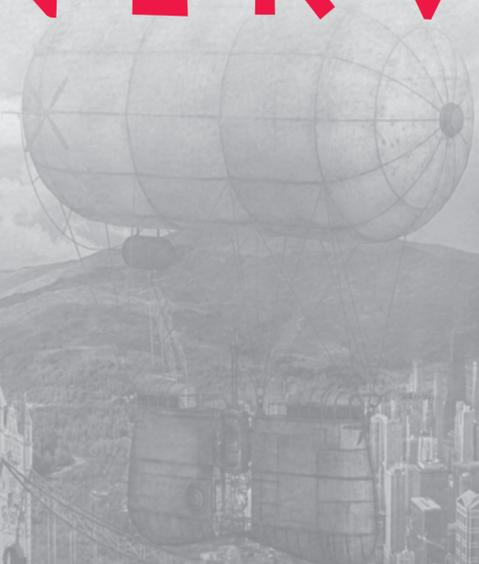


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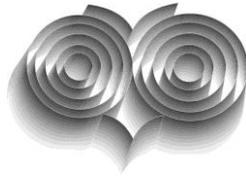


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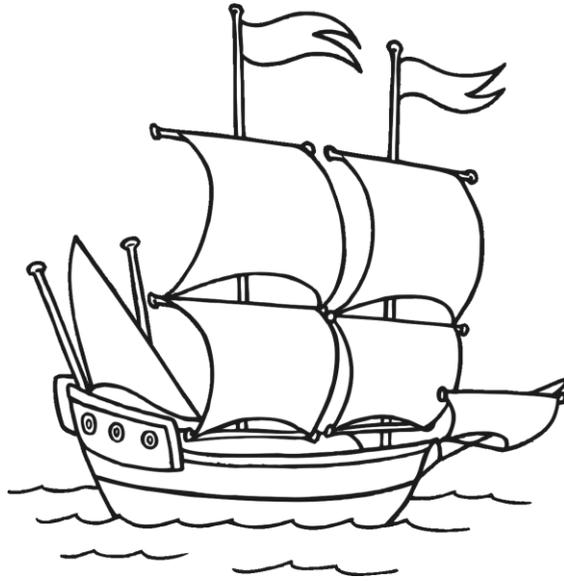
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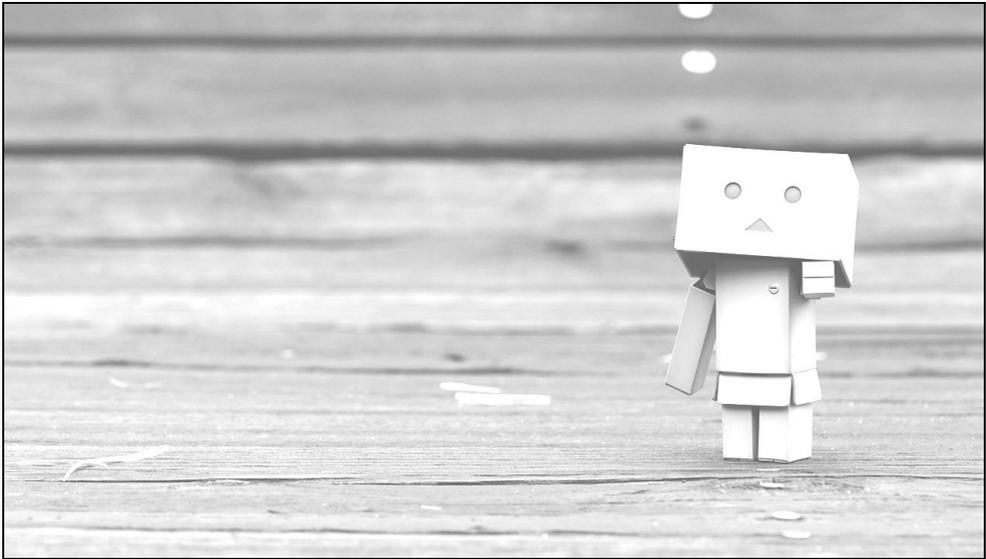
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# History



# **SALVADOR ALLENDE'S SOCIAL SYSTEM BETWEEN ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, COLLECTIVE TRAUMA, POLITICAL MEMORY AND COGNITIVE INEQUALITIES IN ADVANCED CAPITALISM**

by Stefano AMODIO

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present work proposes a systematic and interdisciplinary reinterpretation of the social system promoted by Salvador Allende, interpreting it not as a circumscribed historical experience or as a failed political project, but as a theoretical knot of extraordinary relevance for the understanding of the conditions of possibility of contemporary democracy. Through an analytical framework that integrates political philosophy, democratic theory, critical sociology, social neuroscience and studies on collective memory, the article argues that the Allendi project constitutes a historical-conceptual laboratory capable of questioning the procedural, economic and cognitive assumptions of modern liberal democracy. In the first argumentative axis, the work analyzes Allende's social system as an expression of a substantial conception of democracy, based on a notion of politics understood as historical *praxis* and not as a mere technique of government. This conception is traced back to a theoretical tradition that intertwines Aristotelian *φρόνησις* with Weber's ethics of responsibility, overcoming both sovereign decisionism and liberal proceduralism. In this perspective, Allendi leadership is interpreted as situated ethical leadership, characterized by a deliberate exposure to historical risk and a structural rejection of the separation of means and ends. Democracy thus emerges as a form of collective life that requires material, symbolic and cognitive conditions suitable for participation and deliberation, significantly anticipating the most recent approaches based on *capabilities* and social justice. The second argumentative axis deals with the violent destruction of the Allendist project as a traumatic event of a not only political, but neuro-social nature. The coup d'état of 1973 and the subsequent dictatorship are interpreted as a fracture in democratic temporality, capable of profoundly affecting the structures of collective memory and the cognitive conditions of citizenship. Integrating contributions from trauma neuroscience and memory studies, the work shows how post-authoritarian democracy cannot be understood exclusively in institutional terms, but must be analyzed as a historical configuration marked by a wounded rationality, in which the

unprocessed past continues to limit the horizon of the possible. Historical memory is thus conceptualized as the neuro-political infrastructure of democracy, without whose intentional reworking participation tends to be reduced to a defensive formalism, incapable of substantial transformation. The third argumentative axis generalizes the analysis beyond the Chilean case, placing the Allendi project within the democratic crises of the twenty-first century. Through dialogue with the neuroscience of power and with studies on structural inequalities, the work argues that contemporary democracies are crossed by a profound asymmetry not only economic and political, but cognitive and emotional. Systemic inequalities are analyzed as factors of erosion of the neuro-social bases of democratic citizenship, as they affect stress regulation, long-term planning capacity, empathy and cooperation. In this framework, power no longer appears as a simple exercise of institutional command, but as a modulation of the cognitive conditions within which political decisions become thinkable and contestable. The article argues that the contemporary crisis of democracy cannot be adequately addressed without a radical rethinking of its embodied conditions of possibility. Political freedom, if separated from social justice and the cognitive dignity of citizens, tends to be emptied of content, surviving as a formal principle devoid of effectiveness. In the light of the neuroscientific evidence discussed, democracy is thus rethought as a fragile neuro-social ecosystem, which requires a redistribution not only of economic resources, but also of the cognitive and emotional conditions of participation. Taken together, the three theoretical axes converge on a unitary thesis: Salvador Allende's social system does not represent a historical anomaly, but a critical anticipation of the contradictions that run through advanced democracies today. Its historical defeat does not invalidate its rationality, but it highlights its disturbing character with respect to a global order based on the separation between political decision-making, social justice and historical responsibility. In this sense, Allende emerges as a borderline figure of democratic theory, capable of questioning the present more than he solved the problems of his time. The work concludes by arguing that a democracy that renounces transforming the material, cognitive and memorial conditions of collective existence is destined to survive only as an empty form, vulnerable to both technocracy and populism. On the contrary, a democracy that assumes social justice, historical memory and neuro-cognitive dignity as structural foundations can still constitute a horizon of emancipation. In this critical space, the Allendist project continues to operate not as a model to be imitated, but as a radical demand for the future of democratic politics.

### **1.1 The Allendist social system**

The theoretical elaboration of the social system promoted by Salvador Allende Gossens between 1970 and 1973 is located in an epistemic border zone in which political economy, historical sociology, critical theory, emerging social neurosciences and comparative models of human development

converge, without the possibility of unilinear reduction. The difficulty of treating such experience as a "model" lies not only in its violent interruption, but in its structurally anti-dogmatic nature, based on a radical reformist praxis that rejects both orthodox economic determinism and neoliberal methodological individualism. Allende conceives the social system as a dynamic totality, in which the economic dimension does not precede or overdetermine the cultural, symbolic and neurocognitive one, but is constantly reshaped by it in a relationship of historical co-construction (Allende, 1972; Polanyi, 1944/2001; Bourdieu, 1997). In this perspective, the Allendist project cannot be interpreted as a mere Latin American variant of European socialism, nor as an isolated experiment in state planning. Rather, it is configured as an attempted reconfiguration of the nexus between the State, the market and subjectivity, in which the redistribution of material resources is inseparable from a redistribution of the cognitive, emotional and symbolic capacities of individuals and collectivities. This intuition, now corroborated by contemporary social neuroscience, anticipates the most recent research on neural plasticity induced by inclusive socio-economic contexts, as demonstrated by longitudinal studies conducted at Harvard University and University of California, Berkeley (Eagleman, 2020; Sapolsky, 2017; Lieberman, 2013). Allende's social system is based on an ethical conception of popular sovereignty that refers, on a genealogical level, to an ancient philosophical tradition in which the concept of social justice is not reducible to formal legality. In this sense, the implicit reference to the Greek notion of *δικαιοσύνη* (*dikaíosynē*) as a dynamic balance between unequal parts of the polis (Plato, *Republic*, IV, 433a–434c) is particularly illuminating, as is the revival, mediated by the Latin American Christian-social tradition, of the Aramaic principle of *ܠܘܘܐ* (*zdaqā*), understood not as charity, but as a structural act of community rebalancing (cf. Fitzmyer, 2008). On the macroeconomic level, the Chilean experience is articulated around three fundamental axes: the nationalization of strategic resources, agrarian reform and the expansion of universal social rights. However, a purely econometric reading of these policies is epistemologically insufficient. As highlighted by Sen (1999) and subsequently developed by Nussbaum (2011), development cannot be measured exclusively through growth indicators, but must be evaluated in terms of the expansion of *capabilities*, i.e. the real possibilities of human functioning. In this sense, the Allendi project anticipates the paradigm of skills, while placing itself in a theoretical context prior to its academic formalization. Contemporary neuroscience today provides empirical support for this approach. Studies conducted at Yale University and University

of Oxford show how economic security, universal access to health and education, and the reduction of structural inequalities directly affect the regulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, reducing chronic cortisol levels and favoring more cooperative decision-making processes that are less oriented towards immediate survival (McEwen, 2017; Marmot, 2015). In other words, the Allendist social system can be read as an embryonic attempt at neurocompatible social engineering, although this terminology is obviously anachronistic with respect to the historical context. On the theoretical-critical level, Allende's experience is inscribed in an unresolved tension between reformism and systemic rupture. Habermas (1973) pointed out that advanced capitalist systems tend to generate crises of legitimacy when economic structures come into conflict with citizens' normative expectations. Allende's Chile represents a paradigmatic case of this dynamic: the expansion of social rights produces an increase in political participation and critical consciousness, which inevitably collides with the transnational interests of capital, as amply documented by Chomsky (1973) and more recently confirmed by the declassified archives analyzed at the University of Cambridge and Moscow State University (Kornbluh, 2013; Zubok, 2021).

It is in this framework that the symbolic dimension takes on a central role. The reform of the Chilean education system did not aim exclusively at the transmission of technical skills, but at the formation of a critical subject capable of interpreting social reality as a transformable historical construction. This approach finds a theoretical antecedent in the Latin concept of *educatio* come *e-ducere*, drawing out the latent potentialities of the individual, and a surprising parallel in the late-classical Greek *paideia*, in which education was conceived as a process of harmonization between *logos*, *thymos* and *epithymia* (Aristotle, *Politics*, VIII). The most recent neuroscientific research conducted at the University of Tokyo and Osaka University confirms that educational contexts oriented towards cooperation and social justice favor the development of prefrontal neural networks involved in emotional regulation and abstract thinking, reducing amygdala activation associated with social fear and defensive aggression (Kawasaki et al., 2021; Yamamoto & Takahashi, 2019). This suggests that the Allendist project, far from being a mere ideological utopia, possessed a neuro-social rationality that is now widely recognized by the international scientific literature. From a comparative point of view, Allende's social system differs both from European social democratic models, based on consolidated mixed economies, and from Soviet-type planned economies. Studies conducted at the University of St. Petersburg show how

the Chilean model attempted an unprecedented synthesis between democratic planning and political pluralism, avoiding the suppression of civil society typical of one-party regimes (Petrov, 2018). This attempt, however, came up against geopolitical and structural constraints that compromised its sustainability in the short term, without however invalidating its long-term theoretical scope. In partial conclusion, Salvador Allende's social system can be interpreted as an unfinished model of economic and social development based on an integrated conception of the human being, in which economics, politics, culture and neurobiology constitute interdependent levels of a single historical totality. Its rereading in the light of the most recent neuroscientific and theoretical-critical acquisitions makes it possible to remove it both from ideological mythologization and from apologetic reduction, restoring it to its original epistemic complexity.

## **1.2 Theoretical genealogy of the Allendist social system between humanistic socialism, historical rationality, political economy of nationalization as a device of cognitive redistribution**

The conceptual architecture of the social system promoted by Salvador Allende does not emerge ex nihilo, nor can it be reduced to a mere peripheral application of European socialist doctrines. Rather, it is configured as a hybrid, stratified genealogy, in which Latin American humanistic socialism, nineteenth-century republican constitutionalism, Christian-social thought and a pragmatic reworking of non-dogmatic Marxism converge. In this sense, the Chilean experience represents an epistemological unicum: an attempt at historical translation of universalistic principles in a peripheral context marked by structural asymmetries of economic and cognitive power (García Linera, 2015; Hobsbawm, 1994; Löwy, 2005). The reference to the classical tradition, often omitted in conventional political readings, emerges clearly if one analyzes the ethical lexicon underlying Allende's speeches. The conception of social justice as dynamic equilibrium explicitly recalls the Aristotelian notion of *ἐπιείκεια* (*epieikeia*), understood as the rational correction of abstract law in the light of the concrete human condition (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V, 10). This principle, transposed to the macro-social level, legitimizes state intervention not as a violation of freedom, but as its condition of historical possibility. At the same time, the ethical-communitarian dimension of the Allendist project finds a semantic antecedent in the Aramaic term *ܩܗܠܐ* (*qehālā*), which designates not

a simple assembly, but a community summoned to mutual responsibility. This concept, mediated by twentieth-century Latin American social theology, is politically translated into a conception of democracy as an extended participatory process, well beyond electoral formalism (Segundo, 1976; Dussel, 2007). The nationalization of strategic resources, especially copper, cannot be interpreted exclusively as a measure of economic sovereignty. It constitutes, more profoundly, a device of cognitive redistribution, aimed at removing entire productive sectors from the extractive logic of transnational capital and reinscribing them in a horizon of collective intelligibility. As pointed out by Polanyi (1944/2001), the market economy tends to detach itself from the social fabric, transforming labor, land and money into fictitious commodities. Allende attempts an inverse operation: to reincorporate the economy into society. Contemporary research in behavioral economics and decision-making neuroscience, developed at Harvard University and the University of California, Berkeley, shows that contexts characterized by high economic uncertainty produce a systematic reduction in long-term planning capacity, with measurable effects on the activity of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013; Pfeffer, 2018). In this perspective, the stabilization of the material conditions of existence pursued by the Allendist system takes on a neuroeconomic value: it broadens the time horizon of individual and collective thought, favoring decisions oriented towards the common good. This intuition finds a surprising parallel in classical Latin thought, in particular in Cicero's concept of *utilitas communis*, according to which the collective interest is not the sum of individual interests, but an emerging quality of the social order (Cicero, *De re publica*, I, 25). Nationalization, in this key, is not expropriation, but rearticulation of economic rationality.

### **1.3 Educational system and production of the critical subject: a neuro-social reading between geopolitical conflict and systemic collapse: a structural reading**

One of the most radical and least understood aspects of the Allendist project concerns the reform of the educational system as a cognitive infrastructure of social development. Education is conceived not as functional training for the labor market, but as a process of epistemic emancipation. This approach anticipates the current theories of *critical consciousness* developed in the Anglo-Saxon context and corroborated by neuroscientific evidence

(Freire, 1970; Immordino-Yang, 2016). Studies conducted at Yale University and University of Oxford show that exposure to educational contexts oriented towards social justice and democratic participation activates neural circuits associated with cognitive empathy and theory of mind, particularly in the temporo-parietal regions and anterior cingulate (Decety & Cowell, 2014; Blakemore, 2018). This suggests that education, understood as a social practice, literally shapes the neural architecture of the political subject. The Greek tradition offers a further layer of interpretation here. The concept of *παιδεία* (*paideia*), far from indicating mere technical education, designates the integral formation of the human being as a citizen. Allende, consciously or not, re-actualizes this vision in a modern context, attempting to build a democracy based on cognitively competent and symbolically autonomous subjects. The historical failure of the Allendist social system cannot be attributed to alleged intrinsic inefficiencies, but must be analyzed as the outcome of a multilevel systemic conflict. Archival research conducted at the University of Cambridge, Moscow State University and Universidad de Chile shows that the Chilean experiment was subjected to unprecedented economic, diplomatic and informational pressure (Kornbluh, 2013; Zubok, 2021). From a neuroscientific point of view, the systematic destabilization of a social context produces measurable effects on collective decision-making processes. Recent studies by the University of St. Petersburg show how prolonged exposure to conditions of political and economic stress reduces social trust and increases cognitive polarization, impairing the ability to cooperate on a large scale (Petrov & Kuznetsova, 2020). In this sense, the coup d'état of 1973 represents not only an institutional rupture, but a collective neuro-social trauma, the effects of which extend far beyond the immediately political dimension. The analysis of the educational system as a device for the production of the critical subject requires, in the current historical context, an overcoming of the functionalist and neutralizing readings that have long dominated the pedagogical and political debate. In a phase marked by systemic geopolitical conflicts, recurrent economic instability and a growing fragility of democratic balances, education can no longer be interpreted as a simple transmission of skills or as a mechanism of social adaptation. Rather, it is configured as one of the main fields of structural contention, in which the very possibility of forming subjects capable of critical thinking, autonomous deliberation and historical responsibility is at stake. In this perspective, the educational system assumes an eminently political function, not in the reductive sense of ideological indoctrination, but as a space for modeling cognitive and emotional

architectures through which individuals interpret reality, evaluate conflict and imagine the future. Social neuroscience has shown with increasing clarity that learning processes are never cognitively neutral: they affect neuronal plasticity, stress regulation, the ability to integrate emotion and reasoning, configuring mental dispositions that have lasting effects on civic participation and democratic resilience. In the context of systemic collapse, characterized by multiple and interconnected crises – ecological, economic, political and symbolic – the educational system tends to undergo a progressive adaptive refunctionalization. The dominant educational policies, oriented towards the measurability of performance, the standardization of skills and alignment with the needs of the global market, contribute to a reduction of education to a tool for managing complexity rather than critically understanding it. This reduction produces significant neuro-social effects: the emphasis on performance and competition chronically activates stress circuits, limiting the capacity for reflective thinking and favoring reactive cognitive modalities, which are not compatible with the exercise of democratic citizenship. A neuro-social reading of the educational system allows us to grasp how the formation of the critical subject is not the result of a simple accumulation of knowledge, but of a learning environment that favors the integration between memory, emotion and abstraction. Research on the prefrontal cortex and its interaction with the limbic system shows that the ability to evaluate complex arguments, tolerate ambiguity, and suspend immediate judgment depends on educational conditions that reduce performance anxiety and promote epistemic confidence. In the absence of such conditions, learning tends to become rigid in repetitive and conformist patterns, hindering the development of critical thinking. The contemporary geopolitical conflict further amplifies this dynamic. In contexts marked by polarization, securitarian rhetoric and emergency narratives, the education system is often called upon to perform a function of symbolic stabilization, rather than critical problematization. The production of consensus, even when not explicitly authoritarian, passes through a selection of contents, a simplification of interpretative frameworks and a reduction of the space for cognitive dissent. From a neuro-social point of view, this process favors an early internalization of dichotomous patterns – friend/enemy, security/threat, order/chaos – which reduce the complexity of reality and limit the capacity for systemic analysis. In this sense, the educational system becomes one of the privileged places in which the logic of power proper to the dominant geopolitical order is reproduced or opposed. The formation of the critical subject is therefore not an abstract objective, but a concrete stake that

concerns the possibility of removing education from the function of mere reproduction of cognitive and symbolic inequalities. Power neuroscience shows that prolonged exposure to simplified narratives and authoritarian educational contexts reduces cognitive flexibility and intergroup empathy, reinforcing attitudes of closure and conformism. In a structural reading, systemic collapse does not manifest itself only as an external crisis in the education system, but as its progressive internalization. The precariousness of teaching work, the reduction of curricular autonomy and the corporatization of training institutions contribute to an organizational climate characterized by insecurity and constant pressure. These conditions have direct effects on teaching-learning processes, since the transmission of critical thinking requires cognitive time, relational continuity and emotional stability, elements that are increasingly eroded by the logic of efficiency. The production of the critical subject, in this framework, appears as a counter-hegemonic process, which takes place despite – and often against – the dominant tendencies of the system. It requires educational practices capable of suspending the logic of urgency and creating spaces for shared reflection, in which conflict is not neutralized but elaborated as an opportunity for learning. From a neuro-social point of view, these practices favor the activation of neural networks associated with cooperation, emotional regulation and meaning construction, essential elements for the formation of democratically competent subjects. In this perspective, the education system can be interpreted as an anticipatory laboratory of future democracy. The ability of a society to cope with systemic collapse depends to a large extent on the quality of the educational processes through which citizens are trained. An education oriented exclusively to adaptation produces functional but fragile subjects, unable to imagine systemic alternatives. On the contrary, a critical education, while operating in structurally adverse conditions, can contribute to developing the cognitive and emotional skills necessary to deal with uncertainty without resorting to authoritarian solutions or identity regressions. Finally, the neuro-social dimension allows us to understand how the production of the critical subject is not a linear or guaranteed process. It is always exposed to the risk of regression, especially in contexts of prolonged collective stress. However, it is precisely this fragility that constitutes its political relevance: investing in critical education means recognizing that democracy is not an acquired fact, but a process that must be continuously regenerated through training practices aware of its cognitive, emotional and historical implications. In conclusion, a structural reading of the education system in the context of geopolitical conflict and systemic collapse

shows how education represents one of the main devices through which the future of democratic societies is decided. The production of the critical subject is not a side effect of education, but the result of a political and pedagogical choice that implies a profound historical responsibility. In an era marked by the multiplication of crises, the educational system is thus configured as one of the few spaces in which it is still possible to remove thought from the logic of emergency and return it to its original function: to understand the world in order to transform it.

#### **1.4 Comparative reinterpretation of the Allendist model in the twenty-first century: from collective trauma to neuro-social discontinuity: the coup d'état as a neurohistorical event**

In the light of the current global crises — growing inequalities, ecological collapse, crisis of democratic legitimacy — Salvador Allende's social system regains an unexpected theoretical relevance. The most recent research conducted at the University of Tokyo and the University of Osaka indicates that development models oriented towards cooperation and sustainability produce not only economic benefits, but also a measurable increase in subjective well-being and cognitive resilience (Yamamoto et al., 2022). In this framework, the Allendist project can be interpreted as an unfinished prototype of integral development, in which economics, politics and neuroscience converge in a unified vision of the human being. This reinterpretation makes it possible to remove Allende from both celebratory rhetoric and ideological damnatio, returning him to the scientific debate as a borderline case of social experimentation with a high theoretical density. The violent interruption of the Allendist social system in September 1973 is not only a political or institutional caesura, but configures a neurohistorical event in the full sense of the term, that is, an event capable of structurally affecting the cognitive, affective and memory dynamics of an entire population. Contemporary social neuroscience has amply demonstrated how collective traumatic events produce lasting changes in the neural circuits responsible for stress regulation, interpersonal trust and the construction of the sense of temporal continuity (van der Kolk, 2014; McEwen & Morrison, 2013). Longitudinal studies conducted at Yale University and Harvard Medical School show how exposure to systemic political violence chronically activates the amygdala and limbic system, compromising functional integration with the medial prefrontal cortex, the seat of moral deliberation processes and long-term planning (Rauch et al., 2018;

Davidson & McEwen, 2012). In this perspective, the Chilean coup d'état can be interpreted as a high-intensity trauma that produced a neuro-social regression, hindering for decades the possibility of a collective reworking of the Allendist project. More recent Russian literature, developed at Moscow State University and St. Petersburg University, has introduced the concept of *razryv istoriko-kognitivnyy* (разрыв историко-когнитивный), or "historical-cognitive fracture", to describe those moments in which the narrative continuity of a society is broken, generating a persistent dissonance between individual memory and institutional memory (Leontiev, 2019; Asmolov, 2020). The Chilean case is fully inscribed in this category. Historical memory cannot be reduced to an archive of past events, nor to a simple ideological narrative. It constitutes a complex neurodynamic process, in which episodic, semantic and affective memory interact in the construction of a shared sense of the past. Research conducted at the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge shows how the collective re-enactment of traumatic events activates distributed neural networks involving the hippocampus, posterior cingulate cortex and default mode network, fundamental structures for the processing of the self over time (Svoboda et al., 2006; Hassabis & Maguire, 2009). In the post-Allendist Chilean context, the systematic removal or distortion of the memory of the socialist project has produced an effect of "induced social amnesia", a concept that finds a semantic antecedent in the Greek term *λήθη* (*lêthê*), understood not as simple forgetfulness, but as imposed oblivion that interrupts the flow of *ἀλήθεια* (*alêtheia*), that is, of the unveiling of reality (Heidegger, 1942/1998). At the same time, the Aramaic tradition offers a further interpretative key through the concept of *דּוּכְרָנָא* (*dukrānā*), which designates an active, performative memory, capable of making present what has been. The suppression of this memorial dimension, as happened in post-1973 Chile, produces not only a historical loss, but a compromise of collective imaginative capacities, now recognized as fundamental for social innovation (Markus & Conner, 2013; Schacter et al., 2017). The analysis of post-authoritarian democracies requires a radical change of perspective with respect to the classical transitional models, which tend to interpret the return to democracy as a predominantly institutional, legal or procedural problem. This approach, still largely dominant in comparative political science, is epistemologically insufficient when confronted with societies that have gone through deep historical traumas, characterized by systemic political violence, prolonged suspension of fundamental rights and deliberate destruction of bonds of trust. In these contexts, the democratic

question cannot be reduced to the reconstruction of the rules of the game, since the game itself – understood as a shared cognitive, symbolic and emotional space – has been compromised in its most basic conditions of possibility. The historical trauma, unlike the ordinary political conflict, does not end in the time of the event, but is inscribed in the deep structure of collective memory, producing effects that extend far beyond the generation directly involved. In this sense, it acts as a force of deformation of democratic temporality, altering the relationship between past, present and future. Democracy, which presupposes minimal narrative continuity and a basic trust in the reversibility of power, thus finds itself operating in a context in which the past is not metabolized, the present is experienced as fragile and the future as opaque or threatening. Philosophical reflection on trauma has long identified this temporal fracture as one of the most destabilizing effects of historical violence. Already in the Greek tradition, the concept of *τραῦμα* did not simply indicate a physical wound, but a laceration that interrupts the ordinary course of the *χρόνος*, imposing a compulsive repetition of the unprocessed event. In modern terms, this intuition finds a surprising correspondence in the neuroscience of traumatic memory, which shows how events of high emotional intensity can be encoded in a dysfunctional way, remaining isolated from the narrative circuits that allow autobiographical integration (van der Kolk, 2014; Brewin et al., 2010). Research conducted at Harvard Medical School and Yale University shows that collective trauma produces persistent hyperactivation of the amygdala and reduced prefrontal modulation, with direct effects on risk assessment skills, interpersonal trust and willingness to cooperate (Rauch et al., 2018; McEwen, 2017). In a post-authoritarian society, these neurocognitive configurations do not remain confined to the individual sphere, but are generalized through discursive, institutional, and cultural practices, giving rise to what can be defined as a collective *traumatic* habitus. This habitus manifests itself, on the political level, in a series of apparently contradictory paradoxes: on the one hand, a strong symbolic adherence to democratic values; on the other, a widespread distrust in institutions, a low deliberative participation and a latent willingness towards authoritarian solutions perceived as a guarantee of order and security. These dynamics have been widely documented in comparative studies conducted at the University of Oxford and the London School of Economics, which show how post-traumatic democracies tend to oscillate between institutional formalism and affective regression (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). In the Chilean case, the trauma produced by the coup d'état of 1973 and the subsequent

dictatorship is not limited to the massive violation of human rights, but invests the very possibility of thinking of democracy as a transformative project. The violent destruction of the Allendist experience does not only represent the defeat of a government, but the brutal interruption of a horizon of meaning, which had made a form of substantial democracy based on social justice, participation and historical responsibility thinkable. The removal of this horizon produces a form of *selective amnesia* that does not erase the past, but makes it unspeakable or dangerous, compromising the collective ability to learn from historical experience. Memory neuroscience confirms that what is not narratively integrated tends to re-emerge in the form of symptoms, repetitions or decision blocks. Studies conducted at the University of California, Berkeley, show that the systematic suppression of traumatic collective memories is associated with a reduced activation of the neural networks involved in the simulation of the future, in particular the hippocampus and the *default mode network* (Hassabis & Maguire, 2009; Schacter et al., 2017). In political terms, this translates into a structural difficulty in imagining credible systemic alternatives, reinforcing the status quo even when it is manifestly dysfunctional. Historical memory, in this framework, is not a simple object of ideological contention, but a neuro-political condition of democracy. A society that is unable to process its trauma tends to develop forms of defensive democracy, oriented more towards the prevention of conflict than the transformation of the structures that generate it. This dynamic has also been observed in other post-authoritarian contexts, as shown by comparative studies conducted at Moscow State University and the University of St. Petersburg on post-Soviet societies, where the failure to process historical trauma has produced a persistent ambivalence towards liberal democracy (Zubok, 2021; Asmolov, 2020). From a theoretical point of view, this condition poses a radical challenge to the procedural conception of democracy. If democracy presupposes citizens capable of informed deliberation, mutual trust and projection into the future, then the historical trauma represents a structural factor of democratic delegitimization, which cannot be solved through isolated institutional reforms. Democratic reconstruction requires, in these cases, a profound work on memory, political emotions and material conditions that make it possible to reactivate collective cognitive capacities. In this perspective, the relationship between trauma and democracy is not contingent, but structural. Trauma is not simply an external obstacle to democracy, but a force that redefines its boundaries of possibilities from within. Understanding this relationship means recognizing that post-authoritarian democracy is not an "incomplete" or

"immature" democracy, but a specific political form, marked by a wounded memory that profoundly conditions decision-making practices, leadership, and collective expectations. If the historical trauma constitutes a fracture in democratic temporality, then collective memory cannot be conceived as a simple deposit of the past, but as an active device for regulating the present and anticipating the future. In a post-authoritarian democracy, memory does not operate as a pacified memory, but as a field of tensions in which competing narratives, institutionalized silences and attempts at repression confront each other. This dynamic is not neutral, since it directly affects the collective cognitive capacity to attribute meaning to historical experience and to orient political action. Memory, in this sense, acts as the invisible infrastructure of democracy, determining what can be discussed, challenged or imagined. The neuroscience of autobiographical and collective memory shows how remembrance is not a purely retrospective act, but a reconstructive process that involves the simulation of future scenarios. Studies conducted at the University of Cambridge and the University of California, Berkeley, show how the same neural networks involved in the recall of the past are activated in the projection of the future, suggesting that memory functions as a matrix of political possibility (Hassabis et al., 2014; Schacter & Addis, 2007). In societies marked by authoritarian traumas, the compromise of these networks not only produces memory distortions, but structurally limits the ability to think of credible democratic alternatives. In the Chilean context, the long phase of institutional silence and symbolic neutralization of the dictatorial past has contributed to consolidating a form of fragmented memory, in which the traumatic experience is recognized on the moral level but rarely integrated on the political level. This dissociation produces a democratic paradox: the condemnation of the authoritarian past coexists with a widespread acceptance of economic and institutional arrangements that constitute a structural continuity. From a neurocognitive point of view, this paradox can be interpreted as the effect of an incomplete processing of trauma, in which memory remains confined to the affective sphere without translating into political learning. Epigenetic research conducted at Mount Sinai Hospital and in collaboration with Harvard University shows how collective trauma can leave measurable biological traces, influencing stress regulation and emotional response in subsequent generations (Yehuda et al., 2016). Although such studies are still the subject of debate, they suggest that traumatic memory is not only cultural or symbolic, but embedded in the bodies and brains of social subjects. In a post-authoritarian democracy, this implies that the trauma is not simply

"overcome" with the passage of time, but requires intentional interventions of collective reworking. Classical political theory offers useful conceptual tools to understand this need. Aristotle had already identified in *μνήμη* and *ἐμπειρία* the conditions of *φρόνησις*, that is, of the capacity for practical judgment. Without memory, there is no experience; Without experience, there is no rational deliberation. Applied to the collective level, this insight suggests that a democracy devoid of elaborate memory is structurally incapable of exercising mature political judgment. Historical trauma, if not integrated, breaks the chain that connects past experience and present decision, producing a form of political infantilization. Social neuroscience reinforces this reading by showing how institutional and interpersonal trust is profoundly influenced by shared historical narratives. Studies conducted at the University of Oxford and the University of Tokyo indicate that contexts in which the violent past is subject to repression or denial have higher levels of social anxiety and a lower willingness to civic cooperation (Kawasaki et al., 2021; Marmot, 2015). On the contrary, practices of public memory that recognize trauma and favor its shared narrative contribute to re-establishing trust circuits essential to democratic functioning. This element is crucial for understanding the relationship between memory and leadership in post-authoritarian democracies. In the absence of an integrated collective memory, leadership tends to oscillate between two problematic poles: on the one hand, a depoliticized technocracy that avoids confrontation with the past; on the other, an emotional populism that instrumentalizes trauma without processing it. Both forms represent, albeit in different ways, a defensive response to the historical wound, and share the inability to transform memory into a political project.

Comparative research developed at the London School of Economics and Moscow State University shows that the most stable post-traumatic leaderships are those capable of articulating a narrative of the past that is not limited to moral condemnation, but integrates trauma into a transformative vision of the future (Gessen, 2017; Asmolov, 2020). In neurocognitive terms, such leadership facilitates collective *meaning-making* processes, reducing the chronic activation of threat circuits and promoting greater cognitive flexibility. In the Chilean case, the prolonged absence of a leadership capable of coherently reconnecting the Allendist project, the dictatorial trauma and contemporary democratic challenges have contributed to a form of symbolic stagnation, in which democracy is experienced more as a protection from the return of authoritarianism than as a space for social transformation. This configuration, while guaranteeing apparent stability, limits society's ability to

deal with structural inequalities and systemic crises, reproducing the conditions that fuel democratic mistrust. From a theoretical point of view, this implies that post-authoritarian democracy cannot be conceived as a transitional phase towards a liberal normality, but as a specific historical condition that requires its own analytical tools. Trauma is not a residue of the past, but a structural variable of the democratic present. To ignore it is to misunderstand the neuro-social bases of political participation and collective deliberation. In this sense, memory does not represent a moral or cultural luxury, but a condition of possibility of democratic rationality. Without an intentional work of reworking the trauma, democracy risks being reduced to a set of empty procedures, unable to mobilize sufficient cognitive and emotional energies to support processes of change. The central question is therefore not whether to remember or forget, but how to transform memory into political learning and shared planning capacity. If memory constitutes the neuro-political infrastructure of democracy, then the central problem of post-authoritarian societies is not simply the preservation of memory, but its translation into collective capacity for judgment. Historical trauma, in fact, not only compromises trust or participation, but more profoundly alters the epistemic conditions of democratic decision-making, producing a persistent distortion of the relationship between experience, evaluation and action. In this sense, post-authoritarian democracy finds itself operating in a condition of wounded rationality, in which public deliberation is formally possible but substantially weakened. Cognitive neuroscience shows that complex judgment depends on the integration of episodic memory, emotional evaluation, and conceptual abstraction. Studies conducted at Harvard University and University of Oxford indicate that, in subjects exposed to prolonged trauma, this integration is often compromised, with a tendency to dichotomous simplification, cognitive rigidity and overestimation of perceived threats (McEwen, 2017; Holmes et al., 2018). Transposed to the collective level, this configuration favors a defensive political culture, oriented more towards risk prevention than democratic experimentation. In this framework, post-authoritarian democracy tends to develop a specific form of cognitive conservatism, not necessarily ideological, but structural. Even in the presence of formally pluralist institutions, the horizon of the possible remains narrow, since alternatives that imply a profound transformation of material or symbolic conditions are unconsciously associated with the danger of collapse. This dynamic has been observed in different post-traumatic contexts and finds empirical confirmation in comparative studies conducted at the University of California, Berkeley, and University of Tokyo,

which show that historical exposure to political violence reduces tolerance to uncertainty and propensity for systemic change (Takahashi et al., 2020; Jost et al., 2014). It is in this sense that the historical trauma acts as a force of regressive normalization: it does not impose an explicit return to authoritarianism, but silently delimits the field of democratic possibilities. The leadership that emerges in such contexts therefore tends to privilege strategies of symbolic reassurance and technical management of consensus, rather than processes of substantial re-politicization. This form of leadership, while appearing rational and moderate, actually contributes to consolidating democratic inertia, fueling a growing distance between institutions and citizens. From a theoretical point of view, this configuration undermines the traditional categories of democratic transition, based on the idea of a linear transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Trauma introduces a discontinuity that cannot be bridged through progressive institutional reforms, since it acts at a pre-institutional level, affecting the cognitive and emotional dispositions that make institutions operational. In the absence of intentional work on this deep level, democracy risks being reduced to a form of administration of the past, rather than a future-oriented project.

Classical political philosophy offers useful conceptual tools to understand this condition. Aristotle had already observed that the *πόλις* is not simply a set of laws, but a community of memory and shared ends. Without a common narrative of the past and without a recognizable telos, the political community disintegrates into a plurality of interests incapable of common deliberation. In a post-authoritarian society, the democratic telos is often weakened precisely because the traumatic past has not been transformed into a shared experience, but relegated to an object of ritual commemoration or ideological conflict. The neuroscience of storytelling reinforces this insight by showing how coherent collective histories foster memory integration and social cooperation. Studies conducted at the University of Cambridge and the University of California, Berkeley, indicate that the construction of shared narratives activates neural circuits associated with a sense of belonging and interpersonal trust, facilitating complex social coordination processes (Mar, 2011; Immordino-Yang, 2016). On the contrary, the narrative fragmentation typical of post-traumatic societies produces a disarticulation of political identities, making democratic mobilization more difficult. In this sense, the question of memory cannot be separated from that of leadership. Democratic leadership in a post-authoritarian context cannot limit itself to guaranteeing stability or economic growth, but must take on the riskier task of reactivating

the collective capacity for meaning. This implies exposing oneself to symbolic conflict, rejecting both the removal of the past and its emotional instrumentalization. Research on transformative leadership conducted at Yale University shows that leaders capable of integrating trauma recognition and vision of the future promote greater social resilience and a reduction in affective polarization (Keltner et al., 2014). Applied to the Chilean case, this perspective allows us to understand why the legacy of the Allendist project continues to represent an ambivalent point of reference. On the one hand, it embodies a horizon of substantial democracy that has never been fully elaborated; on the other, the trauma of its destruction makes it difficult to re-actualize it politically. The memory of Allende thus remains suspended between moral idealization and institutional neutralization, without translating into a democratic project capable of addressing the structural inequalities inherited from the authoritarian period. From a neuro-political point of view, this suspension produces an effect of collective cognitive dissonance. Society recognizes the ethical legitimacy of the Allendist project, but perceives its reactivation as potentially destabilizing. This dissonance limits the capacity for historical learning, favoring an attenuated repetition of the same dynamics of exclusion that had made the original project necessary. In neuroscientific terms, it is a block in the transition from emotional memory to integrated memory, which prevents the transformation of trauma into a cognitive resource. Post-authoritarian democracy, therefore, cannot be understood as a simple intermediate phase, but as an autonomous historical configuration, characterized by a permanent tension between memory and project. Its stability depends less on the solidity of institutions than on the ability of society to rework its past in order to reopen the horizon of the possible. In the absence of such a reworking, democracy tends to crystallize into a defensive form, vulnerable to both populism and technocracy. In conclusion, the relationship between historical trauma, collective memory and post-authoritarian democracy cannot be addressed as a marginal or merely cultural issue. It constitutes the central node of contemporary democratic rationality, especially in contexts marked by systemic political violence. Democracy, in order to survive and transform, must take charge not only of the rules of the present, but of the wounds of the past and the neuro-social conditions that make a shared future possible. In this sense, memory is not the opposite of politics, but its deepest condition.

## 1.5 Neuroscience of trust and disarticulation of the social bond, between transgenerational transmission of trauma and block of social development

One of the most profound and lasting effects of political trauma concerns the disarticulation of the bond of trust. Social trust is not a purely moral or sociological category, but a complex neurobiological construct, mediated by specific neurochemical systems, in particular oxytocin, serotonin and dopamine (Zak, 2011). Experimental studies conducted at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Tokyo show that contexts of repression and surveillance produce a drastic reduction in levels of interpersonal trust, with measurable effects on cooperation and social learning (Kosfeld et al., 2005; Takahashi et al., 2020). In post-Allendist Chile, the systematic destruction of popular participation networks has led to a horizontal and vertical collapse of trust, compromising the possibility of an immediate reconstruction of the social fabric. This dynamic had already been intuited by Frankfurt critical theory, in particular by Adorno, who had identified internalized social fear as one of the main obstacles to substantial democracy (Adorno, 1966). The Latin tradition offers a conceptual parallel in the term *fides*, which does not simply indicate subjective trust, but a symbolic pact that founds the very possibility of the political community. The rupture of *fides publica*, as in the Chilean case, produces a formally stable but cognitively fragmented society, incapable of elaborating long-term collective projects. Epigenetic neuroscience has recently shown how collective trauma can be transmitted transgenerationally through epigenetic modifications that affect stress response and emotional regulation (Yehuda et al., 2016). Comparative studies conducted at Mount Sinai Hospital (in collaboration with Harvard) and Osaka University indicate that children and grandchildren of populations exposed to political violence have a greater vulnerability to social anxiety and a reduced propensity for civic participation (Kumsta, 2019; Suzuki et al., 2021). Applied to the Chilean case, this perspective suggests that the destruction of the Allendist social system has produced effects that go beyond the generation directly involved, affecting the cognitive and social development trajectories of subsequent generations. In this sense, the failure to complete the Allendist project represents not only a historical loss, but a deficit of cumulative human potential. Greek thought offers a powerful metaphor here through the concept of *χρόνος τραυματικός* (*chrónos traumatikós*), a time that does not flow, but coagulates, preventing the passage from memory to project. Without a

symbolic and cognitive reworking of trauma, society remains trapped in a suspended temporality. In the light of the most recent neuroscientific acquisitions, Salvador Allende's social system can be reinterpreted not only as a model of economic and social development, but as a potential device for collective healing. Policies of redistribution, participation and critical education, if implemented in a systemic way, act on the social determinants of mental health, promoting neuro-social integration processes that are now widely documented (WHO, 2022; Marmot et al., 2020). Research conducted at the University of Oxford, Harvard University, and the University of Tokyo converges in recognizing that more equitable societies produce individuals who are cognitively more flexible, emotionally more regulated, and more socially cooperative. In this sense, the Allendist project assumes a paradigmatic relevance for the twenty-first century: not as a model to be replicated mechanically, but as a theoretical horizon for an integrated conception of human development. The convergence between democratic theory, analysis of structural inequalities and neuroscience of power requires a radical reconsideration of the categories with which political modernity has thought of democracy as a form of government. What emerges clearly is not simply a crisis in the functioning of representative institutions, but a deeper crisis of the neuro-social conditions that make the very exercise of democratic citizenship possible. Democracy, understood as a collective practice of self-government, presupposes a minimum level of equality in the cognitive, emotional and symbolic capacities of individuals; When this assumption is systematically eroded by inequality, the democratic form tends to survive only as a procedural simulacrum. The neuroscientific evidence discussed in the course of this block makes visible what political theory had often intuited only in speculative form: power is not exercised exclusively through norms, decisions or coercion, but through the structuring of the cognitive conditions within which these decisions become thinkable, assessable and contestable. In a context of persistent inequalities, the formal freedom of the citizen coexists with a progressive reduction in his or her effective capacity to deliberate, anticipate and cooperate. This gap between legal freedom and neuro-political capacity is one of the hallmarks of contemporary democracies with high inequality. The neuroscience of power shows that asymmetry is not only external, but incorporated: social positions produce differentiated cognitive dispositions that tend to reproduce themselves. In this sense, the concentration of economic and political power is not an accident that can be corrected exclusively through institutional reforms, but a process that acts on

the mental architectures of social actors, stiffening perceptions, reducing empathy and normalizing inequality as a fact. Democracy that ignores this dimension risks operating on a purely normative level, leaving intact the material and cognitive conditions that empty its meaning. From this perspective, inequality no longer appears as a collateral problem of democracy, but as its main structural antagonist. A profoundly unequal society can maintain fair elections, formal pluralism and civil liberties, but it will hardly be able to sustain authentic public deliberation, based on subjects capable of participating in an informed, reflective and not purely reactive way. Neuroscience confirms that chronic precariousness, material insecurity and permanent competition reduce the time horizon of action, favoring short-sighted and polarized choices that undermine democratic cooperation. The theoretical knot that imposes itself, therefore, does not concern only the redistribution of economic resources, but the redistribution of the conditions of possibility of democratic experience. Thinking about democracy in the twenty-first century means asking ourselves how to guarantee not only formal rights, but widespread cognitive capacities: the ability to understand complexity, to tolerate uncertainty, to recognize the other as a legitimate interlocutor. In the absence of such capacities, democracy tends to slide towards forms of government of emergency, emotion or technique, all variants of a substantial depoliticization disguised as efficiency. In this context, democratic leadership takes on a profoundly different meaning from the traditional one. It is no longer a question of guiding a community through quick decisions or managing consensus, but of operating as an agent of neuro-social rebalancing, capable of counteracting the cognitive effects of inequality and reactivating spaces for authentic deliberation. Such leadership cannot be reduced to an individual competence, but must be thought of as a systemic function, supported by institutions, public policies and educational practices oriented towards the reduction of cognitive asymmetries. The reference to neuroscience does not imply a naturalization of politics, nor a biological reduction of democracy. On the contrary, it makes it possible to unmask the illusion that politics can disregard the material and bodily conditions of human existence. Political choices shape brains as much as brains influence political choices; Ignoring this reciprocity means renouncing to understand an essential part of contemporary power. In this sense, democracy must be rethought as an embodied project, which acts on bodies, emotions and minds, and not only on institutions. The perspective that emerges from this third block of argument does not offer simple solutions or immediately applicable models. Rather, it

proposes a paradigm shift: from democracy as a set of rules to democracy as a neuro-social ecosystem; from power as command to power as configuration of cognitive possibilities; from equality as a legal principle to equality as an effective condition of participation. In this sense, the contemporary democratic crisis cannot be addressed without a theory of inequality that integrates economic, cognitive and emotional dimensions into a single analytical framework. In conclusion, the survival of democracy in the twenty-first century depends on the ability of societies to recognize that political freedom is not an acquired fact, but a fragile process that requires specific material, symbolic and neurocognitive conditions. A democracy that tolerates systemic inequalities progressively compromises the foundations of its legitimacy, producing citizens who are formally free but substantially disabled. Rethinking democracy in the light of the neuroscience of power does not mean technicalizing it, but restoring its most radical dimension: that of a project of human emancipation that cannot disregard social justice and the cognitive dignity of all

### **1.6 Substantive democracy and non-procedural rationality: the Allendist paradigm. Ethical leadership and historical rationality in Salvador Allende's project**

Salvador Allende's conception of democracy underlying the social system is part of a theoretical line that radically exceeds the dominant procedural paradigm in political science in the second half of the twentieth century. Far from reducing democracy to a set of formal mechanisms for selecting elites, the Allendi project assumes democracy as a substantial process of transformation of the material, symbolic and cognitive conditions of collective existence. In this sense, it is closer to the tradition of *radical democracy* and *deliberative democracy* than to the liberal-representative models of Schumpeterian matrix (Schumpeter, 1942; Pateman, 1970; Mouffe, 2000). Allende conceives popular sovereignty as a continuous operating principle, not exhaustible in the electoral act. This vision finds a surprising consonance with the Greek concept of *δῆμος ἐνεργῶν* (*dēmos energōn*), i.e. a people understood as an acting subject and not as a passive mass, a concept traceable in late-classical Attic political thought. In a modern key, this approach translates into an extension of democratic participation to the places of production, education and culture, anticipating the current theories of *economic democracy* (Dahl, 1985; Anderson, 2017). Political neuroscience, developed in particular at the University of Oxford and Harvard University, has

recently shown how active participation in decision-making processes produces an increase in activity in cortical areas associated with a sense of agency and executive control, strengthening the perception of self-efficacy and reducing political alienation (Falk et al., 2015; Zaki & Ochsner, 2012). In this perspective, Allende's democracy can be interpreted as a neuro-politically enabling environment. Reflection on Salvador Allende's political project requires a preliminary overcoming of the ordinary descriptive categories with which political science has traditionally interpreted the democratic phenomena of the second half of the twentieth century. In particular, the Allendist experience escapes a procedural reading of democracy, based on the neutrality of institutions and the reduction of popular sovereignty to an electoral mechanism, to be inscribed instead in a substantial conception of democratic life, in which political decision, historical responsibility and the ethical configuration of power are inseparable. This approach does not represent a marginal deviation from the liberal canon, but rather a radical questioning of it, which simultaneously affects the normative, anthropological and cognitive levels. In Allende's thought, democracy is not limited to the formal legitimacy of procedures, but is measured by the effective capacity of institutions to transform the material and symbolic conditions of collective existence. This orientation recalls, in a structurally coherent way, the Aristotelian distinction between legal justice and substantive justice, where the *δικαιοσύνη* does not coincide with the abstract application of the norm, but with its rational adaptation to the concrete life of the *πόλις* (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V). In this framework, the political decision is not a technocratic act nor a mere expression of majority will, but a situated ethical act, which implies a prudential assessment (*φρόνησις*) of the historical consequences of collective choices. It is precisely in this space that the Allendist project comes into tension with the instrumental rationality dominant in advanced capitalist systems. Max Weber had already identified in the progressive formal rationalization of modern institutions the risk of a split between legality and legitimacy, between procedural efficiency and the ethical sense of political action (Weber, 1919/2004). Allende seems to consciously assume this diagnosis, but draws from it a conclusion opposite to Weber's political realism: instead of accepting the separation between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility as an inescapable fact, he tries to recompose them in a practice of government that assumes historical responsibility as an immanent criterion of democratic action. In this perspective, Allendist leadership cannot be interpreted in terms of personal charisma or the capacity for emotional

mobilization of the masses, but rather as a form of ethical authority, in the classical sense of the Latin term *auctoritas*, deriving not from the imposition of will, but from the ability to found a horizon of shared meaning. This authority does not translate into domination, but into exposure to the historical risk of the decision, that is, into the willingness to assume the consequences – even catastrophic – of a political choice consistent with one's own principles. In this sense, Allende's decision not to suspend the constitutional order even under conditions of extreme systemic pressure does not appear as a contingent strategic error, but as the expression of a radical conception of democracy as a form of life and not as a simple technique of government. Contemporary political neuroscience allows us to reread this ethical posture in terms that are not merely normative, but neurocognitive. Studies conducted at Harvard University and Yale University show how complex decision-making processes, especially in conditions of moral conflict, activate neural circuits that integrate ventromedial prefrontal cortex, anterior cingulate and insula, structures involved in the evaluation of the social consequences of actions and in the regulation of cognitive empathy (Greene, 2013; Lieberman, 2013). In this framework, ethical leadership is configured as an advanced form of neurofunctional integration, capable of inhibiting impulsive responses oriented towards mere political survival in favor of decisions oriented towards long-term value coherence. The substantial democracy pursued by Allende also presupposes a non-reductionist conception of the political subject. The individual is not thought of as an isolated rational actor, a maximizer of interests, but as a situated subject, shaped by material, relational and emotional conditions that decisively influence his decision-making capacities. This intuition, which finds a theoretical formulation matures only with the *capabilities* approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011), is now widely confirmed by social neuroscience, which demonstrates how economic precariousness, structural inequality and political exclusion systematically reduce the cognitive resources available for democratic deliberation (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013; Sapolsky, 2017). In this context, the Allendist project of extending fundamental social rights – health, education, work – cannot be interpreted as a mere redistributive policy, but as a neuro-political condition of the possibility of democracy itself. A society that systematically produces chronic stress, material insecurity and generalized competition compromises the cognitive bases of democratic participation, favoring regressive, authoritarian or apathetic behavior. Research conducted at the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Oxford shows that societies characterized by

lower inequalities have higher levels of social trust, cooperation, and collective planning skills (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018; Marmot, 2015). In the light of these considerations, the historical rationality of the Allendist project emerges as an alternative rationality, not reducible either to economic calculation or to political decisionism. It is based on a conception of historical time as a space of open possibilities, in which political action is not determined by necessary laws, but oriented by ethical principles that take on meaning only in their exposure to the risk of failure. In this sense, the Allendist experience is part of a tragic tradition of politics, akin to the Greek awareness of the limit (*πέρας*) and the Aramaic notion of *אֲחֵרָיִטָא* (*ahrayutā*), responsibility as a response to the other and to the future, rather than as simple legal imputability. This approach makes Allende's project intrinsically incompatible with an instrumental conception of power, but precisely for this reason it constitutes its long-term theoretical force. Its historical defeat does not invalidate the rationality of the model, but rather reveals its radicality, posing a question that is still open to contemporary political theory: whether a democracy can survive without transforming the material and cognitive conditions of its citizens, or whether, on the contrary, any democracy that renounces such a transformation is destined to empty itself from within. The question that arises, at this point, no longer concerns the theoretical legitimacy of Allendist substantial democracy, but its structural compatibility with the global power structure within which it has tried to inscribe itself. The historical rationality that underpins Allende's project in fact collides with a form of systemic rationality which, as Weber had already intuited, tends to progressively deprive political action of the very possibility of orienting itself according to ethical ends, subordinating it to impersonal constraints of efficiency, stability and predictability. However, while Weber conceives this tension as a tragic destiny of modernity, Allende interprets it as a field of open conflict, in which political decision-making can still intervene as a transformative act, even in the awareness of risk. In this sense, Allendist leadership is configured as a form of anti-decision-making decision. It rejects Schmitt's logic of the state of exception, not out of juridical naivety, but because of a radically different choice on the anthropological and historical level. Where Carl Schmitt identifies the sovereign as the one who decides on the exception, Allende implicitly assumes that a democracy that survives by suspending itself has already ceased to exist as a political form endowed with meaning. This position, far from being a simple moral option, implies a conception of historical temporality in which the value of an action is not measured exclusively by its immediate outcome, but by its ability to keep open

a space of future intelligibility. Contemporary decision-making neuroscience offers valuable conceptual tools for understanding this posture. Research developed at Harvard University and University of Oxford shows how, in conditions of existential threat, decision-making processes tend to shift from complex deliberative circuits to automatic responses, dominated by the amygdala and primary defense systems, with a consequent reduction in cognitive flexibility and ethical orientation (LeDoux, 2015; Mobbs et al., 2015). Allende's choice not to resort to authoritarian measures can therefore be interpreted as a conscious attempt not to allow the Chilean political system to regress to an archaic decision-making mode, based on fear and urgency, rather than on deliberation and responsibility. This element is particularly relevant if we consider the pedagogical dimension implicit in Allendist leadership. Governing, in this perspective, does not only mean administering resources or exercising the legitimate monopoly of force, but shaping collective cognitive horizons. Public policies, institutional practices, and even political language contribute to shaping what a society perceives as possible, desirable, or unthinkable. Studies conducted at the University of California, Berkeley, show how prolonged exposure to political narratives based on cooperation, dignity and social justice measurably changes the neural activation patterns associated with social identity and intergroup empathy (Amodio, 2014; Falk & Scholz, 2018). In the light of this evidence, the Allendist project can be interpreted as an attempt to realign institutional and cognitive structures, aimed at reducing the dissonance between what democracy promises on the normative level and what it allows on the material level. This dissonance, widely analyzed by critical theory, represents one of the main factors of delegitimization of contemporary democracies. When citizens perceive that political participation does not affect the real conditions of their existence, mechanisms of disengagement, cynicism and authoritarian regression are activated, now well documented by the neuroscientific literature on *political disengagement* (Jost et al., 2014; Cikara et al., 2017). Allende's leadership is therefore placed in an area of friction between systemic rationality and ethical rationality, assuming as its regulatory criterion not the optimization of power, but the historical coherence of action. This element refers directly to the Aristotelian distinction between *τέχνη* and *πρᾶξις*: while the former is oriented towards the production of an external result, the latter finds its end in the action itself and in its intrinsic value. Allende governs according to a logic of *praxis*, not of *techné*, and this explains why his project is difficult to translate into the parameters of positivist political science. From a comparative point of

view, this approach distinguishes it both from European social-democratic models, which tend to mediate social conflict through institutionalized compromises, and from Leninist-type revolutionary models, based on the temporary suspension of democracy in the name of a higher historical end. In both cases, political rationality accepts a separation between means and ends that Allende explicitly rejects. This rejection does not derive from an underestimation of the balance of power, but from a conception of history as an open process, not teleologically guaranteed. The most recent historical research conducted at the University of Cambridge and Moscow State University shows how this choice had a very high immediate political cost, but also how it helped to preserve a normative memory of the Allende project that continues to exert a transgenerational influence (Kornbluh, 2013; Zubok, 2021). In neurocognitive terms, the persistence of such memory can be interpreted as the result of a strong narrative coherence, a key element for long-term memory consolidation, as demonstrated by studies on the hippocampus and the *default mode network* (Hassabis & Maguire, 2009; Schacter et al., 2017). In this sense, the contingent political failure of the Allendist project does not coincide with its cognitive or symbolic failure. On the contrary, it is precisely the coherence between declared principles and practices of government that has contributed to establishing Allende's experience as an ethical paradigm of reference, capable of resisting posthumous delegitimization. This dynamic confirms what is claimed by moral neuroscience: the perception of integrity and value coherence activates neural circuits associated with moral trust and admiration, even when the pragmatic outcome of an action is negative (Zaki et al., 2011; Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Allendist substantial democracy, therefore, should not be evaluated exclusively on the basis of its duration or its immediate results, but as a limiting experiment of a political rationality that tries to escape both the cynicism of realism and the abstractness of utopia. It poses a question that still remains unresolved: whether it is possible to govern without radically separating effectiveness and justice, decision and responsibility, power and truth. A question that, in the light of the current global democratic crises, appears more relevant today than it was in 1973. This symbolic persistence of the Allendist project, which resists immediate historical defeat, allows us to address a further theoretical knot: the relationship between ethical leadership and political temporality. If, as Weber suggests, modern political action is forced to move within an insoluble tension between conviction and responsibility, Allende's experience shows that this tension is not resolved through a pragmatic compromise, but through a choice

of radical exposure to historical time. Leadership, in this sense, is not oriented to maximizing the duration of power, but to maximizing the moral intelligibility of action over the long term, even at the cost of an immediate loss of control. This conception of leadership implies an implicit theory of power as a fragile, reversible relationship that is intrinsically dependent on collective trust. Power is not possessed, but continuously renewed through practices of mutual recognition. Contemporary social neuroscience has shown how social recognition activates dopaminergic circuits associated with intrinsic motivation and cooperation, while the perception of coercive dominance activates defensive responses that undermine the stability of complex social systems (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sapolsky, 2017). In this perspective, democratic power appears as a dynamic balance between authority and vulnerability, a balance that the Allendi leadership tried to maintain even when structural conditions made it extremely unstable. Allende's refusal to radically separate means and ends translates, on the theoretical level, into an implicit critique of the instrumental conception of political rationality. This critique finds a profound antecedent in Aristotelian philosophy, where political action is conceived as a sphere of uncertainty (*τὰ ἐνδεχόμενα ἄλλως ἔχειν*), which requires situated judgment rather than mechanical application of rules. In this sense, *φρόνησις* is not an accessory virtue, but the very condition of politics as a rational practice. Allende governs by assuming that there is no transcendent guarantee of historical success, and that the only rationality available is that which holds together ethical coherence and attention to consequences, without reducing one to the other. Decision-making neuroscience reinforces this reading by showing how the processes of complex deliberation, especially in contexts of moral ambiguity, require an integration between emotional evaluations and rational analyses. The idea, still widespread in political theory, that emotion represents a disturbing element with respect to decision-making rationality has been widely disproved by studies conducted at Harvard University and University of California, Berkeley, which highlight how the absence of emotional signals compromises the ability to evaluate the long-term consequences of decisions (Damasio, 1994; Bechara et al., 2000). In this framework, ethical leadership appears not as a limit to political rationality, but as a superior form of it, capable of integrating cognitive and emotional dimensions into a single decision-making architecture. This integration is particularly relevant if we consider the collective dimension of democratic decision-making. Substantive democracy is not simply a set of institutions, but a cognitive and emotional ecosystem that makes public deliberation possible.

When this ecosystem is eroded by structural inequalities, economic precariousness and systemic mistrust, democracy tends to regress towards procedural forms emptied of content or towards authoritarian solutions. Comparative research conducted at the University of Oxford and the London School of Economics shows that rising inequality correlates with a reduction in informed political participation and an increase in affective polarization (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018; Gidron & Hall, 2017). The Allendist project, in an attempt to intervene simultaneously on the material and symbolic conditions of social life, can be read as an anticipated response to this regressive dynamic. Its originality lies not only in the economic policies adopted, but in the intuitive understanding of the fact that democracy requires a structural investment in the cognitive and emotional capacities of citizens. This insight, now corroborated by a vast body of neuroscientific research, gives Allende's project a theoretical relevance that transcends its immediate historical context. Comparatively, the Allendist leadership is in an anomalous position compared to global models of democratic government. Unlike the European social democratic leaders of the post-World War II period, Allende operates in a context of strong economic dependence and geopolitical instability, which drastically limits institutional room for manoeuvre. Unlike the revolutionary leaders of the Global South, he rejects the suspension of democratic freedoms as a transitional tool of social transformation. This double anomaly makes the Allendist project difficult to classify, but precisely for this reason theoretically fruitful. Historical research conducted at the University of Tokyo and Moscow State University suggests that this anomaly produced a systemic isolation effect, making the project vulnerable to coordinated external pressures (Zubok, 2021; Hasegawa, 2015). However, on the theoretical level, it allows us to critically question the assumption that democracy and radical social transformation are structurally incompatible. The Allendist experience shows that this incompatibility is not necessary, but historically produced by global power structures that systematically penalize alternative democratic experiments. In this sense, Allende's leadership can be interpreted as a form of *political testimony*, in the strong sense of the term: not a simple representation of interests, but an exposition of a possible way of inhabiting power without reducing it to domination. This testimony operates over the long time of historical memory, activating processes of moral identification that go beyond the contingency of political outcomes. The neuroscience of moral memory shows how coherent narratives of integrity and sacrifice activate neural networks associated with admiration and the transgenerational

transmission of values (Zaki et al., 2011; Immordino-Yang, 2016). Allendist substantive democracy, therefore, should not be thought of as a normative model to be applied, but as a theoretical limit that tests the dominant categories of contemporary political science. It obliges us to rethink leadership not as a technique of control, but as a practice of historical responsibility; the decision not as an isolated sovereign act, but as a situated ethical process; power not as a resource to be accumulated, but as a relationship to be continually justified. In this perspective, the theoretical value of the Allendist project lies less in its specific policies than in the overall rationality that made them thinkable. It is precisely this rationality, today, that is particularly disturbing. In a global context marked by ecological crises, extreme inequalities and authoritarian regressions, the idea that democracy must take charge of the material and cognitive conditions of its possibility appears both evident and radical. Allende's project, read in the light of neuroscience and contemporary political theory, does not offer immediate solutions, but poses a question that remains open: whether a democracy that renounces the substantial transformation of living conditions does not inevitably end up renouncing itself.

### **1.7 Transformative leadership and the ethos of historical responsibility: global comparative models: structural convergences and divergences**

The figure of Salvador Allende escapes the traditional categories of charismatic and authoritarian leadership. His political action is based on a transformative leadership of an ethical-relational type, in which the leader is not configured as the exclusive repository of knowledge or power, but as a catalyst of collective processes. This approach is close to Weber's notion of *the ethic of responsibility* (*Verantwortungsethik*), while overcoming its limits through a constant striving for social emancipation (Weber, 1919). Allendist leadership is characterized by a deliberate renunciation of authoritarian shortcuts, even under conditions of extreme systemic pressure. This choice, often interpreted as a strategic weakness, can be reinterpreted in the light of moral neuroscience as an expression of advanced emotional regulation and a strong integration between limbic and prefrontal systems (Greene, 2013; Haidt, 2012). Studies conducted at Yale University indicate that leaders capable of inhibiting impulsive responses and maintaining value coherence under stress produce higher levels of trust and cooperation in social groups (Keltner et al.,

2014). On a symbolic level, Allende's leadership recalls the Latin concept of *auctoritas*, understood not as the imposition of power (*potestas*), but as the ability to make the body politic grow (*augere*). This distinction, central to the Roman republican tradition, allows us to understand why the Allendist heritage continues to exert a cultural and moral influence even in the absence of immediate political success. The comparative analysis of the Allendist social system reveals a series of partial convergences with development models adopted in other historical and geographical contexts, despite their radical heterogeneity. Scandinavian social democratic models, for example, share with Allende the attention to redistribution and social cohesion, but develop in contexts of advanced capitalism and geopolitical stability that facilitate their sustainability (Esping-Andersen, 1990). On the other hand, the planned economies of Eastern Europe have similarities in terms of state intervention, but differ radically in terms of political pluralism and democratic participation. Research conducted at Moscow State University and St. Petersburg University highlights how the absence of democratic feedback in Soviet systems produced cognitive and institutional rigidities that accelerated their collapse (Zubok, 2021; Petrov, 2018). In the Asian context, comparative studies developed at the University of Tokyo and the University of Osaka show how some models of coordinated capitalism have integrated elements of welfare and participation without questioning the centrality of the market. However, these models tend to privilege stability over transformation, while the Allendist project is characterized by an explicitly emancipatory and redistributive vocation (Aoki, 2010; Yamamoto et al., 2022). A distinctive element of the Allendist social system lies in its attention, explicit and implicit, to the **emotional dimension of politics**. Contemporary research in affective neuroscience shows that political consensus is not the result of mere rational calculations, but emerges from the interaction between emotions, identities and collective narratives (Marcus et al., 2000; Westen, 2007). Allende intuitively understands that substantive democracy requires a collective emotional investment, grounded in hope, dignity, and recognition. This approach is close to the Aristotelian conception of *φιλία πολιτική* (*philia politiké*), that is, the affective bond that makes the cohesion of the polis possible. The violent destruction of this bond in 1973 can be interpreted as a direct attack on the neuro-emotional foundations of Chilean democracy. Political neuroscience, in particular studies conducted at the University of California, Berkeley, show how the systematic repression of dissent produces a restructuring of political emotions, fostering apathy, cynicism and

disengagement (Jost et al., 2014). In this sense, the collapse of the Allendist project represents not only a political defeat, but a profound reconfiguration of the collective emotional landscape. Salvador Allende's social system cannot be taken as a **universal model in the abstract sense**, but as a *situated universality*, that is, as a set of transferable principles that require a contextual translation. This concept finds a theoretical antecedent in Aristotelian philosophy, according to which the *καθόλου* (*kathóλου*, universal) always manifests itself through the *καθ' ἑκάστων* (*kath' hékaston*, particular). In this perspective, the Allendist legacy does not reside in a replicable political program, but in a grammar of social transformation based on substantial democracy, redistributive justice and neuro-social integration. The most recent interdisciplinary research converges in recognizing that development models capable of holding together economy, emotions and cognition represent one of the few viable ways to deal with the systemic crises of the twenty-first century.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The theoretical itinerary developed in the course of this work has shown how the social system promoted by Salvador Allende cannot be understood either as a simple circumscribed historical experience or as a failed political project in the strict sense. On the contrary, it emerges, in the light of an interdisciplinary analysis that intertwines political philosophy, democratic theory, social neuroscience and studies on collective memory, as a theoretical knot of exceptional density, capable of questioning in depth the conditions of possibility of modern and contemporary democracy. Its relevance does not lie in the immediate replicability of its policies, but in the historical rationality that made them thinkable and in the ethical tension that sustained them until their traumatic outcome. In the first argumentative block, the Allendist project has been interpreted as a form of substantial democracy, based on a conception of politics as *praxis* and not as *mere* *techne* of government. In this perspective, Allende's leadership has proved to be inseparable from a risk-aware historical responsibility, rooted in a tradition that joins Aristotelian *φρόνησις* with Weber's ethics of responsibility, without, however, resolving itself in a compromise between values and realism. Democracy, far from being reduced to a procedure, has appeared as a form of collective life that requires material, symbolic and cognitive conditions adequate for deliberation and effective participation. The second block showed how the violent destruction of this

project has not only produced an institutional caesura, but a profound historical trauma, capable of affecting the neuro-social structures of collective memory. Post-authoritarian democracy has thus emerged as a specific historical configuration, marked by a wounded rationality, in which the unprocessed past continues to condition the present and narrow the horizon of the possible. In this context, memory has not revealed itself to be a simple field of symbolic dispute, but a real neuro-political infrastructure, without the intentional reworking of which democracy tends to crystallize into defensive forms, incapable of substantial transformation. Finally, the third block made it possible to generalize the analysis beyond the Chilean case, showing how the dynamics identified find a disturbing confirmation in the contemporary democracies of the twenty-first century. Structural inequalities, read in the light of the neuroscience of power, have emerged as decisive factors in the erosion of democratic citizenship, not only on an economic or legal level, but on a cognitive and emotional level. The concentration of power and wealth produces asymmetries in the capacity for deliberation, foresight and cooperation, transforming political freedom into a formal principle devoid of effectiveness for large sectors of the population. Taken together, the three argumentative blocks converge on a central thesis: democracy cannot be thought of as a self-sufficient system of rules and institutions, but as a fragile historical and neuro-social ecosystem, which requires conditions of substantial equality, elaborate memory and ethically responsible leadership. The historical failure of the Allendist project does not invalidate its rationality, but rather reveals its anticipatory and disturbing character with respect to a global order based on the separation between political decision-making, social justice and the cognitive dignity of citizens. In this sense, Salvador Allende represents not only a figure of the past, but a theoretical limit for the present: a point of friction that forces contemporary political theory to question what democracy must become if it intends to survive its contradictions. Rethinking democracy in the light of its embodied dimension, traumatic memory and cognitive inequalities does not mean abandoning the democratic ideal, but restoring its historical depth and ethical responsibility. The conclusion that is imposed is therefore not programmatic, but critical: a democracy that renounces transforming the material and cognitive conditions of collective existence is destined to survive only as an empty form; A democracy that instead assumes social justice, historical memory and neuro-cognitive dignity as its foundations can still constitute a horizon of emancipation. In this space of possibilities, the Allendist project continues to question the present, not as a model to be imitated, but as a radical demand for the future of democratic politics.

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# **BIOLOGICAL EXTINCTION, SYMBOLIC TRANSFORMATION, AND THE COMPARATIVE DYNAMICS OF LATIN AND SLAVIC CONTINUITY**

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## **Abstract**

The disappearance of peoples is a recurrent theme in historiography, anthropology, and political discourse, yet it is rarely defined with conceptual precision. This article argues that populations almost never disappear biologically and that what is commonly described as disappearance is, in most cases, a process of symbolic, linguistic, or ethnic transformation. By distinguishing between biological extinction and symbolic disappearance, the study explores the mechanisms through which populations either lose or preserve collective identity over time. Particular attention is given to language, collective memory, territorial continuity, and institutional reproduction as vectors of ethnic persistence. Within this framework, a comparative analysis of the Latin and Slavic elements in European history is proposed, not as a narrative of survival versus extinction, but as a study of divergent modes of transformation. The article demonstrates that both Latin and Slavic populations underwent profound structural changes, yet differed in the way their identities were reproduced and institutionalized. Ultimately, the paper contends that peoples do not vanish; rather, they are reconfigured, renamed, and reimagined within new historical contexts.

**Keywords:** ethnic continuity, symbolic disappearance, language and identity, latin populations, slavic populations, collective memory

## **1. Introduction**

### **The Problem of Disappearance in Historical Thought**

The notion that entire peoples have disappeared from history is deeply embedded in popular and academic narratives alike. Ancient authors, modern historians, and nationalist discourses often speak of vanished tribes, extinct nations, or lost civilizations. Yet such formulations obscure a fundamental

distinction between biological extinction and the dissolution of collective identity. While individuals perish, populations reproduce, migrate, merge, and transform. As a result, the disappearance of a people is rarely an empirical demographic event and far more often a symbolic and cultural process.

This article seeks to clarify what it means for a people to “disappear” by proposing an analytical framework that separates biological disappearance from symbolic or ethnic disappearance. It further argues that continuity should not be understood as the preservation of an unchanged essence, but as the capacity of a population to reproduce a shared identity across generations. From this perspective, the history of Europe offers a particularly fertile ground for analysis, as it reveals multiple layers of transformation rather than absolute ruptures. The comparison between the Latin and Slavic elements illustrates how different historical conditions produced distinct, yet equally durable, forms of continuity.

## **2. Biological disappearance and its historical rarity**

Biological disappearance refers to the complete extinction of a population as a reproductive group. In strict terms, this would require the death or sterilization of all members without assimilation into other populations. Such events are exceptionally rare in recorded history. Even in cases of catastrophic mortality—caused by pandemics, warfare, or environmental collapse—survivors almost always merge with neighboring groups.

Historical examples often cited as biological extinctions tend, upon closer inspection, to involve assimilation rather than annihilation. The demographic collapse of Indigenous populations in the Americas after European contact, while devastating, did not result in absolute extinction but in profound demographic and cultural restructuring. Similarly, ancient European populations described as “disappeared” were, in most cases, absorbed into larger political and cultural entities.

Therefore, biological disappearance should be treated as a marginal phenomenon. Its analytical value lies mainly in highlighting the exceptional conditions under which it might occur, rather than serving as a general explanatory model for historical change.

## **2. Symbolic and Ethnic Disappearance: A Conceptual Framework**

Symbolic disappearance occurs when a population ceases to reproduce itself as a distinct collective identity. This process involves the loss of self-designation, language, shared historical narratives, and institutional continuity. Individuals remain biologically present, but the group no longer exists as a recognized social actor.

Ethnic disappearance is not instantaneous. It unfolds over generations through mechanisms such as linguistic shift, elite replacement, intermarriage, and the adoption of new political or religious frameworks. Crucially, symbolic disappearance does not imply cultural emptiness. Elements of the previous identity often persist as substrata within the dominant culture.

From this perspective, disappearance should be understood not as negation, but as transformation. A population does not vanish; it becomes something else.

## **4. Language as a central vector of continuity**

Among the various vectors of ethnic continuity, language occupies a central position. Language is not merely a tool of communication, but a repository of collective memory, social norms, and symbolic boundaries. Through language, myths are transmitted, genealogies preserved, and distinctions between “us” and “others” maintained.

However, language alone is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for continuity. Numerous populations have preserved identity despite linguistic shift, while others have lost identity despite linguistic persistence. What matters is the institutional and symbolic framework within which language operates.

The abandonment of a language often accelerates symbolic disappearance, especially when it coincides with the loss of autonomous elites and cultural institutions. Conversely, the preservation or revival of a language can function as a powerful mechanism of re-ethnification, even after periods of political domination.

## **5. Additional vectors of ethnic persistence**

Beyond language, several other factors contribute to the endurance or transformation of peoples:

**Territorial continuity:** Sustained attachment to a specific territory facilitates the reproduction of collective memory.

**Institutional continuity:** Religious institutions, legal traditions, and local governance structures stabilize identity.

**Elite reproduction:** The survival of indigenous elites allows for the transmission of historical narratives.

**Collective memory:** Shared interpretations of the past provide meaning and cohesion.

**External recognition:** Being recognized as a distinct group by others reinforces internal identity.

The interaction of these vectors determines whether a population maintains a recognizable identity or dissolves into a broader cultural formation.

## **6. Latin continuity: transformation through integration**

The Latin element in Europe offers a paradigmatic example of continuity through transformation. Roman expansion did not eliminate pre-existing populations, but integrated them into a political, legal, and linguistic system of unprecedented scope. Latinization functioned as a unifying process that absorbed diverse ethnic groups into a shared cultural framework.

After the collapse of Roman political authority, Latin continuity did not disappear. Instead, it fragmented and localized, giving rise to the Romance languages and the medieval Latin Christian world. What survived was not Rome as a political entity, but Latin as a cultural and symbolic matrix.

Importantly, Latin continuity was not ethnic in a narrow sense. It did not preserve a single ancestral population, but created a civilizational identity that could incorporate newcomers. In this sense, Latin continuity exemplifies how a population can “disappear” as a specific ethnic group while giving birth to a broader, more enduring cultural formation.

## **7. Slavic expansion: continuity through multiplication**

The Slavic element followed a different historical trajectory. Early Slavic populations expanded across vast territories, interacting with and assimilating diverse groups. Rather than imposing a centralized imperial culture, Slavic continuity developed through localized communities, shared linguistic structures, and adaptable social organization.

Slavic identity proved remarkably resilient, despite prolonged periods of foreign domination. Byzantine, Ottoman, Habsburg, and Soviet rule reshaped political structures, yet Slavic languages and folk traditions persisted. This endurance was facilitated by the relative flexibility of Slavic identity, which allowed for internal differentiation without complete fragmentation.

Unlike the Latin model, which emphasized integration into a universal framework, Slavic continuity relied on reproduction at the community level. This difference helps explain why Slavic identities often re-emerged forcefully after periods of political suppression.

## **8. A comparative analysis: latin and slavic modes of transformation**

The comparison between Latin and Slavic elements reveals two distinct modes of historical continuity:

The Latin mode prioritizes institutional universality, legal systems, and cultural integration, often at the expense of older ethnic distinctions.

The Slavic mode emphasizes linguistic and communal reproduction, allowing identity to survive without continuous statehood.

Neither model represents survival or disappearance in absolute terms. Both involve loss, adaptation, and reinvention. The Latin world lost its ancient ethnic plurality but gained a durable civilizational identity. The Slavic world preserved linguistic cohesion but experienced repeated political fragmentation.

Thus, continuity should not be measured by purity or permanence, but by the capacity to generate meaning and belonging across time.

## **9. Conclusion: Disappearance as historical reconfiguration**

This article has argued that peoples do not disappear in a definitive sense. Biological extinction is rare, while symbolic disappearance represents a transformation rather than an erasure. Language, memory, institutions, and territory function as vectors through which populations reconfigure themselves into new historical forms.

The comparison between Latin and Slavic elements demonstrates that continuity can be achieved through different mechanisms, each shaped by specific historical conditions. Rather than asking why certain peoples disappeared, it may be more fruitful to ask how they were transformed and what new identities emerged from those transformations.

In this sense, disappearance is not the end of history, but one of its most productive forces.

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# **SOCIETAS SINE PERSONA: DAOS (DECENTRALIZED AUTONOMOUS ORGANIZATIONS) IN THE LIGHT OF ROMAN CORPORATE DOGMATICS.**

## **ALGORITHMIC LIABILITY, *AFFECTIO SOCIETATIS* AND THE RETURN OF UNLIMITED LIABILITY.**

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### **Abstract**

**Decentralized Autonomous Organizations** (DAOs) represent the most radical challenge to contemporary commercial law: organizations managed by *Smart Contracts* on *Blockchain*, without a physical headquarters, formalized administrators and registered legal personality. Faced with the civil or financial tort committed by a DAO, modern law falters, stuck in the dilemma between treating them as legal *entities* or as legal nullities. The present study proposes a hermeneutical solution drawing on the Roman dogmatics of the *Societas* (D. 17.2). Unlike the modern corporation, the Roman *societas* did not generate a third legal entity (*universitas*), but created a direct obligatory bond between the partners. Applying this paradigm, it is argued that the holders of *Governance Tokens* are not comparable to "shareholders" protected by limited liability, but to Roman "shareholders" with unlimited liability for the obligations contracted by the algorithm. *Law & Economics' analysis* confirms that this regime is the only efficient way to mitigate *Moral Hazard* in anonymous environments, reaffirming the principle that there can be no decision-making power (*voting*) without asset risk (*liability*).

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### I. Introduction: The Phantom of the Machine and the Liability Gap

#### 1.1. Anatomy of a DAO: between "Network State" and contractual anarchy

The advent of *Blockchain* has spawned a new institutional species: the **Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO)**. Ontologically, a DAO is not a company, nor an association in the modern sense of the term; it is a socio-technical system coordinated by *Smart Contracts* — immutable self-

executing protocols — that allow a multitude of anonymous actors to manage common resources without a central authority [1]. As observed by Zatti [2], DAOs place themselves in a dialectical tension with the Nation-State: they aspire to become "Network States", supranational entities operating in an a-jurisdictional cyberspace, governed not by the *Rule of Law* but by the *Rule of Code*[3]. However, this aspiration for algorithmic autonomy clashes with economic reality. DAOs manage trillions of dollars in *treasuries*, lend, invest in digital and real assets. As highlighted by Cardoso [4], we are facing an unprecedented convergence between technology, *governance* and law, where the ability to act (*agency*) is delegated to the code, but the economic effects fall on natural persons.

## 1.2. The Qualification Dilemma: "Mind the Gap"

The fundamental legal problem, defined by Borgogno as the "Gap" between digital existence and legal life [5], lies in the absence of legal personality. Modern civil codes are built on the paradigm of the "legal person" (S.p.A., S.r.l., Foundation) as a center of imputation of interests distinct from the natural persons who compose it. The DAO, by rejecting state registration to preserve decentralization, is in limbo:

1. **Private International Law:** As Guillaume [6] and Pinheiro [7] note, it is impossible to determine the *lex societatis* of an entity residing on nodes distributed throughout the world. Where is Ethereum's registered office?
2. **Liability:** If the code performs an illegal operation (e.g. a *hack* due to negligence, or a financial scam), who is liable? Modern doctrine oscillates between considering the DAO a *res* (an object) or an autonomous subject, as suggested by theories on the *e-personhood* of robots [8].

However, Schillig [9] warns that granting legal personality to a DAO without a central registry would create a perfect "veil of irresponsibility", incentivizing *Moral Hazard*.

## 1.2. The jurisprudential response:

### The *Ooki DAO* case and the collapse of the veil

The theory gave way to practice in September 2022, when the U.S. *Commodity Futures Trading Commission* (CFTC) took action against **Ooki DAO**. Faced with the absence of a registered entity, the American regulator

applied a brutal but effective logic: if the DAO is not a *Corporation*, then it is a **General Partnership**. The consequence is seismic: every holder of *Governance Tokens* who voted on the DAO's decisions was held personally and unlimitedly liable for violations of the platform. As analyzed by Napieralska and Kępczyński [10], this case marks the end of the illusion of algorithmic immunity. Decentralization is not a shield.

#### 1.4. Methodology: The Return to the *Societas Romana*

If the *Corporation* (limited liability) model is unenforceable due to lack of registration, and the Common Law *General Partnership* model appears too punitive and unnuanced, where can a balanced solution be found? Heine and Quintavalla [11] have recently proposed looking to Roman Law to fill the "accountability gap" of Artificial Intelligence. Following this intuition, the present study advances the hypothesis that the **Roman Societas** (D. 17.2) is the perfect archetype for the DAO. Unlike modern society, the *Roman societas* was a pure consensual contract, without external legal personality, based on *affectio societatis*. It allowed for joint action without creating a fictitious "entity". By applying the Roman categories of liability (solidarity, *actio pro socio*, liability for wilful misconduct and negligence of managing partners), we can build a legal framework — as advocated by Borgogno and Martino [12] — that goes "beyond the hype", anchoring the volatility of the *blockchain* to the millennial solidity of personal responsibility.

## II. Legal Archaeology: The *Societas* as a Pure Contract

To understand the legal nature of a DAO, it is necessary to carry out an operation of "institutional archaeology". The contemporary jurist, trained on the codes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, suffers from a perspective deformation: he tends to superimpose the concept of "society" with that of "legal person". However, this identification is a recent product of the history of law. In Classical Roman Law, the *Societas* (regulated in Book XVII, Title 2 of the *Digesto Pro Socio*) represented a radically different archetype, which today offers the keystone to decipher the enigma of decentralized organizations.

### 2.1. *Universitas* vs *Societas*: the denial of legal personality

In the Roman system, there was a clear dichotomy between the entities that possessed a personality distinct from the members (*Universitas*,

*Collegium, Municipium*) and the commercial society (*Societas*). While the *Universitas* had its own patrimony and its own legal capacity ("*Si quid universitati debetur, singulis non debetur*", D. 3.4.7.1), the *Societas* was a pure **consensual contract**.

"*Societas ius quodammodo fraternitatis in se habet.*" (D. 17.2.63)

Roman society did not create a "third party". It was an internal obligatory bond (*inter partes*) that bound the partners to the pursuit of a common purpose, without erecting a legal shield to the outside (*erga omnes*). The assets contributed to the company did not become the property of an abstract entity, but remained in co-ownership (*condominium*) or were managed in common [13].

This structure is isomorphic to that of a DAO. As noted by Schillig [14], a DAO on Ethereum is not a registered entity: it is an aggregate of *Smart Contracts* that coordinate funds (Ether/Tokens) contributed by users. Ontologically, the DAO is a **Societas without Universitas**. There is no "Corporate Veil" because there is no *Person*. There is only the pact. Attempting to apply the categories of the S.p.A. (which presuppose a registered entity) to the DAO is a categorical error; applying the model of the *Societas* (which presupposes only agreement) is an act of legal realism. The *blockchain* acts as an immutable ledger of the pact, but it does not ipso facto generate a legal entity.

## **2.2. The digital *Affectio Societatis*: possession of the Token as a negotiating will**

If the DAO is a consensual company, where does the consensus lie? In Roman law, the *Societas* was perfected *bare consensu* (with simple consent), which could also be manifested tacitly (*re*, for conclusive facts). The constitutive psychological element was the **Affectio Societatis**: the continuous and permanent desire to remain members and to share risk and profit.

In the digital context, *Affectio* materializes in the possession and use of **Governance Tokens**. Buying a governance token is not a mere passive investment (like buying an Apple stock for dividends). The token confers the right to actively vote (*on-chain voting*) on changes to the protocol. When a user buys the token and uses it to vote on a proposal (e.g., "Invest treasury in project X"), they are unequivocally manifesting *affectio societatis*. He is saying, "I want to be part of this joint venture." According to Roman dogmatics, this act constitutes the social bond. A written contract signed by the notary is not

required; the conclusive behavior of participation in management is needed. As argued by Madalena et al. [15], active participation in *algorithmic governance* is the cybernetic translation of the *Roman consensus in idem*. Therefore, every *active token holder* is, for all intents and purposes, a *socius*.

### 2.3. The liability regime: from *beneficium competentiae* to solidarity

The immediate consequence of the DAO's qualification as a *Societas* (and not as a *Universitas*) affects the asset liability regime. This is the critical point raised by the *Ooki DAO case*. In classical Roman law, in the absence of a third legal personality, the shareholders were liable for debts contracted in the interest of the company. The historical evolution of the institute offers two applicable models:

1. **Pro Rata Liability (Civil Model):** Originally, each member was liable only for his share.
2. **Joint and several liability (Publicani Model):** For tax contracting companies (*Societates Publicanorum*) or bankers' companies (*Argentarii*), joint liability (*in solidum*) developed. The creditor could attack the entire assets of any of the partners for the total debt of the company.

In the context of DAOs, which operate in global financial markets exposing third parties to systemic risks, the bankers' model (*Argentarii*) is the most pertinent. Because the DAO acts in the shadow of anonymity and with no guaranteed minimum share capital, the protection of third-party trust requires **unlimited joint and several liability**. As Heine and Quintavalla pointed out [16], Roman law used personal responsibility as a counterweight to the absence of state regulation. If DAO members want to operate without registering (rejecting the *limitation of liability* offered by the state), they must accept the "Roman risk": their personal assets (home, savings, other crypto-assets) are generic collateral for the DAO's bonds. The *Token* is not just an asset; it is a potential debt security. There is no power (*vote*) without risk (*responsibility*).

### III. Pathology of DAOs: The illusion of algorithmic immunity

If the qualification of the DAO as a *Societas* solves the structural problem, the pathology of the system remains to be addressed: the claim, widespread in the *crypto community*, that Blockchain technology operates in a dimension of legal extraterritoriality. This section analyzes the three great

illusions of decentralized *governance* — the infallibility of the code, the impunity of anonymity, and the irresponsibility for wrongdoing — by refuting them through the categories of civil liability and Roman law.

### 3.1. "Code is Law"? The humanistic critique of contractual automatism

The founding mantra of the Ethereum ecosystem is "Code is Law", theorized by Lawrence Lessig and radicalized by *DeFi maximalists*. According to this doctrine, if the *Smart Contract* allows an action (e.g. emptying a treasury by exploiting a *bug*), that action is legitimate because it is "compliant with the code". This vision establishes what Filippi, Mannan and Reijers call **the Rule of Code**, as opposed to the **Rule of Law** [17].

However, the Roman jurist rejects with horror the idea that technique (*techne*) can prevail over equity (*aequitas*).

"*Summum ius, summa iniuria.*" (Cicero, *De Officiis*, I, 10, 33)

The blind and literal application of a rule (or a computer code), unanchored from the will of the parties and from the general principles of the legal system, generates the utmost injustice. Legally, the *Smart Contract* is not the Law; it is only the means of execution (*instrumentum*) of the negotiating will. If the code contains an error (*bug*) or allows abuse, we are not facing a "new legality", but a defect of consent or a non-compliance. As argued by Guillaume and Riva [18], the resolution of disputes in DAOs cannot be left to *on-chain* binary logic alone; the law must be able to intervene to correct (*restitutio in integrum*) the errors of the algorithm, reaffirming the primacy of human intention over computer syntax.

### 3.2. The anonymity of the shareholders and the paradox of the *Societas Occulta*

The second defensive barrier of DAOs is the pseudonym. Members are identified only by cryptographic keys (e.g. 0x123...). How can responsibility be attributed to a ghost? Roman law is well aware of the figure of the company in which the partners remain hidden from third parties. However, concealment is not a cause of exemption from liability, but of aggravation.

If a *Societas* operates in an opaque manner, the logic of protection of trust applies. Although the direct action (*actio pro socio*) concerns internal relations, the liability towards injured third parties remains intact. The

anonymity of the Blockchain is, legally, a thin veil. When a judge ascertains the nature of *de facto Societas*, joint liability is triggered. The fact that the shareholders are anonymous simply means that the creditor (or the tax authorities) will be able to attack the first shareholder who manages to identify (deanonymize) for the entire debt (*in solidum*). It will then be the burden of that unfortunate member to exercise the action of recourse towards the other "ghosts". In economic terms, anonymity increases the individual risk of the identifiable member, disincentivizing participation in DAOs that do not implement identity verification (KYC) procedures.

### 3.3. Who is responsible for the algorithm? Imputation of damage *ex delicto*

The most critical point concerns non-contractual liability (Aquilian). If a DAO, due to poorly written code or predatory governance, causes harm to third parties (e.g., copyright infringement, cheating, or a *hack* that drains funds from users), who is liable? Here the analogy with the **Noxa Caput Sequitur** or with the owner's liability for damage caused by animals or slaves comes to the rescue.

The autonomous algorithm, as Okuno notes [19] analyzing the liability of AI, acts as a semi-independent entity. However, having no assets, he cannot compensate. According to the Roman model of *Culpa in Vigilando* or *Eligendo*, the "masters" of the algorithm (the *token holders* who voted for its deployment or who did not update/correct it) are responsible. The vote cast in the DAO is not a political opinion; it is an act of management. If members vote to implement a risky protocol without having commissioned a proper security audit, they are grossly negligent (*culpa lata*).

*"Culpa lata dolo aequiparatur."* (Ulpian, D. 50.16.213.2)

Gross negligence in code management (e.g., ignoring known vulnerabilities) is tantamount to malice. Therefore, the shareholders are liable for the *ex delicto* damages caused by the DAO with their personal assets. There is no "algorithmic immunity": those who profit (*cuius commoda*) from the operation of the machine must bear the risks (*eius et incommoda*).

## IV. *Law & Economics*: The Cost of Irresponsibility

The qualification of the DAO as an *unlimited liability Societas* might appear, at first glance, as an insurmountable obstacle to innovation. However, the economic analysis of the law shows exactly the opposite: in a "trustless" and anonymous environment, the financial responsibility of the participants is the only mechanism capable of aligning incentives and ensuring market efficiency.

### 4.1. *Moral Hazard* and Limited Liability: A Privilege, Not a Right

The economic theory of the company teaches that **Limited Liability** is not a natural right, but a state subsidy granted to shareholders to encourage the diversification of investments. In exchange for this shield, the state demands transparency: registration, public budgets, minimum capital and identifiable administrators. DAOs, by their nature, reject this "exchange": they want asset immunity without offering transparency (anonymity) or guarantees of solvency (absence of tied share capital).

Granting the limitation of liability in this scenario would generate a textbook case of **Moral Hazard**. If *token holders* know that they can earn unlimited (*upside*) by risking only the negligible value of the token (*downside capped*), they will be incentivized to vote for very high-risk or even predatory protocols (e.g. *Algorithmic Ponzi schemes*). As Sims [20] points out, decentralized *governance* suffers from a dispersion of responsibility: "If everyone is responsible, no one is." The Roman model of joint liability breaks this asymmetry: by forcing each shareholder to respond with his or her entire assets, it reintroduces prudence (*prudencia*) in voting decisions.

### 4.2. The *Token Holder* as a "Cheapest Cost Avoider"

According to Guido Calabresi's **theorem** on the cost of accidents, the responsibility must fall on the subject who is in the best position to avoid the damage at the lowest cost (*Cheapest Cost Avoider*) [21]. In the context of a DAO that causes damage to third parties (e.g. due to a bug in the code that allows the theft of funds, or for violation of anti-money laundering regulations), who is this subject?

- Not developers (often anonymous or simple *open-source executors*).
- Not passive users.
- These are the **Token Holders with voting rights**.

They have the power to approve or reject code updates (*proposals*). They have the power to commission *security audits before deploying a Smart Contract*. If we apply the **Societas** (personal responsibility) regime, shareholders will be incentivized to spend resources monitoring the security of the code *before* voting. If, on the other hand, they enjoy immunity, the incentive to control collapses. Unlimited liability transforms the *Token Holder* from a passive bettor to an **active monitor** (*gatekeeper*), drastically reducing the social cost of algorithmic errors.

### 4.3. Efficiency of *Strict Liability* in Decentralized Markets

Finally, the analogy with the Roman bankers' companies (*Argentarii*) suggests the adoption of a regime of *Strict Liability*. In DAOs, proving the "fault" or "negligence" of thousands of anonymous voters is technically impossible and expensive (proof problem). A strict liability regime (profit-sharers are liable for damages, regardless of fault) reduces court settlement costs and acts as a powerful signal of *adverse selection*. Only solid, transparent, and secure DAO projects will attract investors willing to risk their assets. Fraudulent or insecure DAOs will be abandoned, because no one will want to be the "unlimited liable partner" of a sinking ship. As suggested by Borgogno [22], this market mechanism, enabled by strict liability rules, is much more efficient than centralized *ex ante* regulation that would risk stifling technological innovation.

## V. Conclusions: No freedom without a face. For a Humanism of Digital Responsibility

### 5.1. The Decline of the A-Legal Utopia: the Blockchain as an *Instrumentum*, Not as an *Ordo*

At the end of this investigation, which attempted to build a hermeneutical bridge between the wisdom of the Severan jurists and the decentralized architecture of Web3, the failure of the technocratic utopia that claimed to replace the authority of the Law with the inexorability of the Code emerges with sunny evidence. The illusion, cultivated by a certain *cypherpunk rhetoric*, according to which the *Blockchain* could constitute a self-sufficient order (*Lex Cryptographica*), immune from the categories of civil law by virtue of a presumed mathematical extraterritoriality, is shattered against the ontological reality of human relations, which, even when mediated by algorithms, remain

intrinsically relations of power and interest that require a imputation of liability. Recognizing the nature of *Societas* in the DAO does not constitute an act of hostility towards innovation, but the only intellectual operation capable of saving technology from itself: if the *code* is left to reign supreme without the corrective of *aequitas* and without the guarantee of patrimonial liability, it degenerates into an instrument of anonymous predation, making the "Network State" not an evolution of democracy, but a regression to the Hobbesian state of nature, where the strongest (or the most skilled at programming) dominates unchallenged.

### **5.2. The mask and the face: the reintegration of the "Person" into the data flow**

The highest contribution that Roman dogmatics offers to the contemporary debate lies in its anthropocentric conception of responsibility. When we affirm, in the wake of Ulpiano and Paolo, that *token holders* are not atoms dispersed in cyberspace, but *partners* linked by a bond of solidarity, we are carrying out an act of "re-humanization" of commercial law. Digital technology, by its intrinsic structure, tends towards disembodination and anonymity, reducing the individual to an alphanumeric string; Roman Law, on the contrary, requires that behind the "mask" (*person*) there must always be a recognizable face and a heritage that can be attacked. Imposing unlimited responsibility on the participants of a DAO means reaffirming an ethical principle even before it is legal: there can be no decision-making power — the power to vote, to move capital, to influence markets — that is separated from personal risk. The freedom that the *Blockchain* promises cannot be the freedom of impunity, the freedom to act without answering, but it must be the freedom of the citizen who, aware of his actions, agrees to take charge of them *in solidum* with his peers.

### **5.3. Towards a Civil Right of Collective Intelligence**

In the final analysis, the proposal to subject decentralized autonomous organizations to the regime of the *Roman Society* represents a manifesto for a new Digital Humanism. While special legislations (such as the European MiCA) frantically try to chase technology with detailed regulations that become obsolete before they even come into force, the Roman categories demonstrate eternal resilience precisely because they do not regulate technology, but man. The *Societas* is the timeless archetype of human collaboration without a

screen, of trust (*fides*) that is not based on bureaucratic registration but on personal commitment. Applying this model to DAOs means ennobling them: it means transforming them from obscure mechanisms of anonymous speculation into true communities of intent, where the algorithm is degraded to its rightful role as a servant (*instrumentum*) and the human being is reintegrated into his dignity as responsible master (*dominus*). Only through this "dogmatic restoration" will we be able to ensure that the economy of the future, however decentralized and automated, remains an economy on a human scale, governed not by the blind execution of a smart contract, but by the bright, and sometimes severe, *prudentia* of law.

## Notes

- [1] A. Sims, "Decentralised Autonomous Organisations: Governance, Dispute Resolution and Regulation," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2021. The author defines the DAO as a structure where *governance* is codified *ex ante* and execution is automated, eliminating the need for interpersonal (*trustless*) trust.
- [2] F. Zatti, "The DAO Between the Nation State and the Network State," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2024. Zatti analyzes how DAOs challenge the state's monopoly of legal force, proposing competing algorithmic systems.
- [3] P. D. Filippi, M. Mannan, and W. Reijers, "Blockchain Technology and the Rule of Code: Regulation via Governance," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2022. The authors highlight the risk that the "Rule of Code" will become a technical tyranny if it lacks *legal checks and balances*.
- [4] A. Cardoso, "Decentralized Autonomous Organizations – DAOs: The Convergence of Technology, Law, Governance, and Behavioral Economics," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2023.
- [5] O. Borgogno, "Making Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) Fit for Legal Life: Mind the Gap," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2023. Borgogno argues that the gap is not technological, but ontological: the law requires responsible subjects, the DAO offers impersonal processes.
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**ON THE OCCASION OF THE 155TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
BIRTH OF THE "TITAN" OF ROMANIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY  
AND CULTURE AND THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
FOUNDING OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

*"In the name of the sacred principles of its founding, the great Republic of the  
New World feels called to give humanity its future laws"*

– Nicolae Iorga

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**Abstract**

In many of his works, dedicated to the whole of Universal History, general or thematic, in historical journalism, in daily records (notes, comments, obituaries, portraits), in public conferences and university lectures, N. Iorga will insist, depending on the circumstances, on the beginnings and characteristics of the history of the state born on July 4, 1776, on the role of institutions and political and cultural personalities.

Long before the dominant vision in historical writings of his time – which minimized the place of the natives (not to mention the excesses of today's "political correctness" in the re/writing of the early history of the American nation) –, the great Romanian historian amends the fact that the history of the U.S.A. was shown to begin only in 1776:

"The houses of the Indians of the South, very curious, made of clay or of sun-dried, unbaked bricks", multi-storeyed, have correspondence in the massive buildings of New York and Chicago, which when made better, that is, one row retreating from the other, do nothing but imitate the clay buildings of the Indians. What a pity that this civilization, with such beginnings, was cut off suddenly! What could not have come out of the hands of the Indian!"

On another occasion, he argues in favor of knowing and writing a history in which local populations are integrated, with their elements of civilization and culture, into the evolution as such of the space of the future North American state (and not just from the moment of the establishment of the first European colonies):

"Before the appearance of the Europeans, there was a whole Indian world here; is that of no interest? We can reconstruct this history to some extent, and therefore this chapter cannot be missing when you talk about the history of America... The poor Indians were expropriated from everything (emphasis added): **from their forest, from the control of the rivers, from their land**, but it is not right to expropriate them from their history, because they created that country, with its roads, with the beginning of agriculture (...) a chapter of Indian ethno-history should be placed at the beginning of the life of the United States"

The polyhistorian Nicolae Iorga – whose birth marks 155 years this summer – was no stranger to the historical processes that defined the so-called movement of the worlds in various eras, from Antiquity to his own time. For the "Titan" of Romanian Historiography<sup>i</sup>, the history of the Contemporary World did not begin (as was accredited in the scholarly and popular circles of his time) with the year 1789, the beginning of the Great French Revolution, but with the American Revolution, symbolized by the Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776, the first relying, in fact – as he would write in his fundamental work, in 4 volumes, from 1928, *Essai de synthèse de l'histoire de l'humanité*<sup>ii</sup> – on the one triggered in the 13 British North American colonies (*IV: Époque Contemporaine,– Chapitre premier*. pp. 1-10 –, begins with *Les nouvelles autonomies américaines*).

It is, therefore, 250 years since the founding of the United States of America...

It was shown a number of years ago, in a documentary material with a more restricted circulation<sup>iii</sup>, that in the multitude of Iorga's preoccupations, from a journalistic perspective, there could not be missing references, appreciated as such by North American historians<sup>iv</sup>, to America, namely the United States<sup>v</sup> – the "Great Republic", which he visited in 1930, for almost two months (January 27-March 20)<sup>vi</sup> – and Americans<sup>vii</sup>, or Romanian-American relations.<sup>viii</sup>

There were Iorga's attestations excerpted, almost entirely, from "Neamul românesc" (the newspaper founded by N. Iorga in 1906), alongside which were inserted several of the articles published by the great scholar in one of the Romanian-American newspapers - "America". There were Iorga's attestations excerpted, almost entirely, from "Neamul românesc" (the newspaper founded by N. Iorga in 1906), alongside which were inserted several of the articles published by the great scholar in one of the Romanian-American newspapers<sup>x</sup> - "America"<sup>x</sup>.

**"...a chapter of Indian ethno-history should be placed at the beginning of the life of the United States"**

In many of his works, dedicated to the whole of universal history, general or thematic, in historical journalism, in daily records (notes, comments, obituaries, portraits), in public conferences and university lectures, N. Iorga will dwell, depending on the circumstances, on the beginnings and characteristics of the history of the state born on July 4, 1776, on the role of institutions and political and cultural personalities.

Long before the dominant vision in historical writings of his time – which minimized the place of the natives (not to mention the excesses of today's "political correctness" in the re/writing of the early history of the American nation) –, the great Romanian historian amends the fact that the history of the U.S.A. it was shown to begin only in 1776: "The houses of the Indians of the South, very curious, made of clay or of sun-dried, unbaked bricks", multi-storeyed, have a correspondence, our great scholar notices, in the massive buildings of New York and Chicago, "which when made better, that is, one row retreating from the other, do nothing but imitate the clay buildings of the Indians. What a pity that this civilization, with such beginnings, was cut off suddenly! What could not have come out of the hands of the Indian!"

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"Before the appearance of the Europeans, there was an entire Indian world here; is that not interesting? We can reconstruct this history to some extent and, therefore, this chapter cannot be missing when talking about the history of America..."

"The poor Indians were expropriated from everything (emphasis added): from their forest, from the control of the rivers, from their land, but it is not right to expropriate them from the field of history, because they created the country, with its roads, with the beginning of agriculture (...) a chapter of Indian ethno-history should be placed at the beginning of the life of the United States".

"(...) let us salute the noble and dignified figure of Washington, who was neither an emperor nor a great politician, but only a general"

In journalism, most of the time N. Iorga approaches a historical subject mainly out of the need to reveal possible connections or roots of contemporary facts and acts. An example in this regard is an article from February 1918, when – following the speech in the American Congress, on January 8, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson made public his 14-Point Program regarding the post-war organization of the World – he summarizes the motivations of the revolt against the all-powerful Metropolis of London, at the head of which he was – writes N. Iorga in *Amintirea lui Washington* (published in "Neamul românesc") – "a man who until forty years old meant nothing"; respectively, George Washington, the future first president of the United States – until then, a "country boyar", in whose house "no banker with any wealth would live. What did he read? The Bible and a few books. His library? "There was nothing like that" - it was described as follows: "Modest origin, education as for those circumstances: no classical bass, no foreign languages, no literature, no sciences – English grammar and spelling; some mathematics. Some role in the border battles with the French neighbors. Colonel of the irregular troops with whom easy successes were achieved. Nothing brilliant about him: no promise in speech, in eyes, in gesture. At the moment of the "Declaration of Rights" in the name of unorganized territories, in the name of people who had only the consciousness, but full, that they were people, that was all as far as leadership was concerned. As a decision in case of defeat, "retreat to the Alleghany Mountains", death by starvation. And when the Americans see what has come of their desperate efforts under his leadership, have they not the right, the hundred million tireless workers for culture in the name of freedom, to extend to the whole world the new "Declaration of Rights"? (The 14 Points – n.n.).

And are we not allowed, even at the hour when the triumph of the German organization roars louder, to believe that these "rights" will nevertheless triumph and to salute the noble and dignified figure of Washington, who was not an emperor, nor a great politician, but only a general?

**" (...)Liberal idealism is the dominant note of a Washington, a Jefferson, an Abraham Lincoln"**

Likewise, in the years 1917-1920, especially – but also in the interwar period –, the same connections, typical of George's broad vision of the

unfolding of historical processes. Thus, for example, on July 15, 1918, he wrote with references to specificities of the history of the young – even in his time – North American state, as well as to some personalities (most references being made to Abraham Lincoln):

"Such was also the case when the question of the freedom of the oppressed arose within the very heart of the Republic. Were there to be, or not, Black slaves in the United States? Had the American people judged the matter from the perspective of that political economy which was imposed upon Americans as a guiding principle, but which in fact today suffocates the `white Negroes` of a large part of Europe, they would have calculated the advantages of slavery in the Southern states and would have passed on to other concerns. America, however, chose instead to halt all internal productive activity for years (a reference to the Civil War/War of Secession, 1861–1865 — ed. note), to forfeit markets previously secured worldwide, to sacrifice so many lives and to lose so much material wealth, solely in order that within the bounds of the country there should exist only free human beings (emphasis in the original). `Better that the country itself should perish,` Lincoln believed, `than that it be unfaithful to its principle of life, which is also its title of honor.` And in judging thus, he achieved his aim, without the country—however afflicted it may have been at certain moments—being truly threatened in its existence or in its development."

On other occasions, emphasizing the "liberal idealism that constitutes the dominant trait of a Washington ('Everything in America that is idealism and virtue derives first and foremost from him—George Washington'), of a Jefferson, of an Abraham Lincoln," N. Iorga records one of the beneficial specificities of the civilization of the American state, born on 4 July 1776:

"Complete equality; the ceremonial gestures of Europe are unknown here. People are courteous and ready to be of service, but they do not wish to waste time on foolish formalities. At the palace of President Lincoln, there is neither doorkeeper nor lackeys. The Secretary of State, the most powerful man in the Republic, comes in his working clothes to receive a prince and speaks with him just as freely as he would with any other distinguished person. The President himself, the great Abraham Lincoln, an awkward giant, ignores the most elementary rules of *savoir-vivre* according to our etiquette, centuries old. Straight to the point, and quickly, for time is precious!"

As has already been noted, Nicolae Iorga did not produce a work specifically devoted to the history of the United States of America; however, its historical development, civilization, and culture, as well as its place in the contemporary world, are reflected in various thematic volumes, in lectures, travel notes, and in an abundant body of journalistic writings. On the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, we offer to our

"readers"—to use the term and orthography favored by the Apostle of Vălenii—a selection of excerpts from articles published by N. Iorga in his newspaper *Neamul românesc*, as well as in the periodical *America* (published in Cleveland by Romanian Americans) during the 1920s and 1930s (drawn from the aforementioned documentary source).

Nicolae Iorga does not have, as we have shown, a special work on the history of the United States of America, but its evolution, its civilization and culture, its place in the contemporary world are found in various thematic volumes, in conferences, travel notes, as well as in an abundant journalistic production.

We offer to the "citizens", as the Apostle from Văleni named them, on the 250th anniversary of the birth of the United States, some fragments of the articles published by N. Iorga in his newspaper "*Neamul românesc*", as well as in the newspaper "*America*" (published in Cleveland by Romanian Americans) in the 1920s-1930s of the last century (extracts from the aforementioned documentary).

### **Notes about America**

Beyond the Great Ocean lies a new world, a world founded—rightly so—upon justice and freedom of conscience by those who, in past centuries, fled the tyrannies of Europe.

It grew gradually until it reached immense proportions. The United States Republic is not merely a country; it is a world. And it has always claimed that it is a new world not only by virtue of the moment of its discovery.

For a long time, we Europeans did not acknowledge this right of the Americans. We recognized only their technical innovation. Dealers in oil, iron, cotton, lard—that was all we saw in them. And, in fact, this was so. Yet beneath this surface turmoil for money, something was taking shape, through the mingling of races and the accumulation of wealth. What was being prepared was the modern form of the consciousness of rights from which the earliest creative colonization had once departed (December 1915).

### **America**

America has spoken once again. It has spoken in an American manner: precise, concise, with that confidence which is the hallmark of its politics. It cannot accept that the Allies be struck through the drowning of women and children, through the destruction of forms of wealth that cannot be subjected to the cruel laws of war. Recalling that within its borders stand churches crowned with crosses and schools where it is taught that society must be founded upon

morality, it demands that combatants refrain from attacking those who are not combatants and cannot be regarded as such. It has nothing to add, nothing to retract. It is not willing to enter negotiations. It brings forth a principle and demands that it be accepted immediately and respected forever.

With a sense of consolation, the entire world—except for the fanatics of vengeance—looks upon this act, which awakens in the minds of all ideas that too many had believed abandoned in some corner of the past. And thinkers will have reflected upon how much the natural development of events can wrest even from the most selfish acts committed by humankind.

Four hundred years ago, Europe's thirst for wealth violently seized the new continent discovered by a visionary. The most dreadful tyranny destroyed an entire race within a few decades. Over the ruins of an ancient and precious civilization spread the furious labor of profit-seekers from all corners of the world. We laughed at the literature and science, at the philosophy and law of the empire of iron, oil, and pork fat.

Yet every human labor produces, alongside its material outcome, something else as well: a moral product (May 1916).

### **Has America's time come?**

There are people who cannot wait. For them, America's declaration meant the immediate, spectacular, and decisive fulfillment of all that we can only dream of. The millions of the great Republic would have risen as one, animated by hatred against Prussian tyranny and the criminal infamy of submarine warfare, to hurl themselves onto the battlefields of Europe, where Victory would have awaited them from the very moment of their appearance. Edison's genius would instantly have created new means of combat before which German technology—obsolete—would have been forced to lower its flag. And afterward, once the American, the great craftsman of the world, the tireless inventor, had fully expended the measure of his powers, what would remain if not the banquet of victory, at which it would be wise for each of us to reserve the best possible seat, preferably without payment?

How could that world have judged otherwise, with the same light-minded thinking that once expected the end of the world war from the appearance of the Romanian infantryman on the Carpathian ridges, without foreseeing the trials and dreadful sufferings through which we would have to pass before paying even the contribution demanded in exchange for recognition of our rights, so that Romania—so long desired—might be created upon their foundation?

And because America delays, many have already forgotten the acclamations that accompanied its declaration of war some two months earlier. Some would even be inclined to side with the Germans, who shrugged with near contempt at the news that, alongside enemies armed to the teeth and trained through the most costly experience in the newest methods of warfare, there would join the English-speaking Republic of all nations, with all their divergent sentiments and tendencies—one that would require so much time merely to prepare itself, even in artillery, aviation, and submarines, that by then the war would surely be over (June 1917).

### **The Mission of America**

American envoys have visited us—envoys we never expected to see among us—envoys in uniform, hands on their swords, ready for battle, assuring us that they would stand with us "to the very end," granting every people its elementary right to freedom. These are men who believe in this right, and who—unlike others who also profess belief—turn belief into action, and whose action signifies inevitable, unwavering victory.

Listening to those few firm words spoken somewhat at a distance, the very role of America became clearer to me than ever.

No human soul, wherever it may be, is alien to the thirst and need for freedom. Even the stranglers in Berlin speak at least of the freedom to expand, and there is a kind of brutal sincerity in this narrow and aggressive conception of liberty. Countless immortal hymns have been sung to freedom, and so much blood—whose fruits we still reap today—has been shed for it. Yet until the creation and consolidation of America, there had been no political society founded by people who, at the far end of the world, across the waters of the ocean, sought land on which to establish a homeland that was not a conquest of freedom, nor even a foundation of it, but freedom itself.

Yes, everything that can be seen there—from that immense farmland, which without such an addition would have remained forest, from those cities which only through such influence replaced Indian villages and empty clearings, to all that joyful labor, vigorous thought, and generous sentiment produced by the same free spirit—everything is the embodiment, in enduring and beautiful forms, of Liberty itself.

America is no older than Liberty. It arose solely to give Liberty form among states with different origins and tendencies. Everything that followed—the unparalleled flourishing of human labor, the immense material prosperity, the satisfaction accompanying earnings gained through toil—all of this arose naturally. Mills give pleasure and yield sustenance for humankind, yet they did

not bloom for pleasure nor bear fruit for profit. Their mission lies within themselves. There must be flowers in the world—and there are. There must be freedom in human life; and however much merchandise may be produced and sold because of it, Washington, Franklin, and Abraham Lincoln did not live for merchandise, but because freedom must exist in human life (June 1917).

**America—an "Illusion"?**

Those who wish to "finish more quickly," merely to recover their former comfort in some homeland—regardless of its future or of how much honor it might receive, and from whom—habitually speak with great contempt of what America can do, and especially of what it wishes to do, of what it truly intends to give to a cause that is still our own.

In their judgment, the prolonged delays—months upon months, nine months in all—of the powerful Republic could be likened to the delays of Japan, shrouded in such secrecy and capable of so many interpretations. The United States, they say, would endlessly exhort others, deliver captivating speeches of the noblest philosophy, present humanity with an ideal it would never attain, since it was never destined to do so. They would manufacture tirelessly with whatever raw materials they possess, with all available labor, with the full energy of the industrious American soul; they would circulate capital accumulated through immense economic activity, lending to everyone as much as desired, as much as requested, as much as deemed necessary. But beyond these rhetorical exhortations, these industrial aids, this support of gold, these "practical men" would not wish to go.

America's citizens—of so many races, of so many distinct psychologies—possess idealism enough, for they truly need a great deal of it in order to live and work together, when so many immediate realities, memories, and habits separate them. Their labor itself differs from European labor, one of them recently remarked, in that the worker is not mechanized, reduced to the role of an inanimate tool of production; rather, at every moment something spiritual, personal, and ardent sustains even the humblest auxiliary of this immense industry: the thought that he can rise, that he can conquer and prevail through the all-conquering power of the energy he expends and the initiative he proves capable of. And what is this belief in the ultimate result of every honest labor, of every active intelligence, if not, on the one hand, the finest creed of idealism, and on the other, the proof of the most essential virtue of a soldier?

Can it then be admitted that America would allow Germany to triumph, drawing to itself what remains of the wealth of nations that would thus never be able to repay their debts to their lender of unprecedented sums?

I truly do not know what powers of calculation those attribute to themselves who believe that the world's most astute calculators could commit such crude errors.

No! America is engaged in the war with all that it has, all that it can, all that it wills. It is the surest guarantee of the efforts it owes to the cause and to itself. And the fact that it does not act as though embarking on an adventure promises precisely the magnitude of the blow it will strike at the moment—now approaching—when the forces it is accumulating are unleashed (December 1917).

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### **The Memory of Washington**

Telegrams report that Washington's birthday, a national holiday in the United States, was celebrated in Paris with a special ceremony, during which a speech was delivered by Mr. Pichon, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic, praising the deed accomplished nearly one hundred and fifty years ago by the first president America ever had.

It is natural that such importance should today be attached to a day which otherwise would have passed unnoticed anywhere except in America itself. The immediate intervention of the troops that the United States is preparing for the Entente has become increasingly necessary, and the world asks itself whether this intervention will go beyond the task of a strengthened defense and finally take the form of the victorious offensive so painfully awaited by all those who still believe in justice—if only because justice is the permanent necessity of things, whereas injustice has never been more than an accidental and transient disturbance of them.

We do not know how many Americans are at present on French soil, but their cooperation—although the Germans have even displayed in illustrated newspapers groups of prisoners taken from among them—has not so far had any particular importance; in any case, it has not yet been that of an army which, by its own organization, would impart its distinct character to the Great War. Somewhat less is said—perhaps only because of our scarcity of information—about those vast technical preparations that once inspired such great hopes, and for a date earlier than the spring of 1918, which for Westerners is already considered near, as we are approaching March. The

Germans, for their part, believe they can speak of shortcomings in this preparation and of appeals allegedly made—and still being made—by the Americans to their European Allies.

By nothing does America indicate any doubt as to the possibility of fulfilling the great mission it has reserved for itself and for the successful completion of which it is gathering and disciplining all its forces.

This confidence is sustained, no doubt, by the awareness of the immense powers latent within it and by the sight of the gigantic movement set in motion a year ago, into which all national life has been drawn—life previously absorbed in the frenzy of material gain. But it is sustained above all by the very example of its foundation and development: its uncertain and modest beginnings and its magnificent growth up to the present day, when, in the name of the sacred principles of its founding, the great Republic of the New World feels called upon to give humanity its future laws.

The very circumstances of Washington's deed—he who is now celebrated in Paris as a liberating hero, comparable to another simple and humble figure, so weak and yet victorious, Joan of Arc—testify not only to the possibility of such a victory of moral force, but to its necessity, which nothing can prevent.

Confronted with the powerful England of the eighteenth century, which had come to determine European politics in its entirety, serving the economic expansion of its nascent factories; confronted with that proud England which held the entire Germanic world in its power and would defy Napoleon until bringing the colossus to his knees—there stood only a few distant, poor, unknown provinces, without support, seemingly destined to eternal exploitation by the Metropolis, which thought of them solely in these terms, sending them ships laden with Indian tea and collectors of illegal taxes.

In their revolt against this perpetual exaction—without even considering the equal human quality of those from whom profit was extracted—who was there to know them, to value them, and to be ready to support these people, a mixture of Englishmen, peaceful Dutchmen, and a few Frenchmen, who had embarked upon a rebellion without any prospects according to the political calculators and prophets of the time? What could be expected of this association, which one historian has called a "strange mixture of fugitives, speculators, enthusiasts, bandits, and aristocrats," united only by labor side by side? Barely a million people against a great kingdom possessing an immense colonial empire and inexhaustible financial reserves.

At their head stood a man who, until the age of forty, had meant nothing.

Of modest origin, educated as circumstances allowed: no classical foundation, no foreign languages, no literature, no sciences—only English grammar and orthography, and some mathematics. A limited role in frontier conflicts with the neighboring French. Colonel of irregular troops, with whom some easy successes were obtained. Nothing brilliant about him: no promise in speech, in gaze, or in gesture. At the moment of the "Declaration of Rights," he spoke in the name of unorganized territories, in the name of men who possessed only one thing—but fully so—the consciousness that they were men. As for leadership, the decision in case of defeat was "withdrawal into the Allegheny Mountains"—death by starvation.

And when Americans see what emerged from the desperate efforts of those people under his leadership, do they not have the right—one hundred million tireless workers for culture in the name of liberty—to extend to the entire world a new "Declaration of Rights"?

And are we not permitted—even at a moment when the triumph of German organization resounds most loudly—to believe that these "rights" will nevertheless prevail, and to salute the noble and dignified figure of Washington, who was neither an emperor nor a great politician, but merely a general? (February 1918)

### **The Formation of a Spirit**

#### How Today's America Came into Being

I have previously shown what historical and military traditions the citizens of the United States bring into this struggle, in which, from the very first trial, they proved themselves worthy both of the bravery of friends and of the methodical tenacity of enemies.

Half a century ago, they experienced at home a war of secession. The North rose against the South in the power of the principle of liberty, which demands that one human being shall not enslave another, shall not treat him as a mere beast of labor and sustenance. The South rose in retaliation against the North not only because, according to the conception of its people, "economic necessities" demanded that thousands of Black people perform plantation labor from which whites recoiled, but also because, to the principle of liberty invoked by their adversary brothers, they believed they could oppose another principle of liberty: that of individual states, which—even within the Union—are entitled to do as they wish at home, according to their own needs and ideas.

And today, what do the descendants of those of 1863 see—sometimes encouraged at their departure by the last representatives of the generation that fought then and does not regret it even now—if not yet another war of secession, this time in Europe? Once again, it is a question of the right to liberty of every human being, of the moral impossibility of sacrificing it to any economic consideration, and, on the opposing side, of the right of each nation to conduct its life—even against its neighbors—according to necessities others do not understand, because they lack both those necessities and the national temperament from which they arise.

Complete equality; the ceremonial gestures of Europe are unknown. People are courteous and ready to oblige, but unwilling to waste time on foolish formalities. At President Lincoln's palace there is neither doorkeeper nor lackeys. The Secretary of State, the most powerful man in the Republic, comes in his working clothes to receive a prince and speaks with him as freely as with any other notable person. The President himself, the great Abraham Lincoln—an awkward giant—ignores the most elementary rules of *savoir-vivre* according to our centuries-old etiquette. Straight to the point, and quickly, for time is precious.

American society continually evolves in this direction. The conservative Tories gave way after Washington to Jefferson's Whigs—liberal and bourgeois; these in turn to Jackson's Democrats; and they themselves were defeated in the most recent elections by Lincoln's Republicans.

The war is not felt, but it is fought—unlike in other countries where it is felt but not fought. The country works cheerfully, on both sides. Victory and defeat do not decide everything: an army of defeated fugitives is received in triumph, with flowers, in Washington. But the decision is taken. In vain are foreigners told that the North no longer wishes to hear of the slave question, "entirely artificial." It is a national decision, and it will be carried through.

When merchants come in delegation to Lincoln to tell him that the country is being economically ruined, he shakes their hands affectionately, asks after their health, and personally escorts them to the door—which he then closes. Perhaps rumors about "indifference" toward principles may be partly true; but the essential matter is different: something has begun, and whether on the battlefield, in the factory, in the fields, or in the mines, it must be carried through to the end. And it must be carried through by all, shoulder to shoulder, as elsewhere, where only the solidarity of companions in enterprise can bring success (July 1918).

## American Conceptions

President Wilson put an end—more swiftly than an impatient world had expected—to the doubt weighing upon his determination. In the calmest manner, disdaining rhetoric and without saying a word about what the United States represents in the great conflict, about the decisive contribution of American armies or the victories won with their help, he set forth—before offering his allies a mediation that was requested of him, without conditions—the following points, arranged in logical order:

First, in whose name does the new Chancellor speak? That is, does he speak in the name of a new direction now emerging from the democratic states he claims to represent, in the name of a parliamentary regime whose installation is announced even in that Germany still so deeply marked by its Prussian past? Or does he speak in the name of others: those who began and waged the war, the former officialdom from top to bottom; those who, until the completion of Prussian electoral reform, exercised such powerful influence over the political life of the most important state of the confederation; those political thinkers who, with a Count Westarp, even today refuse to abandon an ideal of universal domination inherited directly from the Roman Empire of German nation and global mission, because it was "Roman"? Does he speak in the name of the German people in all their constituted classes? And, clearly, does he possess the necessary power to speak in the name of all?

Second, Wilson asks—through his Secretary of State, Lansing, to whom peace offers from the German-Austrian-Turkish side were also addressed—whether American principles, sufficiently clear, are accepted as a basis in the sense that only details would remain to be discussed, or in another, unacceptable sense, namely that from a starting point negotiations could begin to reduce or transform them.

Third, he rightly asks whether he could intervene with the Allies, amid the rapid advance of their troops, to set the tone for the opening of negotiations at a moment when foreign armies are still present on their territories.

We know Germany's response, which we shall summarize below. For the moment, let us consider the American note alone.

In both style and guiding ideas, it is foreign to all the convolutions of old European diplomacy, to which so many misfortunes are owed. It also has nothing in common with the declarations of the new Bolshevik Russian regime, in which sound ideas coexist with impossible postulates added by entirely

undisciplined minds. Not to mention the very significant fact that, in one sense or another, neither Europe's old-school "bourgeois" diplomats nor the gun-wielding destroyers of the "bourgeoisie" offer guarantees for declarations whose meaning circumstances subsequently alter.

In the American note, however, there is absolute frankness, a sincerity evident in every line, and, alongside this element of radiant moral truth, the guarantee of a great nation capable of acting.

From how many waves of emigration this America of the United States has been formed, with all the peoples it contains—peoples who, when fundamental purposes are at stake, when the supreme mission and moral legitimacy of their new homeland are concerned, feel themselves in so admirable a manner a single being in ideal, determination, and struggle!

As always happens in any normal formation of a society, those who arrived later may bring energy, ingenuity, diligence, a desire for gain, love of material goods, and pride in having acquired them and readiness to increase them. But from the first founders alone comes the dominant principle, which sweeps aside all interests piled upon it; and in moments when a people measures itself, the creative principle appears and acts alone.

This America was found two hundred years ago as a place of fraternal labor by the most fanatical believers in Christian ideas, by those most devoted to their truth, by those least able to endure political tyrannies against free thought and dynastic violations of eternal right. For a long time, the new society concerned itself only with its consolidation, enrichment, and empowerment. It could be believed—and most of us believed it—that this was all it wished to do and that this alone justified its place in the world.

But when foundations have been laid so deeply for so great a power, capable of changing the very course of civilization, *it now rises to remind—and to impose where necessary—the faith for which the old English Puritans left their homeland, so that beyond the Ocean they might profess their unshakable belief in superior moral truths.*

No one has the right to dispose of peoples, no one has the right to take away their land – these are the two great things that America has said since the beginning of the war and that it repeats so resolutely today.

And in Wilson's declarations let no one see a foreign voice: it is that of the best of old Europe heard from the mouths of their powerful descendants – (October 1918).

## ‡ Theodore Roosevelt

America has suffered a great loss, which it now shares with all of humanity. One of the greatest energies the world had has died out, and once again human consciousness can ask itself why such great powers are left to the earth for such a short time.

A man who has put himself through the harsh school of life, he has gone through it all without false shame or false pride, thus becoming a man capable of measuring himself at any time, in anything, with another man.

And, as soon as this invincible force was created that sought the fight to bring any adversary to its knees, fortunately it was devoted only to the noblest purposes.

This was seen in the moment that decided how future centuries would live. If America went ahead, it is also because Roosevelt wanted it that way.

And today, at the moment of victory, which must surround the remains of the triumphant, all the colors of the flags sprinkled with their redeeming blood seem to mingle – (December 1918).

### **The Generous Hand of America**

In this time, the Samaritan work, which is urgently and desperately demanded by the unheard-of misery of the poor population of the forgotten population of the villages, undermined by diseases that no longer fit in the cemeteries and there are no more priests, free from the plague, to make the church forms, is done by foreigners, coming from very far away, who have here neither the graves of their ancestors, nor their ancestral home, nor their property, nor the places of their culture, nor relatives, nor friends and who are attracted by an immense compassion for people, a holy Christian feeling, of which we, in our home, for our brothers, in view of our future, are not capable.

Without any payment, from place to place, seeking misery in the very place where it yearns and lies, Americans, men and women, people who have a purpose in their homeland, slip through the midst of anarchy, social debauchery, insolent luxury and unbearable noise to the place of pain where the noblest duty that a human heart can recognize and impose on itself calls them.

An immense acclamation should rise in gratitude for this great, merciful America, which, if it does not give us all that is demanded in terms of territory

at public meetings, and is demanded justly, if not with all the propriety required, gives us something more precious than that: human power, without which everything would collapse in the destruction of the race itself – (June 1919).

### **The Dismemberment of the United States**

An extremely serious event occurred in Washington a few days ago. The United States, which from the beginning had been considered, in its special situation and with the extraordinary, endless means at its disposal, to be the factor that would decide the great war, declares, for the time being, only in the form of a manifestation of opposition, that it is right to break away from a partnership, established, in truth, by a diplomatic act, but in which they claim that certain guiding principles were not respected.

This is the opinion of Lodge and other members of the American Senate, left aside, ignored, and who now, when the result achieved in Europe by President Wilson and the young men with whom he surrounded himself is brought forward, refuse to accept, not because the clauses of the treaties just concluded would affect specifically American interests, but because of something that seems to them more important and more serious: because they do not recognize in these acts of state the American spirit.

This spirit was formed slowly from the very conditions in which the Republic of the United States was formed and developed, from the liberal idealism that is the dominant note of a Washington, a Jefferson, an Abraham Lincoln. It was formed from the powerful mixture of any political thought there as a certain Christian spirit, which is the protests of individual conscience, of the reserve of one's own opinion. It was formed from the powerful reality of an economic life in which, despite all the languages that are spoken, in the immense American workshop there is only one language: that of work.

Thus, the Americans who remain Americans do not accept historical rights, they do not abide by pacts concluded without their knowledge and before their participation, they do not admit geographical necessities, natural borders, economic solidarities (emphasis added). With great difficulty they come to understand what national law can mean for a people who have remained at their hearth, rooted in their furrows, gathered around their altars. The plebiscite would seem to them the only means of recognition, although their practical sense has sufficiently shown them the value of plebiscites, both spontaneous ones and, above all, prepared and rigged ones.

Thus economic reasons will bring back America that flees for political reasons. But until then – and, in any case, the old illusions of close collaboration, based on an understanding of souls, on the unison of consciences, will not return – Europe, deprived of the political competition of America, which saved it from the German danger, has a duty: to organize itself for a just peace and for a lasting peace.

If diplomats and politicians do not know how to give it, well let others impose it – (December 1919).

### **Without America**

The American delegates to the Peace Conference have departed. Their farewell missive is very beautiful, full of noble ideas and even tender passages in form; it tends to show that nothing has changed in the ties, but especially in the former feelings towards the European Allies, that no present difficulties, no party intrigues in the United States itself will ever be able to make one forget the common efforts, the sacrifices mixed in the same devoted enthusiasm and the great work accomplished for the benefit of the peoples chained or torn apart and who, today, can finally live.

However, it is no less true that, in view of the power of the opponents of the policy of intervention in Europe, who dominate the Senate in Washington, as well as in view of the physical condition of the man who destroyed himself in the fight for his conceptions, some of which were so beneficent and capable of preserving his name among the most glorious in universal history, there is little hope that we could return to what was before things like those of Fiume, of Dalmatia, and before overwork crushed the energetic president of the American Republic.

And then, in the most natural way, the question arises: what is possible without America? Contemporary history shows, however, in the Crimean War, waged against a Russia united with Prussia and assured by Austrian neutrality, what the Western Powers were able to do, even at a time when the place of today's great Italy was occupied by the small Piedmont of Cavour.

The same interests, the same military systems will be strengthened by the same political conceptions.

And if America will support them only when they are hers, she will not always be absent and, in any case, will not sit next to the losers of 1918 – (December 1919).

## **America, the conscience of the whole world**

One by one, in the history of the world, special nations have embraced within themselves the conscience of the world about the rights and duties of each country and each people. They have not always been the greatest nations, but those who have known how to separate in their judgment their own interests from the interests of humanity and to think in great moments only of the latter.

Today, after the eyes of men have looked elsewhere to see how each one presents itself in an impartial and unerring calculation, they are aiming at America, the country where you, brothers, are and are honestly receiving the reward of your honest labors. Of course, the United States of America also had days when it worked for goals that were only its own, and then, instead of judging others, it was judged by others.

Yesterday, however, the American participation in the great war started from the purest motives; the earth should not belong to one person alone who should hold others **under the bloody heel of his unjust victory** (emphasis added). And, at the hour when the hope of the strongest in faith began to waver, world freedom was saved by the American soldier – what shall I say? – the American citizen, *because the fighter was not a fabrication of the barracks, but a free man facing death so that other free men would not become slaves.*

After the victory, everyone took what was theirs. The United States wanted nothing, asked for nothing, received nothing.

The Washington Conference is viewed by the peoples who, even if they won, suffer like the defeated, as Christendom once viewed the ecumenical councils from which the will of God was to be chosen. Will a new Creed emerge from there? We await it – (January 1922).

## **A visit from the Americans**

After I don't know what exhortations from the Romanian Minister of Finance, several envoys of the American capitalists are in the country as I write these lines.

It is a more sensible thing than all the written questions, all the dishonest and irresponsible newspaper clippings, all the rummaging around by people who have only an interest in lowering us in the eyes of everyone.

As it is, with how many shortcomings it endures, with how many sins it suffers, Romania deserves to be known. And it is a duty not to condemn it until you have investigated it yourself. I don't know where the minister's agents are taking them. Certainly **to our riches, which are great and unsearched**. This is so that those capitalists understand that money invested in such a country is not lost (emphasis added).

But it would be a shame if they were not shown something else.

Here there are not only gold mines, oil wells, mineral deposits, methane gas, fertile fields and endless forests; there are also people.

Visitors should get to know these people. Namely the many and good ones, who often have neither name nor position, but who hold on their shoulders everything that is within the borders of this country. From their sight alone, Americans will be able to convince themselves that, whatever the government, this is a country of work and, at the same time, at a time when so many nations are going crazy every day, a country of wisdom.

And there can be no better guarantee for an investment of capital than this – (September 1923).

## **Wilson**

The man has died through whose ideas – entered the circle of vision of diplomats at the end of the war, imposed by the value of American intervention and maintained as an unwavering energy – we live today within the borders of the almost complete national State, founded on the very will of the great majority of its inhabitants (emphasis added).

And, if his ideas had been sincerely adopted to the end, today the League of Nations would not too often be reduced to expressing desires, but in its connection, accepted with true conviction, would be resolved all the problems still open and which will probably remain so until new bloodshed.

He who succeeded in establishing such a blessed reality and in beginning the fulfillment of an even more daring program, played such a role, unique in the history of mankind, through two circumstances that cannot be sufficiently appreciated. He spoke on behalf of a country as large as the world, which was in full agreement, at least as regards the sacred principle of the liberation of peoples through their right to self-determination, with its official leader.

Then to establish, after the satisfaction of those who are in the council that he wanted and knew why he wanted it, and those of the worker who works

at what he chose and knowing that he helps something other than the often anonymous capitalist's gain, to place the social problem as well as the political one on the basis of human conscience, this would crown Wilson's work.

Whoever will do it someday, so long after the death of the initiator, will not forget all that is due to him – (February 1924).

### **An American Disillusion?**

Among those who relied on the technical omnipotence of the United States for the joint struggle against German hegemony in Europe and beyond Europe, a feeling resembling disillusion arose after the vote of the House in Washington.

Thus, hopes for the supply of munitions, at least from across the Ocean, proved vain. And for reasons of popularity, did the American President retreat from his decisions?

Those who judge in this manner fail to understand sufficiently either the position of the House in relation to the Senate, or the role of a president who is too easily placed, in terms of initiative, on the same level as the presidents of the French Republic or the Swiss Confederation. Above all, however, **they do not understand what the will of the American people itself means** (emphasis in the original).

This will appears unexpectedly and spontaneously. It transcends legal situations and even bonds of race, as was seen during the Great War, when German Americans were called upon to fight against Germany. In the United States there are millions of honest, good, and just people who judge the justice of international acts. And whoever fights on behalf of that justice—in which a part of Europe openly declares it no longer believes—will certainly have them on his side (August 1929).

### **What America Is**

America, say the books of superficial European writers eager for effect, is an immense chaos of savage labor from which emerge only goods—material products and nothing but material products.

Thus European "idealism" may look with contempt upon the Great Worker. This is a profound error. A few days suffice to realize that it is something else. It is, first of all, anything one wishes: from rural idyll to the roar of streets where buildings rise sixty stories high—yet one does not feel them

unless one looks at them, and when one does, they appear so well supported that they inspire no fear. It is anything one wishes, but governed by a single system.

Labor perfectly calculated, avoiding everything that in our societies amounts to effort without result and to dissatisfaction.

And in order to preserve this admirable rhythm, an unparalleled moral force is required (14 February 1930).

### **American Revolutions**

For some time, much has been said about the revolution in the small state with a great economic mission: Panama.

And many may have believed that the revolution in Panama was the affair of the people of Panama, concerning matters that pertain solely to Panama.

In reality, it is something else.

Even the most peaceful power in the world cannot refrain from gaining ground wherever its vitality—naturally expansive—can extend. Nowhere, however, is vitality stronger or more urgent than in the great republic of North America.

The boundary of the United States is one thing; the boundary of North American industry, commerce, and finance is another. It extends far beyond, and no small neighboring political entity can escape their influence. Therefore, neighbors must be what suits these overwhelming economic interests.

And when conditions there are not as they should be—then people make a revolution, for others (17 February 1931).

### **George Washington**

#### ***Radio Address Delivered on the Occasion of His Commemoration***

There are very few historical figures before whom all humanity bows without reservation.

Among them, George Washington occupies a foremost place.

He lived at a time when, for all, the hero was the ancient citizen of old Hellas or of ancient Rome. The figure to be imitated was drawn from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. There, human pride, the impulse to struggle against men and circumstances, dignity in all situations, and unrestrained will were presented in the rhetorical form given by the teacher from Chaeronea: orators with noble

phrases on their lips, living statues frozen in white marble, creators of illusions and seekers of effect. Many sought and succeeded in being such figures. George Washington was not—and did not wish to be—such a man. Every attempt to place him on display failed; every appeal to awaken ambition in him proved futile. He remained simple in the face of glorification and calm in the face of attacks that scarcely dared to be directed against him.

He was a nobleman without prejudice, a farmer without greed, a fighter without cruelty, a popular man without demagoguery. Through all circumstances, he carried the same spirit, unchanged in its absolute purity.

His life thus possessed perfect unity. Just as his modest house—whose threshold is today crossed with religious reverence by pilgrims from all over the world—remained the same, so too did his life remain one of apostolic moderation, without the ostentation of a public ascetic. His ambition remained the same, the sole ambition: to be a good and complete man among men whom he loved equally and valued only according to their deeds.

He did not create a tradition; he left a model. Traditions may be corrupted by subsequent interests and by passions that assail them. Models, however, remain intact.

Today, when democracy tends to become standardized and anonymous, the revival of a memory such as that of George Washington draws public opinion back toward those lofty heights where heroes stand, unmoved by the winds of time.

Everything in America that is idealism and virtue derives first and foremost from him.

For Romanian youth, he may be presented as the most perfect image of the human being and the citizen (March 1932).

### **America and Europe**

The candidate in the presidential elections—again a candidate, having tried his fortune some years earlier—Mr. Al Smith declared that America has the duty to assist Europe with its financial resources, Europe from which both people and ideas departed to found the New World, splendid in its technology and prosperous even in moments of crisis, such as those from which few countries on our continent are spared.

At the same time, the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States travels to Paris to discuss European difficulties.

Is this to be a beginning—a fortunate beginning—of a change in the attitude of America's political and financial circles?

It may be determined by the idealism that lies at the depth of the American soul, but also by the consciousness—finally emerging—that although an immense ocean lies between them, the same civilization exists on both shores of the Atlantic, and that however brilliant America's schools, museums, and libraries may be, certain ideas from Europe are nevertheless needed from time to time.

And these ideas cannot exist if we all sink into misery, the mother of ignorance (19 April 1932).

### **The American School From the Lectures of Prof. N. Iorga at the University**

The American school corresponds not to a model borrowed from abroad and servilely adopted without discernment, but to the needs—constantly examined and taken into account—of an entire society.

To understand it, one must therefore follow the entire development of that society.

Groups of scattered colonists arrive on the American shore: some seeking refuge from the threats of an established religion in England, others benefiting from territorial privileges granted to them by the English king as leading nobles. There are significant differences between what each group finds in these distant lands; yet initially there can be no question of cities, nor even of villages in the European sense, and still less in our Romanian sense. They are dispersed farmers, with their homes and holdings spread over vast territories.

In this phase, no form of education other than domestic, patriarchal instruction—from parents to children—can be envisaged.

From time immemorial, very small and sparsely populated markets were founded, up to the time of Franklin, when the war of development of these English colonies began. In these modest centers, some of which date back to the beginning of the 17th century, elementary schools similar to those in the old homeland, England, were founded, the so-called "grammar schools".

In them, of course, great emphasis was placed on matters related to faith, to which these wanderers of Puritanism continued to hold so dear. If higher knowledge was a question, individuals founded establishments of a higher character, the "Academies" of the Latin language.

Only after the War of Independence and after political stabilization did the Americans think of a reorganization of their education and proceeded, in 1821, to the foundation, in Boston, of a "High School".

**The program is eminently practical:** "that the first habits of industry and perseverance, which are essential to lead to a future life of virtue as usefulness..., suitable for setting in motion the powers of life, to prepare the youth to cover with usefulness and dignity many of these societies, both public and private, into which he may be placed...: an education which will make him fit for active life and serve as a foundation for distinguishing himself in his profession, whether merchant or mechanical (industrial)".

This being the aim, it is understood that in the second, secondary education, nothing will come of the ruthless formalistic rigidity of the corresponding establishments in Europe. Whatever individuality can manifest itself, whatever attempt can be made, however daring.

The principles that dominate are two. On the one hand, especially since the beginning of the great European immigration and the beginning of an immense industrial activity, the creation of the American citizen, whatever his national origins, the famous melting-pot, the "melting pot" of ethnic differences. On the other hand, the incitement to the free manifestation of the means given by nature, not without allowing the development of individual qualities.

So the basis is on the English language, on mathematics, on the history of the United States, on the sciences. Of these subjects, the universities, however varied their composition, demand a quantity of studies in a secondary education supported by 45 minutes, which give thirty-six weeks per year and are integrated into "units", of which four are required per year, namely: three of English, two of mathematics, history, sciences. The rest of the subjects of study, including Latin, Greek, rhetoric, philosophy – universities require another six years – are chosen by the schoolchildren themselves, who also have the opportunity to enter special classes, to take orientation research courses, which last six weeks, to enroll in optional courses, to conclude "contracts" of studies.

For a while, the eight-grade primary school gives up two years to the "High School," which thus becomes the gymnasium, as I understood it in my recent reform. But this sometimes gives, as in California, also two years of what is now the "course of the oldest (Junior High School)" in order to transform itself into a preparation for the University. Junior College, which becomes what in the same reform I understood as the high school, a function it fulfills together with the "College" – (May 6, 1933).

## **America and the Parables It Offers Us**

### **From the lessons of Prof. N. Iorga at the Academy of Commerce**

The large part that both Americas have has not yet been integrated into universal history. A few pages due mainly to the editors' desire to catch as many buyers, North and South Americans, cannot be considered as honestly beginning this operation, so necessary to understand the general course and the current common state of nations and states.

**Americans are sufficient unto themselves.** They do not feel the need to know or to present the history of other continents, or to have their broad map set against a universal background. Europeans, for their part—who, in general, do not harbor feelings of hatred or contempt—do not find in American history what is familiar to them in their own continental homelands: wars, peace treaties altering borders defended with the utmost tenacity to the very end, victorious generals, triumphal arches; sovereigns endowed with genuine biographies; a diplomacy in constant activity. Nor are they drawn to cultural developments that do not resemble their own.

In fact, North America, after clarifying its identity only after 1820—Europe having remained closed to it during the era of the Revolution and of Napoleon—sought to appropriate European civilization in the Romantic period. Thus Longfellow became a disciple of German historical and political Romanticism, attempting to create American poems of the same type, such as *The Song of Hiawatha*. Washington Irving, for his part, developed an interest in the Moors of Granada, in Muhammad, and in Columbus, allowing his American irony free rein only in the famous *Sketch Book*. It was scarcely Emerson who, in accordance with the noble, daring religious idealism of America, succeeded in giving, through his *Poems* as well as *Representative Men* and *The Conduct of Life*, a tone that was truly local, genuinely *national*.

Moreover, America exists economically only after the Congress of Vienna. It was then that problems of economic and financial organization, long left unresolved, were finally addressed; then that a form of production capable of confronting and risking everything began; then that English-speaking America appeared on the market of the entire world, which it would later attempt to dominate. It was also then that it completed its map, acquiring, in addition to the old nucleus along the Atlantic coast: Alaska from Russia; California, New Mexico, and Texas from Mexico; vast Louisiana from

Napoleon I; and Florida from the Spaniards—all without bloodshed, solely through careful financial negotiations.

Yet even this English-speaking America now stood before a new and exceedingly difficult question. In reality, within the borders of the Confederation there was not a single country, but two: the North, composed of businessmen and emerging industrialists, continuously nourished by increasing immigration of elements released by Europe's long peace, and thus influenced by all contemporary European tendencies and dominated by the same biblical religiosity previously noted; and the South, composed of cotton planters, employing enslaved Africans inherited from the French and Spanish for a vast and extractive agrarian economy, over which no guiding idea presided and against which no ideal arose. It would require the long and destructive War of Secession between these two worlds for the entire North American continent to be animated by the spirit of Boston (7 May 1933).

### **American Education**

#### **From the lessons of Prof. N. Iorga at the University**

The English higher school was first founded by private founders, like Harvard in 1636, according to the English model, with some modifications imposed by the needs arising from the new environment.

Indeed, the English College, which was borrowed by the colonists, is the form in which one lives at the University, which is in fact nothing more than the sum of several colleges erected one next to the other. Its main purpose is to maintain the supremacy of a proud aristocracy, to cultivate the traditions of an education with a classical, Latin and Greek base, and to give the state a number of men of brilliant qualities, who can uphold its dignity.

The Americans, however, did not have such strong traditions of their own, they were not so closely linked to the culture of the Renaissance and, especially, they could not have as their purpose the formation of such a class, their purpose being that of farmers, industrialists, future merchants and financiers, no matter how great the role played in the revolution by a country gentleman like George Washington. However, as a school of literary subjects, primarily classical, they founded those colleges, in which even today, in addition to English, the fundamental, and the modern languages most useful to them, such as French, German and, in the Southern states, Spanish, at least the cult of the Latin language is preserved.

This is how things went in American higher education until that era, between 1820 and 1840, when young people who had left the New Continent came into close contact, eager to reach the same level, with the culture of romantic Europe. It is the time when Longfellow receives the influence of German lyricism, when historical and picturesque subjects, like Parisian blag, captivate Washington Irving, and from German philosophy Emerson draws the urge towards his high mysticism.

Then, in 1847, the University of Michigan was founded, with scientific goals that had never been pursued before, and others followed, until almost every state had its own university foundation, their number soon rising to about fifty. The greatest difficulty was to find the possibility of collaboration between this imported university and the old colleges, which, as private foundations, could not be abolished, as in our country the state is the master to transform all education as it wants, from one end to the other.

With or without that Junior College, still sporadic, the college took the place of a preparation, which was nevertheless seen as necessary for abstract university studies, of an increasingly pronounced scientific character for those who wanted to go all the way, many who needed only a university atmosphere, stopping after the first semesters. The modern languages mentioned above were introduced into the program, not so much from the point of view of philological research, but so that they could be written and spoken in everyday life, then art, pedagogy – but teachers usually come from four-year normal schools, which one enters only with a high school certificate – and, as an annex, psychology, then abstract sciences, natural sciences, physics and chemistry, social sciences (political economy, sociology and “business science”). With fifteen lessons per week, eight full semesters had to be completed, in thirty-six weeks per year, so that, having the certificate of the prescribed gymnastics lessons, one could reach the baccalaureate.

For some time now, the student – because the young man from college is no longer considered a student, and upon graduation he can get a chair in secondary education – can choose a professor (major), to whom he can dedicate most of the hours he is required to, with a few remaining at his disposal according to his inclination and taste. After four years, the baccalaureate is taken and the university studies proper are started, carried out not only by professors (assistant, associate and permanent), but also by more advanced students, the so-called instructors. Here, one finds not only wonderful libraries, wide and lovingly open, but also student societies and clubs, in which one practices not only sports intended to maintain health and

give a stronger vitality. Sacrifices are made so that a student's thesis, a professor's book, has the richest information: it is an honor for everyone. At the end, there is the "master's degree" and the doctorate.

Today, no one can say that the American university is inferior, in any respect, to the best in Europe<sup>xi</sup> – (May 9, 1933).

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### **A Lesson**

America, the country that sold the largest quantities of grain, has been struck by a devastating drought, beside which the water shortage that alarmed us appears merely a trifle—almost a lesson meant to teach us to rise earlier and attend more diligently to agricultural labor. In certain regions there was no rain at all, and the land has been scorched by a relentless sun. Thereafter came violent winds, overturning everything in their path.

Not only will American grain be absent from markets this year, but such a calamity may also have consequences extending into future years. Thus, the price of our own products, which had fallen so sharply, is now rising, and there are signs that it will continue to rise. If only we had something to sell—given how hesitant and distrustful we have been.

Yet another lesson emerges from this situation. For years, a number of self-satisfied individuals—paper agronomists trained abroad and so-called “economists” of the same sort—have insisted that wheat should not be planted, claiming it is unprofitable. By repeating this claim incessantly, they persuaded the public, and today fallow land stretches freely across the countryside.

But now comes the American disaster, and circumstances change. If only we had produce to sell, as it is said the Hungarians do.

This signifies one thing: do what you know must be done, without heeding facile advice, and in time the moment of reward will follow (*Neamul românesc pentru popor*, 16 June 1934).

### **The American Message**

In Italy, the message of the President of the United States was received with a certain measure of satisfaction. And yet it offered no assurances regarding the supply of oil upon which so much depends—not so much the

operations in Abyssinia, which appear destined to extend beyond all expectations, but rather the normal functioning of domestic life. America wishes to promise nothing.

Moreover, it remains firmly attached to its democratic sentiments and prejudices and feels obliged, even on this occasion, to demonstrate its distaste for the Italian dictatorship—although, at home, every president, and Mr. Roosevelt more than many others, exercises an indisputable form of dictatorship.

Nevertheless, within this message there is something that does not align with the stance of the sanctionist powers in Europe, compelled by their obligations and interests to follow Britain's offensive advance. Italy is not designated an aggressor; instead—astonishing as it may be—Italians are placed on the same level as the grotesque figures from Addis Ababa. At least, unlike others, no distinction is made that grants angelic whiteness to Mr. Haile Selassie while portraying Mr. Mussolini as the darkest villain imaginable.

In the midst of general ingratitude and injustice, Italy must content itself even with this (15 January 1936).

### **American Education**

I have received a notice from an American university which offers—both to us, who need heroism and often do not know where to find it, and to this Europe so profoundly hystericized by ambitions, illusions, and fantasies—a lesson in what the cultivation and formation of heroes ought to mean.

This lofty institution of learning, devoid of deans who listen at doors and rectors who crack the whip, as well as of students who presume to instruct their professors on patriotism and nationhood, is dedicated to a genuine hero: Abraham Lincoln. He was a hero by virtue of having risen from humble origins through labor, earning every step of his life; a hero through absolute selflessness; a hero through his acceptance of all risks when it came to his belief in liberty and human dignity; and finally, a hero through the death he endured.

Yet those bearing moral responsibility within the university wish to transform it into a *panheroion*, a temple of all heroes. They gather images of men from all countries who labored and sacrificed themselves for their own people, with thought for humanity at large—for that great and pure ideal, akin to the divine, which any human being, anywhere, known or unknown, may

embody. Each figure is accompanied by a written thought, expressing what lived in that individual's soul and work.

What would it be if we too were to dedicate our profaned—and now enslaved—universities to such heroism? (14 March 1937).

### **Romanian Achievement in America**

Wherever we are left to our own devices, without state support and without the accursed influence of party politics—whatever name such parties bear or however they disguise themselves, with the ambitions of their leaders—this people of householders creates, builds, and raises institutions. It does so with a modesty and diligence unattainable by undertakings marked by publicity and the interests of a single group.

In the fortunate cases where we are able to demonstrate our true capacities, we seek attachment to what is permanent: the Church, the cultural society, the academy. Thus have the Romanians of America acted—at least those who remain faithful to the old Church.

What Bishop Policarp Morușca has accomplished there is remarkable: a peasant's son from beyond the mountains, closely bound to his people at home and working in accordance with their traditions. In a peasant-like spirit, he conceived the idea of an ancestral estate and built upon it. At the boundary of three states, on the shore of a great lake, rise walls that enclose labor, good cheer, and faith—the great and powerful faith from which the other two spring.

On that distant and foreign soil now stands a citadel—a strong and proud citadel of the nation—and, as in the old Blaj of the other Church, the Bishop resides there, far from the city's clamor. While awaiting his own printing press, calendars are published elsewhere, in which our compatriots find everything that shapes their labor and pride.

It is an example rich in instruction for those who, here in our own country, have yet to understand this secret of success (28 January 1938).

### **The Conversion of the “American Observer”**

Just as the waters of the ocean surge between America—absorbed in its continuous, wealth-generating labor—and our poor Europe, great only in hatreds and passions, the governments of the United States, though decisive in shaping the outcome of the Great War, had displayed and maintained a

policy of detachment, sending merely “observers” to countless fruitless conferences.

Today, this doctrine has been abandoned. Americans now participate in the process unfolding daily, one that threatens a catastrophic outcome. They recall Virgil’s words to Ucalegon: “*Your own interests are at stake when your neighbor’s house is on fire.*” The notion of human solidarity—lost on a Hitler and a Mussolini—imposes itself upon the man in Washington.

He speaks, necessarily, of his democracy. Who could believe that it corresponds to the “popular fronts” of Europe, which represent precisely the rupture of social harmony upon which American labor rests?

At the same time, these declarations reveal a profound hatred of war—both of war as an event, which under present conditions would constitute the crime of a madman, and of war as a means of blackmail. And the blackmailers of war appear to have understood how heavily American public opinion weighs in the balance (15 July 1938).

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## NOTES

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<sup>ii</sup> N. Iorga, *Essai de synthèse de l'histoire de l'humanité*, par... Professeur à l'Université de Bucarest. Agréé à la Sorbonne. Membre de l'Académie Roumaine. Correspondant de l'Institut, I-IV, Librairie Universitaire J. Gamber, Éditeur, Paris, 1926-1928 (X+390+570+528+490 pp.).

<sup>iii</sup> Nicolae Iorga and America. Journalistic milestones (1915-1939), in Constantin Buşe, Constantin Găucan (coord.), Nicolae Iorga 1871-1940. Studies and documents, VIII, University of Bucharest Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, pp. 353-454.

<sup>iv</sup> Cornelia Bodea, "The Old Man of Roumania". N. Iorga seen by American historians, in "Memoirs of the Section of Historical and Archaeological Sciences of the Romanian Academy", XXI, 1996, pp. 71-94; see also – Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, Homage to an American Historian, in "History Files", VI, no. 6, 2001, pp. 55-57.

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<sup>vi</sup> Nicolae Dascălu, **Nicolae Iorga's Visit to the United States of America**, in *Revue roumaine d'histoire*, vol. XXII, no. 2, 1983, pp. 115-127; Gelu Neamțu, **Nicolae Iorga and the Romanians in the United States of America (1917-1918)**, in *Studia Universitatis "Babeș-Bolyai"*. *Historia*, vol. XXXV, no. 2, 1990, pp. 70-77; Petre Țurlea, **Nicolae Iorga and Romanian Americans**, in *Tomis*, vol. IX, no. 8, 2004, pp. 60-62; Victor Crăciun, **Nicolae Iorga in America and on America**, in *The Permanence of Nicolae Iorga. On the Occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the Odious Assassination (27 November 1940) and the 135th Anniversary of His Birth (5 June 1871)*, commemorative volume edited and with an introductory study by Victor Crăciun and Cezar Dobre, with a Foreword by Florin Constantiniu, corresponding member of the Romanian Academy, Cultural League for the Unity of Romanians Everywhere, n.p., Bucharest, 2006, pp. 339-356; Constantin Bușe, **In the Footsteps of N. Iorga in the United States**, in Constantin Bușe and Constantin Găucan (eds.), *Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940). Studies and Documents*, vol. III, University of Bucharest Press, Bucharest, 2007, pp. 59-72; Gheorghe Zbucea, **The American World: a "Precious Experience" in the Life of N. Iorga**, in *Ibidem*, pp. 593-601.

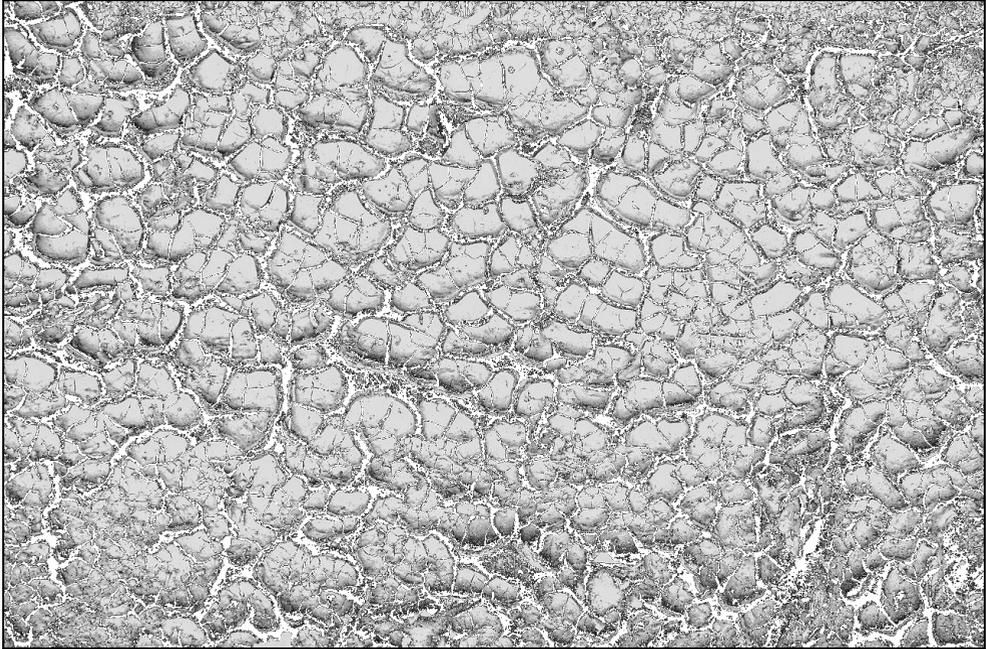
<sup>vii</sup> N. Iorga, America and the Romanians in America. Travel and conference notes, Typografia "Datina românească", Vălenii de Munte, 1930 /238 pp./; the conferences held during the trip were published – see My American lectures. Collected and arranged by Norman L. Forter. Preface John L. Gerig, "State Printing Office", Bucharest, 1932 (194 pp. + 16 pl.).

<sup>viii</sup> Oana Panait, Nicolae Iorga's contribution to the development of Romanian-American cultural relations in the interwar period, in "Annals of Spiru Haret University. History", XV, 2012, pp. 71-82.

<sup>ix</sup> See also – Gheorghe I. Ioniță, Problems of contemporary history of Romania, addressed by Nicolae Iorga in the columns of the newspaper "Romania" from Cleveland (USA) in the years 1921-1924, in "Annals of the University of Bucharest. History", XXII, no. 2, 1973, pp. 95-103.

<sup>x</sup> N. Iorga, Letters to the Romanians in America. 1921-1924, Printing House of the newspaper "America", Cleveland-Ohio, U.S.A., f.a. [1924] /144 pp./ (on the title page: 1922-1923; the correct date is the one inscribed on the cover). On the back of the title page, the publisher reproduces the author's facsimile letter: "The goodwill of those who believed that they could find in me a sincere and unreserved informant for the affairs of the distant country of birth makes my articles of a year – news, guidance and advice – appear in this little book. I wish them to be read in the state of mind in which I myself wrote them".

<sup>xi</sup> For a clear, contemporary image of the complexity of North American higher education, which confirms, in essence, the organization also revealed by N. Iorga – see T.W. Haartle /first vice-president of the American Council on Education/, The Current State of Higher Education in the U.S.A., in "Ziua", XV, no. 4481, March 9, 2009, pp. 3-4; it is an instructive radiography of the respective field, revealed, in the form of a report, to the participants at the 91st /annual/ meeting of the American Council on Education (ACE).



**THE DYNAMICS OF THE EVOLUTION OF LIFESTYLES,  
TERRITORIALITY, BELIEFS, ADAPTIVE BEHAVIORS,  
LANGUAGE, SYMBOLS, VALUE SYSTEMS, AND  
INSTITUTIONS UNDER THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE  
CHANGE.  
A PERSPECTIVE BOTH HISTORICAL AND BASED ON  
PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS.**

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**Abstract**

Climate change has long functioned as a fundamental driver of socio-cultural transformation in human societies. Beyond its environmental and economic consequences, climatic variability reshapes modes of life, territoriality, belief systems, adaptive behaviors, language, symbols, value systems, and institutional structures. Climate change is one of the most important structural factors in the transformation of human societies, acting both as a slow force of cultural remodeling and as a trigger for rapid social transitions or evolutions. This study analyzes how climate variations have influenced, throughout history, ways of life, territoriality, belief systems, adaptive behaviors, language, symbols, values, and social institutions. The paper also proposes a forecast based on predictive analysis on how contemporary and future climate changes may generate new socio-cultural and institutional configurations. The analysis is based on an interdisciplinary approach, integrating perspectives from anthropology, history, sociology, cultural ecology, and futures studies.

**Keywords:** climate change, ecopolitics, *possibilism*, predictive analysis of social changes, environmental impact, symbolic reconfiguration, climatic determinism, territoriality, reconfiguration of social space.

**1. Introduction**

The relationship between climate and the organization of human societies is structural and profound. From the emergence of the first hunter-gatherer communities to the complex civilizations of the industrial and post-industrial eras, the climatic environment has directly influenced the possibilities of subsistence, mobility, population density, cultural patterns

and institutional architecture. In the current context of accelerated climate change, generated mainly by human activity, an analysis that goes beyond the strictly ecological and economic dimension, integrating the impact on the symbolic, linguistic, axiological and institutional structures of societies, becomes essential. Furthermore, it advances a futurological analysis of contemporary anthropogenic climate change, exploring potential trajectories of cultural adaptation, institutional and educational restructuring, and symbolic reconfiguration. The article argues that climate change operates not as a deterministic force but as a structural constraint that redefines the space of cultural possibilities, accelerating processes of transformation already latent within social systems.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Climatic determinism vs. cultural *possibilism***

Early theories of climatic determinism posited a direct causal relationship between environmental conditions and cultural forms, considering them a dominant causal factor of culture. Although such approaches have been widely criticized for oversimplification, contemporary scholarship recognizes climate as a significant structural factor that conditions, rather than determines, cultural evolution.

The concept of *possibilism* emphasizes human conscience within environmental constraints, allowing for cultural diversity under similar climatic conditions. There is practically no contradiction between these two positions, nor should the outbreak of a devastating ideological war for any culture, no matter how advanced, be allowed. The position closest to historical reality would be that according to which climate does not mechanically, automatically and unconsciously determine the evolution or involution of a culture, but creates fields of possibility that favor certain adaptation solutions, initially at the level of general symbolism, then, gradually, determines changes at the level of consciousness, this process being, however, a long-term one, extending over several generations.

Any culture is closely linked to the place where it emerged. So implicitly, to the climate. A civilization born under the desert sun – like the oldest known ones – will be abruptly different from one that emerged near the Arctic Circle or on islands scattered in the vastness of the Pacific. Symbolism is, in this context, born from and shaped by the environment, by the climate. Climate determinism is the prisoner stuck between exhaustive

explanation (unimaginable in this case, due to the unpredictability of the global climate phenomenon) and interpretative limits (subsumed and conditioned by the very power of interpretation of the human mind regarding prediction). The idea that climate decisively shapes the destiny of human societies runs through the history of thought from Antiquity to the present. From Greek theories about the influence of latitude on human temperament to modern explanations linking economic prosperity, political organization, or cultural creativity to climatic conditions, climate determinism has offered a seductive narrative: that the natural environment dictates civilizational trajectories.

However, this perspective, although partially validated by empirical observations, raises significant epistemological, ethical, and political issues. In its classical form, climatic determinism argues that climatic factors—temperature, humidity, rainfall patterns, seasonality—determine not only livelihoods but also social structures, behavioral patterns, and even intellectual capacities of populations. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, this paradigm was adopted by human geography and anthropology, often coupled with hierarchical explanations of cultural differences. Temperate climates were associated with rationality, progress, and discipline, while tropical zones were depicted as favoring passivity or stagnation. Such interpretations legitimized not only questionable scientific theories but also colonial and racial political projects. However, we cannot afford to reject climate determinism outright, for we risk falling into the trap of reductionism: denying the structural influence of the environment. History provides numerous examples in which climate change has played a crucial role in the collapse or transformation of societies, from the decline of Mesoamerican civilizations to the agrarian-demographic crises of premodern Europe. Moreover, the distribution of natural resources, shaped by climate, inevitably influenced population density, mobility patterns, and institutional complexity. Current climate change is neither slower, nor faster, nor more aggressive, nor more irreversible than past ones, but this time a complex civilizational factor intervenes: the need for awareness.

The era in which civilizations abandoned their temples, agricultural crops, and settlements because the climate suddenly became dry, well, that era has set forever. Or it should set. And this is not because it would be difficult for us to recreate our civilization in other areas, but because the level of consciousness of humanity has reached another level, beyond considerations related to territoriality or sense of ownership. The change

must start from within each of us, starting with awareness and going all the way to sacrificing some attributes of civilization that we will have to rethink in agreement and especially in harmony with the environment. All the scientific data and study results accumulated over the last decade demonstrate that not everything that is possible is good for the environment in which we develop our cultures and progress.

## **2.2 The concept of ecopolitics and socio-ecological systems**

Cultural ecology and socio-ecological systems theory provide a useful analytical framework for understanding the co-evolution of human societies and their environments. These approaches conceptualize societies as complex adaptive systems in which material practices, social structures, and symbolic systems interact dynamically with ecological conditions. Today, it can no longer be said that climate unambiguously dictates human destiny, but neither can it be ignored. It acts as a slow, often invisible force that shapes the horizon of the possible and amplifies the vulnerabilities or resilience of societies. This is an epistemological warning: the current global culture, no matter how sophisticated, mechanistic, or technologically advanced it may be, is not, cannot be completely autonomous from the material conditions of existence. In the current era, marked by accelerating climate change, this lesson takes on new relevance, inviting a rethinking of the relationship between nature, society, and human responsibility at the individual level.

Ecopolitics is a field of political thought and practice that integrates ecological principles into the process of governance, public policy formulation and collective decision-making. It analyzes the relationship between power, society and nature, with the objective of protecting the environment, sustainable use of natural resources and ensuring a long-term balance between economic development, social justice and the integrity of ecosystems.

The emergence of ecopolitics is closely linked to the intensification of global ecological crises, in particular the acceleration of climate change, which deeply affects the economic, social and political structures of contemporary society. Traditional development models, based on the extensive exploitation of natural resources and unlimited economic growth, have proven incompatible with the ecological limits of the planet. In this context, ecopolitics appears as a necessary response to the failure of classical policies to anticipate and manage environmental risks. Rapid climate change — manifested in extreme

weather events, rising sea levels and loss of biodiversity — is forcing societies to rethink the role of the state and collective responsibility towards nature. Ecopolitics promotes the idea that the environment is not just a passive backdrop to human activity, but an essential actor that conditions the security, health and well-being of the population. Thus, environmental protection becomes a fundamental political priority, not a secondary objective. In addition, ecopolitics is motivated by the need for adaptation and climate justice. The effects of climate change are not evenly distributed, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities. Therefore, ecopolitics aims to build inclusive and equitable policies that ensure the transition to a sustainable society without accentuating social inequalities. In this sense, ecopolitics represents not only a reaction to the climate crisis, but also a profound transformation of the way in which contemporary society defines its values, priorities and relationship with the environment. What is enormously damaging in this period of readjustment, at least in terms of ecopolitics, are excessive norming, coercive measures without a real basis, the imposition of aberrant rules. The inner balance of the human being rejects any form of coercion, accepting to make concessions only when its own existence is put at risk. It is very difficult to convince a society as a whole to obey rules that protect it from a real and global danger, but which at the same time threaten its way of life based on technological convenience, and – we must admit – sometimes wasteful, if you do not act proactively so that the message reaches each individual, causing them to act and convincing others to do the same.

### **3. A Brief Historical Perspective: climate change as a driver of socio-cultural transformations**

In this chapter, we will limit to examples related to the European continent, but this does not mean and only demonstrates that the stages of this process of evolution of the human-society-environment relationship have not evolved differently in other regions of the planet to the detriment of the third.

#### **3.1 Prehistory and Ancient History**

The end of the last glaciation favored sedentarization and the emergence of agriculture. Climatic oscillations determined: the transition from nomadism to fixed territoriality, the emergence of the first social structures, of property, the institutionalization of political and religious

power. The first concepts of the connection of man with the environment, social structures, hierarchy, and systems of meaning are theorized. And yet, the first advanced cultures in human history appear, develop and evolve in warm areas, near water, as a result of the survival instinct and more – a first sign of the perception of the relationship between material well-being and the stability of the environment.

### **3.2 Middle Ages**

The two climatic periods of the Middle Ages created different evolutionary patterns, with direct, undoubted consequences on European civilization. The Early Middle Ages (until the end of the 13th century), characterized by a mild climate of oceanic origin, supported agricultural and demographic expansion, making possible a remarkable civilizational leap, with the undeniable peak of the Renaissance, the cultural phenomenon that would put an end to a long dark period. In contrast, the Little Ice Age (14th–16th centuries) generated: famine, migrations, conflicts, the intensification of apocalyptic religious discourse, and its end marked the beginning of a new era, considered by some historians the second Renaissance, namely the Baroque.

### **3.3 The Modern Era**

The relative climatic stability that lasted until the end of the 20th century allowed: the development of the nation-state, urbanization, industrialization, secularization, the supremacy of science, the universalization of value systems (progress, growth, domination over nature). Here, however, the first crack in the logic so far appears: the value system based on domination over nature, doubled by the development of industry, triggered a hunger for resources which, in turn, favored the outbreak of the most devastating wars (at least so far), motivated by the grabbing of resources, colonialism, and ignoring the damage caused to the environment. Hence the imperative to reconsider the value system of human society at the individual level so that this process of self-destruction can end as quickly as possible. "Adaptation" is the key word.

#### **4. Adaptive lifestyles and behaviors**

The way humans and the societies they created relate to risk and uncertainty factors has had only one direction throughout history: always risk and uncertainty related to how the environment and climate could harm humans, not the other way around, that is, by relating to how much harm human actions can do to the environment. From this point of view, the times when societies relied on hunting, fishing, and spontaneous gathering of fruits from nature are not much different from today. In fact, not much has changed at the level of individual consciousness. The structure of daily life requires the procurement of the necessities of daily life through much more aggressive methods. The question arises: what else are intensive agriculture, fish farming and all the industries that develop horizontally starting from these? The intensive nature of the economic development of global society, along with new extensive trends, are equally insensitive to the impact on the environment. Hence the need for adaptation. New founding myths are needed, the old ones are no longer useful, because the relationship with the environment, more precisely the need to eliminate its destructuring tendencies, has become a problem of survival for the entire planetary ecosystem. It is about a new paradigm based on solidarity, a new social architecture and interconnectivity at the individual level. Society must not become a hive, but it must learn its survival tactics.

#### **5. Territoriality, migration and the reconfiguration of social space**

Climate and weather patterns changes, the dilution of seasons into each other have profound effects on social space. Problems arise that humanity has never faced before, at least not to such an abrupt extent. Territoriality becomes more fluid, and collective identities can fragment, hybridize, defensively or religiously radicalize, and through the loss or reduction in the surface area of habitable territories, political and cultural borders can be redefined or migrations of a climatic nature can occur, the latter being nothing new, but representing an enormous conflict potential in the current context. The current global political system is based on the state – defined as a territory, a nation, and a language – and its relations with other similar entities. The current configuration is the result of a long series of historical conflagrations and compromises, which does not leave much

room for optimism. Even less so at the level of the simple individual. Because the individual has entrusted his fate to the state - also a creation of his - which makes the transition to a new type of social philosophy very difficult. So the most difficult thing will be the transition from the apathy generated by the existence of the state structure with all the benefits it offers to the citizen to the imposition of solutions from the bottom up, a process that, in democratic states, is still taking place at a theoretical level, but with the state's tendency to make decisions on its own without consultation. Last but not least, climate migration, although it seems like a fantasy now, will become a key element in the future, which will no longer be able to be ignored because massive masses of people will be forced in the not too distant future to leave their homelands due to drought, rising sea levels, or for reasons related to excessive pollution that will make their territories uninhabitable.

## **6. New beliefs, symbols and language**

Historically, climate crises have generated: religious interpretations (divine punishment, purification), rituals of symbolic control of nature, secularized apocalyptic narratives. Nowadays, we are witnessing the emergence and success of a new current of thought: environmentalism as a quasi-religious system. The apocalypse no longer comes from the gods, but is caused by the neglect of the environment by human society in its pursuit of ideal well-being and supreme comfort as a species. There is a reconfiguration of the central symbols of human civilization, and even a new lexicon or modified lexical forms appear to illustrate the seriousness of the situation. As we have shown earlier, excesses do not lead to anything good. The transformation of ecological culture into an institutionalized religion, including through inquisitorial bodies that apply sanctions for violations, is as harmful as possible and does more harm to humanity than pollution or the accumulation of greenhouse gases itself.

A slow transition from anthropocentric values to ecocentric and intergenerational values is observed, simultaneously with the emergence of social tensions or antagonisms between economic growth and sustainability, individual freedom and collective responsibility. An Environmental Law has also emerged, putting intense pressure on social and political institutions, profoundly affecting economic development – through restructuring pushed to the point of abolishing some sectors –,

social protection, legal systems, resource allocation. All of this ultimately affects global governance, international relations and calls into question cooperation between states. This pressure has imposed the creation of new climate-related institutions, the redefinition of sovereignty, and the expansion of the concept of climate security.

## 7. Forecasts and scenarios based on predictive analytics

This analysis draws on literature on futures studies, complex systems theory and resilience research. The scenarios are constructed based on key variables: the level of social cooperation, institutional adaptability, access to sustainable technologies and the capacity to manage climate risks. The aim is not to make an exact prediction, but to identify plausible possibilities that can guide political and social strategies.

Three types of scenarios for the evolution of society under climate change and its effects can be considered as plausible hypotheses.

The first of these is **the adaptive scenario**. In this scenario, considered the ideal one, societies manage to respond proactively to climate change by implementing integrated mitigation and adaptation policies; investments in resilient infrastructure; large-scale education and awareness; intensified transnational cooperation. For such a scenario to succeed, it is necessary first of all to have a flexible, transparent governance that spares the consumer pride that is not accountable to anyone of the human individual as a social entity taken as a singular social unit. It is probably the most difficult to put into practice because of the difficulties related to the belief, deeply rooted in man's mind for millennia, that he is the absolute master of the environment who is obliged to obey him and give him, willingly or by force, everything he wants. Here a new mythology is needed, which will however need several generations to be implemented. Such a scenario must be plausible in the eyes and ears of those who listen/see/put it into practice, flexible and transparent; to emphasize the credibility of the circular economy, the elimination of waste and accelerated decarbonization; to fully favor social cohesion and inclusion and to definitively eliminate inequalities; to integrate local traditions and ancient knowledge into the new strategies of ecological planning. But there are also major risks: uneven implementation across regions; vulnerabilities of developing countries; potential tensions between economic and environmental needs.

The second is **the scenario based on fragmentation and polarization**, according to which climate pressures exacerbate existing discrepancies between social groups, economies and states, generating political fragmentation – competition for scarce resources; social polarization – conflicts between privileged and marginalized groups; climate nationalism – protectionist policies and migration restrictions. The results of the practical application of such a scenario are not simple and even less easy to neglect: exacerbated inequalities between the Global North and the Global South; increased social violence and political instability; withdrawal of major state actors from global cooperation agreements; Local survival systems with an emphasis on security. The consequences will not be long in coming: reduced capacity to respond to crises, massive economic disruptions, decline in trust in institutions, volatility of the global political environment.

The third category, **hybrid scenarios**, will probably be a mix of the two previous scenarios: regions and communities where adaptation succeeds, ensuring a satisfactory level of prosperity, coexisting with fragmented and polarized areas. This hybrid variant is characterized by: the coexistence of technological advances and socio-political conflicts; uneven migratory flows; innovation concentrated in ecological hubs, but restricted in other areas. It is the most possible of the three scenarios, but not the happiest. As for efficiency: it is out of the question. However, from the current perspective it is by far the closest to the global socio-political reality.

## Conclusions

Climate change is not just an environmental crisis, but a process of civilizational restructuring at the individual level. It acts simultaneously on the material and the symbolic, reshaping ways of life, beliefs, language, values and institutions. History shows that societies that manage to integrate climate change into flexible systems of cultural adaptation have a greater chance of continuity. The future will depend not only on technical solutions, but on humanity's ability to redefine its relationship with the environment and with itself. Cultural ecology and socio-ecological systems theory provide a useful analytical framework for understanding the co-evolution of human societies and their environments. These approaches conceptualize societies as complex adaptive systems in which material practices, social structures, and symbolic systems interact dynamically with

ecological conditions. Climatic change has repeatedly disrupted established patterns of territoriality, generating migration and population displacement. In the contemporary era, climate-induced migration challenges existing political boundaries and legal frameworks, contributing to the emergence of fluid, transnational identities and contested notions of belonging. Territorial loss also carries symbolic consequences, undermining place-based identities and collective memory, while simultaneously fostering cultural hybridization and, in some cases, defensive identity formations. Climate change must be understood as a catalyst of deep socio-cultural transformation rather than a purely environmental phenomenon. Its impact extends from material practices to symbolic structures, reshaping how societies organize space, construct meaning, and envision the future. Historical precedents demonstrate that resilience depends not solely on technological capacity but on cultural flexibility and institutional adaptability. The future of human societies will thus be determined as much by symbolic and normative innovation as by scientific and technical solutions.

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# Philosophy



# **OCCUPATIO IN CAELO: THE ROMAN PROPRIETARY TAXONOMY AS A SOLUTION TO THE "TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS" IN THE SPACE ECONOMY.**

## **From *Insula in Mari Nata* to *Asteroid Mining*: Manifesto for a Cosmic Property Right**

By Gerardo Marco BENCIVENGA

### **Abstract**

**While** the evolution of aerospace technology makes the mining of asteroids imminent, the international regulatory framework, based on the *Outer Space Treaty* (1967), is in an interpretative paralysis, stuck between the principle of non-state appropriation and the need to incentivize private investment. The present study proposes to overcome the impasse by recovering the refined proprietary taxonomy of Roman Law. Through the dogmatic distinction between *res communis omnium* (empty space) and *res nullius* (celestial resources), and by applying the institution of the *occupatio* as a mode of acquisition by original title, it is shown that Roman *prudencia* offers the only model compatible with economic efficiency. The analysis, supported by Demsetz's theory of Property Rights and Hardin's critique of the "Tragedy of the Commons", outlines a legal regime that legitimizes private extraction without violating the prohibition of public sovereignty, transforming the current regulatory vacuum into a rational market order.

As aerospace technology renders asteroid mining imminent, the international regulatory framework, anchored in the *Outer Space Treaty* (1967), faces interpretive paralysis, caught between the principle of state non-appropriation and the need to incentivize private investment. This paper proposes overcoming this impasse by recovering the refined proprietary taxonomy of Roman Law. Through the dogmatic distinction between *res communis omnium* (void space) and *res nullius* (celestial resources), and applying the institute of *occupatio* as a mode of original acquisition, Roman *prudencia* is shown to offer the only model compatible with economic efficiency. Supported by Demsetz's Property Rights theory and Hardin's critique of the "Tragedy of the Commons," the analysis outlines a legal regime that legitimizes private extraction without violating the ban on public sovereignty, transforming the current legal vacuum into a rational market order.

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### I. Introduction. The *Space Aporia*: between 21st century technology and Cold War dogmas

#### 1.1. The economic horizon: towards the *ex-orbit extractive industry*

Humanity today finds itself on the threshold of a historical discontinuity comparable to the discovery of the Americas. If the twentieth century was the era of space exploration driven by geopolitical and military imperatives, the twenty-first century marks the advent of the *commercial Space Economy*. The border is no longer symbolic, but mining. Recent

spectroscopic measurements have confirmed that the main asteroid belt (located between Mars and Jupiter) and the Near-Earth Minor Bodies (NEAs) contain immense reserves of platinum group metals (ru, rh, pd, os, ir, pt), nickel, iron and rare earths, as well as precious volatile elements such as water and hydrogen, essential for in situ propulsion [1]. Conservative estimates, such as those developed by NASA in relation to the *Psyche mission* (directed towards the asteroid 16 Psyche), estimate the economic potential of individual celestial bodies in figures in the order of quadrillion dollars (10<sup>15</sup>), a nominal value that exceeds the aggregate global GDP [2]. In this context, private players such as *Planetary Resources*, *Deep Space Industries* (now acquired) and new players backed by venture capital, are developing exploration and capture technologies that will make *asteroid mining* technically feasible within the next decade. We are no longer in the realm of science fiction speculation, but in a phase of industrial *pre-deployment*.

## 1.2. The *Vacuum Iuris* and the paralysis of International Law

This technological acceleration corresponds, however, to a dangerous legal stagnation. The current regulatory architecture, hinged on the **1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST)**, appears today as a vestige of the Cold War, inadequate to manage the dynamics of private capital. Article II of the OST enshrines the cardinal principle of "non-appropriation":

*"Outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means."* [3]

This rule, designed to prevent the USA and the USSR from turning the Moon into a missile base or a territorial colony, has generated a fundamental legal aporia: does the prohibition of "national sovereignty" necessarily imply the prohibition of "private property"? The internationalist doctrine is split:

### 1. Restrictive Interpretation (Common Heritage School):

Based on the spirit of the failed *Moon Agreement* of 1979 (never ratified by the space powers), some jurists argue that space is the "common heritage of humanity", precluding any form of exclusive commercial exploitation [4].

### 2. Extensive Interpretation (Commercial School):

The United States, with the **Commercial Space Launch**

**Competitiveness Act (CSLCA)** of 2015, followed by Luxembourg (2017) and the United Arab Emirates, has legislated unilaterally, granting its citizens the right to own, transport, and sell abiotic resources mined in space [5].

We are therefore faced with a regulatory conflict: on the one hand an international treaty that freezes property claims, on the other national laws that incentivize them, risking violating supranational law. This uncertainty generates an unacceptable legal *risk* for institutional investors, paralyzing the flow of capital necessary for the development of the sector.

## 1.2. The Research Methodology: The Return to *Roman Prudentia*

To get out of this hermeneutical *cul-de-sac*, the present study proposes a radical paradigm shift. Instead of attempting to amend modern treatises that are now crystallized, the intention is to recover the dogmatic "toolbox" of Roman Law. Why Rome? Because Roman jurists found themselves dealing with problems structurally identical to those of today: how to regulate the appropriation of resources in spaces that belong to no one (the sea, the air, the emerged islands) without unleashing wars between powers or blocking economic initiative?

The methodology adopted in this work is twofold:

- **Dogmatics:** We will analyze the sources of the Digest and the Institutions (in particular Gaius and Marcian) to reconstruct the taxonomy of the *res* (*communes*, *nullius*, *publicae*) and the methods of acquisition by original title (*occupatio*, *accessio*, *specificatio*).
- **Law & Economics:** We will test the efficiency of these Roman categories through the lens of the economic analysis of law, using the theorems of **Garrett Hardin** (*Tragedy of the Commons*) [6] and **Harold Demsetz** (*Toward a Theory of Property Rights*) [7].

The aim is to demonstrate that the Roman system of the *occupatio* offers the only theoretical model capable of reconciling the prohibition of state sovereignty (the *imperium* over the universe) with the need for the right of private property (the *dominium* over resources), thus providing a solid and universal legal basis for the nascent multi-planetary civilization.

## II. Roman Dogmatics: A Taxonomy for the Universe

To build a solid extraterrestrial property regime, it is first necessary to clear the field of terminological misunderstandings. Modern spatial law suffers from a certain ontological coarseness, tending to treat "space" as an indistinct *unicum*. Roman *iurisprudencia*, on the contrary, based its effectiveness on the ability to dissect phenomenal reality into discrete legal categories. The *summa divisio* that we propose to apply here to the cosmic environment is that between the fluid "container" and the solid "content".

### 2.1. The Ether as *Res Communis Omnium*: the negation of the *Imperium*

The first step is to define the legal status of the cosmic vacuum, orbits and trajectories. To this end, we are helped by the famous classification of Marcian, transposed in the Justinian Digest:

*"Et quidem naturali iure omnium communia sunt illa: aer et aqua profluens et mare et per hoc litora maris."* (D. 1.8.2.1) [8]

According to natural law (*ius naturale*), the air, the running water and the sea are common to all. The *rationale* of this attribution is not political, but physical: these goods are, by their nature, irrepressible and inexhaustible (or at least so they appeared to the ancients). They cannot be the object of *dominium* (private property) because they cannot be circumscribed; they cannot be the object of *imperium* (exclusive sovereignty) because their use by one subject does not prevent their simultaneous use by others (*non-rivalrous goods*). Celsus, with his usual incisiveness, reinforces the concept by affirming that the use of the sea is common to all men like air: *"Maris communem usum omnibus hominibus ut aeris"* (D. 43.8.3.1).

Translating these categories into the extra-atmospheric scenario, it is evident that they are perfectly overlapping with Art. II of the Outer Space Treaty. Empty space is the new *Mare Magnum*. It is a **Res Communis Omnium**. It follows that:

1. **Freedom of Navigation:** Just as Roman ships could sail the Mediterranean without asking permission from a sovereign (except for ports), so spacecraft have the right of harmless transit in orbits.

**2. Prohibition of Sovereignty:** No state can claim a sector of space as a "national territory". The *imperium* stops where the atmosphere (or the continental shelf, in the case of the sea) ends.

This dogmatic qualification validates, and indeed reinforces, the prohibition of appropriation of *space* understood as a medium. However, as we shall see, this does not imply the prohibition of appropriation *in space*.

## **2.2. The Asteroid as an *Insula in the Sea*: the Qualification of Resources**

If space is sea, what is the asteroid? The mistake of modern jurists who support the thesis of the "Common Heritage" is to consider the celestial bodies as an integral part of the spatial fabric. But for a Roman jurist, this confusion is inadmissible. An asteroid is a solid, finite, delimited body susceptible to physical control. It floats in the *res communis*, but *it is not res communis*.

The most pertinent legal figure is that of the **island born in the sea** (*insula in mari nata*). Gaius addresses the problem of the ownership of a new land that emerges in international (common) waters:

*"Insula quae in mari nata est (quod raro accidit), occupantis fit: nullius enim esse creditur."* (D. 41.1.7.3) [9]

The island born in the sea becomes the property of the first occupant, since it is believed to belong to no one. This is the keystone of our theoretical framework. The asteroid:

1. It is immersed in a *res communis* (space/sea).
2. It is distinct from it by physical nature (solid vs. void).
3. It is, in its natural state, a **Res Nullius** (nobody's thing).

It is not *res publica* (of the State), nor *res divini iuris* (sacred), nor *res communis* (of all). It is simply an object waiting for a subject. This ontological qualification defuses Art. II of the OST: appropriating an asteroid (or its resources) is not "national appropriation of space", but "private occupation of a *res nullius* located in space". The distinction is subtle, but legally decisive.

### 2.3. The Acquisitive Dynamic: *Occupatio* as Original Title

Once the object has been identified, we must analyze the way of purchase. In Roman law, the "natural" way of acquiring the property of the *res nullius* is the **Occupatio**. As specified in the Institutions of Justinian (J. 2.1.12), everything that belongs to no one is granted by natural reason to the first occupant ("*quod enim nullius est, id ratione naturali occupanti conceditur*").

In order for the *occupatio* to be perfected and generate the *dominium*, two constituent elements are necessary, which in the spatial context take on a specific technological connotation:

1. **The Corpus (Objective Element):** The taking of material possession. Discovery (*inventio*) by telescope is not enough. Just as it was not enough to see the island to possess it, it is not enough to map the asteroid. A physical act of apprehension is necessary: the landing of a probe (*lander*), anchoring, the beginning of excavation operations. The *corpus* transforms the theoretical claim into effective control.
2. **The Animus (Subjective Element):** The will to keep the thing as one's own (*animus rem sibi habendi*). This element distinguishes occupation from mere scientific exploration. The declaration of commercial intent, combined with the investment of capital, unequivocally manifests the *animus* of the owner.

In summary, Roman dogmatics provides us with a perfect tripartite structure for the *Space Economy*:

- **Space:** *res communis* (inappropriate).
- **The Asteroid:** *Res Nullius* (Appropriable).
- **The title:** *Occupatio* (Effective Investment Award).

This conceptual architecture does not violate international law, but complements it, filling the void left by the OST with categories of proven millennial rationality.

### III. The Mechanics of Appropriation: *Occupatio* and Possession at a Distance

Having defined the nature of *res nullius* of asteroid resources, it is necessary to analyze the acquisitive dynamics. The classic objection raised by the internationalist doctrine lies in the impossibility for the human being to exercise continuous physical possession over celestial bodies distant astronomical units from the Earth. However, Roman law, in its mature development, had already gone beyond the primitive conception of possession as mere physical contact, elaborating sophisticated theories on **possessio animo et corpore** mediated by third parties or instruments.

#### 3.1. *Corpus* and *Animus* in the Robotic Age: The Probe as *an Instrumentum*

Roman possession is based on the coexistence of *animus* (intention of lordship) and *corpus* (material availability). In the context of *asteroid mining*, the human agent is not *on-site*. How is the *corpus constituted*?

The answer lies in the theory of the **minister** (intermediary of possession). The Romans acquired possession through sons (*fili familias*) and slaves (*serfs*). The slave, legally, was a *res*, an "instrument endowed with a voice" (*instrumentum vocale*). When the slave took possession of a piece of land in Asia on behalf of the *dominus* in Rome, possession was constituted in the hands of the master:

*"Adquiritur nobis possessio per procuratorem, tutorem, curatorem: et ideo per nosmet ipsos et per eos quos in potestate habemus."*

(Paul, D. 41.2.1.20) [12]

In the age of automation, the robotic probe or the mining drone take on the legal function of the *instrumentum*. The robot is the *agent* (devoid of its own will, just like the slave in the acquisitive moment) that exercises the *corpus on the asteroid*. The continuous telemetry connection (the radio signal) replaces the master's voice (*iussum*). Therefore:

1. The company on the ground holds the **Animus rem sibi habendi**.
2. The robot exercises the **Corpus in space**.
3. Possession is instantly constituted in the hands of the company by **instrumental ministry**.

In addition, the figure of the **Traditio Longa Manu comes to** the rescue: the possession of a thing (e.g. a fund or goods in a warehouse) could be transferred simply by pointing to it from the tower (*oculis et affectu*), as long as it was under visual control. The sensors and cameras of the probes ensure this constant "visual check". As long as telemetry is active, the asteroid is in the operator's *custody*, meeting the requirements of the strictest Roman possession [13].

### 3.2. **Separatio and Specificatio:** the moment of establishment of the right

Once possession is established, how do you turn it into ownership without violating the OST's prohibition of territorial appropriation? Here Roman dogmatics offers the most elegant solution: the distinction between the mother thing and the fruits.

**At. Separation (*Separatio*)** It is not necessary to claim ownership of the entire asteroid (which could be interpreted as "territorial sovereignty"). It is enough to claim ownership of the extracted resources. In Roman law, fruits (natural or industrial) become the object of autonomous property at the time of **separatio** (detachment from the mother thing).

*"Fructus, pendentis pars fundi videntur...separated, intelleguntur esse facti eius, cuius est fundus."* (D. 6.1.44)

The operation of excavation (*mining*) is legally an act of *separation*. As long as the mineral is embedded in the rock, it is part of the celestial body (*pars fundi* - subject to the OST regime). When the drone detaches it and stores it in the tank, it becomes an autonomous mobile res, the exclusive property of the extractor. This elegantly circumvents Art. II OST: we do not appropriate the "territory" (the asteroid remains there), but only the "fruits".

**B. The Specification (*Specificatio*)** An even stronger argument is that of the **Specificatio**. If space activity transforms matter (e.g. extraction of regolith and its refining in water or propellant), a *new species* is created. According to the Proculian school (confirmed by Justinian in the Institutions, J. 2.1.25), if matter is transformed so that it cannot return to its primitive state, ownership belongs to the **specifier** (the one who did the work) [14]. The enormous technological and industrial investment necessary to process materials in zero gravity justifies the attribution of ownership to

original title per *specificatio*. The company owns the refined metal not because it owns the asteroid, but because it has created a new object through its own work (*opera*).

### **3.3. *Derelictio*: End-of-Life Management**

The Roman model also closes the circle on the management of space *debris*. If the company ceases to exercise control or exhausts the mine, **Derelictio** (abandonment) can operate. The *res* returns to being *nullius* (or refusal), freeing the operator from proprietary liability, except for the modern obligations of *the Liability Convention* for damages to third parties (which, however, concern the damage, not the property) [15].

## **IV. Law & Economics: Allocative Efficiency and Incentive Structure**

The validation of a legal model, in modern legal science, cannot be separated from the verification of its economic efficiency. If Roman Law provides us with the "form" (the *occupatio*), *Law & Economics* explains the "substance": why applying this institution is the only way to avoid the failure of the space market.

### **4.1. Avoiding the *Tragedy of the Commons*: The Critique of the "Common Heritage"**

The main ideological obstacle to *asteroid mining* is the concept of *Common Heritage of Mankind* (CHM), introduced into international law by the *Moon Agreement* of 1979 (art. 11) [16]. This doctrine would like to impose a regime of collective ownership or forced redistribution of the benefits deriving from space resources, similar to that in force for the ocean floor (UNCLOS).

However, economic analysis shows that the CHM inevitably leads to the *Tragedy of the Commons*, *theorized by the biologist and economist Garrett Hardin* in 1968 [17]. The model is well known: if a pasture is open to all (without rights of exclusion), each shepherd will have the rational incentive to add an extra sheep, privatizing the income (the wool) and socializing the cost (the degradation of the grass). The end result is the destruction of the resource.

In space, the "tragedy" is not overexploitation (resources are immense), but **underinvestment**. A mining mission on an asteroid requires *Capex* (capital expenditures) in the range of \$10-50 billion and extreme technological risks. If the asteroid were legally "everyone's" (or if profits were to be socialized), no private investor (the rational agent) would allocate capital, since he could not exclude *Free Riders* (competitors or non-investor states that claim a share). Uncertainty about the proprietary title acts as an implied 100% tax on innovation. The result is a sub-optimal Nash balance: zero investment, zero resources extracted, zero benefit to humanity.

#### 4.2. The Demsetzian function of private property in space

To break the deadlock, we must resort to **Harold Demsetz's** theory of property rights [18]. In his seminal 1967 article, Demsetz explains that property rights are not metaphysical dogmas, but economic tools that emerge spontaneously when it is necessary **to internalize externalities**.

In the spatial context:

1. **The Positive Externality:** The company that develops the technology to extract platinum from an asteroid creates an immense benefit (reduction of the cost of raw materials on Earth, new propulsion technologies).
2. **Internalization:** In order for the company to invest, it must be able to capture this value. The Roman institution of the **Occupatio** (exclusive right based on taking possession) is the legal mechanism that allows this internalization.

Roman law, by guaranteeing that "*he who captures, keeps*" (*cuius est occupantis*), aligns private interest (profit) with social interest (availability of new resources). In Pareto terms, the transition from *res nullius* to private property is a Pareto improvement: the investor is better off (profit), and humanity is not worse off (the asteroid was useless before, now it injects resources into the market), on the contrary it benefits from the increase in aggregate supply.

#### 4.3. Dynamic Efficiency vs. Statics

Proponents of the "Common Heritage" worry about **static efficiency** (how to divide the existing pie). But in space the "cake" does not yet exist; must be cooked. Roman law favors **dynamic efficiency** (incentive to create

new wealth). The regime of *occupatio* and *specificatio* rewards technological innovation. Only those who develop drones capable of *corpus* (physical grip) and *separatio* (extraction) get the right. This triggers a virtuous competition (race to the top) similar to that which drove geographical exploration or the gold rush in the nineteenth century. Economic history teaches that *Open Access* regimes (open access without ownership) lead to the dissipation of rent (*Rent Dissipation*), while clear ownership regimes lead to the maximization of value. The Roman taxonomy, by defining clear boundaries between *res communis* (navigation) and *res privata* (extraction), minimizes transaction costs and maximizes dynamic efficiency [19].

## **V. Conclusions. *Ad Astra Per Aspera Iuris:* Legal Humanism as an Infrastructure of the Cosmos**

### **5.1. The Perenniality of the Method: Roman Law as a Technology of Civilization**

At the end of this examination, which dared to juxtapose the dust of ancient codices with the stardust of *Near-Earth asteroids*, a truth emerges that transcends mere legal technique: Roman Law does not constitute an archaeological relic to be venerated in museums of history, but a living, pulsating intellectual technology of unsurpassed logical precision. The investigation has shown how the dogmatic categories elaborated by Gaius, Marcian and the Severan jurists were not linked to the contingency of an agrarian empire, but intercepted universal ontological structures of the relationship between Man and the Thing. The distinction between *res communis* and *res nullius*, between the sea that unites and the island that enriches, is revealed today as the only conceptual algorithm capable of ordering sidereal vastness without reducing it to a theater of conflicts. Recognizing this continuity is not passé; it is the acknowledgement that Western legal reason already possesses, in its millenary DNA, the antibodies against the regulatory chaos that threatens the new frontier [20].

### **5.2. *Imperium and Dominium:* Peace through Property**

The great misunderstanding of spatial modernity, crystallized in the aporias of the UN treaties, lies in having confused political sovereignty with economic appropriation. Our proposal to recover the Roman taxonomy

serves to separate, with surgical clarity, the *Imperium* from *the Dominium* [21]. Where the *Imperium*—the pretense of hoisting flags and drawing state boundaries—must stop at the threshold of the atmosphere, ensuring that space remains a sanctuary of peace free from nationalism, the *Dominium*—the individual's ability to make resources his own through labor and ingenuity—must be able to flourish. This separation is not a legal artifice, but a profoundly human necessity: it allows the Universe to be preserved as a place of common transit, while unlocking that vital drive, that economic *conatus* that has always been the engine of human exploration. Without the certainty of "mine" and "yours" guaranteed by the *occupatio*, space would remain a sterile desert, a museum of unreachable stones, precluded to the progress of our species.

### **5.3. The *Occupatio* as a Creative Act: Towards a Multi-Planetary Civilization**

In the final analysis, this study intends to ethically rehabilitate the institution of the *occupatio*. Too often denigrated as an instrument of colonial robbery, it appears to us, in its Roman essence, as the primordial and founding legal act of civilization. The *occupatio* is not subtraction, it is creation. Transforming an inert asteroid — brute and purposeless matter — into resources, energy, habitat, means extending the range of human action, bringing life where there was only silence. When the Roman jurist recognizes the property of the one who operates the *specificatio*, he is celebrating the dignity of human work that infuses value into matter. In an age in which humanity no longer looks to the stars only to dream, but to survive and prosper, the law has the moral duty to build roads, not walls. Roman *prudencia* offers us these paths. It teaches us that order is not the enemy of freedom, but its precondition. To adopt this model is to accept the highest challenge: to export into space not only our machines, but our greatest immaterial invention — Law — so that the expansion towards infinity is not a leap into the darkness of barbarism, but an orderly and rational ascent towards our cosmic destiny [23].

## Footnotes

- [1] J. S. Lewis, *Mining the Sky: Untold Riches from the Asteroids, Comets, and Planets*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996. See also M. Elvis, "Let's mine asteroids—for science and profit," *Nature*, vol. 485, p. 549, 2012, which highlights the critical need for rare metals for the terrestrial electronics industry.
- [2] L. T. Elkins-Tanton et al., "The Psyche mission: Journey to a metal world," *Space Science Reviews*, vol. 216, no. 8, 2020. The economic value is calculated on the basis of the current market prices of raw metals, although the massive injection of these resources would inevitably cause a deflationary supply shock.
- [3] *Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies* (Outer Space Treaty), Art. II, Jan. 27, 1967, 610 U.N.T.S. 205.
- [4] S. Hobe, "Adequacy of the Current Legal and Regulatory Framework Relating to the Extraction and Appropriation of Natural Resources in Outer Space," *Annals of Air and Space Law*, vol. 32, 2007. The author discusses the legacy of the *Moon Agreement* and the concept of *res communis humanitatis* as an obstacle to privatization.
- [5] U.S. *Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act*, Pub. L. No. 114-90, § 402, 129 Stat. 704 (2015). The law explicitly states: "A United States citizen engaged in commercial recovery of an asteroid resource or a space resource... shall be entitled to any asteroid resource or space resource obtained."
- [6] G. Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science*, vol. 162, no. 3859, pp. 1243–1248, 1968.
- [7] H. Demsetz, "Toward a Theory of Property Rights," *The American Economic Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 347–359, 1967. Demsetz theorizes that private property emerges to internalize externalities when the benefits of internalization outweigh the transaction costs associated with defining rights.
- [8] T. Mommsen and P. Krueger, *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Vol. I: Digesta*. Berlin: Weidmann, 1870. See also D. 43.8.3.1 (Celsus) on the public nature of the use of the sea, which anticipates the modern concept of "Global Commons".
- [9] Gaius, *Digesta*, 41.1.7.3. On the relevance of occupation as an original mode of acquisition in the law of nations, see P. Birks, "The Roman Law of Property and Obligations," in *Oxford Principles of Roman Law*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014, p. Birks emphasizes that the *occupatio* is the only logical mode of acquisition in the absence of a previous owner.
- [10] For a comparative analysis of the Roman concept of *res nullius* and modern *terra nullius* in international law, see R. Zimmermann, *The Law of Obligations: Roman Foundations of the Civilian Tradition*, Oxford: OUP,

1996. Zimmermann notes how modern doctrine has often confused territorial sovereignty with private property, a distinction that is very clear in Roman texts.
- [11] On the insufficiency of mere sight (*oculis*) for the acquisition of possession and the necessity of physical (*bodily*) contact, see D. 41.2.3.1 (Paul). This principle is crucial to invalidate speculative claims based on remote astronomical observation alone.
- [12] Paulus, *Digesta*, 41.2.1.20. Modern doctrine has extensively discussed the analogy between slave and intelligent agent; see U. Pagallo, *The Laws of Robots: Crimes, Contracts, and Torts*, Springer, 2013, which recovers the notion of *peculium* for robots, but here the analogy serves to found the purchase of possession.
- [13] R. Savigny, *Das Recht des Besitzes* (The Right of Possession), 1803. Savigny's classical theory of possession requires the physical possibility of acting on the thing. Modern robotics extends human *possibilitas* beyond atmospheric boundaries, making spatial *possession* dogmatically permissible.
- [14] Iustinianus, *Institutiones*, 2.1.25. "*Si ex aliena materia species aliqua facta sit... si ea species ad materiam reduci non possit, eum potius probandum est qui fecerit*". The chemical or physical transformation of space minerals is irreversible, which assigns ownership to the producer/extractor.
- [15] *Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects*, Mar. 29, 1972, 961 U.N.T.S. 187. It is crucial to note that the Roman law of property (*derelictio*) must here interface with the international law of civil liability: the abandonment of property does not exempt from liability for damage caused by the abandoned object (e.g. a decommissioned satellite hitting the ISS).
- [16] *Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies*, Dec. 5, 1979, 1363 U.N.T.S. 3. It is significant to note that none of the major space powers (USA, Russia, China) has ratified this treaty, making it *de facto* ineffective as an international custom, precisely because of its anti-competitive clauses.
- [17] G. Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science*, vol. 162, no. 3859, pp. 1243–1248, 1968. Although Hardin focused on overpopulation and Earth's natural resources, the logic is perfectly translatable to saturated orbits (debris) and disputed mineral resources.
- [18] H. Demsetz, "Toward a Theory of Property Rights," *The American Economic Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 347–359, 1967. Demsetz empirically demonstrates (using the example of Native American furs) that private property emerges when the value of the resource exceeds the costs of monitoring and defending it. In space, technology is lowering monitoring costs, making the "Demsetzian" moment ripe.
- [19] R. A. Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law*, 9th ed., New York: Wolters Kluwer, 2014. Posner points out that *first possession* is the most

efficient rule for resources not yet owned, as it avoids the administrative costs of centralized allocation (space bureaucracy).

- [20] A. Schiavone, *The Invention of Law in the West*, Harvard University Press, 2012. The author masterfully argues how Roman law has created a "technology of form" capable of isolating legal relationships from religious or political constraints, making them universally applicable. It is this formal abstraction that makes the *Digest* applicable to Mars as well.
- [21] H. Grotius, *Mare Liberum*, 1609. The Grotian distinction is fundamental: the sea (space) cannot be occupied because it cannot be delimited, but what is found in it (fish/resources) is appropriate. Applying Grotius to space means saving freedom of navigation without sacrificing freedom of enterprise.
- [22] J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 1689 (II, § 27). Locke's theory of property is based on labor: man has ownership of his own person and of the "labor of his hands." When he mixes his work with natural matter (the asteroid), he acquires its property. The Roman *occupatio*, read through Locke, becomes the affirmation of the dignity of *Homo Faber*.
- [23] C. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, Telos Press, 2003 [1950]. Schmitt identifies the *Landnahme* (land taking) as the radical act that founds every order ("Nomos"). Expansion in space represents a new *Raumnahme* (taking of space): without a founding juridical act of appropriation and division, there can be no order, but only nihilistic chaos.

# **REDEFINING THE BOUNDARIES OF GAMING: AN ONTOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE STATUS OF E-SPORTS AS SPORTS ACTIVITIES**

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## **Introduction**

Although the concept of "sport" is widely spread in today's culture, its definition is anything but simple. Historically, it has been associated with characteristics such as significant physical exertion, the organization of structured events, as well as a shared regulatory framework. However, the emergence of new forms of competitive confrontation, such as e-sports, is progressively undermining this vision, raising questions about the need to review traditional parameters.

Although they take place entirely in digital environments, these forms of competition show a high structural complexity, requiring well-defined technical skills, such as decision-making speed, synergy between perception and movement, tactical skills and mental toughness. Their existence raises an essential question: is it still essential to conceive of the bodily element, understood in the traditional sense, as an essential requirement for classifying an activity as sporting?

The aim of this contribution is to develop an ontological reflection on the nature of e-sports, evaluating whether they can be recognized as authentic sports practices. The intent is to examine the theme not only by outlining the characteristics and organization of these competitions, but also by critically addressing it through different theoretical-philosophical perspectives, in order to clarify its substance.

To achieve this goal, the work will start by tracing the fundamental characteristics that, in the tradition, define what is commonly recognized as a sporting activity, and then introduce e-sports as a problematic and debated example. Subsequently, the main theoretical currents in the philosophical field that have dealt with establishing what a sport is, in

particular the formalist, conventionalist and interpretivist approaches, will be analyzed, with the aim of applying them to the context of electronic sports, so as to highlight both the possible affinities and the elements of friction.

In conclusion, a basic analysis will be conducted on the ontological level, examining both the reasons that support and those that oppose the inclusion of e-sports within the list of sports practices. The theoretical, symbolic and organizational consequences that such a framework would entail will also be explored.

## **1. The concept of "sport": traditional criteria and the challenge of e-sports**

Finding a clear definition for what we commonly call "sport" is particularly difficult, despite the fact that it is deeply rooted in modern life. This complexity does not derive only from a linguistic issue, but from the multifaceted character of the phenomenon itself, influenced by sociocultural and economic dynamics. Although it may seem simple and immediate to recognize what falls within the concept of sport, its theoretical essence turns out to be articulated. Traditionally, reference has been made to elements such as the presence of organized competitions, shared norms and the use of physical or tactical skills. Yet, today there is a debate about whether physical exercise should necessarily be the fulcrum, especially in light of the spread of practices that enhance fine motor activity, ingenuity and psychological resilience.

### **1.1. Constituent elements of traditional sporting activity**

The noun "sport" has its origins in Old French, where it was used to describe forms of entertainment<sup>1</sup>. In ancient times, structured motor practices were already associated with educational purposes and ethical ideals, while in the perspective of contemporary social

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<sup>1</sup> Roversi, A., *Sport*, in [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/sport\\_\(Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/sport_(Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali)/)

sciences, such practices represent a "total social fact", according to the interpretation of the French sociologist Marcel Mauss, acting as a lens through which to observe cultural changes and collective dynamics.

Since the 1960s, the sociological investigation of the phenomenon has adopted a more analytical vision, focused on aspects related to mass entertainment and the economic dimension. The evolution of sport from a recreational activity to an articulated global system is the result of a broader process of commodification of social relationships. In this context, it continues to constitute a symbolic space in which shared values are redefined<sup>2</sup>.

Today, in competitive practices, an organizational structure emerges based on officially recognized competitions, coordinated by formal bodies of a national and supranational nature, including associations and governing bodies that plan calendars and events, supervise the careers of sportsmen and manage regulatory and financial resources, often following a hierarchical logic. Approval by central institutions, such as CONI or the IOC, is essential to obtain validation, financial contributions and admission to major tournaments. They play the role of guarantors of the competitive system, deciding whether to authorize events and contributing to the definition of regulations and organizational structures, also according to strategic dynamics and interests of a political-commercial nature<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, establishing precise rules is a fundamental step in distinguishing a simple recreational activity from a structured sports discipline. These provisions outline the characteristics of the activity (objectives, spaces, operating methods, evaluation criteria), ensure conditions of impartiality among the participants, allow the recording of the results and their comparison, as well as identifying the functions of each person involved.

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<sup>2</sup> Roversi, A., Triani, G., *Sociologia dello sport*, Napoli, ESI, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> For further information see. Bastianon, S., *The federations and the market of the organization of sporting events: a look at the past to try to understand the present*, in «Rivista di Diritto Sportivo», 1, 2016, pp. 64-85.

The origin of these provisions follows a vertical structure, which starts from international founding documents and is articulated through national regulatory texts and sectoral regulations, giving rise to an autonomous legal system but linked to the State system. In parallel with the official rules, there is also a set of non-codified moral principles (*Fair Play*) such as fairness, respect for the opponent or rejection of doping, which embody the ethics of sporting behavior. Furthermore, regulatory provisions are not static, but undergo adaptations and modifications to respond to cultural, technological and social changes<sup>4</sup>.

The skills required in sports practice then manifest themselves in different forms. Physical skills (such as mastery of the gesture, muscle power or motor synchrony), cognitive and tactical attitudes (such as choosing actions, planning the game or predicting opponents' moves) and psychological resources (such as enthusiasm, emotional control and the ability to react to difficulties) can be identified.

In most disciplines, these dimensions are intertwined, although with varying relevance depending on the context. In fact, an increasing awareness of the decisive role played by psychological and tactical skills is emerging, even in areas where physical performance prevails: the recognition of these faculties is transforming the image of the athlete and raises questions about the very concept of sport, undermining models that attribute value exclusively to physical abilities.

One of the most relevant debates today concerns whether these skills should be considered an essential requirement to classify a discipline as "sporting". Activities such as chess and so-called "e-sports" challenge this paradigm: chess, although it involves minimal physical involvement, has been accepted as a sports discipline by the International Olympic Committee, thanks to its competitive

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<sup>4</sup> For further information see. Coco, D., *The concept of rule in its recreational-educational and didactic-sports declinations*, in «Formazione & Insegna», 3, 2013, pp. 121–127.

structure, codified rules, high tactical component and the demand for prolonged concentration both mental and physical.

E-sports are based on virtual dynamics but include official tournaments, rigorous training programs, speed of movement, coordination, planning and emotional resilience, so some studies identify these practices as a bodily element linked to athletic preparation. The Olympic Committee has begun a discussion on these issues, declaring that these activities can fall within the field of sport if they share the Olympic values and comply with rules aimed at combating doping substances.

This discussion represents a collective redefinition of the meaning attributed to the different forms of abilities, bodily, intellectual and digital, and is influenced by both media success and economic logic. Furthermore, it reveals the effort of institutional organizations to integrate new competitive expressions within existing schemes<sup>5</sup>.

## 1.2. E-sports as a controversial case

E-sports represent a very distinct reality from recreational *gaming*, having reached a planetary diffusion and a great impact both in the socio-cultural and economic spheres. The main crux of the debate concerns the relationship between the structural peculiarities of these practices (virtual interaction, specific skills, particular form of physical involvement) and conventional conceptions of sporting activity, opening a broader reflection on the very meaning of the term "sport" in the technological age.

Contrary to the idea that it can be a phenomenon without structure, the e-sports landscape represents an articulated and well-organized system, within which different subjects operate: the companies that create digital games and control their mechanics,

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<sup>5</sup> For further information see. Maietta, A., *E-sports: current status and perspectives of regulatory framework*, in [https://rivistadirittosportivo.coni.it/images/rivistadirittosportivo/ultime\\_novita/2022/Gli\\_e-sports\\_stato\\_attuale\\_e\\_prospettive\\_di\\_inquadramento\\_normativo.pdf](https://rivistadirittosportivo.coni.it/images/rivistadirittosportivo/ultime_novita/2022/Gli_e-sports_stato_attuale_e_prospettive_di_inquadramento_normativo.pdf)

establishing the official parameters and, often, promoting the main events; bodies specialized in the realization of championships and competitive events on a global scale; organizations that deal with the selection, preparation and management of digital athletes, often equipped with technical staff (coaches and psychologists); the participants, both professional and amateur, engaged in the various competitions; an international audience of supporters who follow the events through streaming platforms (such as YouTube or Twitch) or live in dedicated facilities.

This articulated set of players gives rise to leagues both on a local and international scale, and to world-class events with prizes that can reach high figures, often characterized by sophisticated and multi-level competition mechanisms. This structure represents a key element in giving credibility and institutional value to e-sports, clearly differentiating them from occasional gaming experiences and strengthening their image among spectators, media and investors<sup>6</sup>.

A distinctive aspect concerns the way in which the rules are managed: in e-sports, the dynamics of the game are incorporated directly into the software and applied automatically by the system itself. This involves a form of neutrality, in contrast to human arbitrage, typical of physical disciplines, which can be subject to subjective evaluations or inaccuracies, despite the introduction of technological tools. However, the rules of e-sports are not static: they can be updated by the developers through changes, which affect the strategic balance of the game and impose on the participants a continuous ability to adapt.

The figure of the human referee, while not disappearing, takes on a different role: he deals with the technical management of events, the supervision of the behavior of the participants, the application of the regulations and the fight against unfair practices, such as the use of unauthorized programs, illegal agreements between players or the abuse of system errors. It is precisely this last point that raises moral questions: does exploiting a flaw in the game represent ingenuity or

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<sup>6</sup> For further information see. Tang, W., *Understanding Esports from the Perspective of Team Dynamics*, in <https://thesportjournal.org/article/understanding-esports-from-the-perspective-of-team-dynamics/>

impropriety? The debate thus shifts from the athletic gesture to interaction with a programmed digital environment<sup>7</sup>.

Despite this, although it is often not perceived as such, the competitive level of e-sports imposes very specific body requirements such as fine motor skills, such as rapid, accurate and repeated movements of hands, fingers and wrists, subjected to intense and constant loads and an ability to physically and mentally resist developed with prolonged preparation sessions. In addition, repeated engagement can cause problems such as tendon inflammation, compression of the median nerve, pain in the spine or cervical area, and vision problems.

For this reason, both teams and individual athletes have progressively introduced specific training programs, including cardiovascular activities and strengthening and mobility exercises, not to imitate traditional sports training, but to optimize endurance and alertness, prevent the onset of injuries and promote a balanced psychophysical state. In this context, the body becomes a functional means of interaction with the digital environment.

The comparative analysis highlights both affinities and contrasts between e-sports and traditional sports. On the one hand, common elements such as solid planning, a high level of expertise, constant commitment, well-defined regulations and a large participation of spectators emerge. On the other hand, however, there are substantial differences that call into question the canonical categories with which the very concept of sport is defined. In addition to, as we have seen, the bodily component, other distinctive aspects concern the deep integration with the virtual environment and with automated rules, and the management structure, often not centralized and strongly conditioned by the companies producing the games. In this sense, e-sports represent an extreme case that pushes us to reconsider the effectiveness of traditional parameters when applied to contexts born and developed in the era of technological transformation<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> For further information see. Kane, D., Spradley, B. D., *Recognizing Esports as a Sport*, in <https://thesportjournal.org/article/recognizing-esports-as-a-sport/>

The identity of electronic sports has been analyzed by various currents of philosophical thought, including Formalism, Conventionalism and Interpretivism, which propose divergent interpretative perspectives. The discussion is not limited to a linguistic or terminological issue: defining these practices as sporting activities has significant cultural and social consequences, influencing institutional recognition, prestige or access to subsidies.

## **2. Philosophical lenses for the analysis of sport and e-sports**

### **2.1. Philosophical Theories of the Definition of "Sport"**

Although sporting activity has been present in human practice for centuries, a philosophical analysis of its meaning began to develop only in the seventies. The main problem lies in the great variety of disciplines involved and the lack of a shared and universally valid definition. In any case, establishing what should be considered "sport" is not just a theoretical question: concrete consequences depend on this definition, such as recognition by institutions, participation in Olympic events and inclusion in educational programs.

It is possible to focus the analysis on three currents of thought belonging to the "internalist" perspective<sup>9</sup>, each of which aims to investigate the constitutive and distinctive elements that define the essence of sporting activity.

Firstly, Formalism, associated in particular with the thought of Bernard Suits, who interprets sporting activity as a particular category within the ludic universe, identifiable through a set of basic rules. According to the American philosopher, the nature of

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<sup>9</sup> The internalist approach, in the context of philosophical reflection, represents a theory that attributes centrality to subjective factors in the context of the justification of knowledge. According to this view, a belief can be considered well-founded only if the individual has immediate access to the reasons that support it, or if these justifications reside in mental conditions within the subject's consciousness.

participating in a game lies in the deliberate effort to deal with superfluous difficulties, built on four main components: the "prelusive objective", i.e. the concrete purpose that characterizes the activity (e.g., hitting pins with a ball in bowling); the "means of use", i.e. the permitted ways to achieve the end, intentionally selected so as not to be the simplest possible; the constitutive rules, i.e. the prescriptions that determine the difficulties, prohibiting more direct or advantageous solutions; the "lusurious attitude", that is, the voluntary attitude with which these norms are accepted, thus making the activity in question practicable. In addition, to differentiate sport from other forms of play, Suits introduces additional conditions: the presence of a motor component, large-scale collective recognition and a stable organizational structure over time<sup>10</sup>.

Although presenting itself as a coherent and well-structured model, the formalist approach has been questioned because of its excessive inflexibility: it, in fact, tends to exclude examples such as chess or e-sports themselves, as they do not meet the criterion of physical effort. Furthermore, this approach shows limits on the ethical level, since it does not provide tools to assess the moral correctness of norms or behaviors. Another critical issue concerns the lack of attention to the unwritten rules and the shared spirit of sports practice, fundamental elements for understanding its culture. Finally, the so-called "logical incompatibility", according to which breaking a rule would mean ceasing to participate in the game itself, is considered problematic and not very adherent to the reality of sports practices<sup>11</sup>.

Secondly, Conventionalism emerges as a response to the rigidities of Formalism, emphasizing the central role of informal understandings and shared values that permeate the sporting environment. According to this perspective, the regulatory provisions cannot be understood or applied outside the cultural and practical

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<sup>10</sup> For further information see. Suits, B., *La cicala e le formiche: gioco, vita e utopia*, Bergamo, Junior, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Antunes, P., *Suits and "game-playing": formalism and subjectivism revisited. A critique*, in «Sport, Ethics and Philosophy», 2024, doi: 0.1080/17511321.2024.2329900.

context in which they are inserted, made up of collective habits and common expectations<sup>12</sup>.

In this framework, the Australian philosopher Fred D'Agostino proposes the notion of *ethos* to indicate that set of tacit practices and unofficial codes that guide the concrete implementation of rules such as, for example, the degree of physicality considered acceptable in a given discipline<sup>13</sup>. The American teacher and inventor William Morgan, on the other hand, distinguishes between more superficial conventional agreements, useful for practical coordination, and deeper habits, rooted in the moral principles and cultural meanings that give meaning to sporting activity<sup>14</sup>.

Although it represents a more elastic approach and more in tune with the real dynamics of sporting activities, the conventionalist vision is questioned for its conceptual indeterminacy, which makes it difficult to establish precisely what the actually operational habits are. The main problem, however, lies in the danger of slipping towards a form of moral relativism: if normative authority is based exclusively on what is commonly practiced or accepted, it becomes problematic to question widespread but ethically controversial behaviors. This approach, in fact, lacks an external evaluation criterion that allows for a critical analysis of the very conventions on which it is based<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, Interpretivism aims to overcome the theoretical deficiencies of previous models, focusing on the identification of the intrinsic purpose of sporting activity. According to philosophers such as Robert Simon and J. S. Russell, the ideal core around which sport revolves lies in the pursuit of physical-athletic excellence. In this perspective, sport is conceived as a context aimed at the development and testing of human abilities. This purpose serves as a

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<sup>12</sup> Cacchiarelli, M., *Società dell'anti-agonismo. Philosophical models of competition*, in «Lessico di etica pubblica», 1, 2020, pp. 89-99.

<sup>13</sup> For further information see. D'Agostino, F., *The Ethos of Games*, in «Journal of the Philosophy of Sport», 1, 1981, pp. 7-18.

<sup>14</sup> Morgan, W. J., *Broad Internalism, Deep Conventions, Moral Entrepreneurs, and Sport*, in «Journal of the Philosophy of Sport», 1, 2012, pp. 65-100.

<sup>15</sup> Cacchiarelli, M., *Società dell'anti-agonismo. Philosophical Models of Competition*, op. cit.

criterion for interpreting norms, practices and behaviours: regulatory provisions, for example, should be understood and applied in a way that supports, and not hinders, the distinctive quality that each discipline aims to enhance.

The interpretivist orientation provides a solid and coherent regulatory framework, but is not without objections. One of the main difficulties lies in clearly identifying the essential purpose attributable to each sport, since opinions can differ. In addition, the proposed guiding criteria are sometimes imprecise when trying to apply them to concrete situations. Another criticism concerns the tendency to consider these principles as universal and out of time, neglecting the cultural and historical factors that influence sports practices<sup>16</sup>.

These philosophical currents, as we have seen, diverge in their objective, propose different readings of situations at the limit of the sports definition such as, precisely, e-sports, chess or parkour, and deal differently with complex moral issues, such as the use of prohibited substances. Formalism disapproves of the latter as they break the regulations; Conventionalism discusses their legitimacy on the basis of *ethos*, but risks legitimizing controversial behaviors; finally, Interpretivism rejects them because they alter the aspiration to physical-athletic excellence.

Formalism, moreover, tends to exclude e-sports due to the absence of physical effort; Conventionalism evaluates their legitimacy based on the degree of cultural acceptance, while Interpretivism could consider them sporting activities if they are intended as a ground for cultivating mental, strategic or technical skills.

In more detailed terms, the formalist perspective identifies a contradiction in the case of e-sports: although it requires fine motor skills, exceptional speed of response, advanced coordination between sight and movements, considerable mental capacity and both psychological and physical resistance, the physical effort involved is limited to specific areas of the body, in particular hands and eyes, and is conveyed by digital interfaces. This implies the

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

absence of extensive physical activation, a characteristic considered central in traditional forms of sport.

Even if these activities meet requirements such as wide popularity and consolidated organizational structure (with official leagues, professional teams and multimillion-dollar prizes), the formalist conception, linked to a broader vision of corporeality, tends not to fully recognize such practices as authentic expressions of sport<sup>17</sup>.

The conventionalist approach does not attempt to establish in advance what is meant by the physical component, but focuses on how the reference environment, composed of practitioners, supporters, organizers, sports bodies and public opinion, interprets and attributes value to the skills required in e-sports, such as mental, tactical, reaction and fine motor skills. The use of the concept of "athlete" to describe participants, the presence of teams, and media discussions (such as the possibility of inclusion in the Olympic Games, participation in international sporting events, or market expansion) are all signs of evolving cultural norms that are still being compared.

As a result, the conventionalist perspective comes to an uncertain and variable conclusion: the recognition of e-sports as sports disciplines depends on a collective process that is still evolving, in which it will be decisive to understand which shared practices will end up being established. While this approach is able to effectively represent the changing and open nature of the notion of sport, it exposes, as mentioned, the risk of falling into a form of relativism, since it does not have solid criteria for questioning conventions that are emerging, even if they are based on economic logic rather than on substantive values<sup>18</sup>.

Interpretivism, on the other hand, does not focus on the presence or absence of bodily movement in the classical sense, but rather questions the value of the skills involved, such as mental alertness, tactical planning, speed of execution and precision in gestures, and whether these can represent an authentic expression of human ability

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<sup>17</sup> Hauge, D., *What is the Nature of Sport? Formalism, Conventionalism and Interpretivism Reconsidered*, in [https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10196288/2/Hauge\\_10196288\\_Thesis.pdf](https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10196288/2/Hauge_10196288_Thesis.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

worthy of sporting consideration, in line with the profound purpose that is attributed, on a conceptual level, to sporting activity.

In this sense, two fundamental readings are outlined: a narrower point of view, which associates the sporting value exclusively with the use of the body in the classical sense, leading to the exclusion of digital disciplines from the list of sporting activities; a broader perspective, which understands excellence as the ability to face articulated tests imposed by a regulated system, enhancing a wide range of human faculties, including intellectual and motor precision. Within this framework, e-sports can also be recognized as authentic expressions of excellence, as they test complex skills in a competitive context.

The outcome of the interpretivist approach is based on the way in which the concept of "excellence" is defined. This orientation opens up the possibility of recognizing digital competitions as sports practices, but only on condition that a solid regulatory argument can be provided that highlights their consistency with the fundamental principles that characterize sporting activity. In this way, the focus shifts from purely descriptive parameters, such as the use of the body, to more axiological considerations, linked to the meaning and value of the sporting experience. This allows for greater conceptual openness, but also introduces the risk of a lack of clarity and precision within the boundaries of the definition<sup>19</sup>.

### **3. Ontological evaluation of e-sports and conceptual implications**

The expansion of the phenomenon of e-sports has stimulated a reflection on their real identity. The central issue lies in the difficulty of establishing what is meant by "sporting activity", given that there is no shared definition. Attributing or denying this label is not only a theoretical issue, but has tangible consequences: think of the possibility of being included in the Olympic programs (a topic addressed by the International Olympic Committee), the possibility of

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

obtaining subsidies, the legal and social recognition of professional video gamers, and the public image that derives from it. The interest in considering e-sports as a sporting form therefore also arises from concrete reasons, since this recognition brings real benefits in terms of economic resources, bureaucratic facilities and commercial attractiveness<sup>20</sup>.

Those who consider e-sports as similar to traditional sports highlight numerous elements of continuity. Firstly, the organisational model, whereby e-sports are structured into leagues and events on a global scale, with codified regulations, defined playing standards and professional teams, largely replicating the structure of conventional sports. Secondly, preparation, in fact high-level gamers undergo intensive and methodical training programs, including technical exercises, study of strategies and analysis of previous matches, all guided by specialized figures such as coaches and analysts.

Thirdly, the necessary skills, since e-sports require a wide spectrum of skills, including mental skills, alertness and motor precision. Finally, professionalism, for which there is a well-defined working context, with gamers paid, contracted, supported by sponsorships and included in a specific career path.

As we have seen, Interpretivism, according to which sporting activity is understood as a shared commitment to forms of excellence, can accommodate e-sports, provided that a broader concept of merit is adopted, which also includes mental and tactical skills. Similarly, conventionalism, which attributes centrality to socially constructed agreements, can justify the inclusion of e-sports in the sports landscape, leveraging their recognition by official bodies (such as the issuance of visas for professional players and integration into academic training courses) and collective acceptance<sup>21</sup>.

On the other hand, one of the most recurrent criticisms concerns the lack of significant physical effort, understood as the

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<sup>20</sup> For further information see. Kanellopoulos, A., Giossos, Y., *Esports: Philosophical Perspectives*, in «European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science», 1, 2024, pp. 125–148.

<sup>21</sup> Hauge, D., *What is the Nature of Sport? Formalism, Conventionalism and Interpretivism Reconsidered*, op. cit.

involvement of different muscles of the body, an element considered fundamental by many classic theories on sport. The static character of e-sports is often perceived as incompatible with the physiological benefits generally attributed to motor exercise typical of traditional sports disciplines.

On a theoretical level, Formalism conceives sport as a structured form of play that requires physical skills and has social diffusion and institutional recognition. In this perspective, digital competitions risk being excluded if the concept of motor skill is understood in a conventional way and limited to extensive body movement.

A further objection focuses on the pervasive intervention of technology in competitive digital contexts: the challenges, in fact, take place within simulated spaces, made possible by electronic devices and computer programs; the rules that govern the gaming experience are not decided by independent bodies, but are directly integrated into the digital architecture of the software, designed by developers and, moreover, publishers they hold exclusive rights to the games, exercising power over the design, updating of regulatory dynamics, granting authorizations for use and managing the main competitions. This model of centralized control is totally different from the system of autonomous associations that regulate traditional sports disciplines. In essence, every digital discipline is ontologically subordinate to an external economic subject, which can modify or cease its existence based on market choices<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

The examination of the ontological identity of e-sports has brought to light a series of moral issues closely related to the way in which the very concept of sporting activity is understood. Among the main ethical reflections that emerged are the critical issues inherent in the theoretical models taken into consideration: on the one hand, Conventionalism risks slipping into a fluid and unstable ethical vision, especially when legitimacy depends exclusively on collective consensus or economic dynamics; on the other hand, Interpretativism invites us to refer to an ideal of "excellence" in performance, which, in the digital context, must be revised to enhance mental skills, tactical planning and fine motor skills. In addition, there are additional ethical challenges, such as responsible management by publishers who control platforms, regulating illegal conduct within virtual environments, and consistency with shared moral values such as *fair play* and combating the use of performance-altering substances or tools.

A fundamental conflict is evident between the advancement of the technological dimension, represented by competitions related to e-sports, and the protection of the founding principles that historically characterize sporting activity. This contrast is reflected above all in the discussion on the importance attributed to prolonged physical effort compared to the enhancement of different types of human activities, such as cognitive or technical-strategic ones.

Similarly, a dichotomy is observed between a virtual context, highly regulated and dependent on digital infrastructures, and the decentralized and culturally rooted structures of traditional sport, often guided by implicit ethical codes. The fundamental question is to understand how it is possible to welcome the transformations introduced by technology while keeping intact the nature of sport as a path of personal growth oriented towards the improvement of human skills, based on equity, fairness and mutual recognition, even in a context marked by strong pressures related to profit.

Looking to the future, we can hypothesize a progressive transformation of the very notion of "sport", which could open up to a greater extent to forms of virtual competition. It is, however, essential that this transformation is not configured as a simple passive adaptation to market trends or mass diffusion, but as the result of a critical and responsible examination of a moral nature. It therefore becomes essential to adopt a values-based perspective, capable of questioning the role and meaning we want to attribute to competitive challenges in the context of digital innovation.

It is therefore essential to have a constant dialogue between sports bodies, digital content creators, gaming communities and citizens, in order to face the new challenges that this scenario entails. Only through this collaboration will it be possible to ensure that the inclusion of e-sports takes place in harmony with the ethical and cultural foundations that give sport its educational and human value, protecting its authenticity against the pressures deriving from technological innovation and economic interests.

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# HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION OF PEDAGOGICAL HUMOR IN THE LITERARY TRADITION. FORMS OF HUMOR AND FORMS OF EDUCATION

## Biographical note

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## Abstract

This article develops a historical investigation of pedagogical humor in the Western literary tradition, assuming humor not as a marginal expressive phenomenon nor as a circumscribed literary genre, but as a complex epistemic device, endowed with a structural cognitive and educational function. Through a genealogical approach, the contribution analyzes the main forms of humor elaborated in classical texts, relating them to specific conceptions of knowledge, the subject and education.

The basic hypothesis is that Western literature has historically experimented, in symbolic and narrative form, with cognitive and pedagogical devices that contemporary theoretical reflection has subsequently formalized. In this perspective, humor is interpreted as a privileged mode of knowledge production through incongruity, paradox and semantic restructuring, capable of activating reflective and metacognitive learning processes.

The contribution integrates the analysis of the classics with the systematic dialogue with international research in the philosophical, linguistic, pedagogical and cognitive fields, placing *humor as a pedagogical tool* as a contemporary theoretical synthesis of a long implicit educational tradition. The article thus intends to contribute to a redefinition of humor as a founding category of theoretical pedagogy and the history of education.

## Keywords

Pedagogical humor; history of education; Western literature; epistemology of humor; cognitive incongruence; metacognition

## Introduction

### Humor and education as an epistemological and historical problem

In the panorama of Western pedagogical reflection, humor has long occupied a marginal and ambiguous position. Although it persistently crosses the history of literature, philosophy and culture, it has rarely been recognized as a central theoretical category in educational processes. This marginalization does not derive from a real irrelevance of humor, but from its systematic conceptual simplification, which has reduced it to an emotional manifestation, rhetorical strategy or accessory motivational resource.

Such a reduction has prevented us from grasping the epistemic complexity of humor and its function in the processes of knowledge construction. In recent decades, however, international research has progressively questioned this approach, recognizing humor as having a full cognitive status. Studies from the philosophy of language, cognitive science, pragmatics and educational psychology have shown how humor operates through mechanisms of controlled incongruence, capable of producing semantic restructurings and activating advanced forms of reflective thinking (Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994; Giora, 2003; Martin, 2007).

In this perspective, humor can be defined as an epistemic device, that is, as a specific mode of production of knowledge that acts by discarding ordinary interpretative frameworks. Understanding a humorous utterance does not simply mean decoding a message, but implies the ability to simultaneously manage multiple levels of meaning, to recognize the fracture between expectation and fulfillment and to reflect on this fracture. This cognitive operation has obvious educational implications, as it stimulates metalinguistic skills, conceptual flexibility and metacognitive awareness.

The hypothesis that orients the present contribution is that these educational functions of humor do not constitute a recent acquisition, but have their roots in the Western literary tradition. The classical texts are not considered here as simple historical antecedents, but as epistemic laboratories, in which humor operated as a tool for the formation of thought long before its explicit theorizing.

Taking a historical perspective therefore means questioning the forms of humor in relation to the educational models that underlie them. In this

perspective, the forms of humor and the forms of education are historically co-determined: each humorous configuration corresponds to a specific conception of the subject, knowledge and learning.

The theoretical framework developed in *Humor as a pedagogical tool* makes it possible to make this historical continuity explicit, proposing a contemporary systematization of humor as an intentional educational methodology. This perspective allows us to reread the literary tradition not as a repertoire of examples, but as a genealogy of implicit educational practices that today find a theoretical formalization.

## **1. Humor as an epistemic and educational device**

### Theoretical foundations for a historical reading

The assumption of humor as an epistemic device allows us to radically reconsider the relationship between knowledge and education. Far from being a simple stylistic effect or a marginal communicative strategy, humor is configured as a privileged mode of knowledge production, based on processes of semantic dislocation and conceptual reorganization. International research has shown that these processes imply advanced forms of cognitive processing, characterized by the ability to simultaneously manage incompatible representations and to reflect on their structural deviation (Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994; Attardo, 2001).

In this perspective, humor cannot be understood outside of a theory of knowledge that recognizes the constitutive role of incongruity. As highlighted by Giora (2003), humorous understanding requires a violation of interpretative expectations that is not simply recorded, but actively resolved through a complex inferential process. This process activates metalinguistic and metacognitive skills, making humor a privileged field for observing the deep functioning of the human mind.

These theoretical acquisitions find significant resonance in contemporary pedagogical reflection. Jerome Bruner, in outlining a cultural conception of education, insists on the fact that authentic learning does not coincide with the passive assimilation of information, but with the ability to reorganize one's own representations of the world through moments of cognitive discontinuity (Bruner, 1996). In this framework, humor appears as a culturally regulated form of discontinuity, capable of urging the subject to renegotiate meaning, rather than to adhere to it uncritically.

The convergence between cognitive, linguistic and pedagogical studies therefore makes it possible to attribute a structural educational function to humour. Authors such as Ziv (1988) and Martin (2007) have shown how humorous experience is associated with the development of divergent thinking, cognitive flexibility and socio-relational skills. In the educational field, these dimensions are central to the training of subjects capable of dealing with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty, constitutive characteristics of contemporary learning contexts.

It is in this framework that *Humor as a pedagogical tool* is placed as a theoretical proposal of synthesis. The work assumes humor not as an accessory or motivational resource, but as an intentional educational methodology, capable of integrating cognitive, emotional and relational dimensions. The overcoming of the dichotomy between seriousness and humor represents one of the most significant contributions of this approach, since it allows humor to be recognized as having a full epistemic status and a high-level formative function.

This recognition makes it possible to reinterpret the literary tradition in a genealogical key. The forms of humor elaborated in classical texts can be interpreted as historical anticipations of cognitive devices that contemporary theory has made explicit. The relationship between history and current events is therefore not configured as a simple retrospective analogy, but as a structural continuity between symbolic practices and theoretical conceptualizations.

## **2. Classical Antiquity**

### **Irony, incongruity and thought formation**

In classical Greek culture, education is not conceived as a linear transmission of contents, but as a process of transformation of the subject through the exercise of thought. In this context, the first forms of pedagogical humor emerge in a way intimately intertwined with philosophical practice and reflection on knowledge.

Socratic irony represents one of the most relevant matrices of this tradition. As Vlastos (1991) has shown, Socrates' irony is not a secondary rhetorical technique, but an epistemic strategy aimed at producing a destabilization of the interlocutor's certainties. Through the simulation of ignorance, Socrates induces a fracture between presumed knowledge and

actual knowledge, generating a condition of cognitive dissonance that forces the subject to reorganize his representations.

This form of implicit humor performs an eminently educational function. Learning does not take place through the accumulation of correct answers, but through the awareness of the limits and problematic nature of knowledge. In pedagogical terms, it is a form of negative education, in which the suspension of certainties constitutes the condition for the possibility of knowledge. This approach significantly anticipates modern conceptions of reflective and constructivist learning.

Aristotelian reflection helps to consolidate this perspective, inscribing incongruity within a systematic theory of knowledge. In *the Poetics*, the comic is defined as the representation of error without destructive consequences. This definition makes it possible to interpret the humorous experience as a protected learning space, in which the error can be observed, analyzed and reworked without activating sanctioning mechanisms.

As educational scholars inspired by Dewey (1933) have observed, authentic learning implies a reflection on experience that passes through the re-elaboration of error. In this perspective, Aristotelian humor can be read as an anticipated form of pedagogy of error, capable of fostering understanding through critical confrontation and not through mere correction.

Attic comedy further extends this function from the individual to the collective level. Through parody, hyperbole and symbolic deformation, comedy produces a critical distancing from dominant discourses. As Bakhtin (1965) has shown, ancient comic forms create a symbolic space in which hierarchies are temporarily suspended, allowing for a critical reworking of the social order. This suspension has a profoundly educational value, since it makes visible the historical and constructed character of the norms.

### **3. Latin tradition and the Middle Ages**

Normative stabilization of humor and educational models of measure, morality and interiority

With the transition from Greece to the Roman world, pedagogical humor underwent a decisive transformation, which should not be interpreted as an impoverishment of the device, but as its functional

recodification within a different educational model. If Greek *paideia* had privileged epistemic problematization and philosophical dialogue as the primary form of education of thought, Latin culture progressively oriented humor towards a regulative, moral and social function, in line with a conception of education as the formation of the citizen and the responsible subject.

In this context, humor does not lose its ability to produce cognitive waste, but is subjected to a principle of measurement and regulatory control, which delimits its use and directs its educational effects. This transformation responds to a structural need of Roman culture, which is strongly attentive to the stability of the symbolic order and the transmission of shared values. Humor thus becomes an instrument of indirect education, capable of correcting without destabilizing, of producing awareness without undermining social cohesion.

Horace represents a paradigmatic figure of this configuration. In the *Satires* and *Epistles*, humor manifests itself as a strategy of reflective distancing, oriented to unmask excesses, rigidity and illusions without resorting to the symbolic violence of direct condemnation. The famous principle of *laughing dicere verum* should not be understood as a simple stylistic expedient, but as a pedagogical conception of discourse, based on the idea that truth, in order to be internalized, must be mediated and made cognitively accessible. As Freudenburg (2001) observes, Horatian humor operates as a device of critical self-limitation, inviting the reader to recognize his or her own limits through a process of problematic identification.

This educational function of humor is explicitly systematized in Quintilian's reflection. In the *Institutio Oratoria*, humor is included within an overall training project, which aims to construct the speaker as a morally and cognitively competent subject. Quintilian recognizes humor as having an essential function in the formation of judgment, but at the same time emphasizes the need for its controlled use, based on *urbanitas* and ethical responsibility. Humour, in this perspective, becomes an educational skill, not a spontaneous talent, and must be learned as an integral part of linguistic and moral training.

From a pedagogical point of view, this approach anticipates modern conceptions of education as the development of reflective and socio-communicative skills. Education does not consist only in the acquisition of content, but in the ability to modulate language according to contexts, to

recognize incongruity without transforming it into symbolic aggression, and to use ironic distancing as a tool for understanding. In this sense, Quintilian can be considered one of the first theorists of a pedagogy of normative humor, oriented towards the formation of cognitive and moral balance.

With Seneca, pedagogical humor underwent a further transformation, progressively moving from the social to the inner level. Stoic irony is not addressed primarily to the other, but to the subject himself, and operates as an instrument of self-knowledge and reflective detachment. As Hadot (1995) and Nussbaum (1994) have shown, Stoic philosophy cannot be understood as a mere doctrinal system, but as a set of spiritual practices oriented towards the transformation of the subject. In this framework, humor takes on the function of unmasking the illusions of the ego, revealing the inconsistency of the claims of control and domination.

Seneca's humor does not produce a liberating laugh, but a form of critical awareness that passes through the recognition of human fragility. From an educational point of view, this implies a conception of training as a process of emotional and cognitive regulation, in which humor operates as a device for the downsizing of passions and restructuring the relationship with oneself. This configuration significantly anticipates contemporary theories of emotional education and metacognition, in which the ability to reflect on one's mental states is considered central.

The transition to the Middle Ages introduces a further tension in the relationship between humor and education. In a context strongly marked by religious authority and doctrinal normativity, humor does not disappear, but is relegated to liminal spaces, often perceived as ambiguous or marginal. However, it is precisely this marginality that allows the development of humorous forms endowed with a peculiar indirect educational function.

Parodic literature, goliardic texts and carnival practices elaborate a pedagogy of inversion, in which humor acts as a device for the temporary suspension of the symbolic order. As Bakhtin (1965) has shown, the logic of carnival does not destroy the norm, but relativizes it, making visible its historical and contingent character. In educational terms, this produces a form of critical learning that cannot be explicitly institutionalized, but that operates through the symbolic experience of reversal.

Medieval humor, far from being a simple residue of popular comedy, therefore performs a profound pedagogical function. It educates to the complexity of the social order, showing that hierarchies and truths are not absolute, but depend on specific interpretative frameworks. This function

anticipates, in symbolic form, modern conceptions of education as a process of critical deconstruction and pluralization of points of view.

Overall, the Latin and medieval tradition contributes to stabilizing humor as a regulated educational device, capable of operating on several levels: social, moral and interior. This stabilization does not cancel the epistemic function of humor, but orients its use according to specific educational models. It is precisely this plurality of configurations that makes humor a historically central category for the understanding of training processes.

#### **4. Modernity and the twentieth century**

##### **From normative humor to critical and metacognitive humor**

Literary and philosophical modernity marks a qualitative transformation of the humorous device, which from a predominantly regulatory and moral instrument is progressively configured as a critical principle of questioning knowledge. This transformation does not consist in a simple intensification of irony or paradox, but in a profound reorganization of the cognitive and educational functions of humor, now oriented towards unmasking the aporias of systems of knowledge and educational models based on authority, linearity and the presumed transparency of reason.

In this context, modern literature takes on a decisive role as an epistemic laboratory. Cervantes' work represents a fundamental threshold: *Don Quixote* stages a form of structural humor that is not limited to producing narrative incongruity, but questions the very assumptions of knowledge and education. The tension between imagination and reality, between bookish codes and the lived world, produces a paradoxical form of learning, in which the subject is educated not through adherence to a model, but through the repeated experience of interpretative failure. As Close (2003) observes, Cervante's humor constructs an epistemology of error that makes visible the historicity of systems of meaning and the need for a critical training capable of negotiating them.

This line is radicalized in Enlightenment satire, where humor takes on an openly emancipatory function. In Swift and Voltaire, incongruity no longer operates only on the individual level, but affects the institutional structures of knowledge and education. *Gulliver's Travels* and *Candide* use narrative deformation and hyperbole to undermine pedagogical optimism and naïve faith in abstract rationality. Humor here becomes an instrument

of epistemic resistance, capable of revealing the internal contradictions of educational models based on dogmatic assumptions (Eagleton, 2009).

From a pedagogical point of view, these works anticipate a conception of education as a critical practice, in which learning does not coincide with the transmission of established truths, but with the ability to recognize and question the limits of knowledge. Humor, in this framework, plays an essential function, since it allows us to introduce the necessary distance to problematize what appears obvious or natural.

The twentieth century marks the moment in which this literary intuition finds an explicit theoretical formalization. Henri Bergson, while moving in a different philosophical horizon, contributes decisively to recognizing humor as a cognitive and social function. His analysis of the comic as a response to the rigidity of the living allows us to interpret humor as a mechanism for reactivating flexibility, opposing the processes of automatization of thought and behavior (Bergson, 1900). In educational terms, this perspective implies a conception of training as a dynamic process, oriented to counteract cognitive inertia and promote critical adaptability.

Freudian reflection introduces a further level of complexity, placing humor at the intersection of cognitive and emotional processes. In *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*, Freud interprets humor as a psychic operation that allows energy to be saved through the symbolic restructuring of conflict (Freud, 1905). Although not a pedagogical theory in the strict sense, this approach has had profound repercussions on educational psychology, showing how humor can facilitate the processing of emotionally complex content and create favorable conditions for learning.

The point of maximum theoretical density is however reached with Luigi Pirandello, whose reflection on humor represents a decisive turning point for the understanding of its epistemic and educational value. In the famous distinction between *warning of the contrary* and *feeling of the opposite*, Pirandello defines humor as a form of thought that does not stop at the perception of incongruity, but reworks it through a process of empathic and cognitive reflection. Authentic humor does not produce an immediate effect of relaxation, but induces a suspension of judgment that opens up the space for complex understanding (Pirandello, 1908).

From an educational point of view, this conception is of extraordinary importance. Pirandello's humor educates to the plurality of points of view, to the relativity of identity forms and to the awareness of the fracture between form and life. In metacognitive terms, it urges the subject to reflect on his or

her own interpretative schemes and to recognize their partiality. It is no coincidence that numerous scholars have related Pirandello's humor to contemporary theories of complexity and reflective thinking (Forabosco, 2008; Morin, 1999).

It is precisely in the twentieth century that humor definitively ceases to be considered a marginal element of education and is recognized as an epistemological category. Pedagogical theories inspired by constructivism and metacognition have progressively enhanced the role of cognitive discontinuities, ambiguity and error as formative resources. In this framework, humor appears as a privileged tool to introduce these discontinuities in a non-threatening way, favoring deep and lasting learning.

Empirical and theoretical research conducted in the field of humor studies and educational psychology have confirmed this intuition. Studies by Ziv (1988) and Martin (2007) show that humor is associated with the development of creative thinking, cognitive flexibility, and social-emotional competence. Forabosco (2008) has further highlighted how the humorous experience involves processes of cognitive restructuring that make it particularly relevant in educational contexts oriented towards critical training.

In this perspective, modernity and the twentieth century do not represent a break with tradition, but the moment in which a long implicit educational practice finds a conscious theoretical formulation. The forms of humor experimented in classical and modern literature are now recognized as specific cognitive devices, endowed with a high educational potential.

## **5. Contemporary perspectives**

### **Humor, metacognition and education to complexity**

In contemporary debate, humor is progressively recognized as one of the most sophisticated ways in which human thought deals with complexity, ambiguity, and incongruity. This recognition marks a paradigm shift with respect to traditional conceptions of education based on linearity, transparency of meaning and stability of cognitive categories. Humour, as an epistemic device, is now becoming a privileged place to observe and promote advanced forms of reflective learning.

In the field of **humor studies**, international research has shown how humorous experience involves high-level cognitive processes, such as metarepresentation, conceptual flexibility and the ability to manage multiple

interpretive frames. The linguistic and pragmatic theories of humor, starting from the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo, 1994; Attardo, 2001), have shown that humorous comprehension requires not only linguistic skills, but also a sophisticated capacity for inference and reflection on language itself. In this sense, humor is configured as a metalinguistic practice that makes visible the mechanisms of the construction of meaning.

These acquisitions find an important convergence with contemporary theories of **metacognition**. As pointed out by Flavell (1979), metacognition is about awareness and control of one's own cognitive processes. Humor, producing a gap between expectation and interpretation, forces the subject to question his or her own mental patterns, activating a reflection on the functioning of thought. Numerous empirical studies have shown how the conscious use of humor in educational contexts can promote metacognition, improve deep understanding and increase knowledge transfer capacity (Ziv, 1988; Banas et al., 2011).

In the pedagogical field, this perspective is part of a broader reconsideration of traditional educational models. Constructivist and socio-constructivist theories have questioned the idea of learning as a linear transmission of content, emphasizing the active role of the subject in the construction of knowledge. In this framework, humor appears as a particularly effective tool for introducing cognitive discontinuities that stimulate critical re-elaboration. As Jonassen (1999) observes, meaningful learning arises from problematic situations that force the subject to restructure his or her representations. Humor, as a culturally mediated form of cognitive problem, performs a similar function, but with the advantage of reducing the anxiety associated with error and uncertainty.

The emotional dimension of humor represents a further element of educational relevance. Research in educational psychology has shown how emotions play a crucial role in learning processes, influencing attention, motivation and memory. In this context, humor can be interpreted as an emotional regulation strategy that creates a favorable learning climate, without falling into the trivialization of content. Martin (2007) points out how humor, when used competently, can foster more symmetrical and dialogic educational relationships, promoting a sense of cognitive security that facilitates exploration and intellectual risk.

A further development of contemporary reflection concerns the relationship between humor and **education to complexity**. Theories of complexity, in particular those developed by Edgar Morin, have highlighted the

need to overcome reductionist educational models, capable of dealing only with simplified portions of reality. Morin (1999) argues that the education of the future must train minds capable of thinking about uncertainty, contradiction and interdependence. In this sense, humor represents a cognitive resource of extraordinary importance, as it accustoms the subject to live with ambiguity without resorting to simplifying solutions.

Humor educates to complexity precisely because it rejects the closure of meaning. It does not offer definitive answers, but opens up spaces for questioning that urge thought to move between different levels of interpretation. This function is particularly relevant in contemporary educational contexts, characterized by a growing cultural, linguistic and symbolic plurality. Humour, as a practice of negotiating meaning, fosters the development of intercultural skills and interpretative sensitivity.

In the dialogue between humor and education, an often neglected ethical dimension also emerges. Pedagogical humor, in order to be formative, cannot be reduced to an instrument of derision or the exercise of symbolic power. Contemporary research has highlighted the need to distinguish between constructive and destructive forms of humor, emphasizing the role of educational responsibility in the use of the humorous device (Billig, 2005). In this sense, humor education becomes an integral part of ethical education, since it implies the ability to recognize the other as an interlocutor and not as an object of devaluation.

It is in this theoretical framework that *Humor as a pedagogical tool* takes on a particular value. The work does not limit itself to incorporating the acquisitions of international research, but proposes an original reworking of humor as an intentional educational methodology, capable of combining cognitive, emotional and ethical dimensions. Humor is thus removed from both playful trivialization and motivational instrumentalization, and recognized as an educational practice with a high epistemic value.

The contemporary section therefore makes it possible to close the genealogical circle opened at the beginning of the investigation. The forms of humor elaborated in the literary tradition now appear as symbolic anticipations of cognitive devices that pedagogy and contemporary human sciences have made explicit. Pedagogical humor emerges as a transversal category, capable of crossing history, theory and educational practice, and of offering adequate conceptual tools to face the educational challenges of the present.

## Conclusion

### **Humor as a founding category of reflective pedagogy**

The historical investigation developed in this contribution has shown how pedagogical humor does not constitute a marginal or accessory element in the Western literary tradition, but a structural dimension of the processes of thought formation. Along the arc that goes from classical antiquity to contemporary elaborations, humor emerges as an epistemic device capable of profoundly affecting the ways of constructing knowledge, the forms of educational relationship and the very conception of the learner.

The genealogical perspective adopted has made it possible to go beyond a descriptive or compilative reading of the history of humor, highlighting the historical co-determination between forms of humor and forms of education. The humorous configurations elaborated in the classical texts have not been interpreted as simple cultural expressions of their time, but as symbolic laboratories in which learning methods based on discontinuity, incongruity and the critical suspension of common sense have been experimented.

From Socratic irony to Pirandellian reflection, passing through Roman normative stabilization and medieval parodic function, humor has operated as a tool for problematizing knowledge, favoring a form of indirect education that is not based on the transmission of certainties, but on their crisis. In this sense, humor is configured as a pedagogy of the limit, capable of educating the subject to the awareness of the partiality of his own interpretative schemes.

The dialogue with contemporary research has further clarified how these functions do not belong exclusively to the past, but today find an explicit theoretical formalization. Studies in cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, educational psychology and humor studies have recognized humor as having a central role in conceptual restructuring processes, in the development of metacognition and in emotional regulation. Humor thus appears as a privileged resource for education to complexity, understood not as an accumulation of information, but as the ability to think about ambiguity, contradiction and uncertainty.

In this framework, *Humor as a pedagogical tool* is placed as a theoretical synthesis and a conscious methodological proposal. The work

makes explicit an implicit educational tradition, showing how humor can be taken as an intentional educational methodology, endowed with full epistemic status. Overcoming the dichotomy between seriousness and humor makes it possible to recognize the latter as having a high-level educational function, capable of integrating cognitive, emotional and ethical dimensions.

The implications of this perspective for contemporary pedagogy are significant. In increasingly complex educational contexts, marked by cultural plurality, epistemic instability and rapid social transformations, humour offers a privileged tool to promote forms of critical and reflective learning. Educating in humor, and through humor, means training subjects capable of negotiating meaning, tolerating uncertainty and exercising non-dogmatic thinking.

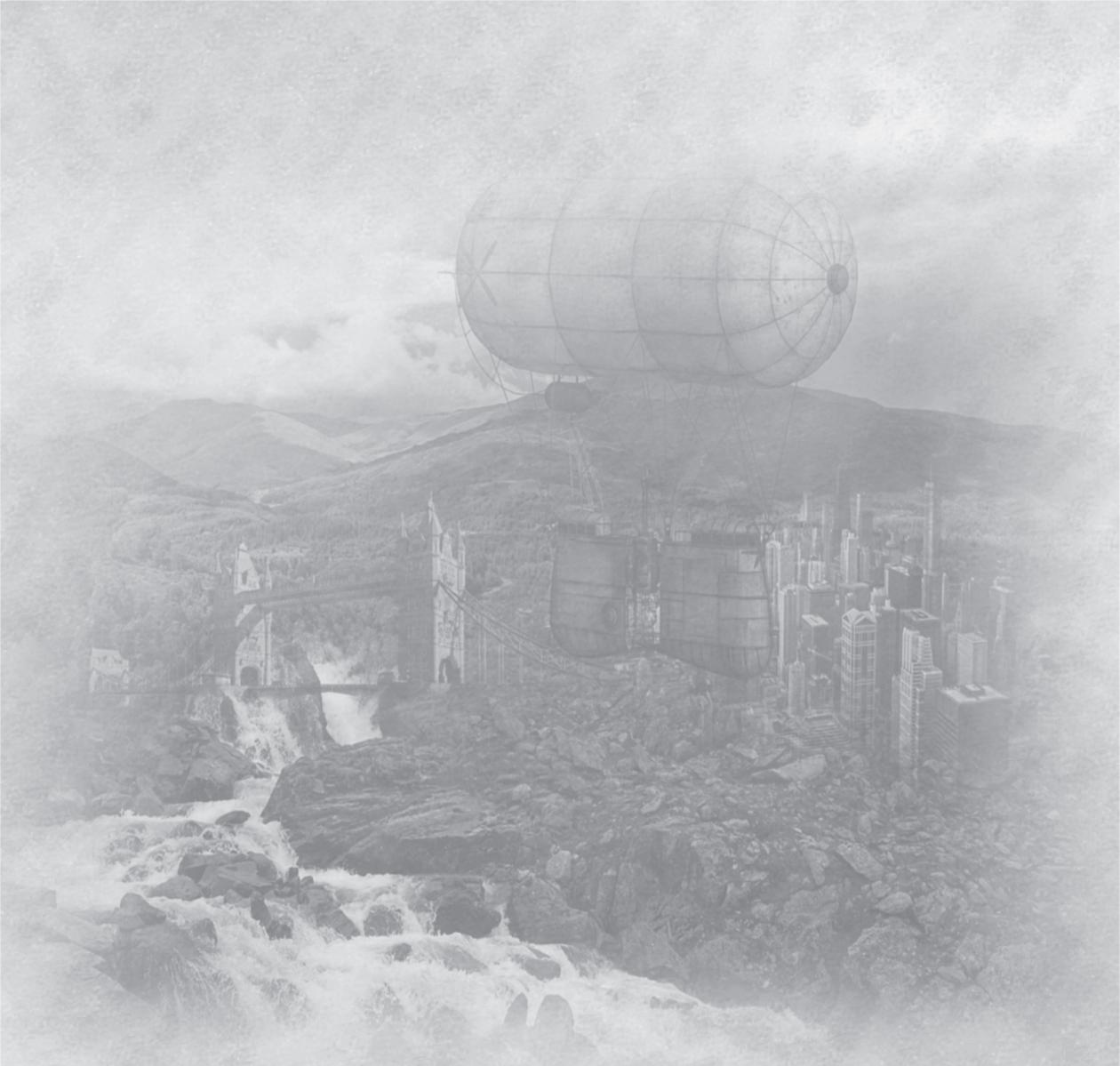
In conclusion, pedagogical humor can be recognized as a foundational category of reflective pedagogy, capable of bringing history, theory and educational practice into dialogue. Its enhancement does not represent a concession to lightness, but a rigorous epistemological choice, aimed at restoring complexity and depth to the processes of thought formation.

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