Section One. The Enlightenment and Violence: paths to national modernisation

1.1. The eighteenth-century French Enlightenment: Deism and the world as a mechanical pattern. Between secularism and absolute knowledge.

The eighteenth-century French Enlightenment stood in principle for the cause of “light”, conceiving itself as the “party of humanity” which sought to represent the “general will” of the nation over the particular interests, estates, or castes of the declining feudal order and Papal jurisdiction. The nation became a privileged category, but yet to be defined. The notion of a “general will” was indirectly enmeshed in cosmological concerns. Underlying the choice of “light” as central imagery was the seventeenth century revolution in cosmology produced by the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo which had established the sun at the centre of the universe, undoing the Ptolemaic system and with it a mental horizon cherished since antiquity of man as the centre of a small cosmos where the Biblical drama of sin and redemption unfolded. Fontenelle (1657-1757), a member of the French Academy of Sciences, wrote "Behold a world so immense that I am lost in it. (...) I am just nothing at all. Our world is terrifying in its insignificance".20

A small number of individuals of the ascending bourgeois class between 1620 and 1650, freed by the new commercial profits and the state from the bare constraints of daily survival, were able to conduct scientific research and thus set in motion a “critical mass revolution” in the order of thought.21 Galileo argued that the mechanical properties of things alone were primary, a view

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shared by Locke, instituting a mechanistic conception of the world, or the "mechanistic revolution" of the second quarter of the seventeenth century. Locke was far from hostile to religion, but he strongly rejected the political discourse of Providence linked to Divine Right. The political order based on the pre-Copernican imaginary institution of society was forced onto the defensive. The engulfing climate of violence through the long religious wars provided, as Milton had argued a generation earlier, a "ready and easy way" to establish a republic.\footnote{John Milton. \textit{The Ready and Easy Way to establish a Free Commonwealth.} March 1660. \textit{Complete Prose Works of John Milton.} Columbia U.P., 1931-40. Volume VI, pp. 111-144.}

The question of conflict resolution, or managing the spread of violence, was at the heart of the early discourses of natural rights – of which Milton was an early voice - that paved the way to Enlightenment.\footnote{John Milton. \textit{Political Writings.} Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page xv.} Was there a contradiction of means and ends in Milton's embrace of the opportunity of violence to bring about radical social reform and his call for "reconcilement; wrath shall be no more"?\footnote{John Milton. \textit{Paradise Lost.} Penguin, London, 2003. Page 59.} This contradiction was perhaps the poison in the machine of these early and idealistic efforts to struggle with the problem of state collapse. For state collapse was the fundamental issue, as Hobbes attempted to map out in \textit{Leviathan} (1651) based on the mechanist idea of a fixed and permanent order of things gone awry, dismissing as irrelevant the ferment of new ideas on liberty.

In the mid-seventeenth-century, one "natural philosopher" advocated experimentation as the only way to achieve "the management of this great machine of the world".\footnote{J.M. Roberts. \textit{The Penguin History of Europe.} Penguin Books, London. 1996. Page 266.} Experiments on the political plane were not long in coming. The English Revolution of 1649 provided several, both scandalising Europe and opening horizons for freer social orders. Robespierre, later cementing the link between new cosmological thought and politics at the time of the French Revolution, said: "Everything has changed in the physical order; and must also change in the moral and political
order".26 Yet neither the actors of the English nor the French revolutions wanted to interpret their own activities in defining the nation as experiments, and insisted on their ontological legitimacy on various grounds - first religious and then philosophical - which expressed new imaginary representations of authority. It also expressed - particularly in the second case - the desire to view science as a metaphysical development grounded in a realm of certainty, beyond the accident and contingency of ordinary experience, and aiming for eschatological completion in the 'end of history'. Both ended up justifying a great amount of bloodshed in their attempts to get there.

The dominant stream in the eighteenth century French Enlightenment was the mechanist notion that life or nature is as a jigsaw puzzle, in which the pieces can all be put together in one coherent pattern. The wide consensus in France that Newton's achievement in physics could also be applied with "equally splendid and lasting results in the world of morals, politics, aesthetics, and in the rest of the chaotic world of human opinion", was combined with a classical drive for perfection in the search for "the network of logical relationships of which the universe consisted and which reason could grasp and live by".27 Within the completed sphere of positive knowledge, it was believed, all virtues must be compatible with one another - in a universe that was a rational whole conflict over truth could only result from a logical error. As Rousseau argued concerning the General Will, the "common good" can have "no incompatible or conflicting interests". It is "always unchanging, incorruptible and pure".28

The issue of violence was at the core of the Enlightenment endeavour: the belief that all truths could be reconciled was attractive in a world where prior religious wars had been fought over conflicting claims to truth. These catastrophic events had revealed the fatally dangerous aspects of early modern state formation in destructive interstate warfare and the institutional rigidity of absolutism. Even Rousseau, who referred to the heart over Cartesian logic to locate universal

humanity, thus maintained in the spirit of classical reason that "Everything that destroys social unity is worthless". The causality mechanism, taken to be the foundation of the scientific enterprise, when applied in conjunction with the episteme of knowledge = virtue, would make a united people happy and free through a correct use of reason on perfect, fixed and eternal principles. Fontenelle argued that "A work of politics, or morality, of criticism, perhaps even of literature, will be finer, all things considered, if made by the hands of a geometer".

"Enlightened monarchs", such as Fredrick the Great of Prussia and Joseph II of Austria, also "compared the state to a machine", insisting that any "flaw in the machine's operation could be attributed to a lack of skill". Therefore, "to learn how to work the machine, future officials would have to study its principles, just as a physician studied the fundaments of anatomy". They considered their method to have "provided the best road to modern nationhood". Yet there was no debate over power or sovereignty, it being "taken for granted that this lay entirely with the monarch" as the state "loomed above the constituent elements of society, drawing them together and harnessing their energy". In the course of real events their degree of self confidence in wielding full control over the nation-making process would prove to be very mistaken. This was the mere tip of the iceberg in the problem of the gap between theory and practice that, particularly with the French Revolution, would signal the rise of a highly effective backlash against Enlightenment ideals in what was initially a German and then European romantic movement.

Because "states in Europe were established during the premodern period through a process of bottom-up, organic formation" where "rulers had to rely on the corporate bodies they inherited from the past, the local governance they enabled, and the resources they could provide", the process of nation making was always a struggle for power and could never be altogether conducted from

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the top down. Voltaire (1694-1778), who had been beaten, imprisoned in the Bastille and exiled to England before finally becoming highly influential as the prototype for the “intellectual-activist”, provided an alternative standard of progress and modernity in his criticisms of the French absolute monarchy under Louis XV. Seeing his works publicly burned on several occasions, he published anonymously and his correspondence constituted a network throughout Europe’s enlightened circles. This signalled the rise of an alternative and potentially rival source of civil power – largely composed of barons, marquis, counts and other noblemen - among an educated strata of the public and centred in the salons.

Voltaire based his ideal of progress and modernity on the experiences of England, lauding what he saw as political and intellectual freedom, religious pluralism, and a commercial policy conducive to national prosperity. There was a call for development in this tacit assertion that the energies and aims of the newly rising French middle class could find no outlet under the existing status quo – or a fundamental view of the political changeability of the future. Voltaire and other radical philosophes were inclined to materialistic ideas of Deism and sometimes atheism – that the world was essentially a machine functioning according to its own autonomous and, as it were, historicist laws. Diderot argued that the world was no longer of God, but “a machine which has its wheels, its ropes, its pulleys, its springs and weights”. To both Voltaire and Diderot, the central obstacle to the free development of the machine of the French nation – and indeed humanity - was religion. They saw the Christian history of Europe as a corrupting and often criminal period of decline, one that had destroyed the Greek and Roman civilisations which had sought to live by

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33 Berlin. The Roots of Romanticism Page 39. Berlin gives an account of the social background of the French philosophes, all of whom were of noble origins with the exception of Diderot and Rousseau who were commoners. 34 Diderot. Pensees philosophiques. G.F. Flammarion, 2007. page 67.
reason.\textsuperscript{35} The particular scientific narrative they introduced as a concurrent to religious narratives was derived from the ancient Platonic construct revived since the Renaissance, a vision of perfection in which certain axiomatic and unbreakable truths can be obtained by a special mathematical method leading to an absolute knowledge capable of correctly organising human life.\textsuperscript{36}

Yet although the \textit{philosophes} took the model of the seventeenth-century English revolutions, they did not think of directly adopting such a constitutional regime to the French context. The Encyclopaedists of Paris hoped to transform the monarch, once submitted to natural law, into the first servant of the national community with the people as the object of his care. This had anti-democratic implications, as Roger Chartier has explained: "in the final decades of the \textit{Ancien Regime} public opinion is defined as the precise contrary of the opinion of the greatest number". Both Condorcet and d'Alembert opposed the opinions of literate people to those of the multitude, while Marmontel contrasted "the truly Enlightened public" to the "blind and noisy multitude".\textsuperscript{37} Constructed upon "reason", public opinion was therefore the "opposite of a popular opinion that was multiple, versatile, and shaped in its habits by prejudices and passions".\textsuperscript{38}

The \textit{Encyclopédie} therefore "took for incompatible the hard demands of the popular condition and the participation of reasoned conduct in the government".\textsuperscript{39} Diderot argued that the "general mass of men are not so made that they can either promote or understand this forward march of the human spirit".\textsuperscript{40} He characterised the voice of the multitude as "that of wickedness, stupidity, inhumanity, unreason, and prejudice".\textsuperscript{41} The French \textit{philosophes} appealed to the authority of the monarch to adapt himself to the "natural laws" they claimed would bring civilization to its

\textsuperscript{36} Berlin. \textit{The Roots of Romanticism}. Page 2.
\textsuperscript{38} Chartier. Page 48.
\textsuperscript{39} Chartier. Page 50.
\textsuperscript{41} Diderot. \"Multitude\", in \textit{Encyclopedie}, X, 860.
highest point, rather in the image of Plato's "philosopher king" where the philosopher is the instructor and educator of princes. They did not envision an active role for the general population. The general public, in its fathomless chaos of contradiction born of ignorance, was to be recreated according to a single ideal of abstract reason through education when possible, or otherwise left to stagnate in the mire of irrationality when incurable. Ultimately, they were attached to a vision of the one and not the many, or total ontological claims intended to put an end to all the confusion of continuous disagreement on the level of an enlightened public opinion. Hence even Montesquieu — who advanced certain pragmatic and context-specific arguments against the grain — evoked for a point of departure the existence of a single principle of truth underlying the "infinite diversity of laws and mores", and claimed to have identified it in drawing his "principles not from prejudices, but from the nature of things".42

There are two points to be made concerning this eighteenth century French intellectual and political movement that viewed the state, the nation, and the world as a machine in a process of development, and found its distant roots in a line of early Greek materialist thought deriving from Democritus and Ionian philosophers that stated: "By convention coloured, by convention sweet, by convention bitter; in reality only atoms and the void".43 The first is that as a political doctrine and programme of action in the context of early modern state formation it had a deeply anti-democratic underlying impulse, and for the simple reason that secular democracy is incompatible with any claim to absolute truth at a metaphysical level on the part of the governing elite committed to eradicating false popular beliefs. The project of "trampling underfoot prejudices, tradition, ancientness (...) all that subjuges the crowd of minds" may have been laudable in its ideal aims,

such as overcoming illiteracy, ill health, deprivation, random violence, war, but suggested doubtful means or more often no clear idea of means at all to these ends.44

It follows that the second, and intimately related, problem, is the aspect of violence tacitly taken as a means to carrying out the intended public transformation and general programme of action based on a claim to the final and unique truth. These two problems are of course deeply paradoxical in a movement that was undoubtedly driven by a principle of toleration inherited from the seventeenth century discourses on natural rights. Be that as it may, the dangerous implications of these problems were soon to be revealed vividly in experiments in the process of nation making undertaken with the eighteenth century French Enlightenment as the guiding ideological influence.

Claims to absolute truth of what ever kind invariably throw up a lot of enemies. The eighteenth century French ideology of reason involves a recasting of the ancient dualism of the nation versus tyranny in terms of a single origin and definition for the nation. The pinnacle of human perfection offered by abstract reason – i.e., the proper functioning of the machine – had to be made through a process of weeding out what was other to the nation and, by extension, truth and humanity. This was a tendency perhaps fuelled by the early modern fear of politics as a merely arbitrary and temporal – and thus unstable - organisation of power. The kaleidoscopic issue of a nation’s historical origins and the problem of securing their political legitimacy was directly linked to the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate moments of violence. This problem was expressed explosively in the central debate between Montesquieu and Voltaire.45 Voltaire argued that the nobility was the source of tyranny in France, and the monarch the legitimate heir of the French national authority. Montesquieu argued, conversely, that the nobility was the true heir to the French nation and the monarch an impostor and the cause of tyranny.

The problem of a single source, single driving force, and single definition for the nation – tacitly anchored in a reality/appearance dualism – naturally invites the practical question as to how the legitimate representative is to gain ascendancy. Voltaire – doubtlessly unthinkingly - replied to the practical question of the means as to emancipating the legitimate nation from the historical interloper, the enemy, in his *Lettres Philosophiques* (1733) when he contended that the “English nation is the only one on earth which managed to regulate the power of kings through resistance”. Though “it had doubtlessly cost dearly to establish liberty in England”, requiring “seas of blood” to “drown the idol of despotic power”, the English did not “believe themselves to have paid too dearly to obtain just laws”. This division of means and ends at the ethical level was an unreflecting echo of Machiavelli’s earlier maxim on nation-making: “one should reproach a man who is violent in order to destroy, not one who is violent in order to mend things”.

Machiavelli’s glacial calculation of the facts in seeking certain ends was far from Voltaire’s troubled metaphysical mood. Voltaire’s writing was driven by a hunger for knowledge and a yearning for certainty in a world where public illusion seemed to dangerously hold sway. He certainly and correctly attacked the organised religious establishment as an obstacle to social reform, but he failed to distinguish between organised religion as a political force and belief as a personal experience. Just as the *Encyclopedie* (1751) sought to represent the “totality of human knowledge”, his writing tends to attribute a total nature to Christianity, and beyond that to religion as such. That is, he thought in terms of ontological definition. In a resolution to champion the pure truth derived from the new scientific principles of the age, he asserted tacitly that cultural and religious beliefs are identical to lies. He argued that “spells, prophecies, obsessions, were for a long time the most certain thing in the world in the eyes of all peoples” but “today this certitude has

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48 Hannah Arendt has argued that Machiavelli’s “insistence on the role of violence in politics” was due less to realism than a “futile hope that he could find some quality in certain men to match the qualities we associate with the divine”. *On Revolution*. Page 39.
fallen by the wayside”. Instead, he asserted the “unchanging and eternal certainty of mathematics” and the certainty that “I exist, I think, I feel pain” based on the principle that “a thing cannot exist and not exist at the same time”. This is an essentially ontological premise for certitude (i.e., based on a single definition of existence) by which he claimed an “equal value” to mathematics.50 A modern philosophical outlook extending to all areas of life should have, he seemed to believe, the certainty of physical science.

The consequence was a mechanist account of fundamental reality, according to which “error is in the eyes” but a “study of optics” reveals the true underlying nature of things (i.e., in the machinery of perception).51 The upshot is that the uneducated mass of people is prone to accepting lies and fantasies spread by charlatans.52 In promoting the ideal of a pure mind grounded in “abstract reason” against the “false mind” ensnared by traditional traps, Voltaire tacitly made a case for the destruction of traditional belief as a path to modernity and progress in a final triumph of positive knowledge.53 Of course he conceived it on the level of public education and the individual mind. The upshot, however, was a contradiction with Voltaire’s own commitment to tolerance and free thought in an assault on people’s beliefs and not merely institutions obstructing measures for social reform – a polar opposition between modernity and tradition.

To the extent that traditional cosmologies are integrated with hierarchical social orders and affirm their oppressive values, or run up directly against the findings of modern science, it is natural that they become a target of rational critique seeking to unmask them from a ‘natural science’ perspective. This is not quite the same as an outright metaphysical and ideological dualism between faith and reason which eliminates religious ideas from the realm of legitimate thought based on the project to “extrude myth from Western thought and direct it back to reality”.54 We see

the perceived correlation between Catholicism and reaction in the French context of the eighteenth
century extended to an imagined causality between religion and reaction in every time and place.

What is certain is that the emergence of a unified field of modern physics in the
seventeenth century, methodically uniting astronomy, optics and mechanics by way of geometry,
did produce consequences of enormous significance and ultimately provide the core scientific
elements of modernity itself. However, as Hume (1711-1776) was to subsequently point out with
highly disturbing effect, although we can demonstrate things by way of logic and arithmetic in
sciences which follow conventionally established artificial rules, we can never prove with
mathematical certainty that anything exists. The world in its everyday aspect must be accepted as a
matter of belief. Hume's scepticism may have harmed the philosophical belief in the universe as a
single rational whole united by necessity that characterised the French Enlightenment; it did, on the
other hand, absolutely nothing to harm the practical advance of scientific knowledge itself, and nor
was it meant to. It is necessary to differentiate between what may loosely be called scientific
method — going back, say, to Ibn al-Haytham (965-1039) of Basra, and his claim that "truth is
sought for its own sake" — and ideological assertions of some absolute truth that claim to derive
legitimacy from modern science while sometimes driving nation making and development
processes in radically telescoped and monochrome form (i.e.; Comtean positivism). It is the
confusion of the two that continues to fuel the appeal of poststructuralist perspectives as a romantic
alternative to a supposed tyranny in the singular reign of a monolithic scientific truth.

What is almost equally certain if a great deal more paradoxical is that the ideological option
of an 'absolute road' in nation making invariably compromises the secular ideal based on rule of
law in the name of a 'higher truth', and it was just such a yielding of empirical evidence/institutional
justice to the ideology of truth as 'genius/pure consciousness' that we saw at the high point of the
French Revolution, during the Terror. Robespierre, proclaiming this priority of sheer vision over

institutional law, would argue that "a regenerator must see big, he must mow down everything in his path". The very suspicion of hidden inner hypocrisy within the eye of the revolutionary storm was adequate grounds for execution by the state in its war on all vestiges of a contradictory past in the name of a single national future in enlightened modernity.

Such a concept of genius had already been articulated by Rousseau. Following Locke, Rousseau rejected the idea of Providence or Divine Intervention in the founding of nations; but he substituted it – and thereby lifted it above the category of purely arbitrary violence - with the category of "genius". The norm in modern society should be the rule of law; but the founding moment in law giving, the work of "genius", is a work of pure creativity necessarily unfettered by any ordinary limits of morality or convention. For Rousseau, "true genius" is "creative and makes everything from nothing". It is this "genius which lies behind all lasting things". This genius or "lawgiver" is the "engineer who invents the machine".

Rousseau's ideal of conscience in "genius" is a part of his reckoning with the clash between Providence and history that characterised the entire European Enlightenment. The concept of "conscience" as a source of legitimacy had arisen with the Renaissance and the Reformation, undergoing a variety of mutations. For Luther, conscience was divided from the state as the only source of religious authority, implying a special relationship between solitary subjectivity and God. This had both unintended secular and anti-authoritarian implications as well as, paradoxically, threatening implications for the secular state. In the French Enlightenment, the stance in favour of Absolute Truth as the expression of a universal "abstract reason" was ultimately an echoing of Plato's contempt for the rule of doxa over philosophia, or the opinions of common people over True Knowledge, which had been at the root of his hatred for the ideal of democracy. The

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60 Rousseau. The Social Contract. Page 44.
paradoxical coupling of this Platonic cognitive tendency with the strongly democratic aspirations in the Enlightenment produced, in the practice of mass revolution in France, a tangle of dangerous political contradictions in attempts to define the new state as one vision in its relation to the genuine plurality of the nation.

All of this was in a way deeply ironic and even sad. The discourses of the French Enlightenment, particularly Voltaire’s *Lettres Philosophiques*, set up their entire argument in obsessive reference to the memories of religious violence, persecution and civil war which had exploded in the wake of the dividing shadow of the Reformation. It was the same Voltaire who praised Catherine II of Russia for her “tolerance of all religions”. Following the early theorists of natural right, and harassed by memories of religiously driven witch trials and persecution, it was a call for tolerance. Yet a second and contradictory aspect of their ideology interpreted the causes of these terrible experiences in religious belief as such, and proposed to lead the way beyond such false and dangerous beliefs to a new universal consciousness in pure reason. In this way they ended up by sealing the loop in the almost equally dogmatic and violent ‘ideology of reason’ that intellectually paved the way to the furious fighting and massacre of the Vendee (March-December 1793) and the police state established under the banner of the deistic Festival of the Supreme Being (1794) in blatant contradiction to the Revolution’s founding principles in freedom of religion.

Rousseau’s idea of secularism involved a civil religion which would supplant existing religions on pain of death, paradoxically liquefying those beliefs that might constitute a threat to tolerance by force from above. The violent memories of the religious wars, which made "men breathe only murder and massacre, and believe they are doing a holy deed in killing those who do not accept their Gods", convinced Rousseau that it is "impossible to live in peace with people one believes to be damned". The creation of the nation, he was convinced, is incompatible with the

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survival of such divisive beliefs. This notion of a campaign of publicly transforming or eradicating belief itself is naturally not the same as the fact of bringing to justice a given individual who has allegedly committed acts of violence - driven by one form of belief or another as it might be. Secularisation is an objective process and secularism a possible variety of doctrines that reckon with this process. Rousseau presents one such doctrine, but far from the least likely to provoke violent conflicts.

Rousseau's stance, never the less, is linked to a deeper critique of the link between violence and sacred truth in the concept of Providence inherited from Locke. Rousseau argued that violence has no moral content, as it is merely "a physical power; I do not see how its effects could produce morality". Taking the line further, he writes that "(a)ll power comes from God" but "(a)fter all, the pistol in the robber's hand is undoubtedly a power". Power (i.e.; violence) is not something to be accepted fatalistically, on the basis that it comes from God, but something to be negotiated and controlled through the modern rule of law. It is on this basis that Rousseau reverses the Aristotelian claim that slavery is founded in immutable nature/human nature, and insists that human nature is universally conditioned by arbitrary social conditions and conventions as we see in Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*. This view of politics as historical convention had the revolutionary effect of unleashing "doubt that poverty is inherent in the human condition" or that the "distinction between the few, who through circumstances or strength or fraud had succeeded in liberating themselves from the shackles of poverty, and the labouring poverty-stricken multitude was inevitable or eternal".

This was surely a step out of the fixed realm of a universal absolute and into the flow of the temporal, but it also provided the grounds for Rousseau's conviction that by way of deliberate political planning this malleable human nature could be moulded in pursuit of perfection. Those

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involved in "the enterprise of setting up a people must be ready, shall we say, to change human nature, to transform each individual (...) into a part of a much greater whole".\(^{67}\) In this way a prototype was established by Rousseau of nation making from above in which those resisting the General Will "shall be forced to be free".\(^{68}\) The implication is an endorsement of political violence where "in putting the guilty to death, we slay not so much the citizen as an enemy".\(^{69}\)

Within the context of a broader Enlightenment debate this foreshadowed the two French Revolutions between "representation" and "regeneration". Montesquieu, following the English political tradition, was concerned above all with the institutional form of political power and saw the guarantee of liberty in the separation of powers. This was at the heart of his disagreement with Voltaire, who saw the guarantee of liberty rather more metaphysically in the intention of the ruler. Both shared the premise of a negative definition of freedom, i.e.; the absence of outside restriction. Within this debate Rousseau introduced a radically alternative conception of freedom into Enlightenment discourse in positive freedom, or a philosophical key to a better and transformed future.\(^{70}\) The state is a citadel driven dynamically according to some higher form of knowledge. He argued that the function of a just state is not merely to govern but to educate, to introduce an "ethical imperative" and create a "context for a moral life." It was in this context that he promoted a "civil religion in which these values would be evoked ritualistically".\(^{71}\) This ideal, though grounded in a worldly basis, certainly has untoward ramifications for secularism as an affirmation of subjective freedom.

Here Rousseau substituted a forceful narrative of historical origins in place of the traditional Biblical narrative which lent itself to multiple future accounts of a lost national 'golden age'. His historical hypothesis argued that the simple virtue of "original" and "natural" man had been

atrophied by the "corruption" of civilisation itself as an enfeebling and degenerate force. This was evoked in terms of an "original equality" in "nature". He thereby extended the concept of national origin to a deeper and ontological level well beyond the mere claims to legitimacy of contending political forces, and proposed the idea that the only legitimate sovereign are the people themselves as a 'primal unity'. Rousseau conceived this ideal in his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1754) through combined images of the native inhabitants of America and historical memories of Spartan civilization, producing a vision of limitless innocence and rigour or "innocence and virtue".\(^72\)

The French Revolutionary war on the past was something of an aberration, the result of a particular conflict between the French revolutionaries with the church and other conservative social forces. These events, however, including the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (1790) and the Dechristianisation Acts (1793), were also the logical extension of aspects of the French Enlightenment discourse. It was the intransigence of the monarchy and vested landed /church interests that ultimately transferred the hopes of intellectuals from an enlightened monarchy to the power of the general population or the 'nation', with radically unforeseen and irreversibly transformative as well as violent consequences in the new politics of the French Revolution as a popular mass movement. The population in any mass revolution hardly conforms to Rousseau's idealized imagining of a single 'primal unity' or 'force of innocence'. Altogether new sources of power were opened up that were enormously more potent, unpredictable and world changing than either the enlightened monarch directing nation making from above or the new educated public seeking to whisper in the king's ear.

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1.2. The background to the problem in the post-Reformation religious wars. Between tolerance and Providence.

In tracing the discourses of European Enlightenment back to their major intellectual roots in the seventeenth century – in concepts of Deism, natural rights, and social morality – we are struck by the fact that the individuals who conceived them were very often political refugees, victims of the long religious wars, and that the doctrines were articulated along opposed parallel lines of tolerance as ‘multiple ways’ versus Providence as ‘single way’.

Defending the principle of tolerance we find, for example, Isaac d'Huisseau calling for a belief large enough to “encompass the universe” and surmount sectarian difference in 1670.73 Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), the founder of modern natural right theory, was a Dutch refugee living in Paris in 1625 during the religious wars. He argued that the supernatural and divine be substituted with the imminent order of nature, or a disenchanted nature. The “secret” designs of God, used to justify atrocities in the name of Providence, could thereby yield to an accessible and neutral “natural law” through which these atrocities might be abolished by human agency.74 Pierre Bayle, a French Protestant refugee in Holland, argued in 1686 that “concord in a state with ten religions” would follow if “each religion adopted the spirit of tolerance” on the grounds that it is “impossible in our present condition to know with certainty whether or not what appears to us to be the truth (of religions) is absolute truth”.75 He thus introduced the epistemic grounds for non-violence, or sceptical reason, again implying a secular and disenchanted space for understanding and law. The discourse of tolerance, very often articulated by the underdog, was obviously an attempt to present an alternative to political violence as a solution to problems of religious pluralism in the early modern state. It challenged the core notion of Providence that nature,

74 Paul Hazard. La Crise de la Conscience Europeene. 1680-1715. Page 256.
society, and war are ordered on behalf of a chosen side by a singular eternal will to the final inevitable detriment of the non-believers: in effect, giving political violence a sacred character.

It was in this spirit that Benedict Spinoza (1632-77) argued that he "who loves God cannot strive that God should love him in return".76 A radical religious thinker of the Dutch Jewish community whose family had escaped the Spanish Inquisition, his writings caused him to be cast out of the Jewish community in 1656 and later banished from Amsterdam itself by the civil authorities. Rejecting the notion of Providence, he argued that citing "the will of God" to explain events was "the refuge for ignorance".77 On these grounds he distinguished the "political order" from the "prophetic order", arguing that "the true aim of government is liberty" while "complete unanimity of feeling and speech is out of the question".78 This entailed a strong secular line by which "laws dealing with religion and seeking to settle its controversies are more calculated to irritate than reform" and "laws dealing with speculative problems are entirely useless". It is "a usurpation of the rights of subjects to seek to prescribe what shall be accepted as true".79 He advanced a political principle of offices, based on the Dutch Estates General, aiming for a society in which "men may live together in harmony, however diverse, or even openly contradictory their opinions may be".80 This was essentially a theory of conflict resolution for early modernity. Spinoza also radically redefined God as limitless singularities unfastened to any metaphysical or teleological end, arguing that "there is nothing which necessarily exists except things finite".81

At the same time, the state-generated arguments for Providence grounded in divine right theory – despite hopeful claims to a profound historical lineage - were also of early modern origin. A new theory was required as "medieval theorists had generally denied that princely power was absolute". The rulers sought, by way of inventing the doctrine of divine right, to answer the attacks

79 Spinoza. Theologico-Political Treatise Pages 233/227.
80 Spinoza. Theologico-Political Treatise Page 232.
81 Spinoza. Ethics. Page 146.
on royal legitimacy levelled by the Jesuits and Calvinists and ‘close’ the hermeneutical and political maelstrom produced by the radically unsettling experience of the Reformation and religious wars. The waves of rebellion and assassination “forced the proponents of strong monarchy to develop counterarguments which would bolster the prince’s absolute sovereign power” by making “attacks upon him sacrilegious as well as treasonable”.82

The status of the traditional sacred knowledge underpinning such defences was indirectly if significantly challenged by the effects of the scientific revolution in producing new empirical knowledge on the laws of physics and calculus, in encouraging the realization that natural law was discoverable to anyone by means of ordinary reason and observation. This had tacitly democratic implications. The simultaneous expansion of geographical knowledge also forced sacred knowledge onto the defensive. The exploration of the world “contradicted certain of the basic ideas in which ancient philosophy was grounded (and) necessarily provoked a new conception of things”. The copious travel literature of the Dutch in the East Indies, and that of England and France, was welcomed and encouraged by kings allured by the prospect of rich colonies and lucrative foreign trade. Yet these kings did not foresee that the tales brought back would “in themselves give birth to ideas capable of shaking the most cherished precepts of religious belief and with them those ideas most necessary to the very foundations of royal authority”, the theories of Divine Right.83 We might call this the geographic-epistemic plane of contention in early modern nation making.

These developments indicate the degree of change in the West European political landscape in terms of the deep need for self legitimation by monarchs in attempts to control and coerce an increasingly important force of public opinion and tame rapidly expanding populations. These developments were in turn linked to an assemblage of macro-institutional events in growing urbanisation/trade between regions, the influx of gold and silver from the New World, and the Price Revolution involving growing responsiveness of prices to distant and multiple changes. We might

83 Hazard. Pages 19, 20.
call this, on the level of its political effects, the national-democratic plane of contention. By the same logic of divine sanction employed by beleaguered monarchs the aristocratic and bourgeois Calvinists found justification for “rebellion, constitutionalism, and limited government”, the Jesuits justified the “deposition of heretical rulers”, and radicals found justification for “republicanism, democracy, and communism”. That is, a variety of opposing ideologies were for a long time set up largely within the framework of a single underlying discourse of divine sanction.

What was at stake politically in these debates on the formation of early nation-states had a conjoined double aspect: the political problem of defining the limits of power in the early modern state, and the socio-religious problem of managing diversity within the self defining early modern nation. The uncompromising traditional ideal of perfect Knowledge inherited from the Platonic construct and now linked to Providence as a political ideology became a weapon within the pluralizing context of “the new secular forces which were capitalism, dynastic rivalry, nationalism, and state sovereignty”. We might say that the older discursive universe, in its efforts to assert itself through new political structures, was in actuality breaking down under the broader and pluralizing sociological/historical process of secularization.

These problems were linked to the loss of “any single ecclesiastical authority to which everyone owed allegiance” and the resulting “problem of political obligation”. The conversion of any leader to Protestantism produced a problem for those of his subjects who remained loyal to the Catholic Church, while individual Protestants living under a Catholic ruler found themselves faced with the same dilemma. The secular and ecclesiastical dimensions of authority clashed as "religious scruple called for disobedience to their ruler". In response to this, a “new basis for political structures was required”. One of the more creative attempts at this – which certainly broke with the underlying discourse of Providence - was the idea of natural law developed by

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Grotius, Pufendorf, Hobbes, and Locke, or the early discourses of natural rights which paved the way to the West European Enlightenment.

What is striking, however, in these debates from the point of view of early Enlightenment is that very rarely did these thinkers take an anti-religious stance. To the contrary: they often sought to save religion from the tainting limits of narrow minded sectarianism and becoming a tool of manipulative political violence. Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694) of Germany, the first professor of natural right, did not deny divine power but distinguished the plane of pure reason from that of Revelation in order to articulate a secular conception of civil society. He thereby envisioned a neutral and shared social space where differences of interest might be legally resolved without reference to questions of absolute theological truth. The gradual effect of these discourses was to construct an ideal of tolerance as a virtue that certainly laid the early foundations of modern secularism. The new debate on natural rights broke with hitherto existing religious discourses, but in rejecting the link between political violence and sacred truth rather than in seeking to attack religious truth as such. This was true as well of scientific and mathematical discoveries, as "Newton and Boyle both emphatically believed that their scientific work served the cause of religion". Newton did much unorthodox work in Biblical hermeneutics as well as laying the groundwork for classical mechanics and modern engineering.

This debate – which tacitly evokes the question of means in conflict resolution - had a long history threading through Holland, England and France in seventeenth century Europe in relation to "the evolution of two strikingly effective forms of state power – absolute monarchy, best exemplified by Bourbon France, and constitutional monarchy, best exemplified by Stuart England". The 1688 Glorious Revolution and 1689 Toleration Act in England were the political and policy embodiments of this growing seventeenth century secular tendency, an attempt to curb

religious violence through civic structures. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1684 and the Inquisition of Philip II, on the other hand, expressed the political ideology of Providence as a national program of religious homogenization based on Divine Right, i.e., to resolve the problem of religious pluralism/political obligation within the nation directly through a policy of state violence. For Philip II the “Inquisition not only in Spain, but also in the Netherlands and Latin America, was not just a matter of faith” but also “an instrument of political consolidation”. His policy of using the Catholic clergy as an arm of the state led to revolts and wars in which he, in the case of the Moriscos, “forcibly resettled 80,000 survivors in other provinces of Spain”, their “silk industry was obliterated” and the “last remnants of Arabic scholarship for which Spain had once been famous were also destroyed”.90

All of these events had a distinctively global dimension, suggesting firstly a broader process of secularization and secondly a world rapidly expanding beyond the old boundaries of Europe in a geographic revolution in experience. Firstly, there was the spreading global market. The development of increasing foreign trade and a regional international market in Europe followed from the national commercialization and specialization in agricultural activities, indicating a matrix of interacting states. This was accelerated in the early modern period by science and technology in the alteration of production functions and conversion of useless resources into assets – a practice which in turn transformed "cultural beliefs about the nature, role and possibilities of useful knowledge" partly through ideas propagated by the Royal Societies founded in 1660.91 Emerging nation-states, centred on kings, sought to enlarge their personal dominions and wealth. Increasingly thinking in secular terms of the economic power of nations, they engaged in the acquisition of colonies, struggles for trade supremacy, and creating the administrative apparatus necessary to collect taxes and raise armies. These were also elements, as previously noted, in the

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91 Greif. Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy. Page 396.
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management and organization of the growing populations within each nation. The Renaissance thinker Machiavelli was among the first to articulate this in secular terms, arguing that the nation should "avail itself of the population in important undertakings" and build the institutional "ways and means" to do so.\textsuperscript{92}

Secondly, it was the advance of the Ottoman Empire in 1453 that necessitated the search for an alternative passage to India and led to the accidental discovery of the Americas. The shift from the Mediterranean to Atlantic trade routes had far reaching effects. It has been described as the "launching of modern history" in terms of the "modern Atlantic world of which Europe was the heart" and an "unprecedented potential for development and growth".\textsuperscript{93} As early as the fifteenth century the Portuguese and Spanish led the establishment of trading posts and ports on the coasts of Africa, the Middle East, India and east Asia in addition to the conquest of the Americas, and by the seventeenth century France, Britain and the Netherlands had forcefully entered the competition.

The European states consolidated themselves in "bringing other vast geographic regions of the world under their political control" and subordinating what had been the "largely autonomous and self-sufficient economies of these regions" to European economies in a gradual "succession of expanding concentric circles".\textsuperscript{94} Unprecedented global regional disparities and the corresponding technological gap were already significant enough by the sixteenth century to permit guns, steel and germs to conquer the "New World".\textsuperscript{95} Voltaire would later use the new sense of chronology produced by the discovery of the far greater historical depth of the Indian past to belittle the exclusive claims of Christianity and ridicule the contradictory limits of the Mosaic historical narrative.\textsuperscript{96}

Geographically, we see the onset of flows of population, goods, and money not only between nations but entire continents with the emerging North Atlantic slave triangle, indentured labour, the Transatlantic and Puritan migrations and the administration of the British East India Company in Surat (1608). This early instance of globalisation, aimed at the creation of commercial empires, we might call the colonial plane of contention in the early nation making process. Buttressed by state power and military intervention, the creation of colonies represents the politically and culturally authoritarian as well as exploitative face of modernity experienced as a reality by the large majority of the world's population. This was a face also given frequent theoretical justification – in thorough contradiction with the principle of 'natural rights' - by the major figures of the Western Enlightenment within the framework of 'universal' systems.97

We may interpret this historical conjuncture as presenting the emergence of new dominant models in morals, politics, consciousness and action, of which the discourse on natural rights was one seminal expression. Such an idea complex inevitably reflects, on a more unseen and everyday level beyond the deadly immediacy of the religious wars, the new emergence of particular patterns of life linked to the new global space of early modern capitalism. Jean-Christophe Agnew has written: “In the century preceding the English Civil War, (…), Britons could be described as feeling their way around a problematic of exchange; that is to say, they were putting forward a repeated pattern of problems or questions about the nature of social identity, intentionality, accountability, transparency, and reciprocity in commodity transactions”.98

This new experience of the global market interacted with older existing institutional tendencies in "the struggle between the secular and the religious regarding the source of legitimacy" going back as far as medieval times at least to the Norman Conquest of 1066, in which the Bayeux Tapestry sought to establish William the Conqueror's legitimacy as an earthly sovereign

through pictorial representation of his coronation on Christmas day following the burning of south London and the betrayal of the Church dignitaries.99

1.3 John Locke and the social context of the English Revolution: early modernity between democracy and salvation

The secular tendency in the early discourses of 'natural rights' culminated in the doctrines of John Locke (1632-1704), which also laid the intellectual groundwork for the distinctive eighteenth century French and British Enlightenments. Locke, with a personal belief in the higher intelligence of angels coupled with a resolutely secular public politics, is almost the bridge between the imaginary of the seventeenth century religious wars and the eighteenth century struggle for tolerance, reason and humanity.100 By following Paul Hazard and tracing the beginnings of Enlightenment discourse to the seventeenth-century and the seminal year of the Glorious Revolution (1688), we may well also ask what political experiences haunted Locke from his childhood memories of civil disorder and collapse between 1640 and 1649. These experiences very likely shaped his mature convictions and ideals, and yet upon close inspection these tumultuous events were themselves early modern political experiments and their accompanying discourses attempts to negotiate the troubling experience of a new world space.

At this time “all of the vital ideas, those of property, liberty, and justice, were brought newly into question by way of what was far away”.101 Hence both Milton and Locke used the image of America or the “New World” to express the dominant idea of their political worldview: for Milton America was the symbol of the Garden, the enclosing cosmic reality of the ancient curse of the Fall, while for Locke America was the vast trackless waste awaiting development under the rational

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99 Greif. *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy*. Page 149.
guidance of the elect. These views in turn corresponded to differing ideas of labour: for Milton, labour expressed the persistence of an ancient curse and a shackle to the past, while for Locke it existed as the source of all wealth and offered a potential road to higher peaks of civilization in the future.

In 1600 English settlers had established themselves in Roanoke Virginia and the English empire gained momentum throughout the seventeenth century in the Americas and the Caribbean Islands, in the second of which were founded sugar plantations based on a slave economy. This was the liminal period of Spanish decline and England taking gradual ascent as an imperial power, with Cromwell giving an "open cry to the English people to challenge the supremacy of Spain in the New World".

With these events we are forced to peer into some murky theological depths in the English Civil War and the First Revolution of 1649 which culminated in Cromwell's religious dictatorship. With the Levellers and the "formation of a party composed exclusively of lowly people" the English Revolution pointed "to the course of the French Revolution", while "the demand for a written constitution as 'the foundation for just government'" anticipates the American Revolution.

Yet although significantly valuing the ideal of tolerance, the English Revolution was often conceived along political lines that were the very opposite of secular in Cromwell's belief that God's will is actively directing worldly affairs through the 'elect'. The general European background was the age of post-Reformation religious wars, the French Wars of Religion (1562-98), the Revolt of the Netherlands (1568-1648), the global Spanish empire of Philip II, and the

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105 Arendt. Page 43.
Thirty Years War (1618-1648) which saw the German population reduced nearly by half, with famine, disease, roaming packs of wolves, witch trials and mass migrations to America.106

These wars were experienced as a revolutionary force of destruction defined ideologically within a religious universe of the imagination as "western Europe became a giant battleground fought over by two crusading armies, Calvinist and Catholic". Both of these groups "can be labelled 'conservative' in the sense that they clung to the traditional medieval belief that no diversity can be tolerated within Christendom" with "just one interpretation of God's commands, one road to salvation". This single road is Providence, the medieval ideal of a cosmically coherent metaphysical opposite to chaos in which "God's timeless perception (and) knowledge (is) made apparent to us as foreknowledge". There is "no way of knowing it from within time".107 In these events we find Providence splintered within a dialectic between the medieval and the modern as "what gave Calvinists and Catholics such dynamic power was their active role in the world" and shared recognition of "the new secular forces that were transforming western civilization". Both groups "harnessed these forces to the service of God" in what was "in one sense the last medieval crusade, in another the first modern war between nation-states".108

If the first half of the sixteenth century involved fierce ideological contestation, by about 1564 the "central spiritual and intellectual questions had been explored, debated and formulated" and "each side sought to convert the other by brute force".109 This indicated a firmly established if hidden link between violence and claims to sacred truth on the ontological plane. Certain streams of the Enlightenment were to inherit this unspoken link and provide it with secularized justifications, while others were to make a concerted effort to break the link and introduce an alternative application of intelligence to this ethical and political problem. This revolution in

epistemological and ethical thinking, already suggested by 'natural rights' discourse, and even now barely sketched, was specifically Locke's contribution.

The period of religious wars tacitly established a principle of imminent value in political action, in this way presenting a slim existential foreshadowing of the praxis generated with the French Revolution. Although "between the 1520s and the 1550s, the kings and princes of central and western Europe had been able to shape and stage-manage the Protestant-Catholic conflict", following "1560 the rulers of western Europe were no longer able to blunt the revolutionary force of the religious crisis" as "Calvinists and militant Catholics began to rebel against the political status quo". At this time a revolutionary politics emerged as both groups "organized effective opposition against rulers who did not share their religious convictions" and "launched a wave of civil wars and rebellions against constituted authority". In this way, it may be argued that "sixteenth-century Calvinists organized themselves into the first modern radical political party, analogous to the Jacobins and the Bolsheviks in more recent revolutionary times".110

The case of the British Isles and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, a piece within the parallel and intertwined Dutch Revolt and the Fronde (1648-53) which constituted a broader European crisis of absolutism, presents a curious inversion of the logic of the French Enlightenment in that the structure of Christian prophecy is used by the Puritan underground in England to consistently deny divine law and traditional Episcopal claims, and assert an exclusively political or natural origin for the orders of the Christian priesthood. Radical Puritanism, as a "phenomena of pre-Enlightenment", was an ambiguous mix of the "deeply secular and deeply spiritual", with an anticlerical and hierarchical belief in the "priesthood of all believers" coupled with a politically dangerous soteriological enthusiasm committed to public salvation at all costs.111

As a result, following the Protectorate (1653-59) the clergy expounded "a rational rather than prophetic conception of religion" on behalf of their own interests or in any bid for extended civil power, and denials of their legitimate role in civil power took the secularised form of calls for liberty over enthusiasm typical of the English deists of the 1690s – itself a response to grim memories of revolutionary Puritan excess.¹¹² The emerging assaults of the French Enlightenment against miracle and revelation, where dominant social interests remained linked to the highly conservative Catholic Church with its commitment to Absolutism and Divine Right, had little relevance in the English context.

There are rather three points that are to be highlighted in the English Revolution which spanned half of the seventeenth century from the calling of the Long Parliament in 1640 through to the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688-9: (1) The tension between the politics of the everyday versus those of absolute ends; following the experiences of civil war and Godly rule, we see "the great campaign against enthusiasm that characterizes post-Puritan England" seeking to anchor Enlightenment projects in everyday realities leading to a general reformist temper.¹¹³ (2) The breaking of the truth, violence, sacred triangle. (3) A shift from the Christian discursive universe of hermeneutical interpretation grounded in multiple conflicting perspectives on holy texts to a secularly conceived set of ethical values, unbound by final claims to any metaphysical truth, and the basis for an open public sphere suited to a multi-religious society. This was in no small part linked to the meeting of the discursive universe with the new theories of Copernicus, Bruno, Galileo and others on the physical nature of the universe which "assigned the earth a more modest place and cast doubt upon the literal truth of the Holy Testaments".¹¹⁴

The philosophical implications of this had been recognized avant la lettre in the fifteenth century by the highly influential German cardinal, mathematician and astronomer, Nicholas of

¹¹⁴ Ashley. Page 34.
Cusa (1401-1464), who in early denying the finiteness of the universe and the earth's exceptional position promoted "learned ignorance" as the "recognition of this necessarily partial – and relative – character of our knowledge, of the impossibility of building a univocal and objective representation of the universe".\textsuperscript{115} Following this line of thought Nicholas of Cusa wrote his On the Peace of Faith in 1453, the year of the fall of Constantinople, imagining a summit meeting of all nations and religions and a declaration of a single faith founded in tolerance and manifested in a variety of different rites.

The Commonwealth between tolerance and a war on shadows

We may analyze the English Civil War period in terms of three problems: (1) the political problem of representation. Christopher Agnew indicates how by the time of the first publication of Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan (1651), "the word 'representation' had already drifted out of the figurative idiom of ritual, art, and religion and into the legal lexicon of politics and commerce", and the "traditional, static definition of a person or token chosen to stand for another" had been replaced by "the more recent and dynamic definition of a person chosen to act for another".\textsuperscript{116} This is a problem of implementing the institutional politics of republicanism. Following the execution of the king, England was named 'a Commonwealth or Free State' and the new Great Seal bore the words "In the First Year of Freedom by God's Blessing".\textsuperscript{117} The European republican movement had its deeper roots in the late medieval self governed, non-kin-based corporations, and "built on the beliefs and norms inherited from the Roman and Germanic legal traditions" centring "man-made (rather than divine) laws, self governance, and formal decision-making processes".\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{116} Agnew. Page 102.
\textsuperscript{117} Ashley. Page 91.
\textsuperscript{118} Greif. Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy. Page 391.
(2) The fairly objective issue of representation is linked to the second deeper – and in fact contradictory - "ontological" problem of authenticity, or the enduring substance of religious or cultural identity and values in the changing social context of early modern societies. This problem expressed a crisis of inner experience that sought to transfer itself to the political and public realm, anxieties epitomized in William Prynne’s attack on the ‘unreality’ of the theatre as undermining the sincerity and authenticity of religious identity through a surfeit of falsely constructed selves, and ultimately pointing to an illegitimate basis for political authority, in his Historio-Mastix, the Players Scourge, or Actors Tragedie (1633). This is a problem of the soul or the hidden world of inner conscience. The degree to which such anxieties came to encompass the prevailing political outlook is expressed in the words of one Huntingdonshire puritan who proclaimed that "I am not to obey a wicked King's Lawes upon Earth (...) but I am to obey the King of Heaven".119

(3) Together these issues point to the problem of "foundation" in early modernity, or the search for a new principle of authority and source of law, the means to lasting institutions out of experiences of radical disorder, a political problem which finally entangles the inner crisis of the soul with the construction of the nation-state in a struggle over the “true” meaning of inherited tradition in the first English Revolution. After all, in the creation of the republic Cromwell abolished the episcopacy, and the religious dictatorship he established was anything but traditional. This problem of "foundation" had been Machiavelli's prime emphasis, in the moment where the republic makes the confrontation with the problem of its own instability or temporality.120 At the heart of these three problems in England is the emergence of a theory of national sovereignty combining a republican pre-Enlightenment discourse with a religious discourse of national regeneration. In the context of the English Civil War a dominant discourse arose linking the representative principles of republican politics centring justice and tolerance to a higher ideal of

120 See Pocock. The Machiavellian Moment.
religious "truth" as the means to attaining the political closure of the promised land, or the "many signs and wonders towards a place of rest".121

Prynne (1600-1690), who came to public attention against the background of widespread anger over the failure of England to aid the Protestant cause in the Thirty Years War, again epitomized this tendency. A lawyer, mutilated and imprisoned for life in 1637 for criticizing the state church under Charles I, he was released with the revolution and formulated a new theory of sovereignty which sought to construct a rival principle of authority capable of justifying the deaths of so many men in the battle against the king in the name of a cause linking religion and the Parliament.122 James Harrington (1611-1677), the "pioneer theorist of English republicanism", insisted in his Oceana (1656) that the "republic was a relation between body and soul". Paradoxically, the major critic of this idea, Mathew Wren (1585-1687), a member of the scientific circle that founded the Royal Society, argued for a politics of Divine Right and High Church on the basis of dangers posed by a possessive individualism in an emerging commercial economy.123

The debates were thus many-sided and unsystematic, and running along the nerve of dominant political discourse was a fusion of violence and the sacred in an intellectual climate where "the idea that Church and State had to be one society was not yet seriously challenged".124 Cromwell consistently made the case that Providence was at work behind the curtain of history, linking violence and the sacred to a national destiny. In seeking to dispel doubt around the prospects for a successful invasion of Ireland in 1649, he admonished those who interpret events as "a thing of chance" and thereby "rob God of all the glory".125 In justifying the subsequent massacre at Drogheda to the Parliament he asserted that "this was a righteous judgement of God upon these

124 Ashley. Page 34.
barbarous wretches who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood" and that "it would prevent the effusion of blood for the future".126

Ultimately, Providence was at the basis of Cromwell's understanding of political power, as he spoke of "strange providences" having placed "the forces of this nation (...) into the hands of men of other principles", or the elect.127 The concept of “the elect” was used to explain the transfer of political authority from the traditional monarch to the republic in terms of an ideology of transcendental agency which supersedes Divine Right. Milton, who functioned as chief propagandist during the Civil War, similarly argued that “God shakes a kingdom with strong and healthful commotions to a general reforming” and “then raises to His own work men of rare abilities”.128

To be sure, Cromwell wanted to recreate the nation from disorder, appealing to “strangers (...) coming from all parts”, and evoked the central problem of hegemony by reference to “the people dissatisfied in every corner of the nation”.129 This creation was, as was typical before the late eighteenth century, conceived as “a recurring, cyclical movement” or “revolving back to some pre-established point” or “preordained order”.130 There was, though, from the beginning, a concern with the potentially conflicting ideals of ‘representation’ and ‘foundation’ as an ontological project in Cromwell’s thought. Throughout his life he held dear the ideal of ‘liberty of conscience’, asserting that "the judgement of truth will teach you to be as just towards an unbeliever as towards a believer”.131 Cromwell permitted the return of the Jews to England in 1655 after their expulsion at the end of the thirteenth century.132 This outlook existed in inherent if unthought tension with his ideal of the nation as a vehicle of public salvation, as a “door to usher in things that God had

126 Ashley. Page 94.
127 Cromwell. Pages 9-10.
130 Arendt. Pages 42-43.
These two ideals have their potential clash at the uncertain frontier between violence and power which defined the emergence of the Commonwealth as a political entity created self-consciously through an organized act of violence.

The result was a continual tension between two possible bases for political decision by the new regime: a political principle of 'representation', embodying an ideal of reciprocity and mutual agreement, and one of 'foundation', as the quest to achieve a common and unifying ideology based on sacred knowledge at the elite and public levels to restore order to an emerging nation lapsed into a state of chaos. This concern with at once identifying the origin and the means to sustaining a new national authority and political union frequently lapsed into affirming the very process in its sheer contingency as a law unto itself under the ideological imagery and ultimate reference of the "judgement of God".

The troubling question of violence was never very far from Cromwell's reflections. He muses over the "strange windings and turnings of providence, those very great appearances of God in crossing and thwarting the designs of men", and marvels that God might "raise up a poor and contemptible company of men" to obtaining power over the nation. He links violence to the sacred in asserting that "God blessed them and all undertakings by the rising of that most improbable, despicable, contemptible means", or violence. The "act of violence" finds its "justification" in "our hearts and consciences", and conscience is based not on "vain imaginings (...) but things that fell within the compass of certain knowledge" (i.e.; sacred knowledge).134

The uncertainty in applying the notion of Providence to a movement for change rather than preserving a static hierarchy is resolved hermeneutically by reference to the concept of progressive revelation by which "in every dispensation" including "the pulling down of the Bishops, (...), change of government, whatever it was,- not any of those things but hath a remarkable point of

133 Cromwell. Page 25.
134 Cromwell Page 14.
providence set upon it, that he that runs may read".\textsuperscript{135} The image of "running" affirms the moment of pure action or experiential immediacy as deciding a transcendental meaning. From this precept a Divine Will is to produce law based on the interpretation of signs among the elect, and the sheer process itself becomes law in an ontologically conceived voluntarist idea of the historical dynamic. Milton similarly argued in 1644 that truth consists in the "all concurrence of signs" by which "God is decreeing to begin some new and great period".\textsuperscript{136}

These three problems - representation, ontology, and foundation - in practice, amounted to a struggle over the problem of securing hegemony for the new regime among the public in the wake of the Civil War, the ultimately unsuccessful struggle involving experiments that veered between "healing and settling" political orders based on the mechanisms of mutual promise, reciprocity and legitimacy implicit in (highly restricted) Parliamentary politics, and exercises in "Godly rule" which sought by way of military dictatorship to "speed" the religious reformation of the national population at large and so create the basis for a "saintly" social and political order. We see the first "healing and settling" period from 1653-54 with the Protectorate and the Instrument of Government, the second with the Lord Protector from 1656-58. The two periods of "Godly rule" included the Barebones Parliament of 1653 and the Major-Generals of 1655-56. It is significant that we do not find a radical transformation of the key concept of justice, as tolerance, as security of property, in the transitions between these varying experiments. It is the means to the end that undergo radical transformation and offer insight into why, in accordance with the means employed, so great a potential discrepancy exists between the actual results of political practice and the original aims as envisioned by the statesmen, the party, the revolutionary, or other type of nation-maker.

Above all, we see the practical and probably unconscious struggle between a modern and secular notion of knowledge, epitomised in Cromwell's 1654 aphorism that the magistrate "is to

\textsuperscript{135} Cromwell. Pages 10-11.
\textsuperscript{136} Milton. Areopagitica. Page 177.
look to the outward man, but not to meddle with the inward" – implicitly based on a public ethic of trust and shared accountability - and his probably equally modern authoritarian observation in 1653 that “God hath in the military way (...) acted with (the chosen) and for them; and now he will act with them in the civil power and authority”. In this context, opponents of the aims of the “elect”, as “men well affected to religion and the interest of the nation”, are not legitimate dissenting voices but merely “interested and biased men” of “corrupted conscience” and “noisome opinions”.

The National-International dimensions and Puritanism between Liberty and Authenticity.

Agnew’s observation about the new definition of representation as a person chosen to act for another refers equally to the growth of industries as one of the “most striking aspects of English history in the seventeenth century”. With the coal industry we see “one of the earliest fields of modern capitalist enterprise”, invested in large part by foreign trade merchants “financed by joint-stock method”. There is hence a defining international political, economic and ideological context encompassing the English Civil War and the Revolution, to the extent that “it was a real shifting of economic power within the community that made the civil war possible”. The Parliament “grew conscious of their strength and wealth” from the influx of professional and merchant classes into the gentry, linked to the broadening economic opportunities of the rising coal industry, the post-Reformation land market, enclosures and overseas adventures. This growing wealth, centred in the bigger towns, contrasted with the “comparative poverty of the monarchy”. Meanwhile, the rural mass of illiterate people, four fifths of the population, hit hard by a steady rise in prices since the start of the sixteenth century and living at subsistence level, were scarcely

137 Cromwell. Pages 32/25.
138 Cromwell. Pages 18/17/32.
139 Ashley. Pages 14, 15.
140 Ashly. Page 80.
141 Ashly. Page 65.
142 Ashley. Page 82.
involved in the arising national politics. This was the secular commercial aspect underlying the English Revolution.

We may point to several secular ideological aspects. Europe at this time was divided ideologically between the two national models of Louis XIV’s Catholic Absolutism in France and the experiment in constitutional government of the Dutch Republic. The Dutch Republic, a maritime rival to England and born in the previous century of a revolt against the Spanish empire based on the principle of natural law, inspired much in the way of thinking about the nature of law, freedom, and sovereignty. In this context Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) wrote the first treaty on international law, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (1630-1635), arguing that the state is an association of free people united in protection of their rights and interests, or the law of nature, which is to be discerned by reason. The technological revolution in shipbuilding had given the Dutch Republic a competitive advantage in shipping that helped it to become the dominant trade power by the mid-17th century with intercontinental trade links through the Dutch East and West India Companies, and boasting the highest standard of living in Europe.

A second secular ideological source was Francis Bacon (1561-1626), a main catalyst for the scientific revolution who gave early expression to the basic concepts of the Enlightenment. These concepts were transferred directly to the field of politics where “after 1640, all Baconians were parliamentarians”. For Bacon, virtue was a social creation, not to be found in nature, but in “another nature”. This conception of the plasticity of social and political forms shifted the line of intellectual ancestry from Aristotle to Machiavelli, centring an empiricism in which truth flowed not from authority but from experience and where the moderns could advance beyond the ancients.

143 Ashley. Page 23, 81.
A new political horizon was thereby conceived in terms of progress. Bacon envisioned "the possibility of abolishing poverty altogether, for the first time in human history".\textsuperscript{147}

The main source of religious ideology was in Puritanism, representing “a large, able, and noisy minority within the Church”.\textsuperscript{148} This was a limited and dispersed movement at the opening of the seventeenth century, loosely united by their Calvinist-inspired belief in Predestination, the hermeneutical notion of the “right of the individual Christian to interpret the Scriptures” and their hostility to the “whole machinery of church discipline” in episcopacy.\textsuperscript{149} It included many merchants, weavers and squires, organised in networks or synods. We might characterize them as \textit{de facto} anarchists who anchored themselves within the shelter of a specific discursive universe.

The Elizabethan settlement of the Thirty Nine Articles (1563) had been framed to provide a viable middle road in the volatile Calvinist-Catholic doctrinal debate over predestination and free will; however, with the onset of the Thirty Years war (1618) an English Puritan movement emerged on a vocal platform of going to war for the cause. This climate of fury served as a cloak for targeting the Arminians, ostensibly again concerning the old doctrinal debate going back to Saint Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} in the fifth century, but more directly in response to their increasing political promotion by James I in a pattern of alliances that Charles I would fatally deepen.\textsuperscript{150}

In political practice the Puritans represented “a minority’s imposition of doctrinal and moral Puritanism by law not only on conservative and royalist Anglicans, but on dissenting religious minorities”.\textsuperscript{151} Yet the brief period of their political ascendancy also contained the doctrinal seeds of what would later flower into the West European Enlightenment i.e., notable thinkers would integrate elements of natural right theory into their Puritanical discourse. In this we find something of a paradox, as if things emerge at times from their opposite. Milton, certainly a true believer in the Puritan cause, would champion natural rights doctrine in insisting that men “should be free (...)\textsuperscript{147-151}

\textsuperscript{147} Hill. \textit{The Century of Revolution}. Pages 34.
\textsuperscript{148} Ashley. Page 26.
\textsuperscript{149} Ashley. Page 31, 32.
\textsuperscript{151} J.M. Roberts. Page 284.
openly to give opinions of (any doctrine), and even to write about it, according to what each believes.\textsuperscript{152} He argued that “all men naturally were born free”.\textsuperscript{153} He denied that either the church or the magistrate has a right to “impose their own interpretations on us as laws, or as binding on the conscience”.\textsuperscript{154}

But Milton also failed to differentiate between soteriological concerns of salvation and secular political liberty, and finally confused freedom and authenticity. Following the disappointments of the revolution he came to “believe that a convergence of the human with the divine would be necessary before a good society could be built”.\textsuperscript{155} In arguing in 1670 that “when God hath decreed servitude on a sinful nation (...) all estates of government are unable to avoid it”, he argued that forms of political organisation are irrelevant next to the public ontological proximity to God.\textsuperscript{156} He echoed this again in \textit{Paradise Lost} (1667): “Since thy original lapse, true liberty is lost”.\textsuperscript{157} This outlook is point for point the opposite of the secular conclusion reached by Locke a generation later, looking back upon England as a field of ruins following the wars. He argued that it is precisely the form of political organisation that determines the condition of liberty, irrespective of any theological considerations.

The English Puritans were colourful and creative in their hermeneutical re-rendering of received religious tradition, “with a literary backing (...) strengthened by a whole battery of pamphlets”.\textsuperscript{158} The central injunction of the Reformation, of basing authority on the Divine Word itself instead of any received tradition, inevitably opened up a labyrinth of formlessness concerning religious interpretation through the minimalist framework they adopted. If they looked back, it was to a past so creatively conceived that it could only be of the future or at least the moment. That is why we find Milton in the Puritan tradition defending Galileo against the Inquisition, speculating

\textsuperscript{154} Milton. \textit{A Treatise on Christian Doctrine}. In \textit{Prose Writings}. Page 126.
\textsuperscript{155} Hill. \textit{Milton and the English Revolution}. Page 336.
\textsuperscript{156} Quoted in Hill. \textit{Milton and the English Revolution}. Page 349.
\textsuperscript{157} Milton. \textit{Paradise Lost}. Page 273.
\textsuperscript{158} Ashley. Page 41.
about an infinite universe in the intellectual company of Giordano Bruno, and articulating an early discourse of natural right, just as surely as we find Puritan and Parliamentarian Robert Harley (1579-1656) smashing the stained glass windows of Westminster Abbey and St Margaret’s Church and setting alight the embroidered alter cloth of Canterbury Cathedral driven by an inquisitorial morality. The Puritan opposition to the monarchy was itself based on hermeneutics, for they rejected “Divine Right because they saw little in the Scriptures to support, and much to contradict it”. In sum, though the wide latitude of possible interpretation testifies to the human imaginative power in engaging a given text, hermeneutics based on any single discursive universe provides no secure foundation for the respect and freedom of the person.

Between military dominance and hegemony: the Puritan turn and the persistence of hermeneutics.

The first English Revolution displayed a constant tension between pragmatic everyday and imaginary absolute ends, and secular and religious politics, in the context of a struggle among competing institutions and mobilized forces for hegemony in the midst of state collapse and military conflict. Army mutinies, popular uprisings, threats of invasion from Scotland, Ireland and continental Europe deepened the complexity of the power vacuum. The Interregnum was also filled “with projects and experiments”, with “(r)efonners, theoreticians, social engineers, utopians and cranks delug(ing) the government with designs to settle the constitution, to improve and enrich society, and to make full use of the resources of the British Isles”. However, for most “of the decade the revolutionary regime was too intent on surviving from day to day to raise its sights

159 Ashley. Page 19. For Milton’s defense of Galileo, see Areopagitica Page 170. For his ideas on astronomy see the introduction to Paradise Lost, Penguin, 2000, by John Leonard.


towards more far reaching structural and social reforms".162 The enduring legacy of the civil wars was that "religious and philosophical ideas were freer and more varied than they had ever been before in the history of England".163 Yet at the time there was a continuous tension between radical and imaginative ideological expectation and the nuts and bolts of existing institutional and political reality.

A discourse linking sacred truth and violence played an important mobilising role, initially through the New Model Army, and then increasingly at government level following the execution of the King. There were key moments in the flow of events, certain of which cemented the imagined political link between violence and sacred truth, and others which represented a bid for public popularity or hegemony on the part of the revolutionary leadership. The key moments linking violence and the sacred were, firstly, the execution of the King (1649), followed by the victory at the Battle of Worcester (1651) and the onset of the first phase of Godly rule in 1653. These are interlinked with the preceding key bids for public acceptance (i.e.; stability) of the new parliamentary regime, firstly in 1647 when a parliamentary order to invade Ireland - in a bid for popularity - was disobeyed by the army who rather marched on London to purge the House of Commons under the leadership of the Agitators; and secondly in 1648 with the fatally unsuccessful attempt by the Parliament to reinstate the King, leading to Cromwell’s promise to “cut off the King’s head with the crown on it”.164 These were the key events leading to a period of more radical experiments, also bids for hegemony, led by a military oligarchy grounded in an ideology wedding incompatible republican and Puritan discourses, as “a small minority was lifted into influence by the obstinacy of the dead King”.165

The ‘Puritan’ turn in the first English Revolution was preceded by a period of predominantly secular projects and preoccupations. The secular parliamentary cause, grounded in

162 Barnard. Page 72.
163 Ashley. Page 38.
164 Ashley. Page 89.
165 Ashley. Page 91.
the "ingrained belief in the co-operation of subject and sovereign that maintained the delicate balance between prerogatives and liberties", had a far longer background than the major national conflict that erupted in the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{166} As early as the thirteenth century, England had replaced the system of community responsibility with "one based on individual legal responsibility and the coercive power of the state". The rising political power of the commercial urban sector was reflected in the replacement of the Great Council of nobles by a parliament in the right to approve taxes in 1295-97, reflecting the new degree of its wealth, population and military importance in forcing a promise from the Crown not to abuse property rights through a legal system.\textsuperscript{167} What this points to is a long term secular project of achieving accountability in coordinating the link between the public and private sectors, i.e., \textit{vis a vis} taxation, public investment, public goods and institution making. It now entered into the swift crosscurrent of new global market forces, increasing public participation, and the clashing of a blend of secular and religious mobilising ideologies.

When the Long Parliament was convened in 1640 by Charles I in the face of war-induced financial crisis, a general unanimity existed among its members in condemning royal policies of the 1630s – the so-called ‘Eleven Years Tyranny’ - for their tendency toward establishing the continental absolutist model. The upper class dominated parliament demanded institutional changes to limit the extent of royal power, particularly in response to the levying of ship money taxes without parliamentary consent. It was from within this secular tradition of demanding accountability that the Parliament, composed of the rising moneyed class and supported by Puritan strains, declared that “the prerogatives of the King were inflated beyond all expectation or limit”.\textsuperscript{168} At this stage despite worries over religious tension and accusations of “popery”, the

\textsuperscript{167} Greif. Pages 343-4.
\textsuperscript{168} Ashley. Page 68.

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conflict between King and Parliament remained rooted in such secular issues. Cromwell himself at the outset "did not consider that religion lay at the root of the Civil War".\(^{169}\)

The consensus within the Parliament, moreover, was broken over the mainly secular and class issue of centralisation when Lord Bedford and John Pyni revealed their intended programme in 1641. In requesting from the King a hold over the great offices of state in order to profit and protect the interests of the nation envisioned as a centralized political and commercial entity, they alienated those of the landed upper class favouring the continuation of cheap and decentralized government based on the rule of the locally oriented justices of the peace. Hence there emerged a split between two factions, the first a minority with national priorities and eager to capture the means of government, and second a traditionalist majority of bounded political horizons defined by estates, parishes and shires. The split between national and provincial conceptions of the political horizon, and between a commercial and a natural ideal of the economy radically deepened with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642 and drove many favouring the local model into the Royalist camp.\(^{170}\)

The ensuing clash was a civil war between sections of the dominant landed class with each side recruiting allies from the other classes to its cause, in alliances which were likely often viewed by participants in terms of local power struggles as much as at the national level. Although the revolution depended on popular demonstrations (largely of small landowners) and a municipal revolution in London based on such coalitions for placing the necessary military and administrative resources at parliamentary disposal, it ultimately only transformed the political structure by abolishing royal intervention in local political, economic and religious affairs but stopped short of revolutionising the existing class and social structures.

\(^{169}\) Ashley. Page 80.

The poor were meanwhile hit by a time of bad harvests, pestilence, and sudden death, with the average life expectancy not more than thirty five years old and less. Many families lived on the verge of starvation and children sought work in domestic industry or agriculture. No police force existed in Stuart England, but law and order was preserved by restrictions on the ownership of arms to the landed class – that is, the poor were excluded from the realm of law and lived within the realm between violence and localised forms of trust.\(^{171}\)

Organised elite elements did exist within the loose Puritan alliance enjoying considerable support among the lower ranks of the Army dedicated to pushing the revolution further, with the Levellers and the Diggers. In the Putney debates (1647) the limits of national enfranchisement were seriously challenged by the Levellers with the new and radical ‘birthright’ argument which insisted that being a freeborn Englishman itself should guarantee the right to vote, in contrast to the ‘fit to fight, fit to vote’ argument which followed the older tradition of the Roman republic and Machiavelli. The entire edifice of the Roman republican tradition by which education and reason functioned as the criteria for citizenship was challenged in perhaps the first articulation of the modern theory of natural rights.\(^{172}\) The Levellers concentrated politically on such secular matters as reducing taxes, curbing the arbitrary powers of Parliament, breaking the trade monopolies of large London companies, and protecting agricultural tenants against their landlords.\(^{173}\)

Yet their radical natural rights discourse, for all its secular aims, remained anchored within a religious hermeneutics. The Digger Gerrard Winstanley (1609-1676) carried out his short lived and brutally terminated experiments in economic equality based upon a passage in the Book of Acts, saying that the “Great Creator” was “dishonoured” by the comfort of the few and the misery of the

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\(^{171}\) See Hill. \textit{Century of Revolution}.  
many.\textsuperscript{174} These movements from below were viewed as a dire threat by the revolutionary leadership that would destroy private property and permit the "poor to govern the rich" and so were crushed with great determination.\textsuperscript{175} Cromwell valued the principle of hierarchy – also on hermeneutic grounds - and deplored "the nation rent and torn in spirit and principle from one end to another" while placing "nothing in the hearts of men but overturning, overturning, overturning".\textsuperscript{176}

The urban upper class limits of the revolution probably held firm largely because the greater part of the population, the peasants, were severely restricted in their actions by the specific county-level political machineries linked to the enclosure system and expanding market opportunities for wool and grain producers. Landlords expanded and commercialised their domains while keeping peasants as 'copyholders', or a system of fines facilitating the disposal of customary peasant tenants. Peasants, moreover, were divided by the rise of commercially prosperous yeomen farmers and a growing number of near landless and impoverished farmers. There could not easily be the widespread peasant revolts that would have "constituted both a direct assault on the base of power of the dominant class and an opening for urban radicals".\textsuperscript{177} There is also evidence that news of the war, even at the Battle of Marston Moore (1644), had not reached as far as some corners of the countryside.\textsuperscript{178}

The enabling framework of mass participation and national participation was, in contrast with law based institutions, the coercive and dynamic power of the newly national military institution. The New Model Army, created in 1645 by the Parliament because of dissatisfaction with the inefficiency of the campaign of 1644, was unique at the time in operating on a nationwide basis as a professional (rather than mercenary) army based on merit rather than birth. While the officers were hardened Puritans, the conscripts came with more commonly held religious views.

\textsuperscript{175} Ashley. Page 92.
\textsuperscript{176} Cromwell. Page 34.
\textsuperscript{178} Ashley. Page 81.
The ideological sense of religious mission or Providence linked to military violence would be important in effecting the ‘Puritan turn’ in revolutionary politics. The New Model Army won significant initial victories, and by 1645 the national wing in the Parliament had succeeded in significantly centralizing the nation and bringing it under tighter rule.\textsuperscript{179}

The accomplishment of these ends, however, was at the same time undermined by a general public fury at the rule of the Parliament and their military wing.\textsuperscript{180} There was hence military victory without the securing of hegemony necessary for the stable grounding of the emerging regime, and this problem became the dominant preoccupation of ruling elites in Cromwell’s new state. It is here that the tension between two visions, one of the everyday and one of the absolute, began to take shape through the institutional carriers of the revolutionary discourses, i.e., the Parliament, the different levels of rank within the New Model Army, opposing the King and the church in varying bids to secure hegemony as a prerequisite for national stability.

The onset of the Second Civil War in 1648 saw popular uprisings and invasion of England by the Scots, highlighting the weak hold of the Parliament over the nation and, with the subsequent overwhelming victory of the New Model Army, affirming the growing conception within the English army of being an instrument of God sent to refashion the nation.\textsuperscript{181} This cemented a link between violence and sacred truth, joined at the same time to a belief that they “had fought for the liberties of the people”.\textsuperscript{182} Liberty and authenticity thus became de facto interwoven as an idea complex. Viewing themselves as the architects of the Parliament’s success and thus entitled to decide its course, the Army advanced what was still a very secular agenda including the reduction of the king’s power to choose ministers, a measure of religious freedom beyond that envisioned by the king and the national church, and compensation for soldiers, orphans and widows. The

\textsuperscript{180} See Barnard. The English Republic. 1649-1660.
\textsuperscript{182} Quoted in C.V. Wedgwood. The Trial of Charles I. Page 27.
argument that the Parliament was unrepresentative of the nation and self interested, while the Army had the right to protect the interests of the entire population, reflected the growth of a nationalist basis for claims to legitimacy.183

With Pride's Purge in 1648, that the Army went a large step further in openly rejecting the authority of the Parliament and taking the initiative in creating a republic. When a majority in the Parliament sought the unconditional reinstatement of the king in a bid to achieve national approval, Cromwell allowed the army to usurp the Parliament a second time. The resulting isolated Rump Parliament, though dividing both the Parliament and the Army ever further from the general population, still claimed to represent the nation. With the construction by the Army of the entirely novel High Court of Justice, the final unpopular act to alienate the general population was the beheading of Charles I on January 30 1649.

It was with the execution of the King - itself paradoxically a pragmatic action - which a religious sense of mission, seems to move nearer to the centre of national ideology as a legitimising discourse. There are certainly still lines of natural right discourse running through accounts of the major actors in this event, albeit linking violence to an abstract notion of justice. John Cook (1608-1660), who as Solicitor General prosecuted Charles I, insisted in 1649 that they “pronounced sentence not only against one tyrant, but against tyranny itself”.184 The minister John Goodwin (1564-1665) published a defence of the Army entitled Right and Might Well Met (1649) in which he argued that the “immutable law of nature” necessitated that “the King must perish in the interests of the nation whom he had deluded and betrayed”.185

Yet it is also at this juncture that Cromwell described the nation in the strictly religious terms of an opposition between Providence and betrayal, arguing that any man seeing the trial in terms of worldly calculations would be “the greatest traitor in the world, (...) since providence and

185 Wedgwood. Page 87.
necessity had cast (us) upon it”. Milton would later reflect upon these times and say: why “proclaim these deeds done by the people, when they almost speak out for themselves, and bear witness everywhere to the presence of God? (...) It was at his clear command that we were suddenly roused to reclaim the safety and liberty we had lost; he was the leader and we followed; (...) it was with respect for his divine footsteps (...) that we entered upon a path (...) laid open to us by his guidance”.

The stakes of legitimacy conceived in religious terms were certainly boosted when Robert Filmer (1588-1653), a consistent royalist during the English Civil War, began publishing in defence of royalist authority in 1648 when the royalist cause was already doomed. He articulated a highly influential and original absolutist model of authority based on the model of the body politic, or a transcendental order in the “great chain of being”, that would later be the primary target of Locke’s political writings. In his Observations upon Aristotle’s Politiques (1652), in which he attacked the growing belief that power originates with, and may be exercised by, the people, he based his hermeneutical argument for Divine Right on the Biblical account of the innocent obedience before the Fall. Filmer opposed the pure truth of the religious doctrine to the scourge of modern ideas, particularly Grotius, drawing a polarising distinction between previously overlapping discourses in the English context. He insisted directly on the incompatibility of the Christian community with any democratic politics: “There never was any such thing as an independent multitude (with) a natural right to a community. This is but a fiction or fancy of too many in these days, who please themselves in running after the opinions of philosophers and poets, to find out such an original of government as might promise them some title to liberty, to the great scandal of Christianity and

186 Quoted in Wedgwood. Page 80.
188 See Hulme, Jordanova.
bringing in of atheism, since a natural freedom of mankind cannot be supposed without the denial of the creation of Adam".189

It was following the execution of the King, further than ever from public acceptance, that Cromwell recognized that “the revolutionaries could settle and control the country only if they found a popular alternative to monarchy” and that the Rump Parliament’s narrow dependence on the Army “needed to be replaced with a wider following”.190 What followed, then, was a series of broadly conceived social experiments which aimed to widen support for the Parliament among the general population and thereby create social and political stability coupled with a sense of fulfilling the higher historical mission assigned to the nation by God. These two aims, as it turned out, were altogether in conflict and proved the undoing of the English Revolution as the Interregnum finally yielded to the Restoration in 1660.

It was a developing conflict between the Rump Parliament and the radical officers which finally culminated in Cromwell’s dissolution of the Rump and the institution of the first phase in “Godly rule” with the creation of the Barebones Parliament in 1653. The door was opened to the influences of sectarian movements including the Seekers, the Saints, the Ranters and the Millenarians, concentrated on projects for the building of a New Jerusalem by way of purifying the gospel and then bringing such secular institutions as Parliament and the law courts into conformity with the word of God.191 Cromwell confessed to have never “never looked to see such a day as this (...) when Jesus Christ shall be owned as he is this day and in this world” after “so much blood and so much trials”.192

Significantly, the Rump Parliament largely ignored these rising ideological currents, remaining “uninterested in ideological changes” and instead concentrating “on making basic

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192 Cromwell. Pages 22-23.
government function”. Their policies were of a secular nature: new debt laws were introduced intended to relieve the poor of being preyed upon by the rich, and other laws aimed to render the proceedings of the legal system more accessible to the understanding of the general public. However, after the intensity of expectation for the creation of a godly nation following Pride’s Purge and the King’s execution, each attended by increasingly eschatological legitimising discourses, the Rump’s actions over the following years seemed disappointingly inadequate to a group of radical Puritan officers.

With the “crowning mercy” of the battle at Worcester in 1651 which definitively put an end to the threat of Scottish invasion, the latest in an “apparently unbreakable sequence”, there seemed to be a final confirmation that Cromwell and “his soldiers had been chosen by God to turn England into a godly Commonwealth”. In 1653 the group of Puritan officers used the opportunity to conclude that the work of the Parliament had been a failure in terms of the original aims of the new republic, criticizing “the Rump for failing to arrest the growth of irreligion and profanity”.

Following a period of troubled indecision Cromwell finally allied himself with the millenarians, believers in a coming millennium in which Christ and the saints would reign on the earth for a 1,000 year period, and dismissing the Rump in 1653, initiated the first phase of godly rule. On a pragmatic level, Cromwell had accepted that overarching moral reform of the society from above was the precondition for the securing of national order, and the imposition of godly dictatorship was intended to speed this process. The new political experiment was launched with a great deal of optimism, aiming to “prise men away from their corrupt and comfortable habits, and simultaneously spread the benefits of a just government”. It was expected that the experience of

"godly rule would soon open men's eyes to its excellence" and that as "the English people were transformed, so their conformity to the new political system would increase".\textsuperscript{196}

This was the short lived twilight of the pragmatic outlook that had largely decided events beforehand as the balance tipped in favour of a more mysterious political vision. Affirming the value of sacred over practical knowledge as the key to achieving national stability, Cromwell placed his confidence in the goodness and purity of the otherwise politically inexperienced "saints" he had appointed to rule in the new Parliament. Within a year, recognizing the failure of this project and the negative feeling it had engendered among the public, he turned to more conventional politics under the direction of the conservative general John Lambert and the constitution drafted by him, the Instrument of Government.

Triggered by repeated Royalist insurrections culminating in Penruddock's Uprising (1655), and encouraged by a belief that the failure of the English attack on the Spanish West Indies (the Western Plan) in 1655 signified God's displeasure at public moral laxity, Cromwell attempted a second experiment in millenarian politics with the major-generals in 1655 which attempted once more to create public loyalty to the regime through a Godly transformation of the people. This highly unpopular military dictatorship lasted for two years.\textsuperscript{197}

Locke, civil society and the wasteland: the limits of hermeneutics

The dominant and enduring discourse to emerge from the experiences of the two English revolutions was the formula of John Locke by which the opposite of force is reason. Locke modified the epistemic demand for 'perfect certainty' to 'degrees of assent'. This was both a

\textsuperscript{196} Bamard. Page 27.
critique of violence as theologically legitimised and a descent of reason from the unitary heights of the pure idea to the world of ordinary human temporality and dialogue.

Although between 1640 and 1649 Locke had been merely a child, he had been deeply marked by the first English Revolution along with the rest of his generation. The trauma had impressed upon him the dangers of an absolute monarchy ruled by the arbitrary powers of a prince. Locke’s father, a captain of the cavalry for the Parliamentarian forces, had been hostile to the Loyalists, applauding the abolition of the royalty and the proclamation of a republic. As a teenager in 1649 Locke had been exposed to the proclamation of the Republic – a characteristic blend of Providence and republicanism - claiming that “by the abolition of the kingly office ... a most happy way is made for this nation (if God see it good) to return to its just and ancient right of being governed by its own Representatives or National Meetings in Council, from time to time chosen and entrusted for that purpose by the people”.

By 1660, shaken by doubt and continuous political unrest, Locke was “like most of his fellow country-men ... deeply afraid of political disorder”. The dangerous political ramifications and anxieties produced by the overflow in meaning expressed in the cloudy language of the Civil War period formed Locke’s point of philosophical and political departure, when he argued that it is not “to be wondered, that the will of God, when clothed in words, should be liable to doubt and uncertainty”. As a result, “all those tragical revolutions which have exercised Christendom these many years have turned upon this hinge, that there hath been no design so wicked which hath not worn the visor of religion ... none ever went about to ruin the state but with pretence to build the

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Locke's identification of the dangers and misuses of the political construction of Providence led to his articulation of a secular public space for non-violent conflict resolution.

Revolutionary Puritanism had its secular aspect in Baconian philosophy and the memory of Sir Walter Raleigh - who, prior to being executed in 1618 to appease Spain, had written the *History of the World* in prison and become a legend among the commercial and Puritan population. Coming from a Puritan background, Locke had a highly complex relation to the tradition. The Royalist opposition had charged that the Puritan practice of preaching only bred faction and that strict adherence to the Holy Text alone could provide true religiosity - a religious debate which translated into a political one between the ideals of public discussion and social obedience. The Royalist position corresponded to a prescriptive ideal in which a centre of power oversees the execution of commands or obligations, while the Puritan view favoured the contractually grounded and socially ambitious or autonomous self. Locke, taking the Puritan side in this debate, argued that the religious duty consisted in arguing, thinking and acting upon the problems of the world. To this extent Locke shared with Milton the fundamental concern over the manner of correctly interpreting one’s duty to God in a dizzyingly changing world where, “cut off”, the “Book of knowledge” presents “a universal blank”.203

Yet both points of view in the Royalist-Puritan debate – one univocal, the other pluralistic - remained grounded within the hermeneutical space of a discursive universe. As Milton had argued, “we have no warrant to regard conscience which is not grounded in scripture”.204 Locke radically transcended this core aspect of Puritan tradition in a rupture with its hermeneutical grounding and entered a secular and material conceptual realm.

We may look at the development of Locke’s secular point of view in terms of three main axes: (1) the “psychological” turn in the context of the revolutionary period of the mid to late

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seventeenth century as entry into conceptual temporality; (2) Locke’s philosophy of value as a theory of “historical development” which presents an alternative and new point of departure from the ideal of “Providence” that oriented the first English Revolution of 1649, and this by way of a transformed vision of the newly central imaginary of America in a reckoning with the new dimensions of global space. (3) Locke adopted Hobbe’s concept of the “state of nature”, or human nature stemming from historical origin, as displacing the “garden of Eden” with its perennial enclosure of fatalism, punishment and blame. Yet Locke transformed the concept of the “state of nature” and shifted the theoretical basis for social interaction and political legitimacy from violence (as in Hobbes) to consent, social dialogue, or civil society, or an intellectually autonomous basis for a public politics of secularism. This was a historically seminal moment in the development of democratic Enlightenment thought that pointed toward the development of a social and pragmatic ethics and implicitly smoothed away the hard rock of foundationalist thought which offers a “final answer” where bloodshed necessarily proves the best argument.

Locke’s “Letter Concerning Toleration” (1689) is a powerful argument for political secularism in which the affairs of the state must be distinguished from those of religious institutions. He declares it “necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between one and the other”. The alternative is that “there can be no end to the controversies that will be always arising”.205 Questions of an otherworldly or metaphysical nature can never be exhausted by rational public debate, and must remain confined to the private sphere, or the “inward persuasion of the mind”.206 These questions concern problems in a realm “above reason”, such as bodily resurrection after death. It is precisely because they are “above reason”, and concern personal faith, that such inherently open questions can be answered conclusively (i.e.; closed) in the public realm only through political violence.

205 Locke. “A Letter Concerning Toleration”. In The Selected Political Writings of John Locke. Page 129.
There is no need to fit the incompatible pieces of diverse religious perspectives together into a seamless and final public whole. Only specific secular questions of public policy (sanitation, health, education, employment, taxation) concerning the objective, if not necessarily always harmonious, interests of all citizens permit of tangible final answers reached non-violently in forums of open public debate (the public sphere). Where Hobbes had seen only uniformity of religion as the key to a functioning civil society (echoing, after all, Philip II, and in a different way foreshadowing Rousseau), Locke’s conception of secularism saw the danger not in religious diversity but in violent state intervention in the private sphere of pluralistic belief. He wrote that “it appears not that God has ever given any such authority to one man over another, so as to compel anyone to his religion”. Any religion spread by the force of the state is not a true religion, reflecting an absence of true belief, and constitutes “great obstacles to our salvation”.207 For this reason, “No violence nor injury is to be offered (a person of another religion), whether he be Christian or pagan”.208 Ultimately, “Each man’s salvation belongs to himself”.209

This secular political outlook was grounded in Locke’s shift to a temporal epistemology, expressed in his call for a halt to all quests for epistemological absolutes or “final knowledge” as a matter of principle, demanding that we merely reflect within the limits of our own capacities for understanding, and forsake futile intellectual plunges “into the vast Ocean of Being”.210 This broke with an absolutist epistemic tradition going back to Plato in the Western tradition. Epistemic uncertainty cannot permit of religious violence: “in this great variety of ways that men follow, it is still doubted which is the right one”, but “does it therefore belong unto the magistrate to prescribe me a remedy, because there is but one, and because it is unknown?”211 On this ground Locke denies

the right to "punish". Locke’s "psychological turn" ripped the democratic discourses of the first English Revolution out of their religious moorings in the discourse of Providence. The secular democratic tendencies of that revolution were extended into the Whig movement which arose through the Exclusion crisis (1678-81). The first Earl of Shaftesbury (1621-83), Locke’s long time patron and a leading political figure in the court of Charles II, led a national political movement against the Crown aiming to strengthen the constitutional restraints on monarchical authority and block the access of Charles II’s Catholic brother James to the throne. Following the unsuccessful Rye House Plot of 1683, which attempted to assassinate Charles and James, Locke’s main allies met arrest and violent death. The Earl of Essex committed suicide in the Tower of London while Algernon Sidney (1623-83), who had argued that civil powers are purely human ordinances and not the will of God, went to the scaffold. A conspicuously political event, Sidney at his trial was charged with attacking Filmer’s ultra-royalist pamphlet Patriarcha. It was in this dangerous context that, in 1683, Locke escaped into Dutch exile in possession of the seditious manuscript, the Two Treatises on Government, and two years later managed to elude the British government’s efforts to have him extradited.

Locke produced his most inspired works during six years of political exile in Holland (1683-88). From there, he faced not only the continuing chaos in England with the 1685 Monmouth Rebellion to overthrow James II, but also the designs of Louis XIV and Catholic Absolutism to overrun the Netherlands and the flood of Protestant refugees produced by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685).

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Locke's point of departure in these works from exile was a debate with Filmer, who made a
total claim for religious hermeneutics against natural law as an argument for divine right. In the
first Treatise of Government (1689) Locke's argument is basically hermeneutical, arguing for a
correct reading of the Holy Scripture against the claims for absolutism advanced by Filmer and also
derived from scriptural authority. In the second Treatise he advances a law of nature based on
reason as preceding hermeneutics and the discursive universe. The law of nature and the law of
reason are one, both of which are grounded in man's fundamental identity with God: "The state of
nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: and reason, which is that law,
teaches all mankind ... for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise
maker".\textsuperscript{215} A relative - rather than absolute - epistemology substitutes hermeneutics. This
empiricist outlook, while affirming the reality of God, asserts the independent existence of an
autonomous system of natural law and thereby denies any reality to Providence except as a
naturalised form of Deism or natural theology.\textsuperscript{216}

The step out of the framework of Providence draws from the early modern historical and
material developments occurring at the time to construct a new imaginary. The primary image is of
the market in seventeenth-century England which created a changing social situation where
"estatelessness undermined the very foundations of judgement about the self and the world".\textsuperscript{217}
This experience was in turn linked directly to a similar anxiety and doubt provoked by the
discovery of worldly diversity experienced with expanding global capitalism, leading Locke to
question "that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an
almost endless variety?"\textsuperscript{218} Locke himself knew at first hand and was directly implicated in

\textsuperscript{216} Locke's views are rather complex, accepting miracle and revelation within the limits of reason. His epistemology,
however, undercuts the traditional political function of Providence.
\textsuperscript{217} Agnew. Page 62.
\textsuperscript{218} John Locke. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Page 189.
emerging colonial institutions, as he “worked closely with the private and state bodies which were responsible for formulating the colonial policies of European countries during the period”.219

Based on this experience of the early modern global market Locke shifted the Puritan category of the ‘chosen’ from religious qualities to secular powers of development. He cleared the ambiguity that encircled framework of Providence by conceiving directly the first complex philosophy of historical development suited to the dynamism of emerging capitalism. Just as Milton had projected an image of Eden onto America in *Paradise Lost*, evoking anxieties of nature’s abundance as promoted by a “corrupt and sensual tempter who uses it as a justification for shameless overindulgence in the pleasures of the material world”, Locke projected his conception of historical development onto an imagined America. 220 Unlike Milton, he invented a moving machine of successive grades beyond the enclosed world of anxiety that is the Garden, in an affirmation of modern historical energies and emerging patterns of domination.

This move on Locke’s part constituted a radical epistemic break on the road to Enlightenment, a new dialectical conception fraught with the tensions and inner contradictions that resounded within the complex historical passage that increasingly centred ideas of “expansion” and “development”. In spite of attempting to formulate an argument “completely independent of historical example” and based on “universal principle” in *The Second Treatise on Government*, “most of the crucial steps in Locke’s argument actually depend on references to America”.221 Locke’s conception of modernity is grounded in a division between labour and reason that is derived from Britain’s colonial experience of North America. The Puritan character of the theory of a rational human nature as chosen is implied in Locke’s *Second Treatise* where he writes: “God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit, and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should

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always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and the rational (and labour was to be his title to it) not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious".\textsuperscript{222} Locke contrasts universal labour, as old as the Fall of Man, as mere gathering or hunting to take food by way of "the spontaneous hand of Nature", to the \textit{chosen} condition of integrating these labour energies into a larger productive process or the "public good" in using the "hand of reason" to control nature as demonstrated in the improvement of the land’s productivity, or the market. It was "under the influence of the prosperous conditions of the colonies of the New World" – America as the imaginary of worldly prosperity - that Locke interpreted labour as "the source of all wealth" rather than "the appanage of poverty".\textsuperscript{223}

Here was also the point of exclusion in Locke’s theory of modernity, for there are those who defy God’s law by leaving the land in "waste", who fail to demonstrate rationality, as illustrated by the central example of the "wild Indian" in the "wild woods and uncultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement".\textsuperscript{224} On this basis Locke prescribes a colonial calculus for the as yet undeveloped expanse of the Americas, and implicitly elsewhere. The foundation for private property is in this improvement of the land and on this basis humanity is divided between those who recognize reason and make use of it, and those who fail to do so. This argument at once targets the unproductive landowning aristocracy of seventeenth-century England, defending the enclosure of common land into private property for the accumulation of capital, notably in the draining of the Great Fens (1630s) which "provoked protests from the local population who were accustomed to extracting a meagre living from keeping geese, hunting wild fowl, and catching pike" (i.e.; people at subsistence level in close proximity with nature).\textsuperscript{225} The same logic would apply to the nomadic and uncontrolled element in the British population produced by such policies. There is an additional aspect of exclusion in the most extreme form of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Arendt. Page 23.
\item John Locke. \textit{The Second Treatise on Government}. Page 33.
\item Ashley. Page 16.
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exploitation: Locke’s universe of productive labour is partly one of slave labour, and he worked as
“a counsellor and secretary on colonial boards setting slave policy” and “as a merchant adventurer
and profiteer in the Royal African Company”.226

In sum Locke introduced the germs of a language of development that would intellectually
dominate the nineteenth century, or the gradations of civilization, in arguing that “in the beginning
all the world was America” or wild and untamed wasteland awaiting order.227 The original state of
the world is a moral desert of blind waste and howling libido, awaiting the intervening logic of the
new capitalist machine. Later, at the onset of the French Revolution, Sieyes, in What is the Third
Estate?, used the same logic to exclude the aristocracy from the nation, writing that the class “is
assuredly estranged from the nation by its idleness”.228 The nation in conjunction with the
expanding market is defined as a dynamic entity constructed for the purpose of transforming the
worldly environment according to human need, reason and will in utter contrast to the traditionally
received ideal of political authority as the guardian of a fixed and eternal religious order.

Locke returned to England in the 1688 Glorious Revolution with William of Orange and a
“motley horde of Dutchmen, English and Scottish exiles” to overthrow the near universally
unpopular James II, and participated in the revolutionary settlement including the Declaration of
Rights and the Toleration Act.229 This event, which gave the term ‘revolution’ “its definite place in
political and historical language”, was in fact seen as “a restoration of monarchical power to its
former righteousness and glory”.230 The settlement did not revive the old Leveller arguments and
remained largely exclusive, being intended only for “a small number of those in the propertied
classes” with about 50,000 “allowed to appoint representatives in Parliament.”231 Yet the
constitutional heritage of the Glorious Revolution, largely articulated by Locke in terms of public

226 James Farr. “So Vile and Miserable an Estate”: The Problem of Slavery in John Locke’s Political Thought”. In the
Selected Political Writings of John Locke. Page 377.
229 Ashley. 176.
230 Arendt. Page 43.
sovereignty, civil right, and natural law, also introduced a radical new conception of human nature as a horizon of democratic and secular possibility. This is a broadly positive contribution in terms of the growing recognition of the importance of human rights in Western history. Jean Fabre has written that “the Declaration of the Rights of Man had Locke as one of its first inspirations”.232

The question of violence, however, having been significantly raised by Locke, was left confused and unresolved to sink back into the realm of the unthought. As a theorist of the right to revolt, Locke argued that on the basis of reason “there is a greater distance between some men and others (...) than between some men and some beasts”.233 In spite of arguing that rebellion is an “Opposition, not to Persons, but Authority”, he asserted the right of society to rise up and destroy “noxious brutes”.234 Disengaged from the imaginary of Providence, it was permitted to lurk abstracted and unnoticed in the corridors of early modernity.

The eighteenth century British Enlightenment: between tolerance and enthusiasm

The Enlightenment harboured within it from the beginning a tension between commitment to secular scientific values and religious belief as two opposed narratives of truth, and largely because an established hierarchic power configuration based on religious institutions clashed with an emerging politics based on a democratic organizing principle. The tensions came most visibly and violently to light in the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution. With this experience, above all, the question loomed concerning the practical possibility of a secular version of “absolute knowledge”, potentially blurring the sharpness of the secular/religious divide that had been conceived in the seventeenth century to transcend the problem of inter-religious violence as a wound without hope of healing.


Hobbes believed that nothing more than the quantifiable problem of physical reality was at stake in politics, and he sought purely mechanical solutions. The ‘Enlightenment’ was for him a purely ‘objective’ project with which the masses needed not be concerned. For Locke it was certainly otherwise. Whatever the limits in his idea of what constituted the public, he never said religious beliefs or values should have no role in the formation of democratic modernity. In conceiving the Enlightenment as a moral project he believed in the potential of religious beliefs and values to participate in the creation a just society, but also believed equally that religious institutions must be kept separate from the state.

We may identify two principle trajectories in the history of Enlightenment thought: one, stemming from Locke, places central importance on the preservation of a distinction between the private and public spheres, the state and civil society, etc., as the precondition for a liberal democratic social order aimed at liberating individuals. Such an arrangement precludes the possibility of final claims to public truth. The second trajectory, articulated initially by Hobbes, seeks to achieve a fundamental and final unity of social being which must in principle destroy the distinction between the private and public spheres as the precondition for “restoring” shared public experience based in “truth” to society.

In the broader and generally quieter river of the European Enlightenment we find, by and large, a project to reconcile the new claims of scientific modernity with the traditional claims of religion via reforms in religion – through Locke, the British Enlightenment of Shaftesbury, and Kant. The alternative stream centred in France which aimed to demolish religion as an inherent obstacle to modernity is comparatively narrow but also greatly more unforgettable. The politics of the French Revolution presented the extreme spectacle of violently forcing the church to the margin of society, and produced a universal ideological principle advancing total rejection of the past as the precondition for enlightened modernity. From this point of view Enlightenment ceased to be grounded in a moral principle and became a matter of imposing an order of abstract reason. Often
this ideological pattern, undoubtedly because of how excitingly it was burned into historical memory, is taken to be the single definition of Enlightenment as such. The model produced from this experience - particularly as articulated by its self proclaimed heir, Auguste Comte (1798-1857) - proved enormously influential as a paradigm of the nation making process. This tendency eclipses a wider and longer European Enlightenment tradition which sought to reconcile modernity and religion, rather than insisting inflexibly upon the necessity of destroying religion as the exclusive road to modernity.

Locke’s variant on the democratic Enlightenment found its heir in the eighteenth century British Enlightenment, which was initiated by the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) and carried on by Francis Hutchinson, Joseph Butler, Adam Smith and others, and centred a “moral sense” or “civil virtue” – that is, the secular community - as the driving force in the Enlightenment project that also accepted a potential role for religious beliefs and values. Locke’s second heir was in the American Enlightenment, which in conceiving the early republic combined a Biblical ethical narrative with a strong secular principle. Thirdly, and most famously, Locke’s philosophy was adopted by the eighteenth century French philosophes, in whose hands he “became a materialist in spite of himself” in the name of a higher principle of abstract reason that would supersede the illusions of the past.235.

The writings of the British Enlightenment thinkers evoke a modern community grounded in a secular “moral sense” which is antecedent to both reason and religion, and which is identified with principles of social equality and toleration (i.e.; against enthusiasm). Viewed in historical context these discourses articulate a programme of nation making which, among other things, seeks to define the proper relation between religion, civil society and the state. We have both an opposition to the old hierarchic social order of Estates, status and privilege accorded to fixed identity and value in “being”, and the traditional values legitimising them, and an affirmation of the

legalistic and horizontal political order enshrined after the long battle in the 1688 Glorious Revolution in which value is invested in “doing” or the commercial and political activities of the private citizen. As articulated in this new social ideal religion is potentially instrumental to virtue, but cannot be its source. Reason is instrumental to scientific experimentation, but cannot disclose the nature of ultimate reality.

The Earl of Shaftesbury, who had been Locke’s pupil as a child, published his “An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit” in 1699, in response to Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding of 1690. While Locke had established the primacy of reason over inherited convention, Shaftesbury argued that prior to reason, interest or education is a “moral sense” grounded in nature, and common to human beings everywhere. He thereby aimed to restore a solid foundation for secular values. In a letter he wrote that Locke, with his concept of human nature as a ‘blank slate’, had “struck at all fundamentals, threw all order and virtue out of the world” and reduced them to “fashion and custom”. He intended, by contrast, to demonstrate these qualities as “naturally imprinted on human minds”.236 In this exchange we see a debate over the proper form and limits of an emerging civil society focused on the split between history and salvation and seeking to identify an adequate secular foundation for a system of ethical belief formerly identified with a religious authority which had now gone into radical retreat. In the background are the dreads and tensions linked to memories of an ideological politics of uncontrollable religious violence in the seventeenth century.

The assault by Mandeville (1670-1733) on Shaftesbury’s humanist ethics in his Fable of the Bees (1714), praising interest and selfishness as the key elements of social progress, and the strong reactions it elicited from Hutcheson and others in Shaftesbury’s defence, belong within this debate over an ongoing crisis in the politico-ethical paradigm of a new secular politics. There is significantly no trace, however, of an uncompromising anti-religious position in these debates of

the British Enlightenment, even from its most radically sceptical member in David Hume (1711-1776). A wide range of criticisms of religion are present, but never a call to abolish it as either an institution or belief.

The secularism we find in Shaftesbury is expressed in terms of a “public moral sense” which is independent of religious affiliation and opposed to destructive passions driven by single claims to the truth. The “natural Affection” for the secular community is prior to all “speculative Opinion, Persuasion or Belief”, and no belief can “immediately or directly (...) exclude or destroy it”.237 It has its foundation in neither reason nor religion.238 Atheism is neither good nor harmful where it is concerned. What is presented as the main danger to the “moral sense” is, firstly, “moral passion” or “enthusiasm”, because by its excessive character it tends to “destroy its own End”,239 and secondly, the related “tragic sense” as the dark and apocalyptic state of mind that engenders “moral enthusiasm” to begin with. The tragic sense is linked to moral convictions of an inflexible and dogmatic nature, leading to acts of violent fanaticism, or violence to others, and he calls instead for “a more easy and pleasant way of thought”.240 Shaftesbury identifies moral passion with abstractions imposed without regard for context or a simplifying approach to experience as “never can such a Phantom as this be reduc’ed to any certain Form”.241

Shaftesbury’s message is a call for tolerance and variance of opinion; self constraint in personal feeling and personal wealth; and, at least tacitly, a harmony of means and ends. He extends his concept of the moral sense to “all mankind”.242 In the pointed absence of any insistence upon a single supreme definition on Truth, he dismisses the gravity of metaphysical problems, arguing that it is of no concern to his argument whether experiences “are Realitys, or mere

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238 Shaftesbury. Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit. Pages 41, 46.
239 Shaftesbury. Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit. Page 30.
242 Shaftesbury. Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit. Page 47.
Illusions; whether we wake or dream”. Adopting a pragmatic outlook on science and ethics, he writes that in “this dream of Life (...) our Demonstrations have the same force” and “our Obligation to VIRTUE is in every respect the same”.

Ultimately, then, the means to a just order of society is not the unveiling of any supreme truth or epistemic foundation, and any appeal for a war against error or the ‘other’ would thereby be meaningless. Underlying these arguments is a deeper critique of violence in the call for a world beyond “bloodshed, wars, persecutions, and devastation”, and the means to this non-violence (following Locke) is perceived to lie in a state of diversity where England might “bring back the whole train of heathen gods, and set our cold northern island burning (with alters)”.

Shaftesbury’s is a pluralistic vision where the ‘lightness’ he promotes in requesting that we laugh at ourselves has the serious flipside of esteeming tolerance as the highest virtue rather than the “perfectibility of human societies”.

1.4 The French Revolution as the defining paradigm of modernity: 1791 and the problem of innocence.

The experience of the French Revolution presents a complex paradigm of modernity which introduces new models of political action and radical discourses centred on the problems of historical origins and national identity, or historicism and political ontology as embodied in the idea of a ‘social contract’. It also expresses a variation on Locke’s ‘development’ paradigm radicalised beyond his discretions. These discourses in themselves do not constitute a unified or coherent ideology, and rather present values which although celebrated jointly in modern thought enter into inherent conflict with each other in political practice: equality and liberty, national unity and democracy, fear and truth. The experience of the French Revolution unsettled the confident

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243 Shaftesbury. *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*. Page 63.
245 Soboul. Page 1.
eighteenth century belief in modern knowledge as leading necessarily to a single and final coherent and universal pattern joining social life to positive knowledge. Underlying these dialectical tensions among principles the French Revolutionary experience presents a paradigm of modern politics in which action as a value in itself "exhausts the world of values, and so the very meaning of existence". The paradigm of modernity presented by the French Revolution requires analysis within the unfolding historical context of the Revolution in terms of three key turning points.

The developments in the years 1791 and 1793 must be analysed against the background of the principle aims of the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789, until the demise of the Jacobin movement with the Thermidorean Reaction in late 1794. Within this historical framework we may identify the emergence of two paradigms of political revolution which have shaped subsequent movements claiming political democracy as a national ideology. These are what Hannah Arendt identified as the politics of Constitutionalism or 'representation', a project of civil equality, and the more radical politics of the 'general will' as the vision of social equality based on a higher order. Two corresponding modes of conceiving sovereignty come into existence: 'national sovereignty' wielded indirectly through elected representatives and 'popular sovereignty' wielded directly by the people.

Within this framework we may analyse the second tendency in terms of three ideological complexes which have been seminal to future revolutionary movements and discourses. (1) Historical origin, corruption and the discourse of 'equality'. (2) The 'Regeneration' as a quest for a lost 'innocence' linked to a regime of 'virtue'. (3) The campaign of the heart and the mask in which virtue is conceived as a political rather than a moral disposition, and a state ideology seeks to obtain full control over civil society and the inner life of individuals in the name of a purported higher truth capable of producing a 'new man'. The three are interlinked within a complex paradigm which has dominated ideologies of political modernity with implications for defining the

emerging nation as oriented around two key points: destroying the traditional past and state policy concerning relations between the public and the private spheres. As such, these idea complexes have a very direct impact on the problem of the relation of means to ends in projects of nation making and of the consequences of these idea complexes around means-ends for freedom, and the implications in terms of violence.

a. Public opinion and the Enlightenment.

The general background to the events of 1791 may be interpreted broadly in terms of the growing political importance of public opinion as a force shaping the course of national events. At the global level what was at stake was dominance of the sources and supply of those tropical and oriental luxuries for which Europe was developing an insatiable need. The Enlightenment as a social and intellectual movement figured in these international developments. As the slave trade in the eighteenth-century expanded to an average of 55,000 slaves per year one of the ship owners christened his ships with the names Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Social Contract.248 This international context saw the rising supremacy of English capitalism linked at the same time to the weakening of Holland and the continuing struggle against stagnation of rural France. It was "through the exploitation of the rural worker, paid less and except from corporative control, that scattered manufacturing and commercial capitalism were developed".249 From 1733 to 1770 the French economy was on the upswing with agricultural and industrial productivity as well as

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colonial and domestic commerce expanding. After 1770 a period of contraction set in with falling agrarian income, languishing industry and rising unemployment.250

As France lost footholds to England in India, China, and Canada, the eighteenth century saw her fight three wars on a worldwide scale which resulted in colossal debt. The act of declaring independence by colonists of British North America in the 1770's presented an opportunity for France to take revenge on England for the shameful and profoundly damaging peace of Paris (1763) which had set Louis XVI's regime on an extended and largely hopeless struggle to avoid bankruptcy.

In this context the career of the Genevan banker Jacques Necker revealed the new significance of public opinion as a political force. The French public felt itself severely overtaxed during this century of expanding world trade. After the American War had been launched and sustained in considerable part by France over a four year period without substantial new taxation, Necker attributed his success in this endeavour to 'economies' and published a statement of royal accounts in 1781 to demonstrate how he had done it. Following his conflict with the king and resulting resignation from office Necker continued to publish writings on financial affairs which orchestrated public criticism of government policies. The longer term effect of these unprecedented actions was to encourage the public to take issue with future government tax policy and to explain social problems in terms of the failings of public office.251

This situation evolved in tandem with the intellectual forces of the Enlightenment in giving shape to educated public opinion. Prior developments in public literacy stemming from deliberate propaganda campaigns linked to the conflicts between Reformation and Counter-Reformation forces, rather than formal schooling, had partly laid the ground for the expansion of an urban civil

society.\textsuperscript{252} This remained within strict limits at the national level: in 1792, perhaps 50\% of the population did not speak or understand French.\textsuperscript{253} Newtonian rationality as interpreted by Montesquieu argued that a well ordered and coherent system of nature was the real basis of reality. He accordingly mounted a criticism of political despotism and the arbitrary social order, condemning a system of estates linked to labyrinthine legal complexities left without any attempt at codification since the 1670's.\textsuperscript{254} The system, it was maintained, should be brought into harmony with nature - identified by Rousseau with natural man as innocence and goodness. Enlightenment discourses also identified the church to be largely at the root of existing social evils, claiming that superstition and irrationality had overlain the original message of the gospels while the grip of the church on the state had produced disproportionate wealth for its members.

The church responded to this challenge by seeking to intensify censorship, thereby unwittingly entering an information war which resulted in an increasing loss of public confidence in its value as an institution. Similarly, when Montesquieu and Voltaire published works extolling the British ‘representative’ traditions of liberty, toleration and parliamentary government, the king sought to limit the damage through efforts to control what information reached the French reading public. His doing so at a time when France was embroiled in the dangerously costly Anglo-American wars on the side of American colonists in a battle over the political principle of representation at once exposed him to charges of hypocrisy and unwittingly revealed the dependence of his political order - where supposedly in all things he was sovereign - upon the force of a new public opinion he was unable to either persuade or control. John Adams (1735-1826), a

\textsuperscript{252} See Furet/J.Ozouf. \textit{Lire et ecrire: l'alphabeticisation des francais de Calvin a Jules Ferry} (Les Editions de Minuit, Paris)


leading American Founding Father, at this time evoked “the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth”.255

The consequences of the economic failure on the broader French public, including famine, resulted in the violent intervention of the popular masses into the political process, an experience which radically expanded the category of the public and figured prominently in the urban unfolding of the French Revolution by way of the links between the *journees*, the sans culottes, and the Jacobin club. A spreading agrarian revolt against the seigneurial system, though forcing nationwide developments beyond mere political revolution to radical social transformations in the abolition of feudalism, remained ultimately limited as revolutionary authority strengthened centralised administration and left large rural private landholdings intact.256 It was never the less the intervention of this powerful new public force, linking elements of popular will to a ‘party’, that took the Revolution to places it had never expected to go and reconfigured the political and social landscape of European and global modernity. The Haitian Revolution followed, inspired by the discourse on the Rights of Man, and following an extended struggle the country achieved independence in spite of colonial assaults in 1804.257

In a testament to the new power of public opinion, Marat proclaimed that “I have only taken part in public affairs by my writing”.258 The struggle between different versions of legitimacy over a national voice, or for hegemony over the symbolic centre of political action, became in one sense the main battlefield of the Revolution as imaginative discourses on power sought to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the old order. This battlefield was the political and discursive aspect which struggled continuously with the entangled social level of emerging social classes and changing relations of power in a state of ongoing economic and political crisis.

256 Skocpol. *States and Social Revolutions*. Page 127.

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b. The national discourse and two Revolutions: the ideal of equality between "representation" and "regeneration"

1. Nationalist discourse. The problem of national sovereignty at the heart of the French Revolution also provided the background for two ideological expressions of the ideal of equality. Interpretations abounded in eighteenth-century France attempting to theorize the legitimacy of the nation-state as it had arisen in the seventeenth-century within the context of radical disorder inflicted by religious wars in the wake of the Reformation. Jean Bodin (1530-1596) had initially elaborated a concept of sovereignty in the name of absolute monarchy which provided an alternative to the traditional theory of the King's "two bodies".259

In the six books of The Republic (1576) he argued that the sovereign's power, although of divine origin, is limited by a natural law which distinguishes that absolute power from an arbitrary power which constitutes a violation of the king's rightful role. At the same time, in response to fears of potential anarchy, Bodin argued that sovereignty is constituted by a supreme will which must be unitary and indivisible. Since the natural order of society is composed of multiple orders and estates, only the monarch could be the locus of this sovereignty based on a supreme will. The result was an absolute emphasis on the 'unity' of sovereignty. Within this tradition the state is conceived as a passive entity, a social reality to be preserved and maintained in good order in relation to the traditional order of things.260

With the emerging tendency of the state in the eighteenth century to mobilise social resources in its service, to seek improvement in agricultural production through accelerated commerce and industry, the building of roads and canals, and general measures to promote national growth and prosperity, a new discourse on the function of the state emerged with the French Enlightenment intellectuals defining sovereignty as the power to recompose traditional society to

promote the general good.\textsuperscript{261} This discourse centred the ideal of an integrated community over hierarchical estates and functional citizens over passive subjects. This was where Enlightenment discourses introduced a radical new voice in a national discourse of civil equality promoting an ideal of social progress. On the other hand, it also provided a line of continuity between the project of the monarchical state beginning with the reign of Louis XIV and the political aims of the main actors throughout the Revolution in the national struggle for political centralisation.

2. Equality. These Enlightenment discourses on equality can be divided into two streams. The first and more widespread, circulating in popular pamphlets in the decades leading up to the first assembly of the Estates General in 1789, was based on the French Constitutional tradition. This discourse argued on behalf of the ‘rights of the nation’, positing a ‘social contract’ at the centre of national life as the tie linking the monarch to the people and constraining monarchical power to legislation receiving the consent of the governed. This is a discourse essentially based on the ideal of ‘representation’ as derived from the experience of the English Revolution of 1688 and articulated by Locke.

The second and more imaginative stream, articulated most strikingly by Rousseau, rests on the ‘historical’ problem of a growing disjuncture between sovereign power and the natural order, and seeks to transform the exercise of sovereign power into one of accordance with the unifying laws of nature. Hence this discourse implies two main aspects: a ‘historical’ and an ‘ontological’ aspect which are interrelated in so far as the ‘historical’ problem is to be resolved by recourse to a political programme based on conformity to a ‘fundamental reality’ located in a lost ‘original state’ in the past (of ‘innocence’, etc.). The concept of a shared and united but now divided ‘original state’, or the \textit{ame dechiree} (divided soul), suggests equality as a deeper problem of identity and

belonging rather than merely the civil technicality of equal rights. This vision targets the “fabric of society” for change rather than “the structure of the political realm”.

It was within the framework of these debates that Gabriel Bono de Mably (1709-1785) argued, in defending the idea of an original Germanic aristocratic heritage, that the national origin had been a condition of social equality or ‘primitive’ democracy corrupted by the effect of subsequent de-purifying historical events. A period of decadence had allegedly set in following Charlemagne characterized by a double ‘usurpation’ in both feudalism and despotism, and Mably therefore called for a ‘return’ to the origins, or legitimacy, by way of the restoration of the true rights of the nation. This linking of feudalism and absolutism as equally illegitimate usurpations of the true national heritage in a discourse of ‘primordial equality’, damning the existing political order as such, had considerable impact on the new waves of radical political thought taking shape in the later part of the eighteenth century. The political project modelled on a ‘golden age’ became that of recovery of an original founding equality, or a homogeneous society, against the artificial inequality of status resulting from the historical corruption of the Ancien Régime.

History by this account was interpreted as the site of a usurpation of the legitimate order by corrupted ‘particular’ interests with a false claim to national power. The solution is to restore the ‘original state’ of ‘natural’ equality. Hence, the ‘natural order’ based on the unimpeachable unity of the ‘general will’ is to replace the divided ‘artificial order’ of estates in order to pursue a policy of the ‘general interest’ over the ‘particular interests’ or the ‘usurpers’ in the name of the nation. Following the lead of traditional monarchic theories of sovereignty, there is an absolute focus on the ‘unity’ of the ‘general will’. In this way the ‘ontological’ aspect, previously a static form to be ‘maintained’ under feudalism, becomes injected with a strong element of dynamism that transcends

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the mere ideal of constitutional reform with the more radical ideal of a national 'regeneration' at the 'total' level.

3. The historical context. June 1789 saw the transfer of sovereignty from the King to the nation, the dismantling of the first major obstacle on the path of the revolution which declared absolute monarchy to be on the wrong side of the fundamental rupture in the order of historical time implemented by the revolutionaries of 1789. Only in 1792 did the belief that monarchy as such constituted an opponent to national progress arise on the crest of a popular movement spearheaded by the sans-culottes. This development emerged in tandem with an increasingly more radical rejection of religious tradition and religious reason. What took place within the span of these several years was a struggle over the very meaning of the emerging French nation in its modern form. This national model in turn came to represent an ideal of modernity for a long time accepted almost as universal, in which the past and the future are divided with the imaginative calibre of the parting of the Red Sea.

How did a historical fissure come to be conceived in terms so absolute as to crack human history as such into a binary between the old and new world which expanded with the violence of a black hole in the minds of the revolutionary actors? The French Revolution leads us down the corridor from an early ideology of equality based on individual right to one based on identity in which the "nation" becomes the universal limit to human possibility in a bid to transcend the problem of individuality - or hidden and dangerous thoughts potentially linked to the 'great conspiracy' - as a threat to social harmony and public virtue embodied in the popular will. These impulses find their intellectual inspiration in murky interpretations of the writings of Rousseau and Mably. This transformation of the concept of 'equality' was accompanied by a complex ideological shift from securing institutional legal guarantees of social justice to a quest for the firm establishment of transcendental or ontological foundations in Reason (i.e.; nature) as the basis for a
uniform social order or eventual conflict free society. In this ideological transformation we see a fundamental reorientation of the role of the nation-state in its arbitration between the private and the public spheres as it takes on a mission of creating public meaning whose culmination was the eclipse of civil society by state ideology expressed in the Festival of the Supreme Being in June 1794.

In the year 1791 the Second Revolution embodied in the Jacobin club took visible shape and made headway on the road to seizing national power. This was a defining moment of radical redirection for the Jacobin club. The Jacobin club was set up in Paris in 1789 at the same time as the King and the Constituent Assembly following the October Days in which the King had been forced to accept the conditions of the August Decrees and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The Constituent Assembly was dedicated to creating a national market and giving France a uniform, decentralized, representative and humanitarian system of government based on a uniform legal system and reformed penal code. Historically the Jacobin club had functioned as an adjunct to the parliamentary process, focused on the discussion of texts destined to be debated in the Assembly. In this way it followed solidly in the ‘English’ representative tradition of 1688 and Locke celebrated by Montesquieu and Voltaire and aimed for a legal closure to the revolutionary process.265

The club came to function in addition as the symbolic centre of the people for controlling the Constituent Assembly and so embodied a principle of ‘direct democracy’. When the Constituent Assembly was prepared to accept a compromise position with the King over the August 4 decrees, it was the Jacobin club linked to the popular masses by way of Marat’s invocation of an ‘aristocratic conspiracy’ that forced the monarchy into a position of total surrender and saw the removal of the royal family from Versailles to imprisonment at the Tuileries. By 1790 the Jacobin club constituted a political network with tentacles extending throughout the nation and functioned

as a ‘mother society’ in its financing of local political organisations, and in this way had created for itself a *de facto* political and national legitimacy.

In general terms, the ideologues of the French Revolution sought to provide themselves with origins and legitimacy by claiming for their cause the tradition of the “century of Enlightenment”.\(^{266}\) They viewed their task in finding “a new absolute to replace the absolute of divine power”.\(^{267}\) Moved by a “pathos of novelty”, by which nothing of comparable “grandeur and significance had ever happened”, they believed in a “new beginning” linked inextricably to violence as the means to creating a “new body politic”.\(^{268}\) The theoretical tensions behind the two revolutions, given articulation in these Enlightenment discourses, had long been in place. As early as 1778, Turgot had argued that the division of national representation into two bodies, along the lines of the American Revolution, contradicted the principle of the sovereign unity as “undivided centralized power”.\(^{269}\) At the earliest stage the dominant national ideology articulated by Sieyes in *What is the Third Estate?* already borrowed partly from Rousseau’s ideal of the unified sovereignty of the people. While the nation is conceived by Sieyes borrowing Rousseau’s vocabulary of a ‘natural’ equality among citizens before the law, there is also a violent innovation in the deeming of the aristocratic class and its traditional privileges as not only outside of the limits of the nation but even the enemies of the community. Sieyes proclaims the need to be “open in showing our hatred of internal enemies of the nation” as an expression of “patriotic feeling” and the “first, initial act of public justice”.\(^{270}\) In this way an element of exclusion and violence was sown into the French revolutionary nationalist discourse from the outset – but it was only with the second Revolution that the premise of a legal framework for resolving these conflicts was jettisoned in favour of an open ideology of war.

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\(^{267}\) Arendt. Page 39.

\(^{268}\) Arendt. Pages 34-35.


Throughout the early period the three poles of the Constituent Assembly as linked to the Jacobin club - that of La Fayette, Mirabeau, and the Triumvirat (1789 and 1791) - remained wedded to a legalist and constitutional political framework expressed in a general unity of purpose in seeking to give France a uniform, decentralised, representative and humanitarian system of government. There was still a predominant concern with the creation of lasting institutions. Having vanquished Mirabeau in 1791 on the grounds of his compromising with the Ancien Régime and so being with 'the enemy', Barnave and the Triumvirat took up his same political line in proceeding to pursue the original aims of 1789: a state constituted by a strong monarchy limited in its power by the Assembly, a break between the King and the old aristocratic order, and general manhood suffrage centred on the middle class. No one in power at this stage, including Robespierre, called for the establishment of a republic.\footnote{Ruth Scurr. *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution*. Henry Holt, 2006. Page 200.}

It was the King's flight to Varennes in June 1791 that entirely transformed the stakes and so the prevailing political conditions so as to instigate the emergence of the Second Revolution by bringing the monarchy into terminal crisis and radically dividing the Jacobin club. At the Continental level the Church of Rome completed "the rupture between Rome and Paris" by opposing its doctrine to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.\footnote{Georges Lefebvre. *The French Revolution from its Origins to 1793*. Tr. Elizabeth Moss. Columbia University Press, 1962. Page 170.} On July 16 Barnave, still upholding the legal-constitutional tradition of Mirabeau, left the Jacobin club with the majority of the Parliamentary members. The remaining members, led by Robespierre, had the terrain cleared for pushing the club into full alliance with the popular Parisian movement linked to the national network. With the transfer of dominance from the Triumvirat to the Left the Jacobin club was transformed from a talking club to a political machine focused on the conquest and exercise of power in the service of the Second Revolution.

The Jacobin club abandoned its function of preparing Assembly debates and assumed the role of creating a counter-Assembly. This new direction found its culmination in the events of

August 10 1792 and the creation of the National Convention. The legalist line was definitively abandoned in 1792 in a reversal of the original principles of 1789 and by 1793 the Vendée Rebellion set the conditions for dictatorship by the Committee of Public Safety and the creation of the machinery of the Terror. This moment saw the onset of the Jacobin Club’s transformation into a political machine for the production of social unanimity under an ideology of public virtue dedicated to fighting a hidden conspiracy. A ‘war on hypocrisy’ was carried out by way of both inner and outer purging of all vestiges of the ‘old order’ among the population and the creation of a ‘new man’.273 The Second Revolution therefore saw the transfer of ideological hegemony from the legal-constitutional framework to that of the ideal of total regeneration beyond the law in a shadowy realm of perpetual ‘emergency’.

Several things may be said concerning this ideology of ‘total regeneration’ and the circumstances which gave rise to it. Firstly, the renewed concept of equality as articulated by Robespierre in 1793 at the culmination and twilight of the Second Revolution may provide a starting point when he argued that equality is not a provisional social or institutional state but a permanent condition of virtue based in nature to be obtained by an endless pedagogic and moral crusade.274 From the beginning, the leaders of the French Revolution had found inspiration in the Enlightenment ideal of man liberated from the prejudices of the past and so had undertaken the pedagogic mission of regenerating the nation and creating a ‘new people’. It was the means that were radically transformed with the Second Revolution, expressed most vividly in the inextricable link declared to exist by Robespierre between “virtue and terror”.275 We must trace the historical trajectory by which this idea came to be identified with an ideological ideal of abolishing the past in a campaign of state violence which considered the suspension of individual rights to be necessary as a means to the end of what Saint-Just called the “perfection of happiness”.276

273 Furet/Ozouf, Dictionnaire Critique de la Revolution Francaise. Idees. See ‘regeneration’.
c. The Regeneration as the clean cut of a Platonic blade

The politics of the Terror in the French Revolution is to be understood in terms of three factors: the war unleashed against France by its European neighbours following the King’s flight to Varennes in 1791, the creation of a mass basis for the counter-Revolution inside of France with the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the collision course it created with certainty for the first time between the Church and the Revolution, and finally within the political discourse of ‘equality’ that held sway throughout the Revolution and underwent radical mutation with the Second Revolution. The Second Revolution attempted to impose a politics tacitly based on a tacitly Platonic ideal of pure truth involving an attempt to radically cut with the inherited ‘corruption’ of the traditional past, to create an entirely new order and pure foundation, and even to exit the very flow of historical time in the ‘corruption’ of its impurity or conditioned genesis. This ideology is that of the national ‘regeneration’, and presents a tangle of problems concerning the issue of matching means to ends and political violence in the process of nation making.

The six weeks between the seizure of the Tuileries and the first meeting of the Convention on September 20 1792 mark the beginning of the Terror in revolutionary politics. From the 1789 ideal of establishment of liberty by law the Revolution shifts ideologically with August 10 1792 to the Second Revolution based on the ‘state of emergency’, of ‘exception’, or the law of war directed inward toward society and its enemy within. With the shift from ‘legal’ to ‘revolutionary’ legitimacy in 1792 we see the emergence of an ideology centred on the razor’s edge of the guillotine which aimed to organize, systematize and accelerate the repression of internal adversaries of the Republic. Saint Just envisioned the guillotine in this context as “the fatal instrument which decapitates in a single sweep both the conspiracies and the lives of their
The guillotine gave embodiment to the philosophically inspired ideology of revolution as a radical and permanent ‘cut’ with a ‘past’ resisting its annihilation through the persistence of an ‘aristocratic conspiracy’. It is necessary to analyse the central role of the concept of conspiracy in the ideological and practical history of the French Revolution, an ideological thrust whose underlying romantic logic significantly undermined the original legalist orientation, and the manner in which this concept flowered into political carnage in a practical effort to find a way out of the national crisis of 1791.

Although the war launched by France’s neighbours in 1791 in great measure destroyed the line between opposition and treason, the Terror was also largely founded on the political beliefs and convictions of the revolutionary actors themselves. It is for this reason that we cannot simply reduce the political to the social in the analysis of the Revolution as a ‘pure’ class struggle. A comparative perspective demonstrates that discourses do shape the process of nation making, particularly where the problem of means and ends, or practical ethics and violence, is concerned. The germ of the Terror had been contained, though by no means determined in advance, within the early discourses of 1789 in the idea of an ‘aristocratic conspiracy’. This state of mind was expressed in the violence of July 14 1789 and given theoretical articulation the following September in Marat’s “Friend of the People”. This serialised newspaper evoked in paranoid terms the hidden “other nation”, the deadly abstract shadow inflated to the level of invisible totality and set in opposition to the purity of the “public will”.

With the King’s flight to Varennes in 1791 the revelation of the ‘little plot’ served to confirm the imagined reality of the long dreaded ‘aristocratic conspiracy’ which had served ideologically to incite the Great Fear among peasants in the provinces as well as the Versailles/Bastille assaults by the urban masses in 1789 in the first of the journees. The same ideology, making use of a plastic and ever changing image of the ‘aristocratic conspiracy’, also

served the Convention in September 1793 when it voted the Terror to the centre of revolutionary politics. This move saw the creation of an internal ‘revolutionary army’ destined to make war on the internal adversaries of the Republic.

In his *Report on the Police* (1794) Saint Just referred to the new politics in the vocabulary of “regeneration” as “the passage from evil to good, from corruption to integrity”.279 The “regeneration” is thus an interval of time or a means toward the highest end, which can never be won at too high a price. As Marat argued, “drops of blood are to be poured” to avoid floods.280

The term “regeneration”, visible in pamphlets as early as the first meeting of the Estates General, gained ascendancy and radical ideological redefinition with this new political wave.281 With the aim of creating a “new people”, the ideology of “regeneration” had its roots in the eighteenth century obsession with a “second birth”, “innocence regained”, or Rousseau’s idea of the “revolutionary rupture”. These images in part derived from experiences of the newly conquered Americas, in which the Huron presented the icon of a pure man untouched by the advance of civilisation.282 Hence Saint Just described the Revolution in terms of a struggle of “truth” against “hypocrisy”, in which the aim was to “make nature and innocence the passion of all hearts in the formation of the nation” as inspired by the “wisdom of children”.283 This idea of ‘innocence’ or ‘purity’ borrowed the language of religion in which a true ‘regeneration’ must first and foremost transform the heart.

The prophetic discourse of “regeneration” was unevenly interwoven with constitutionalist discourses from the beginning. An element of the miraculous found its way into these discourses: Condorcet evoked the prophetic discourse of a historical moment which separates two humanities, while Mirabeau evoked in a language of magic the dead being brought to life.284 Finally the

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concept of “regeneration”, by the logic of its drive for total transformation, had to reject both legalism and the Constitution in a campaign of ‘purification’ as mere aspects of a corrupted past which needed to be banished in its entirety. As early as 1789 Clermont-Tonnerre made this tension clear, arguing that the regeneration could never be “the mere reform of abuses and the reestablishment of a Constitution” and thereby debasing the French Constitutional tradition in the name of a projected “higher order” of politics.285 This internal conflict harboured within the French Revolutionary discourse from the beginning resulted in a clouding of the matter of practical ethics and ultimately subverted the institutional rudiments of secularism. The question of means and ends perished against the brilliant vision of regeneration as Saint Just argued that for its sake “everything must be permitted”.286

The view expressed by Saint Just of a party machine for which nothing is forbidden is linked to the heart of the ideology of “regeneration”. The “regeneration” is conceived as a total ideology, and totality automatically implies the absence of limits. As Arendt has observed, the poison of Robespierre’s virtue “was that it did not accept any limitations.”287 In the refusal to recognize limits to the path of the Revolution, the only possible explanation for inevitable difficulties remains the persistence of enemies in a “boundless” hunt for hypocrites. Robespierre’s war on hypocrisy “carried the conflicts of the soul (...) into politics”, where they “became murderous because they were insoluble”.288 Locke’s idea in secularism had been precisely to preserve the public sphere from such insoluble conflicts which can lead only to violence. The institutional construction of secularism therefore yields to a philosophical ambition with the Second French Revolution. Robespierre was “hunting for truth”.289

This is where the element of Platonic idealism – of a force pure in essence and non-relational - fights against the vastly entangled relativity and plurality inherent in all change. The

287 Arendt. Page 90.
French Constitutional tradition was the main victim of this ideological tendency because from the point of view of the “regeneration” there is “nothing worthwhile to expect from the national past, the very richness of which was perceived as a misfortune and even a curse”.290 The political imaginary of unfettered human action in the construction of a ‘new man’ with an emphasis on the ‘supreme moment’ implied a desire to break with and make an exit from time itself. An imaginary chasm cracks open to divide the nation forever from its past. There is an element of French classicism in this projection of a national myth representing a moment of ultimate perfection, a realization of social organization and harmony based entirely on a single and supreme ‘Reason’ where nothing is left to chance.

As Roger Chartier has written, Saint Just and Robespierre are in this sense the heirs of Descartes. In Descartes the monarchical and religious dogma of the day remained untouched in his project of radical scepticism, but following the line of Newton as interpreted by Voltaire the revolutionaries embraced an idea of “abstract human nature” over the fullness and complexity of the world in existing historical reality. Classicism, Chartier argues, amounts to not only a “negation of the social world” but a “refusal of the real” and hence radically separates politics from the world of everyday life in favour of an absolute and mythic discourse.291 The salvation presumed to follow the ‘final cut’ becomes the justification for the violence done to the richness of everyday life.

In practice such an ideology unleashed a ‘purifying’ campaign to inflict a radical rupture with the ‘corrupted’ past which targeted at once ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ obstacles to the achievement of the Republic as a conflict free society – that is, it entered the inner realm of the person. The logic of the campaign dismissed the world as mere appearance, an illusionary surface behind which conspiracies proliferated. The problem became that of distinguishing between “true and false patriots”, based tacitly on one of the “oldest metaphysical problems” in “the relationship between

The Rights of Man were based on an ontological claim about what is inherent in human nature, not an idea of artificial institutional restraints, and so reduced politics to nature. Enemies could only be instances of corruption of such nature. This campaign employed the full means of state authority in a ‘transitional phase’ of extreme violence while projecting an outcome which would embody the very opposite of such terror in the ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality. This radical separation of ‘ends’ and ‘means’ on the ethical plane is perhaps one of the starkest warnings to come out of the experience of the French Revolution.

As the public war against the ‘aristocratic conspiracy’, or partisans of the ‘past’, became an avowed campaign of ‘integrity’ against ‘hypocrisy’, each individual was also called upon to undergo an invisible inner battle to undo the heritage of the past contained within him. This in turn commanded a pedagogic campaign of re-education by the state as the road to the ‘new man’ in a world where political guilt took on the imprecision of a flashing or involuntary state of mind. The framework of truth opposed to hypocrisy left behind the scientific distinction between truth and falsehood of verifiable data, or even truth and fiction, and entered the boundless existential realm where authenticity opposes inauthenticity.

There are three consequences to equality as a discourse of identity rather than legal rights within the context of “regeneration”. (1) The idea of the ‘social contract’, from having been the basis for a defence of universal rights, becomes a weapon to be used to deny basic rights to those ‘outside’ the nation. Debate and human rights are negated for the purpose of the larger aim. Yet the division between the nation and its enemy is perennially unclear and a politics of terror substitutes the rule of law. (2) Representation is rejected in favour of the ‘unity’ of public will. An ideology of the ‘will’ ultimately replaces the discourse of ‘reason’, with the ideal of ‘one national voice’ overriding the principle of democratic pluralism. The ‘public will’ was articulated initially in terms of a single universal Reason and later in terms of the purity of heart among the

revolutionary leaders, but neither discourse permits a space for political pluralism. (3) Everyday life is destroyed in the campaign of total revolution, with catastrophic consequences for the project of democracy. This blueprint for the nation pits modernity against tradition and even subjectivity in a way that invariably undercuts the ideal of human rights.

These three aspects can be made sense of in terms of the key concept of 'virtue' within the ideal of "regeneration", or its expression in mass politics as the 'unity of the movement', or the fiction of a unanimous people sustained by the assertion that "ontological truth" lies in the "goodness" of the "people". By this binary and demagogic logic of affirming the intrinsic or essential goodness of the people, the barrier between the "people" and the "enemy" remains fluid and subject to the political exigencies of maintaining power for the ruling clique. At the same time, any diversity among the people is already denied in principle. The result is that the distinction between the public and the private spheres is destroyed, and the public sphere itself becomes monopolized by an ideological regime which crushes the emergence of secular-democratic culture.

On June 2 1793 the dualism of the "people" and their representation in the Assembly finally yielded to the purity of a unified sovereign will as the Girondins were purged and the Committee of Safety under Robespierre assumed dictatorial powers. At this time Robespierre articulated the progress of the "regeneration" in terms of a perpetual struggle against "the intransigents who sought to replace other intransigents". With 18 floreal (June 8) the Cult of the Supreme Being was introduced in a celebration of the end of "factions", and accompanied by calls to punish the surviving hidden networks of agents and conspirators. In this we see a renewed link between religious "truth" and political power. Robespierre proclaimed this "God of nature" in terms of the "eternal principles on which human weakness finds the support for launching itself on the path of virtue". The Cult of the Supreme Being, according to Robespierre, announces the dominance of one truth in "dealing a blow to fanaticism" by which "all fictions disappear before the truth and all

294 Arendt. Page 120.
nonsense succumbs to reason.²⁹⁶ Invoking “Providence”, he described a “supreme being who essentially influences the destiny of nations” and watches “with peculiar love over the French Revolution” surrounded by “vile intrigues” and “so many enemies”.²⁹⁷ At the 1794 speech on the Festival of the Supreme Being he praised the inspiration of Rousseau’s idea of a civil religion.²⁹⁸

On June 10 the Law of Prairial defined “enemies of the people” in terrifyingly vague terms as “those who have sought to mislead opinion… to deprave customs and to corrupt public conscience”.²⁹⁹ With acquittal or death as the only possible verdicts, revolutionary justice dispensed with even any pretense of law and grounded legitimacy upon “the conscience of the jurors, enlightened by love of the nation”. In this way, as Saint Just put it, the Revolution was “frozen”, yet done so in the tape loop of a paranoid replay where the secret conspiracy was unveiled and exterminated only to be uncovered again, in an eternally recurring step toward a new dawn that was never to materialize. This left only an arbitrary politics of state violence grounding a national identity based on discourses of integration and exclusion. As the legal framework of justice disintegrated entirely, and a state of perpetual war advanced against the ubiquitous “mask” behind which the “conspiracy” lurked, Saint Just argued that “the detentions do not have their source in judicial relations”. Rather, the detentions found their justification as a means to “establish an order of things in which a single universal tendency to good will prevail”.³⁰⁰ In a praise of equality as “virtue” or a “pure” and “unified” public identity which may distinguish “truth” from “hypocrisy”, Saint Just defines the function of the state: “If there were morals, everything would be fine; we require institutions to purify them”.³⁰¹

The Thermidorian Reaction of 1794 proclaimed its political independence from ideology and sought to restore the early legalist principles of 1789. Yet it retained the political logic of the

'nation versus its other' as the Jacobin club was simultaneously outlawed and preserved to function as the perennial fugitive responsible for endlessly recurring patterns of conspiracy. This logic of paranoia that runs throughout the French Revolutionary discourse, the reduction of the political to consensus or death, must function as the point of departure for comparing the case to alternative rational paradigms of Enlightenment in order to champion and affirm the radical democratic republican tradition which the French Revolution helped to bring into the world.

1.5 The German experience, the Romantic revolt and counter-Enlightenment

The birth of the modern political categories of "right" and "left" were born on June 27, 1789, when "the deputies representing the Third Estate – whose members had been bred on Enlightenment precepts – took their seats in the National Assembly on the left side of the hall" and their opponents remained on the opposite side. Yet these "political battle lines had been drawn decades earlier" and already by mid-century a "new breed of anti-philosophe (had) emerged to contest the epistemological and political heresies proposed by the Party of Reason". These counter-Enlightenment idea complexes were elaborated initially and most colourfully in Germany.

If the "maritime discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the exploitation of new worlds" had created new forms of "mobile or commercial wealth" and a "new class" in France, to the east in Germany these transitions were having a more deleterious effect. The progressive and dynamic Germany of the sixteenth century had yielded to a period of decline as France, England and Holland consolidated themselves as centralised states. German efforts to create centralised statehood had been unsuccessful and throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth

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centuries the Germans were governed by three hundred princes and twelve hundred sub princes.304 The dramatic effects of this transition within central and eastern Europe are described by A.J.P. Taylor: "The great geographic discoveries ruined Germany almost overnight. (...) The opening of the Cape route to India caused an economic collapse in Germany, the effects of which lasted for three hundred years. From being the centre of world commerce, Germany became within a generation an economic backwater".305 By Hegel’s lifetime (1770-1831), "Germany was not yet Germany" but "234 fragmented petty states which considered themselves part of the ‘East’, a synonym for ‘backward’ throughout most of the ‘West’".306

Germany’s struggle for nation making had been an experience of frightening violence. The “assertion of a national and reformed religion” with the Reformation was “expressed in the enthusiasm for Luther which swept all parts and all classes of Germany in 1519 and 1520”. The moment ended in bitter disillusionment when from “a resolute and irresistible popular leader, Luther suddenly became a timid mystic repudiating all connection with worldly affairs” under the pressure of the Peasants’ Revolt of 1525. This was a seminal moment in defining the nation as “Luther had hastily to decide whether by the ‘German nation’ to which he had appealed he meant the German people or merely established authority, the princes”. The outcome was seminal when he “decided in favour of the princes and became the wild, unrestrained advocate of a policy of absolutism and ruthless repression.”307 During the Thirty Years War (1618-48) foreign troops, including those of France, “killed a very large section of the German population” in a massacre unparalleled since the days of Genghis Khan.308

It was within this broader national context that the German Enlightenment philosopher Gottried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646-1716) was obsessed with conceiving a new universal framework

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304 Berlin. Page 34.
308 Berlin. Page 35.
for human experience that would reconcile religious tradition with the epistemic wreckage of early modernity and the social division of the religious wars. He sought to shift the terms of the debate from the Will of God to Divine Reason. His entire intellectual life’s work was motivated by a struggle to unite Calvinist and Catholic religious factions in a painfully divided Germany, and to pave the way to a reunited Christendom based on the reduction of multiplicity to a unity.309 Entering the service of the Archbishop of Mainz, he sought means to create a lasting peace in Europe and advanced such practical plans as promoting the invasion of Egypt by France to ease aggression against the Netherlands. On a visit to England in 1673 he joined the Royal Society and discovered, roughly coterminous with Newton, the infinitesimal calculus.310

As a Christian and a Rationalist, Leibniz believed the goal of knowledge to be achieving identity with a pre-established harmony in the universe tending toward the greatest perfection. He sought to explain ethical obligation in terms of an ontological identity with the universe in his “total explanation of the world”.311 In the war ravaged world of his lifetime this doubtlessly reflected a yearning for security, and he conceived his universal explanation in terms of a “total presence”, an “absolute fullness”, with “no windows” and “no breaks”, where nothing could escape into the uncertainty or darkness of an unknown future.312 He identified this order with the sovereign justice of God or Reason as an “absolute continuity” and the “best of all possible worlds”, a closed and finished work.313 At the end of his life he confronted the failure of his “mondology” as the “analysis of infinity” to permanently reconcile physics and theology, and splintering religious factions in Europe.314

Leibniz employed a concept of epistemic totality to try and close the contradictory nature of early modernity as a social experience in arguing that “in obeying reason, we fulfil a Supreme

313 Lest we exaggerate Voltaire’s rationalism, Leibniz’s outlook was the target of his mockery in *Candide* (1759).
Reason". In contrast to the moral philosophers of the British Enlightenment, who also sought to reconcile modern scientific thought with religious tradition and to seal the violent fissures of religious sectarianism, Leibniz established a standard of “perfection" as opposed to mere “happiness" in moral sentiment of the British Enlightenment.

Out of these hard German conditions arose the popular religious movement of Pietism (late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century), a Puritan rejection of all formality from scholarly learning to accepted ritual, and this discourse of the soul provided the soil for the spread of the Romantic revolt. The inner mood of Pietism, smouldering in a “wounded national sensibility”, contrasted with the perceived superficiality of French civilisation embodied in salons, wealth and snobbish intellectual culture. The Romantic movement was of high intellectual calibre and reflected a crisis of confidence in the universality and impartiality of Enlightenment reason - the noumenal-phenomenal dualism behind the Kantian autonomy of Reason could as reasonably be assailed as the ethical contradictions on a practical level. While Romantic critics doubtlessly addressed questions worthy of being posed, the perhaps unintended consequence of their line of attack was to politically risk compromising the secular gains of early European modernity with a sharp turn back into a closed hermeneutical logic.

Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788), the founder of the German Romantic revolt, was a Pietist who rejected Enlightenment reason and – influenced by Hume – insisted that only faith in God could resolve the existential and social dilemmas presented by early modernity. Enlightenment reason, Hamann argued, was to “dissect a body or an event down to its first elements" and “to want to trap God’s invisible being, his eternal power and divinity”. Rational abstraction, he maintained, “does violence to reality”. Critiquing Bacon, he asserted that

316 *Berlin*. Page 38.
"empirical knowledge too is from God" and "God's revelation is throughout the whole of creation". Hamann extended the old Biblical doctrine that God speaks to humanity through nature to the claim that "God mediates himself in a relational way through history". This transformation of history into a function of divine communication, in defiance of Deism, also transforms the meaning of truth as the "deepest truth behind anything (becomes) the relationship with God that it mediates". It becomes necessary to dispense with the 'dominating' modes of historical inquiry in objectivity and empiricism and to recognize "the whole of history" as "mythology". Rather than the arrogant confidence in assuming one can know the "whole of reality", the "true understanding" capable of uncovering the "real meaning" must be obtained through the inexhaustible depth of symbols and mythic meanings. The line between fact and fiction is thereby erased, history is reunited with salvation, and nature reintegrated with an enchanted cosmos as epistemology yields to a "hermeneutic of mythology".

As a private point of view Hamann's vision would cause little offense. With the "breakdown of the reason-revelation dichotomy" in which there exists "no opposition between grace and nature", however, as a doctrine extended to the public or political sphere, it would certainly undermine the institutional foundations of secularism. Moreover, his contention that "Tradition and language are the true elements of reason" is to assert an incommensurability of intercultural communication and to thereby eliminate the theoretical basis for legal institutions founded in impartiality or secular natural law. Is reason is not in principle viewed as independent of cultural or religious traditions, then it certainly must remain confined within the dogmas of whatever discursive universe is proposed.

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320 Dickson. Page 146.
322 Dickson. Page 66.
323 Dickson. Page 145.
324 Quoted in Dickson. Page 272.
Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), an admirer of Hamamm and inspired by his anthropological views, introduced a historicist argument charging the standards of Enlightenment with being "ultimately nothing more than the standards of their own culture and time, illicitly universalized as if they held for all cultures and all times". Hence he brought to bear a charge of ethnocentrism, asserting that Enlightenment universalism took the "values of eighteenth century Europe" to be "the purpose of history itself". Herder countered that "Every nation has the center of its own happiness within itself", and by extension held that the limits of human experience are bound by culture with as many existing "forms of humanity as there are different cultures". The primary meaning of human existence was therefore the experience of belonging within the community and the world of specifically localised expression it entails. This pre-rational life world coloured by specific cultural values and beliefs is grounded in hermeneutics, with the hidden "roots" being the "most important thing" containing "all the treasure of its interpretation".

What is notable in both Hamamm and Herder is a basic conception of insoluble difference and conflict underlying the human condition. Both their celebration of diversity and their refusal to accept a single wave of homogenisation is doubtlessly commendable; what is less to be admired is the utter absence of any project to create conditions for a peacefully existing multi-religious society or even non-violent strategies for social conflict resolution in general. Rather, the Romantic intellectual tradition of which they were the fountainhead seems to revel in a principle of imaginary self encapsulated plurality that slides back into singular hermeneutic worlds, as if there is no call for creating those institutional constraints required for preventing the potential crisis of inter-communal violence and domination haunting every modern society.

The experience of the French Revolution, by seeming to confirm the forebodings of the Romantic revolt, caused its flames to rise higher in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Though


\[326\] Quoted in Beiser. Page 142.
promising “a perfect solution to human ills” based upon “peaceful universalism” and “classical perfection”, the Revolution “did not go the way it was intended” and produced the contrary of its stated intentions in “violence” and “unpredictable change” contributing to anxieties about the severe political limits of practical knowledge in a radical gulf between theory and practice.

One important voice in the Romantic tradition to arise out of this perception of human destiny plunged into chaos was Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). He reconceived epistemology as action and an instrument for effective living, rather than objective knowledge, and the nation organically as an experience in existential self realisation and affirmation driven by a sheer process of action in creating new values. He contrasted this with the decadence of the Latin nations. Deeming the Jews “a nation within a nation”, he insisted that the only way to extend civil rights to them would be to “cut off their heads in one night and put others on them in which there would be not a single Jewish idea”.327 In his highly influential speeches to the German nation (1806), delivered when Napoleon had conquered Prussia and producing a vast upsurge of national feeling, Fichte contrasted the authentic primal Germans to “the derivative, the second-hand product” or “strangers” to the Urvolk.328 These speeches, later to become the Bible of the 1918 generation, forcefully introduced the discourse of authenticity into political circulation. This contributed greatly to the confusion of liberty and authenticity as a political aim, with dangerous consequences for the later.

From the point of view of the counter-Enlightenment inside of France, the Revolution was an “abyss which had suddenly opened up in the history of France”. Its ideologues nurtured dreams of a “simple return to stability” intended to “reconnect the broken continuity”.329 Joseph de Maistre (1753-1851), a champion ideologue of the absolutist order, had been a member of the court of justice (the Senate) at Savoie before fleeing in 1793 from revolutionary occupation and taking

328 Quoted in Berlin. Page 96.
refuge in Lausanne where he carried out an intense counter-revolutionary campaign. De Maistre’s *Considerations on France* (1797) argued in defence of the particularity of historical traditions and insisted that “humanity” was a mere figment of imagination and did not exist. He wrote that: “There is no such thing in the world as man. In my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, and so on. I even know, thanks to Montesquieu, that one can be Persian. But as for man, I declare I’ve never encountered him. If he exists, I don’t know about it”.330 In these terms de Maistre attacked the basic Enlightenment conception of universal “human nature” as a shared political horizon of democratic modernity, or non-violent conflict resolution, and implied a politics of ethnic nationalism.

Yet De Maistre’s project was not ethnic nationalism but a militant Catholic universalist ideology as the foundation of the state. Adopting a mythic discourse opposing a framework of cosmic time to the secular time of the Enlightenment, he asserted that “no one can deny the mutual relations between the visible world and the world of the invisible”. He consequently explained human historical reality within the limits of a discursive universe: “The Original Sin, which explains everything, and without which nothing can be explained, unfortunately repeats itself with each instant across the span of time, however much in a secondary manner”. 331 Applying this conviction to the violent events of the French Revolution, de Maistre argued that only a theological understanding could explain how Providence had inflicted vengeance upon the nation for its dabbling in the heretical ideas of universalist modernity destructive to the Great Chain of Being: individualism, liberalism, and the rights of man. The “disgraceful revolution of France”, he wrote, “were the mysterious means used by Providence to snap the tyrannical chains of heretical power”.332 He concluded that it “is not men who lead the Revolution, it is the Revolution that

employs men". History was a place of universal evil and decline, a condition which only obedience to the infallible spiritual power of the Pope could ameliorate.

De Maistre conceived an alternative path of early modern nation making focused on bringing the issue of Catholic Salvation to the very heart of the public sphere and installing every other consideration in subordinate relation to it. He argued that: “However sovereignty is defined and vested, it is always one, unviolable and absolute”. Yet in contrast to natural law, for him civil laws “rise out of the foundation of the true faith” as the “offspring of Heaven” and are therefore “incapable of being reformed”. Authority is conceived in terms of “the paternal relationship between prince and subjects”. On this basis he applauded the Spanish Inquisition which had condemned Galileo for heresy in 1633, likening “religious error” in its effects to a “poisonous drug”. The Inquisition had for its sole purpose “the protection of the true faith”. He further argued that what was at stake was “whether the nation could continue its Spanish character and independence, or whether Judaism and Islamism would divide the spoils of these” through “superstition, despotism and barbarity”. Defining the nation in terms of one authentic conception of public religious identity, he claimed the Jews were “a nation contained within another”. There was certainly, then, an overt sense of violence grounded in the ideal of Providence driving De Maistre’s vision of the nation.

Such arguments for the necessity of authoritarian rule, based on the mysterious and irrational forces which govern destiny, the pessimism and vision of historic decline, and insistence on the irreducible relationship between ethnicity and human identity - entailing a conviction concerning the primacy of particular attachments such as family, clan, region and religion - ultimately helped to form a basic conceptual vocabulary for the entire array of ‘nativist’ political

335 Quoted in Hulme -Jordanova. Page 215.
ideologies rejecting epistemic or moral universalism based on particularisms of race, religion, or other claims to an ontologically privileged identity or authenticity.

What is striking is how at the outset, de Maistre and his contemporaries were horrified by the idea of radical change. He said in 1796, “The counter-revolution will not be a revolution in reverse but the opposite of revolution”\(^\text{339}\). He started out by deploring the Revolution for endeavouring to “annihilate” all that “the wisdom of time had protected”\(^\text{340}\). Yet the embrace of modern political categories in the name of counter-Enlightenment ideals ultimately conceded the emergence of a new political realm centring not submission but conscience, and so by implication doctrines of action and political violence. The counter-Enlightenment became an “apologetics for the intrinsic value of time’s work, peaceful and impersonal, and a simultaneous call for struggle without mercy to retrain the entire historical direction that contemporary events were taking”\(^\text{341}\).

The same rather devastating implications of the French Revolutionary-Enlightenment conjuncture as a crisis of confidence dilemma were also driving Kant’s attempt, roughly co-terminus with the French Revolution, to reconcile the tensions — expressed in philosophical discourse between ‘rationalism’ and ‘empiricism’, the radical scepticism of Hume and the claim to ‘absolute reality’ made by Leibniz — between modern scientific knowledge/ democratic political organization and public religious belief. He thus extended the legacy of the early Enlightenment in an answer to the newer ‘destructive’ paradigm of Enlightenment as ‘total revolution’ taking shape around the French Revolution.

At the centre of Kant’s concern was the state, which he considered the “most difficult” problem to resolve and one in which — significantly — “a complete solution is impossible”\(^\text{342}\). Living under the regimes of Frederic II (1712-86) and Frederic William II (1744-97), between


experiments in “Enlightened despotism” and political crackdowns, Kant came into conflict with authority over his “Religion within the Limits of Simple Reason”(1793). Kant was in dialogue with the German Jacobins at the time of the French Revolution, who promoted total transformation of the political order through violence. He was exposed to the pessimism concerning all harmony between theory and practice in the analysis of the French Revolution by Burke.\textsuperscript{343} He also encountered the religious “enthusiasts” and “irrationalists” who reacted to the perceived failure to master the dualism of “faith” and “reason” by a return to the “pure sources” of religious experience.\textsuperscript{344}

Kant saw the obstacles to a freer society in dogma, determinism, fatalism and political authoritarianism. Instead of seeking to hit upon the ultimate nature of reality, he endeavoured to construct a secular framework for religious belief in modern society. This involved inbuilt institutional structures for avoiding the potential excesses of politically inflicted violence from the modern state in the name of closed religious ideologies and any public monopoly on ‘truth’ imposed by particular groups. Favouring growth over Final Ends, he called for a conception of reason “more modest than the expression providence”.\textsuperscript{345}

Kantian thought grew from a lifelong obsession with ending the conflict between science and faith, and with the political project of advancing human freedom. At the core of the Kantian project is a rejection of the possibility of any timeless and spaceless ‘eternal’ knowledge of the kind Leibniz strove to obtain toward the goal of social and religious reconciliation for Europe. Kant, though certainly sharing the same hope for reconciliation, recognized in such totalizing means a grave political danger and consequently conceived a more modest path. Kant was a thinker of ‘means’ and ‘ends’, concerned with the problem of theory and practice, and his rejection of ‘absolute knowledge’ established his thought within a historicist horizon in inevitable tension with his universal humanist commitment.

\textsuperscript{343}See Gerard Raulet, ed. \textit{Aufklarung: Les Lumieres allemandes}. Chapter 4 sections 5 and 6.

\textsuperscript{344}See Gerard Raulet, ed. \textit{Aufklarung: Les Lumieres allemandes}. Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{345}“To Eternal Peace”. In \textit{Basic Writings of Kant}. Page 451.
The shaping moment of the Kantian dilemma may have been the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, after which he rejected all ideas of Divine Punishment in natural and historical events. Firstly, in this rejection of Providence and the intervening Hand of God as legitimate epistemic categories of reflection, Kant refused the notion of Final Ends.\textsuperscript{346} History is divided from Salvation, as there can be no ultimate synthesis as the universe continues to create itself in time.\textsuperscript{347} Kantian reason shifts from ‘totality’ to the specificity of pure practical reason.

Kant wanted to go beyond the attachment to ‘nature’ that characterized the British Enlightenment from which he otherwise drew a great deal of inspiration in terms of a ‘moral sense’. Rejecting the materialism which sees simply a world of ‘people’, millions of them living and dying like any other animal, he insisted upon the reality of a higher category of ‘humanity’. The empirical individual, with all attendant limits and failings, finds fulfilment in the species and the project of human progress.\textsuperscript{348} This is where the concept of the ‘transcendental’ or the ‘universal’ finds its place in Kant’s thought as a secular notion of autonomous reason.

Institutionally posed between demandable law and undemandable morality, Kant concedes the individual human agent as always an end in itself. Human beings cannot be sacrificed to a larger vision such as Providence, and progress in the “rights of man” is the result of struggle and not nature.\textsuperscript{349} Civil society, the result of this struggle, is conceived by Kant as dynamic and unfinished, as creating ends. Economically, the Kantian outlook would certainly pose the problem of limiting the predatory aspects of capitalism in terms of a moral community. Politically, no particular human being may obtain that ‘absolute knowledge’ which would legitimize the imposition of any regime, religious or otherwise, from above. In Kant we find a concept of context-specific universalism, or a reflexive mode of engaging modernity, with each moving

\textsuperscript{346} Gerard Raulet, ed. Aufklarung : Les Lumieres allemandes. Page 226


121
"according to one's own rhythm and in terms of the specificity of existing conditions". The key to maintaining the ongoing dynamism of civil society for Kant is the political and institutional order preserving the proper division of powers, and the division between the public and private spheres.

The concept of secularization as a distinction between the private and public spheres was at the core of Kant's argument as the very precondition for democratic modernity. He accomplished this by proclaiming a strict limit where ideologues of the French Revolution such as Saint Just had proclaimed unlimited Totality as the "final end" and any means necessary to accomplish it. For Kant "limiting speculative reason to its proper sphere" was comparable to the function of "the police" in preventing "violence", as he sought to "remove (the speculative and dogmatic excess of) knowledge in order to make room for belief" in the name of "more moderate claims".

In political practice this doctrine entailed the separation of powers, of the private and public spheres, and the state from religious institutions. Kant thus indicated the necessity of keeping the public sphere open as a permanently unfinished space for ongoing public debate on issues of secular public interest. Kantianism and the French Revolutionary ideology at the apex of the "second revolution" present us with two principle variants on the meaning of modern political secularism.

At the same time, Kant's conception of 'humanity' beyond the boundaries of Europe was certainly dim and imbued with the commonplace prejudices of his time. This too constituted a tension at the heart of his metaphysics in his simultaneous condemnation of the injustice of the slave trade and his affirmation of the globally transformative powers of Europe in bringing about the "autonomy of reason" against the supposed "forces of nature".

351 Critique of Pure Reason. In Basic Writings of Kant. Pages 16-21.
1.6 The experience of early modern nation-state construction, between Asia and Europe: Akbar’s “Universal Peace” (Sulh-i Kul) in its relevance to the Enlightenment.

a. Forgotten experiments in early Enlightenment

In the sixteenth-century Mughal state under the Emperor Akbar (1556–1605) - co-terminus with Philip II’s reign in Europe - we find an extended and dynamic political experiment characterised by ideological precepts and ends closely matching the spirit of the European Enlightenment, yet derived from local cultural resources while responding to particular manifestations of increasingly global conditions. The Mughal state under Akbar not only self consciously projected a universal message based on tolerance and dialogue, it also functioned as a forerunner of secular and democratic aspects of modern Indian state policy since independence. In this capacity it points not merely to an alternative source of Enlightenment ideology in the context of organizing the early modern state, but also suggests a particular heritage of Enlightenment indigenous to India which dispels the claim that reason and democracy are exclusively products of the West and undoes what we may call the linear and Eurocentric model of Enlightenment, or the teleological concept of historical Enlightenment as the product of European Reason.

Akbar was not the first to undertake the experiment of constructing a composite nobility, though the first to create an enduring one.354 We can also point to further examples of moments of democratic potential in Indian history - for instance, in the early republics including Vaishali Bihar (600 BCE). There is some evidence that “early India enjoyed democratic institutions comparable to those developed in Greece from about 600BC to 200AD.” These republics were based on “village councils composed of elected representatives with wide executive and judicial powers”

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including “distributing land and collecting taxes”. Not long after Vaishali Bihar, the Buddhist emperor Ashoka (third century BCE) “outlined the need for toleration and the richness of heterodoxy” and “laid down what are perhaps the oldest rules for conducting debates and disquisitions”, demonstrating the historical depth India’s dialogic tradition. On the cultural level, the writings of Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) proposed a complete supersession of the aristocratic code of ethics glorifying virility and war, and advanced an alternative ethical principle of alleviating human suffering. A popular court poet associated with seven rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, his poems evoked the “pain of the mother” in losing children to war, insisted that a slave is the “child of a man”, that a “needle is better than a (cutting) sword” because it “binds”, and appealed passionately for Hindu-Muslim unity. Khusrau, a member of the Sufi Chishti order, is identifiable in his poetic vision with the spirit of non-violence.

Deitmar Rothermund has written a comparative analysis of the co-terminus reigns of Akbar and Philip II of Spain (both beginning in 1556) in terms of contrasting strategies of imperial consolidation. Both rulers had “inherited large realms and expanded and consolidated them with great determination”. Both acted within the space of the “modern world” opened up by the discovery of the Americas and the shift to Atlantic trade routes. Hence, “Philip spent the silver mined in his American colonies in his continuous wars and much of it found its way to India where it helped to monetize the land revenue which was the mainstay of Akbar’s power”. Also, when in 1580 Philip “became the head of the Portuguese Estado do India” Akbar “welcomed the Portuguese as traders who brought silver to India and as protectors of the Mughal ships taking Muslim pilgrims to Arabia”.

357 Amir Khusrau. *Between Kings and Masses*.
Akbar undertook a correspondence with Philip II in 1582 over political and religious principle, in which he voiced a strongly rationalist outlook: “men most (being) fettered by bonds of tradition, (and) imitating the ways followed by their fathers”, and ignoring “arguments and reasons”, were thus “excluding (themselves) from the possibility of ascertaining the truth, which is the noblest aim of the human intellect”. He requested that “we associate at convenient seasons with learned men of all religions, thus deriving profit from their exquisite discourses and exalted aspirations”. This call for the joint development of an independent reason - as opposed to following “the religion in which (one) was born and educated” - is striking in its secular implications at a time of wholesale religious massacre in Europe.360 The response of the Jesuit Father Monserrate to the experience of Akbar’s court is equally revealing of profound differences of outlook on the nature of truth: “the king cared little that in allowing everyone to follow his religion he was in reality violating all”.

Rothermund’s analysis involves three main points of comparison: (1) tolerance versus intolerance. (2) Organizing the early modern state. (3) The Methods of Incorporating and Networking. He writes: “Both Akbar and Philip had to solve the problem of organizing an early modern state, depending on expensive armament like the artillery and a large standing army. For this there had to be a reliable tax base and an efficient territorial administration”. Concerning incorporation, he writes that “Unlike the later modern state which depends largely on impersonal institutions, the early modern state had to rely on personal ties of the monarch with the ruling elite of his realm”, ties that were “no longer the ties of feudal vassalage and homage”. The alternative between tolerance and intolerance presents two possible strategies of imperial consolidation in the face of these problems.

In pointing to the "enormous heterogeneity of their subjects", Rothermund argues that Akbar followed a policy of tolerance or Sulh-i kul (universal peace) because it "made good sense as far as imperial consolidation was concerned". Philip, conversely, "stressed Catholicism as the leading principle of his realm with a vengeance". His organization of the "Inquisition not only in Spain, but also in the Netherlands and Latin America, was not just a matter of faith" but also "an instrument of political consolidation".

At bottom there is a fundamental difference of perspective regarding the relation between religion, the state and personal belief in which "while Akbar did not interfere with the beliefs of others, Philip felt called upon to fight heretics". In the case of Philip the state was used as an instrument for the violent transformation of mass consciousness to fit a uniform model of True Belief, while for Akbar the very process of communication and dialogue between different faiths and viewpoints was the ground for searching for the truth and rendering the inevitable conflicts of religious difference creative through the construction of institutional supports for free and open debate. In this sense Akbar "laid the formal foundations of a secular legal structure and of religious neutrality of the state, which included the duty to ensure that 'no man should be interfered with on account of religion, and anyone is to be allowed to go over to a religion that pleases him.'"

Yet there is a still deeper ethical difference than simply ideological forms of power giving shape to the state, and that is the difference between the foundational principle of rationality based tacitly in non-violence for Akbar and the dogmatic use of violence for Philip. These alternatives present archetypal modes in the history of modern politics between a principle of pluralism and a dogma of inflationary ontology which separate a democratic from an authoritarian principle when applied as the guiding ideology of the state. Philip's outlook surely partakes of the sacred-violence-truth triangle of Providence forged during the European religious wars, while Akbar's outlook in turn reflects longer term ongoing ideological struggles taking place in Indian society.

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362 Rothermund. Page 1-5.
expressed in a religious idiom. The politics of Akbar’s reign was directly enmeshed in the tensions resulting from the “strife between shariat (Muslim Law) and tariqat (Sufism) which had started in West Asia with the rise of Sufism”.  

Among Sufi orders the Chishtiyya was the most widespread in India, having been introduced in the twelfth century from Iran. From its earliest days this order adapted Hindu practices including the use of devotional music and yogic type breathing and concentration exercises. This openness was consistent with the avowed principles of the order which centred “universal love, malice toward none, simplicity and generosity”. The Chishti treatises of Akbar’s time expressed a “plea for the illegitimacy of considering Islam as superior to any other religion”, arguing that as the “whole world is a manifestation of love”, there is “no precedence of one religion over another”. It was this order, rather than Akbar’s sword, that largely contributed to the spread of Islam among the popular masses in India. This predominant Sufi order, with its ethic of non-violence, became Akbar’s ideological centre following the consolidation of Mughal power in 1556. By the 1570’s Akbar appeared to be an exclusive devotee of the Chishti saints. This became so particularly because Akbar believed his belated success in producing an heir in 1569 was attributable to the intervention of a disciple of India’s most venerated Muslim saint, Khwaja Muinneddin Chisti. Akbar built a mosque named after him and visited the shrine fourteen times.

These religious and political debates during Akbar’s reign were linked with secular circumstances at the global level in that “the changes that took place in the other parts of the world at the dawn of the modern era did exercise certain influences on the development of medieval (Indian) institutions (...) and on the ideas and intellectual atmosphere in which what was new in the

Mughal imperial polity was formulated. Akbar argued, with regard to experimenting with new commodities arriving from Europe, "we must not reject a thing that has been adopted by people of the world, merely because we cannot find it in our own books; or how shall we progress?" This is consistent with a larger pattern in which "frequent intercourse with foreign influences has stimulated the creative imagination of the Indian peoples in all forms of the arts and literature and philosophy as well as science and technology and basic political and social institutions". Akbar's reign "belongs to the period when modern technology had dawned in Europe, some rays of which had also fallen on Asia". The Mughal empire may, therefore, "far from (having been) the climax of traditional Indian political endeavour, (have rather) represented one of the several unsuccessful experiments of History towards that titration which has at last given us the distinctive modern civilization of our times".

Three points support this observation: (1) the system of coinage, in that "the coming of the rupee was linked to the Spanish discovery of the New World, because that led to the heavy influx of silver, plundered extracted from the newly discovered continents, into the 'Old World', thereby ending the silver famine that had prevailed there since the fourteenth century". As a result there was "greatly expanded money circulation not only in the absolute terms of metal but, more important, in terms of transactions" or "an expansion of trade". (2) The role of artillery, which "gave to the towns, where alone guns and muskets could be manufactured, a new basis for political and military domination over the countryside". Abu'l Fazl, the leading court philosopher, remarked that the interest taken by Akbar in gun-making "was a major factor in the development of advanced technology", introducing a method followed throughout the Indian Ocean. Akbar

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371 Wood. Page 35.
374 M. Athar Ali. *Mughal India*. Pages 69
sponsored the production of prefab and moveable structures, textiles, air cooling and refrigeration devices, water lifts, arms and ships.\textsuperscript{376} The Mughal ruling class, being “mainly urban in character”, was able to gain “as a result of the new military importance of the towns”. These cases present “two new sources of strength and stability that ‘modern’ developments gave to the Mughal polity – the silver influx, a component of the Price Revolution, and the artillery, an early product of modern technology”.\textsuperscript{377}

(3) Thirdly, “information about the Europeans was available to Akbar and his contemporaries”. Abul Fazl was “aware that the Europeans had discovered the Americas, which he called Alam-i Nau, or the New World”. European advances in technology and medicine were also known and respected. Such knowledge “could not but engender questioning about the finality of traditional knowledge”.\textsuperscript{378} Among a variety of responses to this Abu'l Fazl adopted a rationalist approach. He pointed out, for example, that zinc as a separate metal was unknown to the ancients, and charged that “al-Ghazali spoke nonsense when he condemned sciences that were not manifestly based on the Qu’ran”. This indicates a dawning division between a concept of knowledge as grounded within a discursive universe and one grounded in a natural science perspective. Athar Ali describes these responses as “symptoms of a cleft in the hitherto solid structure of faith in the traditional cultural heritage of Islam”, a “void that was unconsciously sought to be filled by the special position of the Mughal emperor as a spiritual guide”.\textsuperscript{379}

It is also within the context of such a crisis of certainty that we may view the adopting of Sul-i Kul as a flexible strategy of state consolidation, derived conceptually from the pluralistic Chishtiyya order in its ongoing theological and practical tensions with the Naqshbandi order. The Naqshbandi order, introduced into India in the sixteenth century and given impetus by Babur’s 1526 conquest, held a commitment to promoting a “total conformity and obedience to the traditions

\textsuperscript{377} M. Athar Ali. Mughal India. Pages 69-79.
\textsuperscript{378} M. Athar Ali. Mughal India. Page 69.
\textsuperscript{379} M. Athar Ali. Mughal India. Page 70.
of the Prophet" and discouraging the "customs of strangers". A section of the Naqshbandi order became committed to political intervention in the name of these principles and so came to function as an active link between nobles who were displeased with Akbar's religious innovations. By the 1560's a new pattern of emperor-noble relationship had evolved which suited the needs of the new Mughal State in terms of defence by a nobility of diverse ethnic and religious groups "amongst whom the Hindus and the Shi'as came to occupy a dominant position", and which favoured the Chishti order. This development was altogether incompatible with the Naqshbandi perception of a Muslim state, and we find Shaikh Abdur'Haq articulating a legitimisation of Kingship "narrowed down to the exclusive benefit of Islam". The lead was taken by Baqi Billah of the orthodox Naqshbandi sect in a "movement against the liberal, eclectic policies of Akbar" while the Chishti sect led a trend in favour of such "liberal elements under the slogan of wahdat-al-wujud" (unity of being).

Within this broader context it is necessary to analyze in some greater detail the life experience and thought of the Emperor Akbar and those contemporaries who helped shape his views in order to demonstrate precisely how he independently developed a secular governing perspective out of these issues, with its strong area of overlap with the worldview of the European Enlightenment. The end of this analysis will be to point to the importance of the central category of 'rationality', in its pluralistic sense, for understanding Enlightenment as at once distinctive and a diversity of differing potentials unbound by geography or culture.

This question must be posed in the context of two historical questions which will function as guiding stars: (1) to what extent and in what manner was India a nation from Akbar's point of view? (2) How did Akbar understand the category of reason and this in relation to the problem of religious pluralism?

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382 Satish Chandra. Pages 431/265.
b. nation-making between pluralism and the supreme identity.

The Akbar period was an experiment in early modern nation making. In such reforms as the “prohibition of sati, and (...) pre-puberty marriages, (in the) demand for equal inheritance for the daughter, (the) condemnation of slavery and the slave trade”, Akbar displayed a “rejection of some of the burdens of the past”. In the attempt to transform India from a “cultural unity (to) a cultural diversity undergoing synthesis, we have (...) the first vision of India undergoing moral or social improvement”. Akbar’s reign covered “perhaps one of the most dynamic periods in Indian history, a time of profound social, intellectual and religious transition”.383

This process occurred within a broader international context of change. The dynamism of the period, according to Abu’l Fazl was linked to the need to guard “Kabul and Qandahar as the twin gates of Hindostan” in order to obtain “peace from the alien (raider) and global traffic by these two routes” in order to “prosper”.385 Very likely, then, the “formlessness” at the centre of the doctrine of Sul-i Kul was also a response to the new and disruptive experience of expanding global market relations.

Although Akbar was born in India in 1542, he grew up in Afghanistan and only returned to India in 1555. He later spoke of his “arrival in India (‘Hind’)”, as if he had arrived at the place of his birth as an outsider. This identification of a bounded region by name already suggests some underlying assumption of historical unity. By Akbar’s time the “concept of India had (...) gone much beyond a purely geographical one in the Indo-Muslim tradition with which Akbar obtained

familiarity first”. In October 1578 we hear of Akbar “referring with affection and pride to the people of India (‘Hind’)” when he “praised the truth-based nature of the people of India”.  

Towards the end of the sixteenth-century we see examples of a shift from the writing of dynastic history toward a general and more modern history of India, among them being Muhammed Qasim Firishta’s Gulshan-I Ibrahimi (1609-10) which attempts to reconstruct the country’s history beginning from the pre-Islamic time. The orthodox theologian and historian Abdu’l Qadir Badauni, in his 1590-91 works on ethics, emphasised the distinctive character of the Muslim custom in India as compared to Islamic practices elsewhere, suggesting the growing consciousness of an independent identity within the larger composite culture specific to India.  

While we may not speak of a nation in the later modern sense, we may speak of a developing consciousness at this time of the Indian state’s particular identity linked to the early modern dynamism of the period, and identify attempts to reckon with the complexities of the Empire as a self defining entity seeking to implement a particular ethical and political order within a bounded region.  

Akbar came to the throne in 1556 but began to rule independently in 1560. By the end of his reign in 1605, the Mughal empire extended from Kabul to the Deccan and from the Arabian sea to the Golf of Bengal, forming the third player in the “triumvirate of giants of South and South-West Asia, the Great Turks [the Ottomans], the Great Sufi [the Safavids] and the Great Mughals”.  

There is evidence that he was deeply religious from a young age, but uneasy in his sense of the meaning of Islam. He seems to have embraced a strongly fatalistic attitude in the early years of his reign. Abu’l Fazl records Akbar saying, following being witness to an elephant fight in

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1561, “may that elephant finish us, for we cannot support the burden of life under God’s displeasure”.389

In his early years there is evidence that Akbar was quite dogmatic in his attitude toward Hindus, Shiites and other religious minorities, and later expressed regret at this after initiating the period of his reign founded on the policy and philosophy of Sulh-i Kul (Universal Peace). The 1562 decree to “abolish the enslavement of the families of captives finally stemmed the tide of forcible conversions to Islam”. Akbar’s rejection of proselytisation formed part of a broader Chishtiyya Sufi outlook, and from the time of his reign “the Mughal public services were open to adherants of all religions, to members of all castes and racial groups”.390 Thus Sulh-i Kul was linked to an evolving conception of the Indian nation in so far as central importance is placed on the welfare of the common people of India, based not on their religious identity but their being members of a larger geographic community. Abu’l Fazl records Akbar as making statements concerning the “duty of the ruler to work for the welfare of the common people” and expressing “deep respect and concern for women”.391

Abu’l Fazl was “more conscious of the geography of India than any previous writer”.392 His recognition of India as a distinctive nation is expressed in a “long and accurate survey of the (Hindi language) in the latter portion of the A’in-i Akbari, entitled “Account of Hindustan” (Ahwal-i Hindostan)”. In this work there is no indication that the culture is “to be considered in a sectarian colour”. The work opens with a description of the conditions of the country and a “survey of the opinions of the Indian sages (Hindi nazad)”. It proceeds to discuss Indian beliefs in the spheres of astronomy and geography and concerns the entire range of Indian learning, giving an “essentially

391 Khan. Page 90.
secular or non-sectarian perception of Indian culture”.\textsuperscript{393} Court painting during Akbar’s reign was also released from traditional religious connotations.\textsuperscript{394}

In 1587, at the time that Akbar founded a translation bureau or maktab khana to reach the “transcendent truth of religions”, Abu’l Fazl wrote that “the pillars of blind following were demolished and a new era of research and enquiry to religious matters commenced”.\textsuperscript{395} In the reconciliation between Brahmans and Jainas he saw Sul-i-kul as an “earnest search for truth” which had “partially dispelled the darkness of age by the light of universal toleration”.\textsuperscript{396} The religious quest was embarking on the uncharted road to the early modern secular nation as “in pursuit of Empire (…) a set of mutually consistent religious ideas (were evolved) derived from a multiplicity of sources but processed and refined by a considerable application of reason”.\textsuperscript{397}

c. Secular reason as multiple paths.

Father Monserrate of the Jesuit Mission, while visiting Akbar’s court, recorded the following speech made by the Emperor: “I perceive that there are varying customs and beliefs of varying religious paths. (…) But the followers of each religion regard the institutions of their own religion as better than those of any other. (…) And this has caused me many serious doubts and scruples”.\textsuperscript{398} Akbar elsewhere described the world as a “distressful place of contradictions” where “dimness of comprehension, and conceit, are heaped up, layer upon layer, (so) not a single step can be taken without the torch of proof”.\textsuperscript{399} At the root of Akbar’s experiment in Sulh-i Kul was the experience of doubt, or sceptical reason, which leads to a politics of secularism. Akbar’s vow “to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{393} M. Athar Ali. “Perception”. Page 222.
\item \textsuperscript{394} See Som Prakash Verma. Akbar’s School of Painting Mughal Vision and Approach. In Akbar and his India.
\item \textsuperscript{396} Rizvi. Dimensions of Sulh-i Kul (Universal Peace). Page 15.
\item \textsuperscript{397} M. Ather Ali. Mughal India. Page 169.
\item \textsuperscript{398} Rizvi. Dimensions. Page 13.
\item \textsuperscript{399} Syed Ather. Page 9.
\end{itemize}

134
liberate and dissociate himself (ibra wa tabarra namuda) from the traditional and imitative religion (din-i-majazi wa taqlidi)" follows naturally from his doubts.400

The flipside of Akbar’s haunting moments of doubt was his new conviction, after 1575, that "there are wise men to be found ready at hand in all religions, and men of asceticism and recipients of Divine revelations and workers of miracles among all nations. Truth is the inhabitant of every place; and how could it be right to consider it necessarily confined to one religion or creed".401

Abu‘l Fazl characterized the transformation in Akbar’s worldview from 1578-82 as “the elevation of intellect (Khirad) to a higher pedestal (buland paigl)”.402 Akbar himself referred to “the path of reason” (rah-i-aql), by which anyone being forced to abandon his rites of worship is a violation of Sul-i-Kul.403 He came to consider organized religion as "mere reflex".404 His anxieties suggest that a radical interrogation of inherited religious constructs was taking place, yet from an intellectual outlook which sought to reform but not destroy the religious inheritance.

Abu‘l Fazl’s statement that the “pursuit of reason (‘aql) and rejection of traditionalism (taqlid) are so brilliantly patent as to be above the need of argument” was part of a broader critique of religious violence.405 Abu‘l Fazl argued that “social strife was caused in India primarily by the absence of the spirit of Sulh-i-Kul” which in turn is “caused mainly by the preponderance of an attitude of imitation (taqlid) and by the suppression of intellect and reason”. He envisioned Sulh-i-Kul as a strategy of conflict resolution, elevating it “from the status of a mystic notion alluding to the state of fana to that of a concept denoting a principle capable of promoting amity among divergent groups in a culturally pluralistic situation”.406 It was also intended as a cautionary restraint on the demagogic impulses of the sovereign, urging the Emperor “not (to) seek popularity among people through opposing Reason”. In sum, Abu‘l Fazl urged a practical and dialogic reason

402 Iqtidar Alam Khan. Page 87.
403 Iqtidar Alam Khan. Page 95.
404 M. Ather Ali. Mughal India. Page 162.

135
that "the inner and external conflict should turn into amity, the thorn-bush of enmity and hostility into the garden of friendship" through "reasoned argument".407

The prioritizing of reason as the supreme political value was the outcome of a prolonged struggle to establish a multi-religious empire in which several very different paths remained practical options, including the campaigns of exclusion and violence urged by many within the more orthodox religious stream. Over the first twenty years of his reign, the Emperor "made strenuous efforts to strengthen the broadly based government that he had in mind within the framework of Sunni orthodoxy but the ulama frustrated his efforts".408 As Akbar gradually "made the Mughal Empire into a neutral force as far as the internal controversies of Islam", the orthodox elements, experiencing the loss of their power, "inflated the decline of the ulama's influence into a decline of Islam".409 Inevitable political tensions surfaced as "Akbar pursued a broad, liberal religious state policy" while, simultaneously, "the orthodox ulama ruled the roost at the court".410 The tensions reached a crisis point when the "prosperity of Akbar's reign and his patronage to scholars and talented people irrespective of religious or sectarian considerations had made his court a rendezvous of both the Shiites from Iran and orthodox Sunnis from Turan".411

The conflict erupted on the surface when the rigorously orthodox Shaikh Abdun Nabi, Sadrus-Sudur (chief officer of religious affairs and grants to religious people), set about making "life impossible for all those who differed with him, mainly, the Shiites". Shaikh Abdun Nabi set upon an "orgy of capital punishments in the name of elimination of sinful innovations and of retrieving the prestige of orthodox Sunnism".412 This event generated mounting tensions between the Emperor and the ulama, which reached a critical level when a Brahmin of Mathura who had usurped public funds intended for a mosque and instead built a Hindu temple was executed against

409 M. Ather Ali. Mughal India. Page 166.
410 Satish Chandra. Page 168.
Akbar’s wishes. In 1579 this culminated in Akbar enlisting the help of the rationalist thinker Shaikh Mubarak (whose family had also been targeted by the persecution) in drafting a mahzar (legal document attested by witnesses) by which power was removed from the ulama and placed in the Emperor’s hands. In the same year Shaikh Abdun Nabi and his ally Makhdumal Mulk were banished to Mecca. This crisis revealed the value of a notion of reason that transcends particular religious claims in a multi-religious and multi-racial country, and it was from the conceptual resource of the Chishiyya Sufi discourse that this new secular political doctrine of Sulh-i Kul was developed.

There is evidence that in 1562 Akbar’s attitude changed towards Hinduism with his marriage to the daughters and nieces of a number of Rajput chieftains, when he allowed his Hindu wives to keep their religion and even performed a form of fire worship in their company. This change was followed by a series of reform measures. It is possible that these “early measures of tolerance (including) the abolition of the pilgrimage tax and jizya in the early 1560’s were episodic and of little immediate significance”. Such measures occurred within a broader policy framework that also included a “vigorous ‘Islamic’ policy, illustrated by the Fathnama-i Chittor in 1568, where the infidels are reviled”. This suppressive attitude towards the Muslim sects condemned by the orthodox as heretical and restrictive attitudes towards Shiism persisted until the early seventies. In 1571 Akbar came increasingly under the influence of pantheistic Sufi doctrines and this paved the way for his “eventual rejection of what he regarded as Islam professed by traditional divines (faqihan-i taqlidi) in favour of a new and entirely different concept of Islam which transcended the limits demarcating the different religions (Kesh’ha)”. Akbar became “familiar with the systematic exposition of the doctrine of wahdat ul-wujud [Unity of Being] by Ibn al-Arabi in a larger philosophical perspective”. From around 1572, a new set of political alliances began

413 M. Athar Ali. Mughal India. Page 159.
414 Iqtidar Alam Khan. “Akbar’s Personality Traits and World Outlook”. In Akbar and his India Page 86.
415 Iqtidar Alam Khan. Page 87.
to change the power arrangement as "Shaikh Mubarak, Faizi and Abul Fazl started gaining the upper hand at the Mughal Court" and introducing a "rationalist approach" to "fight against sectarian and communal biases in the society".416

The more major wave of humanitarian measures came after 1579 in the second phase of Akbar's reign following the onset of Sulh-I Kul with the abolition of slavery (1582), forced labour (1597), the decree concerning monogamy (1587), forbidding of child marriage (1595) and the outlawing of sati or widow immolation as a duty of the wife (1583). There were also numerous policies concerning the welfare of animals: the learned Jain saint Hariji Sur persuaded the Emperor "to issue an edict forbidding the slaughter of animals for six months (...) and to set free many snared birds and animals".417 Such edicts were issued at various times between 1587 and 1604. That these policies were influenced by discussions with Jains is evidence of the multi-religious input shaping Akbar's policy. At the same time these reforms were articulated in a language of rationality based on compassion rather than appeal to any religious authority. Thus we see a departure from a religious discursive universe and entry into a new secular realm of ethics and policy. In 1580, for example, Akbar announced that "no man or woman, minor or adult was to be enslaved and that no concubine or slave of Indian birth was to be bought or sold, for this concerned priceless life".418

The Ibadat Khana (House of Worship), a "large rectangular building built around the cell of a sufi saint", was opened for theological consultations or discussions of 1575. Akbar may have hoped to obtain recognition from theologians of his own supreme position among contending elements in the newly consolidating empire, but the upshot was that the theologians could not agree on anything. At first only Muslims were admitted including "sufi shaiks, ulama, learned men and a few of the Emperor's favourite companions". After a "mystical experience in 1578, Akbar opened

the doors of the debate to Hindus (...), Jains, Christians and Zoroastrians" and undermined the consensus over fundamental discursive issues such as “the finality of the Quranic revelation”.419 Mulla Badauni, an orthodox critic of Akbar’s policies, remarked: “The discussions passed beyond the scope of the controversies of the Sunnis and the Shias, Hanafis and Shafi’as, and lawyers and philosophers, they attacked the very basis of faith”.420 In the process, lines of reciprocal exclusion between religions were also undone. Closed in 1582, the experiment had two important consequences in convincing Akbar “that all religions had elements of truth, and all of them led to the Supreme Reality”, and publicly demonstrating “the narrowness of views, bigotry and arrogance of the court ulamas”. This experience for Akbar “led to the evolution of the concept of Sulh-I Kul” and had – in providing a facility for religious discussions setting up a dialogic basis for resolving conflicts of power and rendering them creative forces for reform - a “crucial role in the emergence of a new liberal, tolerant state”.421

Akbar’s question at the time of these debates - “Why assert one thing and deny another, and claim pre-eminence for things which are not essentially pre-eminent?” - expresses a denial of the kind of religious ontology that espouses a narrowly mono-religious view of any civilization, identifying one ‘real heritage’ at the expense of all others. These thoughts express a step into a secular rationality – the value of a person, idea, or culture transcends confessional identification and is to be judged based on its own distinctive merits.422

*Sulh-I Kul* as a mature idea complex or philosophy evolved through Akbar’s dialogic experience of the *Ibadat Khana*. It includes two interdependent parts: (1) an *epistemic conception of God* as opposed to an immediacy of religious experience. This is to say that “God is to be grasped and worshipped by different men according to the limitations of their knowledge”.423 (2)

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419 Satish Chandra. Pages 169-72.
421 Satish Chandra. Pages 169-72.
The first is linked directly to the distinction between "blind following" (taqlid) and "reason" (aql). For "blind following" is an immediate form of experience unmediated by reflection or rationality and at worst leads to the violence of mob conformism. This kind of experience, for Akbar, was doubtlessly epitomized in the wave of capital punishments inflicted by Shaikh Abdu Nabi in an effort to purify and restore the Sunni heritage.

These two aspects point to a notion of autonomous individual consciousness. The essence of religion, Akbar argued, "was not in reciting the article of faith or getting circumcised, but in one's readiness to fight against overpowering worldly desires or urges".424 The meaning of "worldly desires" as what comes unbidden, such as hunger, lust, mood, illness, fear, impulses to conformity, etc, are the key to the meaning of rationality in Sulh-i-Kul. This is close to the pre-Hobbesian notion of rationality as the generally spiritual part of us which is capable of making decisions based on the reflective consideration of existing alternatives, a view which corresponds to the nature and functioning of the Ibadat Khana itself as an informed choice made among multiple points of view. The new conception of religion developed through Sulh-I Kul centres the individual consciousness, as "Divine Reality (is) to be reached not through formal prayers, but only by cultivation of the self".425

The year 1579 presented an open revolt which was the culmination of a power struggle between Akbar and the dominant section of the ulama wedded to elements of the Naqshbandi movement. In 1580 rebellions erupted among a section of the nobles in Bihar and Bengal in which elements of the ulama took a leading role. Mulla Yazdi issued a fatwa insisting on the duty of taking the field and rebelling against the Emperor in a "Divine vengeance" for having deprived the ulama of their madad-i mash grants in the alteration of the political power balance.426 After twelve

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424 Iqtidar Alam Khan. Page 86.
425 Iqtidar Alam Khan. Page 89.
426 Satish Chandra. Page 175.
months the Emperor crushed the rebellion and was “free to implement his policy of *Sulh-i Kul* which by now had crystallized”.\textsuperscript{427}

With the 1580-1 rebellion a seal was set on the alienation of Akbar from Islamic Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{428} In terms of the political order, the onset of *Sulh-i Kul* “put an end to the domination of orthodox ulama on the politics of government and administration”.\textsuperscript{429} It was thus following the “failure of his appeasement of the Muslim orthodoxy” that “Akbar began looking towards other religions out of the increasing desire to put his own position beyond the narrow framework of traditional Islam” and he began to conceive the project of *Din-I Ilahi* with the aim of absorbing all religions.\textsuperscript{430} This was linked to Akbar’s national “ambition to govern India as a benevolent ruler of the entire Indian population”.\textsuperscript{431} The basic strategy for achieving this aim was the “transformation of the nobility into a composite ruling group”.\textsuperscript{432}

After Akbar’s death in 1605 Shaikh Abdul Haqq "hoped that the powerful dignitaries friendly to him might succeed in replacing Akbar's policy of 'peace with all' by strict Sunni rule as envisaged by Ghazali".\textsuperscript{433} There were also others who continued his legacy in promoting religious reconciliation, as with Dara Shikoh (1615-59) who struggled with Aurangzeb for the throne and wrote the treatise *Mingling of Two Oceans* which explored the common grounds between Hindu monotheism and Sufism.

Akbar’s experiment, *Sulh-i Kul*, was not democratic in any modern sense. His very concept of knowledge was elitist and based on the ideal of an aristocratic order. Although Akbar disdained the religious practices of the common people as those of the unawakened, he did not seek to substitute them with his own ideal of “inner religion” because he believed such “higher religion” belonged only to an aristocratic elite. He stated that “Whenever servants take to knowledge (*ilm)*,
various affairs would be disordered". He thus shared the view of the French *philosophes* concerning "enlightened monarchy", the inherent irrationality of the common people, and their need for "superstition" to occupy their minds.

This view accords with his project of "national integration" as the construction of a spiritual elite at the aristocratic level, despite his strong concern with the welfare of the common people. *Sulh-i Kul* was a social movement, but like other Enlightenment discourses, never for a moment perceived or intended as a mass movement. In this sense we may also compare Akbar to other later enlightened monarchs in Europe who sought to build early modern empires, such as Joseph II, Frederick II, and Catherine II.

This absence of a truly national sensibility may have been the elementary weakness in Akbar's experiment. While giving "stability and power denied to its predecessors, it still did not solve the new contradiction inherent in the existence of a medieval polity in a world advancing to modern conditions". It was perhaps the "contrast between the sense of unity infused in the imperial ruling class, in spite of its heterogeneity, and the absence of the consciousness of such unity among the mass of imperial subjects". In sum, the chiefly lacking element was a "developing sense of nationhood" among the broader population. There was an absence of hegemony resulting in the people at large being "indifferent to whether they were an imperial or a regional regime". This is perhaps why the Mughal empire ultimately proved vulnerable to challenges and attacks from new forces in the form of Marathas, Jats, Sikhs, and Afghans "involving the entry of peasant soldiers".

What is at stake in the movement of *Sulh-i Kul* is a concept of rationality by which 'cultural identity' is a choice rather than a factual discovery. In terms of epistemic absolutism, epitomized in Philip II, the Jesuits, and the orthodox *ulama* with which Akbar struggled, our cultural or religious

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142
identity is an ontological fact that is already fixed in existence. It cannot be questioned or doubted, to say nothing of reformed or reconstructed to meet changing historical circumstance. Hence in the moment of crisis or doubt only violence can provide the solution to the problem of change or adversity. Akbar and the Sul-i Kul experiment did not see identity as a fixed and completed ontological figure, because the movement conceived religious tradition in terms of rationality, i.e., intelligent selection among existing alternatives based on reasoned reflection and open debate without prior claims to the knowledge of absolute truth. In this way religious or cultural identity, in significant measure, becomes a matter of rational or creative choice within the broader context of the community, or an early expression of political secularism. In this is also contained an implicit endorsement of the value of modern human rights, as it endorses the right to choose one’s own religious identity, or lack there-of, and one’s path in life.

This public reasoning, poly-vocal and consequential rather than metaphysical, avoided some of the trappings that have dogged Western Enlightenment reason in terms of solipsism, subjectivity, and the peril of categories of political totality. These trappings were made visible with the French Revolution as the opening of the Enlightenment as a mass political experience. The Indian Revolution, on the other hand, introduced an alternative model of mass politics based on Enlightenment principles. The comparison points to the problem of means-ends and the function of the state.