

The Rebirth of Pre-Modern Man: A Journey Beyond the Orbit of the Modern Universe

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Abstract

The modern world is founded on the model of a “scientific” prison in which freedom is radically redefined within a mechanistic framework purporting to save people from evil. From within that cage, we are incapable of seeing what is without it without severe distortions. In order to understand the nature of our modern condition, we must question its moral and epistemic roots by seeing them onto a plane of possibilities whereon modern man faces pre-modern man as fundamental “other” and partner in dialogue. By encountering the pre-modern as viable alternative to our modern or Machiavellian “ways and orders,” we begin seeing the world, not as a mechanistic shelter against divine authority, but as a poetic place where the divine reveals itself in terms of a secret, though unambiguous activity seated at the heart of all things human.

Keywords

freedom, reason, nature, ancients, moderns, Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, ideals, God

Introduction

The modern world as modern is created by human calculation; it is therefore not generated naturally; it does not simply “evolve” out of a pre-modern past. The modern world is created first as a Machiavellian/Cartesian blue-print that is then supposed to be “realized historically,” to provide a solution to problems that pre-modern man had left unsolved. The upshot of our collective struggle to realize the blue-print is the establishment of a “brave new world” characterized by a concrete planetary, global or international System of rules and regulations that is supposed to incarnate man's loftiest aspirations, while sheltering all Peoples from fundamental questions, questions pertaining to the essential or inalienable bond between the human and the divine, between the ethical and the metaphysical.

Within the System or "World Order" in question man becomes progressively and unwittingly an expendable number, even as he is formally presented as gaining divine or divine-like attributes. We are promised the stars, as it were, in the very act of being crushed into the all-too-earthly; we are proclaimed free, precisely as our freedom is (re)defined strictly within the boundaries of a Global (or Totalistic) Regime of mechanistic control and manipulation: Technocracy. Those of us trying to escape from such a progressively dystopian cage, will need access to signs, primarily literary signs, from the pre-modern world; we will need to wrestle with our pre-modern classics in ways that risk undermining, even subverting altogether, our most cherished modern certainties or prejudices in favor of a pristine encounter with truths to which our modern upbringing tends to blind us.

Methodology

The method adopted by the present work is a phenomenological one carried out in a two-fold manner, or through two distinct phases: 1. a preliminary "bracketing" (akin to what Husserl (1970) called *epoché*) allowing us to consider our ordinary modern certainties as mere possibilities vis-à-vis fundamentally viable *pre-modern* alternatives; and 2. an intimate encounter with pre-modern literary sources as signalling the irreducibility of reflection to any compulsion, be it moral-historical, bio-chemical, or more vaguely existential. Modern methodologies redolent of a Cartesian-like "scientific method" are included within the scope of certainties to be bracketed for the sake of fulfilling a phenomenological cause. Thus is the modern notion of a "subject" beholding an "objective" world questioned at its roots and so in the face of an alternative scenario in which mind is not formally or symbolically cut out of a merely "extended" or quantifiable world (a world of value-free data), but in which the world itself is our method: a *poetic* stage on which a determined mind (thought within a world) discovers "providentially" its irreducible indetermination (thought as outer limit of its world). The original instantiation of thought within the world will then not be a conceptual "empty shell" such as Descartes's egoic structure (the "subject" as *res cogitans*), but the "incarnation" of a thought acting beyond any subjection to its world.

Results

The present investigation finds that modern moral-conceptual habits have tended to drive us towards a crisis of humanity on a planetary scale, while blinding us to the very possibility of a remedy to our crisis. Such a remedy is now exposed as a way of life represented most notably by pre-modern literary classics of the caliber of Aristotle and Dante Alighieri. These newly-encountered sources guide us to recognize ourselves, not as "subjects" lost in a quantifiable world, but as "descendants" emanating directly from an *intellective agency* disclosing the world primordially as a meaningful whole.

Discussion

We need not be familiar with twentieth century literature — from Franz Kafka to Michel Foucault (See O'Donoghue, 2021; Backman 2018)—to notice that Jeremy Bentham's panopticon (Bentham, 2020) is a blueprint, not merely for new prisons, but for the world as

a whole;¹ much as Disneyland is in principle no mere amusement park among others, but the prototype for a universal society or a society that has shed all political-theological “pretense” — all public-minded quest for transcendence.² In such a society, the only problems left are problems that can be solved (as per the 16th century mathematician François Viète), which is to say essentially *technical* problems (Klein, 2013). All non-technical problems are either conceived mechanistically and so in strictly technical terms, or they are dismissed, nay scoffed at as practically irrelevant, publicly insignificant, if not altogether toxic to the thriving of a truly free society — the truly universal or open society.

Today, we have the liberty to talk about unsolvable problems such as justice, truth, freedom itself, beauty and evil, as long as our talk does not spill “metaphysically” or “poetically” outside of the cage of technocracy, the regime defined by the rule of the machine, or where mind is defined as a function of the mindless. Here we learn to serve the machine by pretending to use it and so by ignoring that the machine is using us 1. to pretend to use it *and* thereby 2. so that we may most efficiently serve as fuel for the machine. This much is entailed by the technological imperative: our lives must fuel a machine set up to manage them given the supposition that without such a machine our lives would in all likelihood, if not altogether inevitably, fall into a state of chaos.

Today's intellectuals are expected to articulate discourses that remain compatible with the rule of the machine insofar as they do not threaten its stability by calling its foundations into serious question. Moral opposition to technocracy poses no threat to the regime as long as it is not grounded in a purely theoretical opposition, or a questioning of the very *principles* of technocracy. For then moral opposition feeds into the vortex of machine-domination. To oppose the machine in mechanistic terms is *de facto* to fuel the machine's “will” with a lesser will; it is to oppose one power by contributing a minor power to it. When opposing technocracy merely in moral terms, we throw but a burning twig into a gargantuan bonfire of voluntarism, which swears by the primacy of will over pure reflection. On the other hand, to oppose technocracy on purely theoretical grounds is to expose its essential impulse to a realm of possibilities it otherwise tends to obscure; it is to see technocracy itself as a possibility, rather than as any imperative; as a hypothesis rather than any fateful necessity.

1 Brunon-Ernst (2012) and Baudrillard (1981), esp. pp. 48–56 (“La fin du panoptique” or “The End of the Panopticon”). Baudrillard's argument that we are no longer in the era of the panopticon or of its logic of despotic control tends to obscure the character of the passage from A. the master/slave or active/passive relation entailed by Bentham's logic of control, to B. a world of “simulation” in which the audience is (supposed to be) the actor. Though readily admitting that today we have reached a mode of “absolute manipulation” (*manipulation absolue*), Baudrillard writes as if contemporary tyranny were an alternative to the despotism defined by the panopticon. In reality, what our contemporary conflation of viewer and viewed involves is the triumph of the “Big Brother” surveyor via its immanentizing as “way of life” in the viewer: it is not so much that the audience becomes the medium/instrument of control (though in some sense people have tended to behave robotically and so in the element of sheer compulsion, as “reactors” devoid of reflection), but that they have been duped into believing to be free wherever they pretend to be their own masters by having “assimilated”/embraced the panopticon as a universal way of life. The “chip in the brain” that today's renowned technocrats (from Bill Gates to Elon Musk) advocate enthusiastically is a mere shadow of the contemporary technological integration of the master in the slave, where the latter is convinced of having become a master (of being the one who chooses, who uses, who manipulates) in the very act of serving his master's logic. It is not merely that we use ourselves, or feed upon our own life as cannibals, but that we are compelled to do so, or to abide in a protracted suicidal more of being, by a logic that we have “swallowed” already from our earliest childhood. We have in sum interiorized our chains, which are consequently successfully at work in us, without need of being tangibly imposed from above.

2 On the political-ideological significance of Disneyland, see Baudrillard (1981), pp. 25–28.

We can understand technocracy or our contemporary world-Regime only where we see it as a possibility, rather than as the universal answer it promises to be. To speak of technocracy from within technocracy is to take what is cardinal about the Regime for granted; it is to allow the Regime to use our discourse as mere fuel. Yet, the possibility of technocracy emerges in contrast with a fundamental alternative, namely pre-modern civilization. Genuine understanding of technocracy requires familiarity with a pre-modern way of life (*old* "ways and orders," to paraphrase Machiavelli).

One of the key traits by which modern civilization distinguishes itself from pre-modern civilization is the former's habit of conceiving war or strife, not merely as accidental to nature, but as essential to the thriving of both nature and man.³ The key difference between man and nature is defined by the former's capacity to feign peace by conceiving it as a mask of war. How this is done is methodologically simple: we must all pretend to be at peace by "privatizing" war. Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray* explores this problem with graceful ingenuity: evil (including the evils of war) must be hidden "in a closet" to best serve the interests of public prosperity and its glammers. Fear of our skeletons in the closet, or more precisely of their coming out of the closet, drives us every day to embrace the cause of the publicly gilded as facade that could symbolically (thus in the abstract) replace its contents. In crude terms, the body is to emerge *as if it were* a spiritual agent: freedom is to be sought as physical where the physical is attributed spiritual qualities — *as if* the light of spirit could be appropriated by darkness (John 1:5). The story of modernity unravels in these terms, where the physical is progressively "empowered" with spiritual traits/attribution, until it can *collectively* affirm itself as the coming of age, or consummation of spirit itself.

The collective "body" ("the masses" implied by expressions such as "mass media") is to resolve the problem of private or underlying horrors, as an "ideal" in the making. The very drive towards the consolidation of a public mask for private violence fosters at once unbridled exacerbation of private violence and the rise of a Regime of violence-containment — at once inner chaos and outer chaos-management. As long as violence is merely camouflaged, an intolerable tension remains between what Hegel speaks of in terms of Slave and Master. This is why violence must come out into the open as peace itself: violence unjustified by any ideal beyond itself; violence as Progress — as the ideal of progress *in action*; violence (including violent repression) as its own solution, as a progress leading to the exposure of violence as unlimited creativity.

The Regime of unlimited creativity is that of an open, global or technocratic society wherein all traditional institutions are re-framed or re-contextualized in technical terms and so in accordance with "international laws" that are supposed to incarnate human rationality at its best (O'Donoghue, 2021; Strauss, 2019; Germino, 1969; Bevir, 2007).⁴ Violence is to have no motive left other than the realization of that society; all other motives emerge as redolent of historically contingent illusions. Of all ideals we can possibly fight for, only freedom

3 See Cicero (1988), 1.5, where the wise follow and abide by nature as supreme providential God (*naturam optima dux tamquam deum sequimur eique paremus*). Cicero's words help us see that what our pre-modern classics mean by "nature," is not what modern man means by that very same term.

4 O'Donoghue (2021) and Strauss (2019). Germino (1969), p. 888 reminds us that for Hegel natural right (*Naturrecht*) remains irreducible to positive right. Yet, Germino remains silent before the question of the terminal rise of a positive right that is supposed to incarnate the highest demands of natural right. Modern tyranny or totalitarianism is not thwarted by the project of defining positive right as capital function/expression of natural right. On Hegel's refusal to identify (positivistically) any earthly State as fully realized (*Wirklich*), see Lobkowitz (1968), pp. 103–10. For a recent attempt to blame Medieval Christianity for the tyranny of today's international law, see Delsol (2015). On the Machiavellian roots of Hegel's doctrine of international law, see Kadelbach, Kleinlein & Roth-Isigkeit (2017).

conceived as a function of the universal society, freedom as the triumph of the *human* Will and so of what the modern Enlightenment calls “human rights,” is worthy of being called just and true. “Just war” recognizes no ground in an intelligent nature or in God, but in the demands, nay imperative of the The Triumph of the Will, or to speak with the predecessors of contemporary liberals, der *Triumph des Willens* (Heilbrunner, 2017).⁵ This, above all else, is peace; this, above all else, violence and so war.

No one more than Hegel, the greatest representative of modern rationalism and paladin of modern freedom, shows us that Progress, or the rise and consolidation of the Global Society, needs war absolutely (not accidentally): the Global Society emerges primarily through war, through the struggle between the ideal or dream of freedom and the harsh demands of law and order; between, therefore, slaves and masters. The upshot of our History of Struggle is a Regime in which freedom is realized in thoroughly secular institutions, forms of authority that are supposed to fully represent the demands of freedom. This is what Machiavelli, the father of modern idealism, spoke of as “new ways and orders” (*modi ed ordini nuovi*) (Machiavelli, 2000).⁶ Our forms of authority are such that freedom re-conceived as cut off from any divine mind, finds itself entirely at home within those forms. We are supposed to thrive in the thriving of our institutions. Our institutions are no longer shadows of a divine or natural order of things, but *realizations* of freedom progressively emancipated from ties to eternal limitations, to all that had been previously deemed immutable. Now, even and especially God serves as a justification for freedom. God as *our* ideal.

No longer seen as rooted in a divine, transcendent mind, law itself is supposed to incarnate or realize the freedom that earlier ages had merely fought for. Now, at the End of the Struggle we call History, freedom itself fights. Not us for freedom, but freedom for itself; freedom as incarnated in a concrete Regime. Our own fate? Either we cheerfully sacrifice our lives to the supreme cause of freedom as consummate fighter, as supreme demand to fight, as machinery of total war, or we are “left behind” as absolutely expendable numbers. Either we embrace the cause of Absolute War, of War as “the new normal,” or as the consummate Norm (the one that is supposed to contain all war), or we are rejected as illiberal failures, discarded as inadequate citizens of the world.⁷

The machine in question is none other than Technology, not merely as tool, but as Regime, as system of control and manipulation of all that is properly human, all that is natural in man. Technology's foremost cause is and must be war as way of life: not war that is waged by men in the name of an ideal, but war as the realization of the supreme ideal, of the prototype of all ideals. War as the self-expression of a freedom embodied “historically,” as the expression goes. Yet, men themselves are caught in the cogs of war; we are lost, or find ourselves born of war. Should we then ask what war is for? No, for war makes or is supposed to make life bearable. War as the production of meaning; war as flight from the supposed meaninglessness of life; war, not as mere means, but as the elevation of means to the status of ends. For in the face of the absence of any other true end, our struggle, our power, the triumph of our will-at-war, emerges as an end in itself. War itself emerges as our destiny; “History” as the Triumph of War.

5 On the liberal roots of German National Socialism, see Heilbrunner (2017). Far from being opposed to modern liberalism, the Nazi movement sought to fulfill the demands of modern freedom by extinguishing all obstacles to its triumph. This much Dostoevsky (2003) helps us understand most notably in his *Brothers Karamazov*.

6 Proem to Book 1. On Machiavelli as apologist of violence as key to the rise of a modern world, see Winter (2018).

7 For an examination of contemporary manifestations of the nexus technocracy-war, see Hughes (2024). For an analysis of the contemporary “scientistic” drive to reconcile democracy with technocracy, see Esmark (2020). On the way, the art of politics is reduced to the science of chaos management.

As moderns, we do not merely find ourselves lost in a fallen world, a world fallen into a state of war. Instead, we find ourselves *realized* in a world progressing towards war as destiny, a World Order wherein war is an imperative involving self-affirmation as mode of denial of any affirmation beyond all selfhood. Was it at once terrible and glamorous; of course, fatal, but enthralling, inspiring, engrossing, rewarding, enchanting. War is a God, the supreme God, the true God that we are here to embellish, to "justify" in the eyes of its foolish detractors, its dangerously foolish detractors. The final war characterizing what Hegel calls "the end of History," is not merely as a necessary evil means to a transcendent peace, but as the truth about peace itself.

The 1930's Nazi movement comes to mind. Hitler's National Socialism had a vision of world peace that demanded total war, or total dedication to the cause of war. The envisioned peace was the mere facade of war, the Machiavellian smile on a machinery of death, of annihilation, where the primary enemy would be the Old God and his stubborn People. The extermination of all reminders of the God of the beyond, the God that hides in a peace beyond all war, was not merely a sad necessity, but a fate to be embraced enthusiastically on a collective basis (Andreacchio, 2024a). World peace was the goal, but only insofar as world peace involved the affirmation of blood and soil and so of the spirit of war as supreme over all other affirmations, all other commitments.

Our language is by and large still tied, if only parasitically, to old ways, still speaking of war as an evil to be avoided. Yet, as children of Machiavelli's revolution (De Corte, 1961)⁸ we adopt old ways only by way of re-contextualizing them, and so by making strategic use of them as Trojan Horses for the triumph of new ways and orders. Thus, while we speak of avoiding war, we admit in practice that only a war can end all wars — only a permanent state of war, only war as universal fate, can save us from *old* warfare. The new war that smothers all old wars is war *as* peace, chaos as order, violence as law, malevolence as supreme benevolence, cunning as nature (Allan, 2022).

If modern peace is the mere pretense of peace, modern pacifism can amount to no more than fuel for war. Indeed, the modern pacifist does not so much oppose war, as he does any *good reason* to fight.⁹ The modern pacifist is the atheist-at-heart who rejects any divine grounds to oppose bad ideas and the barbaric legions that serve them (DiClementi & Langiulli, 2008). The modern pacifist believes or pretends to believe in a strict politics of appeasement. He believes that *the* good is not a transcendent reality we might have to fight for, but the mask of an amoral "historical" necessity, or of our dedication to that necessity. We are good when we embrace the flow of life, the evolution of nature, *beyond* "good and evil" or any *pure* good (good beyond all evil);¹⁰ when we give a kind or "humane" face to the flux of the quantifiable.

8 For an exemplification of the difficulty of writing outside of a Machiavellian "sphere," even when it comes to reading Machiavelli himself, see Vilches & Seaman (2007).

9 On the hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy of pacifism, see Orwell (1941). Orwell notes why "objectively, the pacifist is pro-Nazi". For a recent critique of pacifism, see Consiglio (2022). Consiglio appeals to purity of motives, falling short of admitting a justification for war in nature and God.

10 The expression "beyond good and evil" (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*) made famous by Nietzsche pertains to a fateful/historical necessity for us to reject any good beyond evil, any absolutely pure good, embracing the idea that evil is essential to the rise of what is *truly* good. What is truly good is an existence in which evil is the primary propeller of good. The truly good is the result of evil's overcoming of any pure good. Evil emerges throughout a harsh historical struggle as the essential content of the good. Hence our current predicament, where the good invoked propagandistically by our most prestigious institutions is but the mask of evil. To be good "at the end of History" will be to bravely embrace the demands of an evil that, having overcome all pure good, can successfully posture as supreme good, if not for all ages, at least for a present moment to be rehearsed or recycled in perpetuity. In this respect, truth emerges as the repetition of lies; reason as bold imposition of unreason.

Thus does the pacifist court chaos, raising green lights for barbarism. What is wrong according to the pacifist is not barbarism per se, but traditional appeals to a God calling us to oppose barbarism in his name and so in the name of a peace more fundamental than any war.

Modern warmongering goes hand in hand with modern pacifism, which in effect contributes to the spreading of the view that we produce the good as a place in which amoral existence gains meaning (Ogden, 2024). The good as “spaceship” in which violent nature is dressed in civil garb; in which the absence of God or Being emerges as true Being; in which non-Being defies Being by converting into the pretense of Being.

The pacifist who pretends to be contributing to the end of all war is merely contributing to opening the door to the idea that war is a universal reality that we should all work, nay fight, hard to camouflage. The war that is to put at end to all wars would have to be a war to mask all wars, a war affirming the pretense of peace: war as a new peace — the peace of the pretense of Being; the triumph of a grand lie over the absence of any truth.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* invites us to face our modern predicament with unsurpassed audacity. The modern world is one of impostures confirming each other in a catastrophic game of mirrors that the prince of poets exposes as suicidal. Once the question of Being (“to be or not to be...”) is dismissed as the laughable, if not altogether intolerably dangerous fruit of a deranged imagination, we can talk about *ideas* as much as we please without interfering in the least with the rise of imposture as master key to world order. We would then merely pretend to say something, while in reality pronouncing mere words, *nuda nomina*. Speaking as conceptual mercenaries, we would take pleasure in speaking about nothing, or in transforming nothing into the pretense of something. Language as departure from Being. This is precisely the obscurantism that Heidegger accused Platonism for, thereby obscuring the anti-Platonic character of Heidegger's own modernism (Turner, 2024; Bartlett, 2017). For the drive away from Being is the modern one that is Platonic or idealistic only in name, whereas below the grammatical surface it trades poetic distances for a mind-numbing immediacy that cannot but lead us to conclude that “God is dead” (Philipse, 2021).¹¹

Platonism considers names on the horizon of Being, which is to say of the source of all physical motion: the “negative” or vicious infinity of the physical presupposes the “positive” or “intensive” infinity of spiritual motion. The “Platonic” distancing of names from Being entails the *poetic* reflection of the distance between physical finitude and its infinite spiritual perfection — between the determinate (*peros*) and the absolutely indeterminate (*apeiron*). Platonic speech is purely poetic speech, which exposes the hiatus between a point and the circumference inscribing it, between “matter” and “form”. Progressive alienation between the two is the result, not of Platonism, but of the modern anti-Platonic attempt to overcome the hiatus in question.

The modern/progressive attempt to synthesize the finite and the indefinite¹² is based on a Cartesian-like misunderstanding about the nature of both poles. Now the indefinite is seen as a mere possibility anticipating a finite actuality — as if there were no actuality preceding possibility; as if actuality were merely the “realization” of a possibility. The modern notion of “History” stems from such a misunderstanding (Strauss, 1965; Ghibellini, 2024). For now, we see “History” as the horizon of the *possible* realization of Being. “History,” not as the per-determined journey of man back to God, but as the stage on which man has the *power* to *realize* God, or to convert a “name” into “historical action”.

¹¹ pp. 382–83.

¹² On the unlimited (*apeiron*) as the earthly, see Semerano (2005). For a more recent survey of interpretations of the Greek *apeiron*, see Gregory (2016), pp. 86–98.

But "History," one might object, is the plane of the *imaginary*, spilling out of the purely reflective or contemplative. Would the historical realization of God not involve a shift from the classical God of contemplation to the *dream* of God, a dream we can or rather must fight to realize?

Modern anti-Platonism involves an idealism based on a "materialist" foundation (Von Wussow, 2020, Andreacchio, 2022; Stauffer, 2018): the dream of God (God as dream)¹³ presupposing God's need to be *realized* in the dream. Once we rid ourselves of Being itself, we can work exclusively upon setting up the pretense of Being. Hence Shakespeare's *Hamlet*'s importance for our times. Claudius, the impostor-king, is the anti-Platonist who pretends to have overcome the hiatus between Being and non-Being by reading the former as fuel for the transformation of the latter. On the other hand, for the Platonist at heart we are not here to realize our dreams, including the dream of Being. Instead, we are here to seek our own realization in Being as primordial act of return or "reflection" of all that emanates from it.¹⁴ Man will not realize *himself* in "History"; instead, he will *be realized* (and thereby saved from a painful state of alienation/fragmentation) as he departs from his fallen world, a *chiaroscuro* world *partially* fallen into darkness.

The classical Platonist will not hold onto his fantasies, no matter how astutely justified these may be in terms of unassailable "ideals" beyond good and evil; rather than dreaming of realizing his dreams, he will prepare for being-realized outside of all dreams, in God as the *extinction* of all dreams (in the classical sense of the Sanskrit *nirvana*), especially when these are modern man's "ideals" (Andreacchio, 2024b).

In a passage from his *Metaphysics* A, Aristotle objects to Anaxagoras for having appealed to God or divine intellect as accounting for our empirical world *ex machina*, as if ordinary experience could be adequately understood aside from direct divine agency (1.4.985a21–22). If the world is eternal or unending, then it is not infinitely such *in time*, but in God as absolute limit of physical motion (Aristotle refutes the *actual* infinity of time in his *Physics*). Mind, rather than any body, no matter how large, defines the physical universe in all of its facets; not as an agent acting upon things from without them (as Deism would have it), thereby allowing us to understand the world as "a clock without craftsman" or "a maker-less mechanism,"¹⁵ but as an actuality that alone resolves all potentiality within itself and itself alone (Andreacchio, 2023a).

Casanova (2016) is right in correcting Zeller and kindred scholars for having reinvented/falsified Aristotle to meet modern moral and epistemic expectations. The real Aristotle is incompatible with Cartesian grids and Descartes's appeal to God as *ex machina* guarantor of a modern *method* to know all things symbolically (universal in its applicability, in its power to be imposed, rather than in its coherence with things themselves, or the actual content of the world). Aristotle's "method" or "way of treading" is divine agency itself — divine providence — saving man from brutality, including the brutality of a cage-world that we may be tempted to build as solution to the problem of violence, a cage that breeds nothing but evermore violence, defining the violence it contains as peace (or "mostly peaceful") and the slavery it manages as freedom (Rosas, 2022).

13 See Chapter 20 ("Feuerbach's Bourgeois Atheism") of Westphal (2007).

14 On the classical meaning of "emanation" from divine being, see Andreacchio (2023a).

15 Citing here an example of popular literature reflecting the dominant cosmological view of the modern age: Moore & Gibbons (2014), p. 138.

Let us consider how Aristotle's God acts in our world. Thus reads *Metaphysics* 1072b19–31:

Now thinking as such is of that which is as such best, and thinking in the highest sense is of that which is in the highest sense best. But thought thinks by drawing from what is thought; for it becomes an object of thought by reaching out to think, since thought and what is thought coincide, for that which is receptive of what is thought and so of a substance, is mind, which is active where it bears [its content]. So it is activity, more than receptivity that is said to be mind's divine property, and its contemplation most pleasant and best. It is then marvelous if God has always the good that we have sometimes; and if he does so more fully, then it is even more marvelous. Yet such is the case and indeed life belongs primordially to God; for the activity of mind is life, which is that very activity, which is in itself the best life and it is unending. We then assert God to be a living being unending and best. So that life, the perpetual and the unending converge as the primordial property of God; for this is God.

Aristotle further testified to the divine roots of man's thinking within his world in *Metaphysics*, Book L, 983a, where the Stagirite exposes the consummation of ordinary investigations into the nature of things. Natural reason arrives at the thought that all things depend from a first cause that is the spring of thought itself. The unmeasurable in the measurable, or the irreducibility of things to quantities no longer occasions bewilderment: in exposing ourselves to the first cause, to God, we see why all things defy finitude, for all things are destined to be fulfilled in divine thought alone.

Aristotle's articulation of the nexus between the properly human and the divine helps us appreciate the theological-political bond that Leo Strauss returned to as the creative reality underlying modern promises, or as the pre-modern soul of modern discourse — a soul the abandonment of which consigns “the West” to collective suicide (once again, Nazi Germany stands as reminder of the way modern reason commits suicide as it betrays the substance of what it appeals to *nominally*) (Robertson, 2021, p. 9).

Let us further explore the political aspect of the classical-canonical alternative to modern idealism, or to the ideological replacement of non-quantifiable “things themselves” (*res ipsae*, or things in divine/pure intelligence) with nominal signposts the meaning of which is to be determined by brute force (Mao spoke pertinently of “the barrel of the gun”).¹⁶

On the modern stage, progress is fueled by a war between slave morality (freedom-fighting) and master morality (inherited forms of authority), whereby war is fought as leading to the rise of a master morality based on a slavish foundation, and so of a Regime in which the “slave by nature” (Ambler, 1987) emerges as dictator of norms (hence the contemporary rise of “victim culture” or “identity politics”) (Campbell & Manning, 2018). On a classical “Platonic” stage, and so in conformity with nature itself (as opposed to nature as reinvented by modern/Machiavellian reason), the war between slave and master unfolds on a *poetic/mythical* stage, mediated by a discourse moderating strife by opening it to an otherworldly dimension — death, both as negative limit of war and as positive content of all that war must presuppose. The poet, rather than the implacable logic of a progressive

16 On Aristotle's account of human experience as disclosed within the horizon of divine intelligence, see Casanova (2016), pp. 207–10.

machine, serves as moderator of strife; modern "chaos management" yields to classical moderation of passions in anticipation of exposure to a transcendent realm of being and understanding. Thus do the slave and master alike abide in *piety*, conserving a sense of shame in reverential memory of the permanent conditions for genuine freedom.

Aristotle's God is not (the modern) one "of the gaps" (Dawkins, 2006, pp. 151–61), though he may be fairly called "of the interstice," not in the (late)modern sense that he is opposed to centrality, but in the classical evangelic sense that he speaks and dies on a Cross, at the crossroads between light and darkness, between eternal life and utter demise. In this sense, the God of the interstice is the God of Platonic poets who attend to the reflective act underlying the fiber of everyday life-death experience. What holds things together, what makes things whole *from within*, what sustains all phenomena throughout their ordinary, natural unfolding (from birth and growth to decay), would not be anything quantifiable or "physical," but the absolutely indeterminate, which is pure thought or mind acting as irreducible producer of forms reflecting its own activity (Aristotle, 1995, 2001).¹⁷

The distinction between physical and so determined/limited motion and divine motion is disclosed by the latter's purely *reflective* or "circular" nature, as Dante shows vividly most notably in his *Comedy*. We do not find the whole of things, their circumference or proper context by simply departing from the centrality of the human (the "center" of the circle, in Dante's *Paradiso*), but by returning to the center as mirror of a whole disclosed as miraculous interstice between all physical determinations. Here the center discovers itself tied supremely to divine *interstitiality*, to the divine that binds all things together, the divine that *hides* between certainties as between extremes, "in the middle of the path of our life" (*nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*, as per *Inferno* 1.1) not to overcome or destroy ordinary human life and order (all that Caesar stands for), but to regulate it, to sustain it constantly open to divine transcendence.

If God is the whole of everything, then what we consider to be "the whole" from our ordinary perspective of minds seemingly fallen in the midst of things is no more than the shadow of a true whole, tendentiously a *trap* that distracts many from the poetic challenge of regaining access to the true *form/boundary* (*eidos*) of things reflectively (Gerson, 2017, pp. 209–41). We are not here seeking a "thing" among others, but an *informing agency*, a movement disclosed primarily or fully in a reflective mode of being that "hides" between¹⁸ all of our certainties helping us discover our certainties as reflections of their generative principle, *and* ourselves as the "center" or "point" of conversion of the physical into the spiritual, of opaque distractions into transparent reminders, of "dumb jewels" (Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*) into jewels that speak, poetic pearls signaling what is never given out for grabs or subject to use/manipulation — to being contextualized — insofar as it gives itself freely and rigorously on a path of return to its own hidden home-ground.

Aristotle's classical God of interstices is, in sum, one that welcomes man to be restored in "reflective hiddenness" as master key to the constitution of the world we would otherwise remain fearfully lost in. The God that hides and returns all things into hiddenness,

Let us consider however an alternative conception of divine hiddenness articulated relatively recently primarily in Schellenberg (2006). Schellenberg speaks of divine hiddenness as implying that God might not make himself known to some people. Schellenberg's

17 Aristotle (2001), pp. 1–37 (Sachs, translator's introduction).

18 For a (post)modern attempt to re-evaluate the theological/ontological valence of "the between," see Desmond (1995) and Desmond (2008). Desmond's "between" emerges in tandem with concessions to the "weakness" of thought (we are not far from Gianni Vattimo's "return" to religion) or to thought's immanence *vis-à-vis* a transcendent divine being (Aristotle's God is all too readily dismissed). See Vattimo & Rovatti, eds. (2013).

objection is that if God is all-loving, as we should expect him to be, then we should all have a sense that God exists, so that all “non-believers” would be “resistant non-believers,” which is to say rebellious with respect to God. At which point Schellenberg will note that pagan antiquity shows that there certainly are, or at least have been non rebellious non-believers in an all-loving God. Why would pre-Christian pagans have no notion of an all-loving God? Why did that God not bless classical antiquity with his knowledge, or at least awareness that he existed?

Such and similar considerations are easily met by recognition that awareness of divine perfection requires ears to hear, or more precisely a *conversion* from the “extended” world of appearances to the “intensive” one of divine hiddenness. This is what we find in philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. Yet, the “Platonic” (or Platonic-like) turn to divine perfection as “hidden” *in* man — as well as *to* man insofar as he loses himself in his “extended” environment — is not necessary to have *belief* in divine perfection. For us to hold such a belief, all we would need is “apostles” or poets charismatic enough to convince us that an all-loving God truly exists. The *existence* of God would then require a “special” (as opposed to “general”) prophetic forewarning that philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle did not need in order to readily concede that there is such a thing as divine perfection.

Schellenberg's argument is sophistic insofar as it obscures the *essential* demands of conversion (Plato speaks of *periagoge*) (Lastra, Monserrat & Monserrat-Molas, 2016, p. 106) and so the distinction between direct revelation and revelation as mediated by prophets or “poets of the divine”. In the former case, conversion entails a turning of one's life in the mode of reflection, whereas in the case of non-philosophical or poetically-mediated revelation, conversion consists of a “point” or threshold beyond which the faithful's life is mediated by the words of poets who are, in the best cases, enlightened by direct revelation or the encounter of divine transcendence in the element of pure reflection.

Those who do not “believe” in God are well advised to begin reflecting as Plato and Aristotle did — to live in the element of *natural reason*, open to a reality transcending the “extensive” flow of physical motion. Schellenberg is right as far as non-rebellious non-believers go: they do exist. Plato would call such people Sophists; medieval Christianity might call them Epicureans. Where Schellenberg's argument fails is in its obscuring of the difficulty for light to illuminate darkness, or to order chaos. An all-loving God need not be heard by everyone for him to exist and speak always quietly enough for everyone to hear.

Let us recall Dante's words to Virgil in the first Canto of *Inferno*. Virgil having spoken of himself as “rebellious” to the Emperor of the universe, Dante's avatar (Dante within the poem) seeks help from the pagan poet under the aegis of “that God that [Virgil] did not know” (*quello Dio che tu non conoscesti*). Dante as author is helping us realize that Virgil was not really a rebel (*ribelle*), even though he would be considered a rebel if transposed in Christian times. For you cannot rebel to an authority you do not know (of). So here we have a pious pagan poet who did not know the divine as all-loving Lord of the universe. Why not? What prevented him from knowing (of) the Christian/biblical God? Not his vice or lack of virtue, to be clear.

Dante's poetry invites us to conclude that Virgil knew God, though not as ordinary Christians know him; not *through* poets, but in the active company of enlightened poets (Andreacchio, 2013). This same point is articulated in *Purgatorio* in the presence of the character Statius: Virgil is now seen as carrying a lamp behind himself as he advances towards a hidden light (Andreacchio, 2011). The light that Virgil bears in the dark is not for himself, but for those who are to follow Virgil. Virgil bears the light benevolently, as a good poet, rather than as fallen Lucifer. As for ancient “Epicureans” who did not know

any God, they were not philosophers at all, for they failed to live in the element of reflection, wherein, as Aristotle showed incisively, we naturally come to the realization of divine agency at work in every aspect of experience and indeed in the formation of all physical objects, though most evidently in the awakening of man out of a state of compulsion.

Schellenberg argues, not in favor of philosophical Epicureans, but in favor of Sophists who represent the corruption of pre-Socratic natural philosophy (or of those whom Aristotle calls philosophers of nature). Pagan poets such as Virgil do indeed know of God and divine providence, even though their knowledge is not mediated by biblical prophets. The all-loving God would then let himself be heard by all, independently of poetic mediation. He need not speak loud to be heard by all, but quietly enough so that, as we grow silent, as we begin to reflect, we may all hear the single voice that is best heard in hiddenness.

Aristotle helps us appreciate the classical Hebrew appeal to a hidden God, a God hidden to man. The Christian Gospels corroborate the lesson by emphasizing God's hiddenness *in* man. God hides from man as long as man hides from the God hidden *in* him — as long as man abandons the reflective mode of Being in favor of an "extensive" life of distractions from Being itself.

Modern man's case of abandonment of Being is especially severe: as Machiavellian Hobbes teaches, we cannot know the supreme good (*summum bonum*), but we can know the supreme evil (*summum malum*) (Oakeshott, 1991, pp. 250–53; Strauss, 1965, pp. 149–50). This is because evil is now seen as formally or symbolically resolvable, or manageable. The supreme evil for modern man as such is violent or avoidable death. On the other hand, evil can be known precisely on condition that the supreme good cannot be known. The modern rejection of knowledge of the supreme good is based on the assumption that what is beyond conquerable goods is "beyond good and evil," or mindless (not being desirable in and of itself, it is incompatible with a classical/Aristotelian understanding of mind tending to its own perfection as supreme good).

For modern man, any "supreme good" would need to be unknowable so that we could not distinguish it from an evil, though we could say it is not the worst evil, which is what we can know as violent death. On the other hand, we can say that the "supreme good" is in a decisive sense an evil that is second only to the supreme evil insofar as the first distracts us from ways to address the supreme evil effectively. For this reason, Machiavelli blames the Christian message as responsible for the fall of Roman civilization. Instead of seeking a good beyond all evil, we should be seeking amoral means to fight against evil. This is "the modern position" Machiavelli worked hard and successfully to popularize.

Whereas modern man can know the greatest evil insofar as he cannot know the greatest good, pre-modern civilization is founded on the principle that knowledge is tied to the good as ignorance is to evil. We can know the *summum bonum* insofar as knowledge belongs to it absolutely. The more we depart from the supreme good, the less we know, or the more we know merely nominally. In this respect, modern knowledge/science as modern is illusory — merely-symbolic. Modern knowledge is a lie imposed upon reality to convince us that we have identified our enemy (evil) without need to discover or face the challenge of discovering a supreme good. As if we could eliminate evil *now*, without waiting upon the disclosure of a good beyond all evil. Indeed, liberation from "metaphysical" concerns is supposed to allow us to best *establish* the good in the present, or "a better world," rather than having to wait for it to be offered to us in the future. Whence the modern notion that the future builds on the present, or that those living fully in the present are "building the future" (Benaroya, 2010; Maxwell, 1991; Tomin, 2020).

Edmund Husserl's exposure of modern reason as sham (Husserl, 1970) helps us see why pre-modern civilization would look upon modern science as an imposture. Classical knowledge is the product of thought returning to itself as supreme good: we know truly

only insofar as we are illuminated by a divine act of pure reflection; otherwise we are left with empty or vain certainties cut off from nature or life while fueling our alienation from what is eminently real. The upshot of modern alienation is violence as a way of being, violence as cover-up for alienation, violence as affirmation of non-Being as Being, of death as life — whereby that affirmation, that modern mode of being, is in itself the pretense of Being.

As long as we adhere to Machiavelli's anti-Platonic dogma we are doomed as a civilization to spiral into a vortex of pretense that can have no final outcome other than collective suicide (Andreacchio, 2023b; Burnham, 2014; Strauss, 2014; Strauss & Kojève, 2013).¹⁹ An outcome that comes hand in hand with progressive loss of awareness of the tide of our times, as Federico Fellini's 1969 *Satyricon* shows most starkly. There, as in our own times, the lust for power as a capacity to fend the threat of violent death leads gradually, though relentlessly, to an existence in which men are but vanishing shadows of men, while poetry or art is fragmented to record mere traces of dissolution.

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¹⁹ See also Goldberg (2020) explores the tip of the iceberg of the current at hand.

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