the insights of Jean Jacques Wunenburger, the American thinker Lewis Mumford (1965) portrays utopia in some not very hopefully terms. Utopia is associated with the city and with what he calls the megamachine, that is a totalitarian organization of the human community, first seen in armies. He roots utopian thought in the remembrance of the ancient cities, like the cities from Mesopotamia, cities seen as been created by gods and as reflecting an unchanging, cosmic order, which, of course, can't be criticized. The city is therefore associated with a rigid and totalitarian order from which spontaneity disappears. Lie all ideals it is life- arresting, or even life-denying (Mumford, 1965: 25). Realizing and implementing human ideals can be fatal for society and humankind, even if that ideal is change and novelty. As he astute observes even in the old Greek predecessor of utopia one finds isolation, stratification, fixation, standardization, militarization, and these features are present in manifest or hidden form even in modern utopias. In the twentieth century, utopia merges with dystopia and the distance supposed to exist between positive and negative ideal proves not to exist. Many evils remain in Utopia, even though they might have been acknowledged and such. They permeate utopia because, as Mumford remarks, abstract intelligence is not an instrument of creativity and liberation, but a coercive one. A self-restricted instrument, a fragment of human

totality, determined to re-forge the world in oversimplifying terms, rejecting and denying everything that is not in accord with its interests, depriving itself and its products from other cooperative and fertile functions of life (feeling, emotion, exuberance, playfulness, etc.). It rejects unpredictable creativity, and thus life. Utopia is a desert, unfit for human occupation, for real human life (Mumford, 1965: 278). In some ways, it reflects the ancient archetypal city run by a God-king. The city, and therefore utopia, is associate with power. The king gathered and condensed in himself all the power and function that were once distributed among open communities, whereby the king becomes the godlike incarnation of all communal powers and responsibilities. In a city and under the concentrated power of the kin the population could be made to act as one, as a machine. The city is the first human collectivity that becomes and is transformed into an ideal form, a glimpse of the eternal order of the gods, visible heaven on earth, a place of abundance. Thus, so Mumford, the city incarnates utopia. Living in a city meant becoming a member of a super and more abstract community, wherein everyone has an assigned place, an assigned role, and function to fulfill. It is a structure that represents the universe itself, a structure run by formal law, and formalized knowledge. It is a machine made out of human parts, everyone fulfilling his task, long before Adam Smith theorized the division of work. Systematic, disciplined whole, with inner relationships disposing of energy and being able under command to achieve various tasks. Organization, discipline, obedience. Human autonomy and creativity are laid aside. Mechanization comes in. Be as it may, there is a difference between the ancient city and modern utopias. Utopia excludes the intervention of God. It is the work of man and/or history but not of external numinous power. Even in Plato's Republic, a work that could be seen as a predecessor to modern utopias, there is place for transcendence. The philosopher-king contemplate the ideas and do not rule according to a supposed autonomous reason.

4. Roots of progress and utopia

Utopia, sovereignty, or even progress have some roots in reality. They are absolutization and idols made up of some aspects of human existence. Human beings are not necessary beings. They do not exist in themselves, the root and origin of their being resides outside themselves. Though there is the temptation to ground individualist conceptions on biblical text, the fact that man is made in the image and likeness of God does not make him an individual or a self-sustaining being. For once, being image and likeness does not entail identity. Man, even in Paradise, depends on his existence on God, enjoying only potential immortality which is then lost. The loss of this condition puts man in the face with his mortality and contingent existence. God is the one and only necessary existence and man is not. Being exiled in a world for which he was not made, man must plan his existence and must get some hold over the condition of his existence. The isolated individual postulated by modern theories couldn't have made it out alive. Even in their most basic existence humans depend on each other, language, ideas are transmitted from one another, are inherited, etc. since man has no real natural defenses or weapon, he must think, plan and organize his existence. And since he is not bound to a single ecological niche, he can expand his existence, while most animals can't. Interpretation and understanding of the world are vital for human being as the German anthropologist and sociologist Arnold Gehlen recognized. From a non-theological point of view man is a *Mangelwesen*, a being characterized by lack, even on the ontological level since his being comes from somewhere someone else. Human being is a being exposed to danger, to contingency, to nothingness, both in a

metaphysical sense and a very concrete one – *exponiertes Wesen*. Mankind lacks in the biological equipment that will assure him the existence.

„Morphologisch ist nämlich der Mensch im Gegensatz zu allen höheren Säugern hauptsächlich durch Mängel bestimmt, die jeweils im exakt biologischen Sinne als Unangepaßheiten, Unspezialisiertheiten, als Primitivismen, d.h. als Unentwickeltes zu bezeichnen sind: also wesentlich negativ. Es fehlt das Haarkleid und damit der natürliche Witterungsschutz; es fehlen natürliche Angriffsorgane, aber auch eine zur Flucht geeignete Körperbildung; [...]“ (Gehlen 2009: 33)

Nevertheless, man is open toward the world or a world (*Weltoffenheit*) and his inner drives structure are capable to get educated and transformed. Man can transform himself in such ways that he becomes able to transfer his surroundings (*Umgebung* or *Umwelt*). His continued existence is a task that has to be performed and can't be performed by a single, isolated individual. The manipulation of the world is inherent to man's continual striving to exist. „Sie bestehen in der tätig gelösten Aufgabe, sich in der Welt zu orientieren, daß sie ihm verfügbar wird und in die Hand fällt.“ (Gehlen 2009: 46). Arnold Gehlen goes further, highlighting the fact that human existence requires of man to take an attitude toward himself and the world, thus his existence requires interpretation (philosophy, religion) or building some kind of maps of meaning that allows him to orient himself in reality and endure the existence (Ellul). The surroundings are transformed by man. These transformed surroundings Gehlen calls culture. There is no way for man to exist in pure, unadulterated nature, that was not processed and transformed by man. There is no such thing as a pure natural man - „[...] und es gibt keine Naturmenschen im strengen Sinne“ (Gehlen, 2009: 38). The continual existence of humanity entails for the whole of mankind the need to master his own inner drives, to postpone immediate reactions, to think, to anticipate. In this sense, human existence is oriented towards the future, but this orientation depends on the past, on the accumulated experience, and knowledge. From this point of view, man is an unspecialized being which that develops a cultural, social, political world that allows for his continual existence. Utopia can be then considered as amplification and fixation of this need of man to configure, master, and understand its surroundings, without its existence being seriously endangered. And the sovereignty, defined as the capacity to give laws, or not to obey them when necessary – the so-called *Ausnahmestand* (state of emergency) fits very well into this conception of man. Sovereignty as such has religious connotations. The roots of the concept of sovereignty are religious, the concept being transferred in the political and social realm. According to Ulrich Haltern, the use of the concept in both domains, entails the idea of participation in the sacred. Sovereignty as a kind of symbolic form offers the possibility to transcend death. Sovereignty connotes the overcoming of death, and also omnipresence and omniscience (Haltern, 2007: 31). Moreover: „Der Souverän übt nicht nur ein derivatives göttliches Recht zur Herrschaft aus, sondern er ist eine Erscheinung des Göttlichen.“ (Haltern, 2007: 36). The right of sovereignty is not a derivative right, is an appearance/manifestation of the divine. In Jean Bodin words, sovereignty is the supreme and perpetual power in the commonwealth, which is the power to command (Bodin, 1992: 1). The sovereign is not subject to conditions and obligations, though Jean Bodin recognized that God is the source of sovereignty and the upper limit of this power. „And so, sovereignty given to a prince subject to obligations and conditions is properly not sovereignty or absolute power.“ (Bodin, 1992: 8). The sovereign can't be bound by decrees and laws given by his predecessor or by his own. And though,

theoretically, if God prescribes death penalty, the sovereign does not have the right to grant forgiveness. Sovereignty implies that there is no power above: „But persons who are sovereign must not be subject in any way to the commands of someone else and must be able to give law to subjects, and to suppress or repeal disadvantageous laws and replace them with others – which cannot be done by someone who is subject to the laws or to persons having power of command over him.” (Bodin, 1992: 10). Sovereignty is, as Gerard Mairet puts it, maybe the inner substance of modernity. The purpose of the social and political organization founded on this principle has the purpose to maintain and develop human community and its members. It is then self-oriented, auto-telic. The political organization based upon the sovereignty principle precludes from the get going any kind of organization based upon a divine law, a natural law, a law coming from transcendent sources. The law which is the ground principle of sovereign states is man-made. Political and social organization excludes any kind of extra human grounding principle (Maire, 1997: 127, 163). Without taking bearing to Carl Schmitt, what we have here is really the application of a religious and theological concept that belong rightly to the ontological principle of existence – God which is appropriated by man. God is banned from political and social realms. This can happen even in theology, when something like deism is proposed or when God is reduced to his absolute simple essence that does not enter time and space. Nature and society are no longer places for divine manifestation and action. Instead they become a place in which man’s action is the solely source of legitimacy. Nature itself changes its status. It now begins to be *res extensa*, a pure material thing which manifest no divine presence or order, and is mean to be mastered by man. It becomes a uniform, mathematized form of existence that can and should be exploited by man to satisfy his desires. Contemplation has no longer a place in the way man handles nature. The voluntarist and nominalist frame of mind precludes the existence of nay transcendent presence in the world. There are no inherent principles of Good in creation. Good or Bad are the whim of a post-modern God, which is reduced again to his essence which equals will (in the futile attempt to give back God his biblical nature, but ending in reaffirming the pagan philosophical notion of divine simplicity) etc. But not only external nature becomes the target of man’s action. Society and human nature are now legitimate targets to transform and use according to man’s wishes. The purpose of sovereign action is the commonwealth itself and the people. The people can even be considered to be the principle of sovereignty itself (Mairet, 1997: 164). The adoption of the principle of sovereignty makes it possible that the potential of the human beings becomes free and can be used accordingly. The systemic application oof this potential on reality becomes possible. Man breaks free from the constraints of heteronomy and becomes autonomous and independent. Now, mankind can put his forces to work to transform reality as he sees fits without being obliged to respect an extra-human law or nature. Heretofore, the relationship to nature, to the external world is based on dominance (Mairet, 1997: 205). Gradually, even human nature and man becomes *res extensa*, so that he can become master of his destiny. „L’homme est sujet-auteur - de son propre destin” (Mairet, 1997: 207). Through the development of technology, through domination of nature human community can be transformed into a *res publica*, can become an artifact, just as human nature can. Will, power, technology, and science become the ground stones of the human community. According to Mairet in this new configuration of human life, power decides what the fundamental grounding of the human community is, and what justice is (Mairet, 1997: 215). This is a divinization of man, and power. „I would like to argue that if we take the concept of sovereignty seriously, we will find that there is only one legitimate candidate for the label

'sovereign' and that is God." (Van Duffel, 2007: 127). This development wouldn't have been possible without the contribution of Francis Bacon, who is one of the first people to establish an equation between science, knowledge, and power. Sovereignty is thus closely related to emancipation, which sometimes is confused with regeneration (Taguieff, 2019: 268). This is present in the French revolution and is also present under the form of eugenics in socialism, which is an expression of the above-described concept of sovereignty. According to one of the Marxist supporters of eugenics, a true emancipated man should be able to mass-engineer superior human types. The Marxist conception of emancipation is an expression of this idea of sovereignty, of attaining total rational control on reality, on nature, on history. This idea is expressed in F. Engels's *Anti-Dühring* (Taguieff quoted 2019: 270). After the transformation of society by revolution, man is supposed to get into the realm of liberty as opposed to the one of necessity. The Marxist emancipation of man seems not to be different or distinct from the Baconian and Cartesian accounts of the scientific and technological mastery of nature. The conception F. Engels utters promises even the abolition of the unintended consequences of human action, the so-called perverted effects thereof. There is no denying that this emancipatory endeavor presupposes and has as target a deification of man, even if it is not expressed in these terms. Emancipation, as Pierre- Andre Taguieff remarks, originates in classical Latin and it means to break free from paternal authority. It is the act that breaks free the holdover of the family father, the one who owns a property (*manicipum*) or exercises his right of property upon someone. *Mancipum* entail *manus* – hand, which is token for power, and the *capere*, which means to take. This action implies a revolt, a conflict, implies breaking the hold someone or something has over somebody else, getting out from the dominion of a master, etc. (Taguieff, 2019: 110). The concept of emancipation entails some other components. The first one is the refusal to accept a certain state of being as unavoidable, a state of affairs that is deemed to be unacceptable or unbearable. The second one is the collective effort through which a certain collective subject comes to be, and the third one consists of extending to certain categories of people the protection of universal principles to which the excluded social categories had no previous access. (Taguieff, 2019: 115). Last but not least, the fourth component is the expectation of a positive transformation of human relationships based on the three mentioned components, a transformation that can be seen as being necessary produced by the flow of time, or by violent upheavals. The problem is that this emancipatory process is seen as having no end, which can never be completed. It is a kind of permanent revolution and change. This idea of emancipation is supposed to be the norm of all modern-day education, education being now thought along these lines.

5. Emancipation

Mankind does not live in a natural environment like other species. Man's existence is defined by culture, by civilization, and that what is called world (*Welt*) and culture (*Kultur*). The world in which man lives is not the bare environment of other living species. It is an environment transformed by meaning. Meaning is vital, meaning makes man, as Ellul put it, not work. The man organizes his environment, it imbues it with meaning. Otherwise man cannot live, since he has not the natural equipment that would allow him to confront and overcome dangers: strong crocodile-like teeth, body armor like crocodile, speed, pelt against cold, etc. Utopia is a kind of continuation of man's effort to organize world so he can survive and thrive, and the ideology of progress is in a sense an extrapolation of his effort of getting better or more efficient means of organizing his life and tools. Moreover, utopia can be seen also as an effort to

overcome man's ontological deficiency and replace the void left by severing his relationship with the source of all life (God) with himself. The problems lie even in the concept of modernity. Modernity as such is messianic concept which divides time in a before that is bad and an after that is good, the time of bringing about the Paradise on Erath sometimes through revolution or buy the necessary movement toward progress, which comes automatically about (Taguieff, 2019: 336).

Let's take for example a concept that during its use and misuse by communist propaganda seemed to have vanished from the surface of the world, but it is still very active and undergirds many currents of ideas, ideologies, etc. It has permeated the whole political imaginary of present-day, though it can be seen in the left and extreme left ideologies, especially in the so-called ideologies of social justice., ideologies which pretend to the fight against domination. This is the concept of emancipation. As Pierre-Andre Taguieff explained, the concept of emancipation is characterized by many meanings, there is no single unitary definition thereof. And this irrespective of the ideological coat under which the concept of emancipation is expressed:

„L'«émancipation humaine», dans tous les récits idéologiques où elle est posée comme objectif final, est l'objet d'une promesse: l'horizon reste celui du messianisme et des doctrines, sécularisées ou non, de la rédemption universelle. Mais l'universel s'entend de diverses manières, selon les individus ou les groupes, les cultures ou les croyances.”(Taguieff, 2019: 102)

Emancipation is central to the cultural or Neomarxist left. It is a slogan of the altermondialist movement, too, a movement that declares its intention to fight neoliberalism but it does not criticize the fundamental globalist position thereof. Emancipation of whole humanity is at the core of this ideology; therefore, it remains attached to globalism (Taguieff, 2019: 82). The concept of emancipation entails the abolition of power relations, for example, the one between the oppressors and the oppressed, exploiters and exploited, etc. Meanwhile, this whole struggle is understood as being the process through which human beings reach adulthood, become free and autonomous, etc. The process is purported to abolish oppression, dependence, and alienation. It is a promise of becoming free, of being free from unjust constraints. But there are some strings attached to it, that might be deemed to be enjoyable. This promise opens the gates for the dream of the abolition of all limits, of abolishing all relations which are deemed to be enemies of personal freedom, of abolishing and refusal of all inheritance (cultural, ethnic, sexual, etc.). It implies a devaluation and denial of the past, (wherein the past is seen as the place of unmitigated evil) (Taguieff, 2019: 86). Emancipation is nevertheless not a Marxist invention, but it has deeper roots. The promise of emancipation belongs to the core of modern ideology, an ideology based on the domination of economy – mans as economical animal -, and it is, at the same time, individualist, universalist, and also egalitarian. It presupposes reason as the main guide in human affairs, and it sees emancipation as gaining autonomy and maturity, as learning by each individual of the critical use of his faculties, which is a fundamental point of this ideology. Through critical thinking the emancipated man can break the ties to the past, to the prejudices, to superstitions, can fight off fanaticism (one can see where that led and what success it had, when one thinks of the genocide in Vendee, the communist massacres and gulags, the actions of the so-called justice warriors, the cleansing of fundamental disciplines in universities of white dead male authors, etc.). There is no such thing as emancipation without fight and breaking/destruction of the past, particular belongings to a community, a country, etc.

This process is seen as the manifestation of indefinite/infinite perfectibility of man, and it is seen as a proof of progress in history, therefore as proof of the existence of meaning therein (Taguieff, 2019: 39). According to the revolutionary state of mind, progress of science and knowledge leads to ethical progress and happiness. All these concepts are seen as inter-relating realities. They do not stand alone. Emancipation is mostly seen as a process of unilinear and necessary progress toward a better state of humanity. It is seen as the fundamental law of history. For this point of view, for the progressivist state of mind - *fortschrittliche Gesinnung* - fight and conquering become positive values. This implies that emancipation, which is based upon the process of breaking up with the past, is the process that leads to emancipation. It means emancipation is self-emancipation. It is a permanent voluntary movement. Getting free of constraints or dependence is worthwhile only if it is done voluntarily (Taguieff, 2019: 40). The purpose of this self-movement is to attain the state of autonomy, wherein a human subject might be considered free because he acts and abides by the law, he gives it to him or herself. The quest for emancipation is not – theoretically reducible to the quest of independence but it supposes it. Three targets that have to be reached: thinking with one's own mind, judged using one's own head, and acting through one's self. The moral law has to be within the human subject. It must not be external. This thought is remade in the Marxist schema of emancipation which entails the abolition of all individuals in a collective existence, which somehow reminds or should remind of the pagan and philosophical notion of absolute divine simplicity, a notion that excludes or precludes any kind of real distinction in divinity, whereby distinction as such is assimilated to composition and difference, particularity to conflict. It might seem odd to make such an observation, but the concept of emancipation is a religious one and its history can't be cut off the history of western European theology which has continued the ancient Greek philosophical project and had thus falsified the authentic Christian understanding of the Holy Trinity. As Joseph P. Farrell showed in *God, History, and Dialectic* (2016), the adoption of the Neoplatonic philosophical and dialectical notion of divine simplicity distorted Western Christian theology by introducing dialectics in the Trinity and then into history, which starts to be seen in the terms of dialectical process and as a progress. This transformation of Christian doctrine into a Neoplatonic-Christian hybrid had led to the birth of what he calls Second Europe, which is the West and to modernity.

Emancipation is present in a form or another even on the right side of the political spectrum, everyone or almost everyone uttering his or her adhesion to progressivism. In the brave new world of present-day democracy, few people do dare to declare themselves conservatives let alone reactionary (Taguieff, 2019: 42). Emancipation is present under the guise of a pale and contentless progressive ideologies. Emancipation does not work alone, she is tied to the concepts of oppression and domination, which nowadays are seen to be somehow are pervasive and even can masquerade as desire for emancipation. „Travestie en forme nouvelle de liberté, l'aliénation peut se transformer en objet de désir” (Taguieff, 2019: 43). The cunning of oppression (reminding of Hegel's expression „the cunning of reason” – Die List der Vernunft) is pervasive and takes many a form. This conviction that oppression is omnipresent and that one can be an oppressor even if he is not aware of thereof is has been used as a political weapon to stifle debate and demonize entries categories of people. That emancipatory effort and emancipatory ideologies could be or are really oppression tools should be considered a truth. The experience of the tyranny of emancipatory ideologies has been made, and probably will occur again. This paradox can be seen in the real of technology and science, too. The fact that technological

progress does not produce freedom, but instead becomes a new force of oppression has been examined by Jacques Ellul and lies at the core of his work. Emancipation is, as Taguieff argues, a magic word which shows the Hegelian capacity to bind together apparent opposed position like that of the socialist elites with the one of liberal elites, both embracing globalization as a means of salvation; of course, the leftists still dream of it in their try to reinvent the critical thinking whose incarnation in reality in the form of communist tyrannies still don't bring an end to this demonic fantasy (Taguieff, 2019: 45). The beat must go on. It is worth remembering that Marxism is not born on Mars and didn't fall out of the heavens but is a product of a specific intellectual tradition and it was not possible without Hegel, Kant, John Locke, Adam Smith, or even without theological thinkers. Both capitalist and communism and the varieties thereof share the same gnostic or platonic vision of man as a disembodied being with no particular traits defined solely by the power to choose, and not by particular marks like ethnicity, gender, etc. The idea of emancipation impossible without the conviction that relationships are bad and that they stifle freedom. This conception is at work in the individualist conception of man as a separated individuals, somehow existing through and in themselves; and just as liberalism, that considers that natural bonds between humans are the expression of the will to power and that only legal and rational constructed relations have value and are worthy to exist, so emancipation strives after a society built by the power of will and rational reconstruction of humane existence. This society would be stuffed with laws – supposed to abolish power relations and the all-present alienation. Emancipation seems to be also an expression of the need for heroism in a non-heroic hedonistic society, in which the promised emancipation looks like consumption, and fails to recognize the value and ambivalence of human relationships and human existence or existence as such. Familial bonds and relations are the paradigms thereof. They are not chosen, but they make life possible. The basic thought of emancipation is the idea of self-creation of man or human persons (Taguieff, 2019: 46). Emancipation is thus a kind of *apotheosis*, of self-deification which is opposed to the Christian *theosis*. It is a utopian ideal, bound (most of the time) to the idea of humanity as rational and as a being that can self-govern without following an extra-human scale of values. The idea of emancipation and its cognates, social justice, anti-racism, equality delusion, etc. express a modern system of convictions and beliefs that is very active despite the historical catastrophes that they helped to produce. The emancipation ideal is very attractive because it incorporates the idea of a necessary infinite process of the betterment of human condition in all realms of existence and because it entails also the idea of abolishing all the limits imposed on humane existence, that is the idea of Godhood. We can see the idea of getting Godhood through technology in such a motion picture as 2001. *A Space Odyssey* or in Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*, an expression of the alchemical image of the snake that bites his tail, the man creating himself by sending instructions from the future to the past. The meaning of emancipation is therefore religious and covers more things that meets the eye.

Pierre-Andre Taguieff rightly sees that the notion of emancipation as being confuse, and as not being grounded in reality. The real observable progress, he asserts, is local, not universal. The growing technological and scientific mastery of some parts of the world does not abolish limits or emancipation from natural laws (Taguieff, 2019: 56). Nevertheless, this idea lives on taking sometime a universalist approach to human existence or an approach based on difference. The universalist approach entails, for example, the refusal of all identities or features that have not been chosen by the individual, like gender identity, or ethnic identity or even one's age. This is a direct expression of a liberal and nominalist heritage, which is based on the individual and his

or her own will, whereby the only true value is free-choice. This is another example of sovereignty. The isolated individual is the ontological basis of existence, social relation is secondary, at best. Everything that exist, even the state or human community exists only to be instruments for the individual to fulfill his or her desires. Everything converges to this situation. Refusal of heritage, devaluating stability, idolizing mobility, praising the lack of border and of limits, nomadism are just expression of the new normativity that emancipation instills in society. All this is weapon drawn against every kind of communal existence, or traditional norms, or nations, etc. This is not possible without a very strong state that destroys any communitarian relations, particular belongings, and which must reeducate people to get rid of the past. Thus, it is easy to see that to the core of the emancipation concept and its variants lies an enlightenment presupposition. This is a presupposition of the human being as an abstract being, devoid of particular features, like belonging to a certain community, to a certain gender, etc. Every kind of rootedness in a community, in a transpersonal category, is seen as slavery. Every kind of attachment to a certain particular heritage, tradition, past, the country is seen as slavery and must be fought, eliminated, destroyed.

„Tout attachement à une passe particulière une aliénation. L'histoire, la culture, la langue et la religion exercent une emprise insupportable sur l'individu. Ne parlons pas de l'ethnicité. Toute identité particulière est une prison.” (Taguieff, 2019: 280)

6. Conclusion

The idea of emancipation is essential to the self-understanding of modernity. She belongs together with other equally important concepts, as already shown. Emancipation is in a sense the purpose of modernity. Its purpose is the abolition of all things that impose constraints on man and make him unhappy; this process produces a kind of deification of man, whereby he becomes master, and shaper of the world and of nature. This is the ideal that undergirds the whole modernity. Destruction of human communities, of family, is a consequence of this liberal-oriented thought; Marxism came a little bit later, but both conceptions share some essential conviction. In the case of Marxism, the hate for particularity, true belonging, heritage, and past are condensed and expressed by Karl Marx anti-Semitism. The Jews or the Jew - *der Schacher* – represents the past, the tradition, the particularity (Senik, 2011). They represent rooted existence. Emancipation entails in Marx's view not only overcoming human rights which is individualism but overcoming or annihilation of this particular rootedness (Taguieff, 2019: 322). Annihilation of particularity in the whole of mankind is the way to obtain the desired emancipation, and the tool to achieve this purpose is terror (Senik, 2011: 87). Emancipation entails the reign of abstract man over the real existing human being with their particular and singular features. The idea of abstract man though is not restricted to Marxism alone. The same idea lies at the core of the opposite view on emancipation, based on the conception of human rights. Here, this idea of an abstract human being comes to the fore, namely the idea of a being that has no particular belonging, which is neither man nor woman, which has no ethnicity, and can become whatever he thinks to become. The only defining feature is that of the power to choose freely.

The religion of emancipation postulates the future as a state of bliss, the future being a kind of substitute transcendence that replaces God, whereby history or/and man are the agents of the desired transformation of humankind, society, world, nature. It is also tainted by a belief in illimitation, of abolishing limits, the destruction of particularities. Another expression for this is the much-vaunted flourishing of humankind seen as a collection of atomized individual existences. This supposed state

of bliss is based upon emancipated individuals, that is people without any kind of particular relation with something, this conception being only a camouflaged expression of the wish to abolish all limits, all differences, all particular identities, the rejection of past, basically of human culture. Emancipation is thus dehumanization, loss of humanity. This trend of thought is expressed by the trans- and posthumanism movement, which are knock-offs of Enlightenment philosophies and recreate the technological utopia of a deified man. The idea of re-creating and fabricating the human being with the help of new technical means, or the idea of downloading of the consciousness in a computer to make it quasi-immortal, etc. are manifestations of desire to abolish abolishing of all limits constraining human existence and of molding human nature as some self-righteous fake wisemen wish (Taguieff, 2019: 339-340).

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