REFLECTIONS ON MODERNITY AND RELATIONALITY

HELEN ALFORD

The problem of the individualistic model of the human being used in the social sciences has occupied this Academy for some years, and rightly so, given its importance.[1] Since some of the relevant aspects of these discussions have been brought into the Academy's considerations in the current volume on the economic crisis, this text, which began as a response to the main papers, starts from this problem and considers how it relates to modernity itself.

It is a commonplace to regard the French Revolution as one of the key moments in the arrival of the modern period. The threefold cry 'liberté, egalité, fraternité' has become inextricably linked with this set of events, for, although at the time many slogans and rallying cries circulated, this one eventually emerged as the synthesis of them all.[2] This seems to put relation-

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[1] One volume focused especially on this issue: *Conceptualization of the Person in Social Sciences*, Eleventh Plenary Session, 18-22 November 2005, Acta 11, eds. E. Malinvaud and M.A. Glendon, Vatican City, 2006; others that have also dealt with it include: *Work and Human Fulfilment*, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, May 2003, eds. E. Malinvaud and M. Archer, Sapientia Press of Ave Maria College, 2003; *Vanishing Youth? Solidarity with Children and Young People in an Age of Turbulence*, Twelfth Plenary Session, 28 April – 2 May 2006, Acta 12, eds. M.A. Glendon, P.P. Donati, Vatican City, 2006; *Pursuing the Common Good: How Solidarity and Subsidiarity can Work Together*, Fourteenth Plenary Session, 2-6 May 2008, Acta 14, eds. M. Archer and P.P. Donati, Vatican City, 2007.

[2] We should note that among these many slogans circulating at the time of the Revolution, examples abound where the term 'fraternity' has been dropped altogether, leaving only liberty and equality (or two similar terms). For example, on August 25 1790, Mirabeau addressed the National Assembly saying: 'the influence of a nation that...has reduced the art of living to the simple notions of liberty and equality – notions endowed with irresistible charm for the human heart, and propagated in all the countries of the world – the influence of such a nation will undoubtedly conquer the whole of Europe for Truth, Moderation and Justice, not immediately perhaps, not in a single day...' (as quoted in Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*, Pimlico, London, 1996, p. 675). See also the contribution of Margaret Archer to this volume, p. 11 of 20.

ship, symbolised by the word 'fraternity', on a par with liberty and equality, two ideas that fit very well with a purely individualistic view of the human being, even if fraternity is the last term of the triptych. And yet, only the first two have been carried forward and structured into subsequent political and economic projects, hence the need for a reconsideration of fraternity today.[3]

We know well that 'Liberty' has been the basic value of the liberal politico-economic model, where the market is a key mechanism that should be allowed to find its own equilibrium, thereby promoting maximum freedom. 'Equality' has been emphasised by the socialist movements, for whom real freedom is not possible without access to a minimum of economic goods, leading them to favour government intervention in redistributing income and wealth. Fraternity has not been carried forward by either movement, unless we allow the promotion of 'class solidarity' in socialism to be some kind of reflection of it (even if it is not the same thing, not least because such solidarity is aimed against those of a different class), or, on the liberal side, if we note the volunteering that one finds, for instance, in the US (though again, this has not lead liberal thinkers to take fraternity seriously in their theories).[4]

Having noted, therefore, that both these politico-economic projects have difficulty in incorporating fraternity into their theoretical schemes, we may go on to note further that, partly for this reason, liberalism and socialism are only alternatives in a limited sense. Indeed, more profoundly, they are bedfellows, and indeed, at least to some degree, historically as well as intellectually, the socialist movements were born out of the side of the liberal ones.[5] Both liberalism and socialism share a fundamental concern with liberty understood as 'freedom from'; they differ, instead, on the less fundamental level of how to achieve this freedom.

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[3] As encouraged by *Caritas in Veritate*, (nn. 19-20; 34-37) and witnessed to in the recent literature regarding, for instance, the 'civil economy'; for a good starting point, see Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni, *Civil Economy: Efficiency, Equity, Public Happiness,* Peter Lang, 2007.

[4] For current information on volunteering in the US, see the web site: http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov (last accessed 12.08.10).

[5] Two from many possible articles on this question, one very recent and another dating back to 1890, are Edward Rooksby, 'The Relationship between Liberalism and Socialism', paper for the PSA conference, Edinburgh, March 2010, available at: www.psa.ac.uk/journals/pdf/5/2010/744_451.pdf (last accessed 12.08.10) and E. Belfort Bax, 'Liberalism versus Socialism', a Lecture delivered in the Conference Room of the National Liberal Club, November 1890, available at: www.marxists.org/archive/bax/1890/11/libvssoc.htm (last accessed 12.08.10).

We may note here that we can find parallels to this partial opposition combined with a more fundamental communality, where supposedly different and competing theories turn out to be more alike than dissimilar, in fields of thought that bring us closer to the economic crisis. In business ethics, for instance, or in the discussion of the social responsibility of business, the 'shareholder' and 'stakeholder' views of the firm are often presented as opposed to each other. In the first case, the purpose of the business is seen to be the maximisation of the value of the investment of shareholders in the company, whereas in the second case, the 'stakes' of all those somehow 'invested' in the company have to be taken into account.[6] While this second theory may give us the possibility of recognising the contribution of various groups to the business and the need to take their interests into account in decision-making, it may not necessarily make any difference at a more fundamental level, that is, to our view of the final purpose of the business. It is quite possible that those attempting to implement stakeholder theory in their management use it to maximise profit for the stakeholders as a whole, rather than just the shareholders. In such a case, the underlying purpose, towards which all other goods are instrumentalised (including the development of human beings in their work), is to maximise profit. In the form that they are usually presented, therefore, shareholder and stakeholder theory, like liberalism and socialism, are less different than they might at first seem. They are only clearly opposed at an intermediate level, in deciding who should be taken into account when running a business, but not necessarily at the level of ends.[7]

If we may return to the comparison between liberalism and socialism, we may say that, seen like this, it is not at all surprising that 'lib-lab' systems could develop, to use Pierpaolo Donati's terminology, since both the 'lib' and the 'lab' are two sides of the same coin, two children of the same mother, two expressions of the same fundamental worldview.[8] As Margaret

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[6] The first articulation of this theory can be found in R. Edward Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, Boston: Pitman, 1984. Freeman's most recent synthesis of his approach is R. Edward Freeman *et al.*, *Stakeholder Theory: The State of the Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[7] For a discussion of this and other problems with stakeholder theory, see H. Alford, 'Stakeholder Theory', *OIKONOMIA: Journal of Ethics and Social Sciences*, giugno, no. 2, 2007, pp. 25-32, available at: www.okonomia.it (last accessed 17.07.10).

[8] See the contribution of Pierpaolo Donati to this volume, p. 138.

Archer also reminds us in this volume, collectivism is not the opposite of individualism, or, at least, they are only partially opposites.[9] Donati has demonstrated that the 20th century history of Western Europe and North America has shown amply that these two systems can co-exist relatively easily. Both are in crisis, or perhaps it is their combination that is so.[10]

So what happened to fraternity? Why did it drop out of view? Speakers in our conference have mentioned some of the reasons why it was not taken forward; I summarise two of them here:

– Individualism in modern thought makes fraternity difficult to conceive, since relationships of individuals are instrumental towards obtaining individual objectives. The idea of fraternity is either reduced to this level or, more likely, just dropped out altogether, since it does not really add anything;[11]

– Creating mathematical models in which preferences and final objectives are not just individual but also held in common is much more difficult than if we limit objectives and preferences to being individual only.[12]

The discussion so far, then, may lead us to a question: can we say that fraternity is a part of the 'modern project', or of 'modernity', or not? Or, to put it another way around: do we need to propose an alternative politico-socio-economic project to modernity, one that takes fraternity seriously? The contributors to this volume who have mentioned this issue have opted decidedly for a positive response to the second question (Donati in particular). But can an argument be made for the opposite answer?

If fraternity is there 'in the beginning', so to speak (even if somewhat uncertainly) – if it is a part of the 'logos' of modernity – would it not be possible to recover or rediscover the full inspiration behind modernity? Could this not be seen as to propose a *truly modern* project? On this line of argument, it is not with modernity in itself that we should take issue, but with the ways in which it has been concretely realised in history. This approach, which could perhaps be immediately criticised as splitting hairs, should not be dismissed so lightly if we remember that just this type of argument has been used to defend the impact of Christianity in Western society by a figure none other than G.K. Chesterton: 'the Christian ideal has not been tried

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[9] See the contribution of Margaret Archer to this volume, p. 118.
[10] See the contribution of Pierpaolo Donati to this volume, p. 138.
[11] See the contribution of Margaret Archer to this volume, p. 118.
[12] See, for instance, the contribution of Stefano Zamagni to this volume, p. 296.

and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried'.[13] Chesterton here aims to defend the Christian project against detractors who say that it has co-existed in society with all kinds of evils: slavery, oppression of women, torture and so on. Is it possible to paraphrase Chesterton, and thus to suggest that it is not that modernity has been tried and found wanting, but that it hasn't been tried? Maybe even these two affirmations could be connected to each other. At any rate, there would seem to be at least some basis for this position. One third of the 'trinity' of ideas that, over time, became associated to modernity in a fundamental way has not found its place in the way the modern project has been worked out concretely, or perhaps even half has been excluded, if we make the argument that freedom and equality, as they have been understood up to now, are two sides of the same individualistic coin. We may go back to the example of the volunteering; it seems that at least incipient forms of fraternity can develop within modernity on the practical level, even if the theory behind modernity has not developed enough to deal with this properly.

One advantage of this way of thinking is that it avoids any connection with postmodernism or any of the numerous other 'after' or 'post' projects. Many of these seem to be more an exasperation of modernity rather than any genuine alternative, presupposing the same individualistic *weltanschauung*. On this reading, post-modernity is to modernity what socialism is to liberalism or what stakeholder theory is to shareholder theory. But postmodernism presents more problems for Christian social ethics than modernism. Above all, the frequent attacks of its proponents on our ability to reason together, and their common assertion that any shared rational foundation for discourse and argument is nothing more than the result of power structures in society, makes these approaches inimical to any project to be proposed here. Despite all the problems that the Church has had with modernity, it is still possible (as Maritain and others have argued) to see it as an offspring of the impregnation of Western culture with Gospel values.[14] The anti-rational element in postmodernism makes it harder to see any such connection between it and the Christian tradition.

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[13] G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World,* London, 1910, chapter 1, part 5, available at: en.wikisource.org/wiki/What%27s_Wrong_with_the_World/Chapter1.5 (last accessed 17.07.10).

[14] See, for instance, various of the chapters in the collection of articles by Jacques Maritain brought together in the book (in its English version), *Christianity and Democracy*, Geoffrey Bles, 1947.

One of the practical ways in which there has been an attempt to introduce fraternity into modern society has been through the philosophy, and, to a greater or lesser extent, the practice of Christian Democracy.[15] Although more or less absent from the English-speaking world, and seemingly largely exhausted elsewhere, there is no mistaking the parallels between the thinking behind the Christian democratic movements and the kind of proposals that are being made in this volume to rediscover or replace modernity. Christian Democratic parties have tried to develop policies that start from a relational view of the human being. Empirical work on welfare policy, such as that of Kees van Kersbergen on welfare systems in countries with significant Christian Democratic parties from the 1960s onwards, indicates that while spending levels were similar to those of countries dominated by social democratic models, the quality of that spending was different. In his 1995 book (some of which is updated in another book on a similar theme published in 2009), van Kersbergen looks at data from the 1960s to the 1980s, and can say: 'As expected, Christian Democracy is positively related to family-bias in the tax-benefit regimes, whereas social democracy is not'.[16] Also interesting is a preference for systems with diverse sets of benefits, allowing for more personal contribution on the part of those able to afford it, than for the more standardised systems favoured by the social democrats.

Connecting the interesting proposals that have been made here with Christian Democracy is both encouraging and salutary. Encouraging, because some of the most successful parties of the postwar period in Western Europe have based their policies on a relational human being – already trying to do in practice what we are discussing theoretically here.[17] But the connection is also salutary, since we know that these par-

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[15] For a good introduction to the key philosophical ideas behind Christian Democracy, and how they differ from those of other parties, see Kees van Kersbergen, 'The Distinctiveness of Christian Democracy' in David Hanley (ed.), *Christian Democracy in Europe: A Comparative Perspective*, London, Pinter, 1994, pp. 31-47.

[16] Kersbergen, Kees van, (1995), *Social Capitalism: A Study of Christian Democracy and the Welfare State*, London, Routledge., p. 139). See also Kees van Kersbergen and Philip Manow (2009), *Religion, Class Coalitions, and Welfare States*, Cambridge, CUP.

[17] On the success of Christian Democracy in Europe, see Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of the European Union*, Cambridge, CUP, 2007, esp. chp 5, 'Hegemony by Default: Christian Democracy in postwar Europe', pp. 163-190; David Hanley, 'Introduction: Christian Democracy as a Political Phenomenon' in David Hanley (ed.), *Christian Democracy in Europe: A Comparative Perspective*, London, Pinter, 1994, pp. 1-11.

ties were only partly successful, and indeed, with the exception of Germany, are currently experiencing great difficulty, and not only because of secularisation. Perhaps, however, that difficulty has been in no small measure to do with the lack of economic or sociological theories that could have supported their ethico-philosophical and political commitments, preventing them from offering a real, practical alternative to the dominance of liberal economic and social theories. If this is the case, then the work in this volume could be instrumental in breathing new life into what has been an impressive movement, or in creating new and different forms of it where it has never yet existed.